POSITING AND ITERABILITY: JACQUES DERRIDA'S THOUGHT OF THE PERFORMATIVE

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ABSTRACT

In *Memoires for Paul de Man* (1986) Derrida acknowledges the urgency, for any rigorous deconstruction, of closely confronting Austin's notion of the performative. This study aims to countersign Derrida's acknowledgement by elaborating a certain deconstructive tradition of thinking the performativity of the performative and, thus, of retracing the performative (as auto-performative) back to the modern philosophical tradition of (self-)positing. In particular, it focuses on Derrida's thought of the iterability of the (auto-)performative, as the speech act of self-positing. The chapters investigate Derrida's elaboration of the notion of positing by bringing to light his engagement with a certain French and continental tradition of the Hegelian concepts of recognition and mastery, as they are exposed in the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness. My argument is that Derrida understands positing as always caught up in a struggle for recognition, what he calls war in the infinite and among finite ipseities (drawing on Lévinas's concept of war), as the self's positing itself as such or imposing itself and, thus, as making itself recognized, mastery, ipseity, etc. This positing always admits iterability (or, enforceability, as Derrida will suggest, for instance, in 'A Number of Yes' or in 'Force of Law') to the extent that it calls for repetition. It originally allows the movement that replaces and supplements it (the very concept of *différance*) by granting to it the possibility of repetition. This movement is understood by Derrida as the text of the recognition that the self posits or gives to itself and, therefore, as the text that the self writes or posts to itself. In fact, this text accounts for the slave or the representative of self-positing, for those who have given up the desire for recognition, but also for the other to come, for the absolutely other, for the unconditioned risk of death or non-sense. As I will attempt to demonstrate by following Derrida's reading of the master/slave dialectic and of its tradition, he understands the relation between the master and the slave as the structural relation between positing and iterability. It is from this perspective that I propose looking at Derrida's elaboration of the performative as

the speech act of (self-)positing, mastery and ipseity. It can be described as the engagement that the self takes with itself, as the act of faith toward the representative, as the appeal for credit and preservation addressed to others. Therefore, as Derrida suggests, it is always threatening or making itself fear by necessarily admitting its enforceability.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AR: Derrida, J., 2002. *Acts of Religion*. Edited by G. Anidjar. London & New York: Routledge.

BPP: Freud, S., 1920. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Edited by J. Strachey, 1961. London, New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

BS: Derrida, J. 2008. *The Beast and the Souvereign. I (2001-2002).* Translated by G. Bennington. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

CV: Benjamin, W., 1921. On the Critique of Violence. In *Reflections*. Edited by P. Demetz, 1986. New York: Schoken Books, pp.277-300.

DA: de Tocqueville, A., 1835-1840. *Democracy in America.* Translated by Reeve, 2002. (Electronic Classic Series. The Pennsylvania State University).

EudEt: *Eudhemian Ethics*. In Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (the revised Oxford Translation). Edited by J. Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gl: Derrida, J., 1974. *Glas*. Paris: Galilée. Translated by J. P. Leavey & R. Rand, 1986. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

GM: Nietzsche, F., 1887. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by C. Diethe, 1994. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

IUO: Derrida, J., 1962. Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction. Translated by J. Leavey. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Met: *Metaphysics.* In Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (the revised Oxford Translation). Edited by J. Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

MMor: *Magna Moralia.* In Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (the revised Oxford Translation). Edited by J. Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

MP: Derrida, J., 1972. *Margins - of Philosophy.* Translated by A.Bass, 1982. London & Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

MPM: Derrida, J., 1986. *Mémoires: for Paul de Man.* Translated by C. Lindsay, J. Culler and E. Cadava. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ne: Derrida, J., 2002. *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001.* Edited by E. G. Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

PC: Derrida, J., 1980. *Postcard. From Socrates to Freud and Beyond.* Translated by A. Bass, 1987. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press

PF: Derrida, J., 1994. *Politics of Friendship.* Translated by G. Collins, 1997. London: Verso Books - 1997.

Po: Derrida, J., 1972. *Positions: Interviews with Henri Ronse, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Louis Houdebine, Guy Scarpetta.* Translated by A. Bass, 1981. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pol: *Politics.* In Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (the revised Oxford Translation). Edited by J. Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

PE: 1807. *Phénoménologie de l'esprit.* Translated by Jean Hyppolite, 1941. Paris: Aubier.

PS: Hegel, G. F. W., 1807. *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Translated by A.V. Miller, 1977. New York, London: Oxford University Press.

Ps II: Derrida, J., 1987. *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre II.* Edited by P. Kamuf and E. Rottenberg, 2008. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ro: Derrida, J., 2003. *Rogues. Two Essays on Reason.* Translated by P.-A. Brault and M. Naas, 2004. Stanford: Stanford University Press

SM: Derrida, J., 1993. *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International.* Translated by P. Kamuf, 1994. London: Routledge

VM: 1974-19755, *La vie la mort.* Derrida Archives, University of California (Irvine).

WA: Derrida, J., 2002. *Without Alibi.* Edited by P. Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

WD: Derrida, J., 1967. *Writing and Difference.* Translated by A. Bass, 1978. University of Chicago Press; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to trace out a thought of the performative across Jacques Derrida's corpus? Is the performative an iterable (that is, originally repeatable) structure such as that of *ipseity*? Is the performative the very structure of ipseity? Can we follow across Derrida's corpus the traces of a thought of the performative structure of ipseity? The present study can be read as a tentative response to the last formulation of the initial research question. On the one hand, I take up Derrida's attempt, throughout his work, from the early elaboration of self-positing totality to the late treatment of sovereignty, to think of the very structure of ipseity. On the other hand, I aim to demonstrate that a certain elaboration of the performative responds to the stakes of this early announced and general attempt. By breaching a certain route within Derrida's corpus, a *via rupta*, that is, by elaborating a canon of texts and a conceptual trajectory, my study pursues the task of accounting for a thought of the performative conditions of ipseity.

As I intend to point out, not only is the treatment of the notion of the performative inscribed in a search for the very structure of ipseity, rather, the performative itself is conjured up by Derrida in order to account for that structure. To this extent, I propose developing an investigation into a sort of arche-performative (what I will call later, for specific reasons, auto-performative), which is, first of all, the very condition of what any speech act theory leaves unaccounted. From this perspective, I measured Derrida's thinking of the performative against a certain contemporary tradition of reading the notion of the performative speech act, which is inaugurated by Benveniste. As I attempt to demonstrate at the very beginning of the study, in Chapter 1, this tradition consists in the gesture of taking into account the performativity of the performative or the performative conditions of the unaccounted-for of speech act theory. In other words, it reckons with the absolute performative or the auto-performative as the performative movement of self-referring or self-constituting. This tradition finds the roots of the contemporary notion of the performative speech act in a Fichtean line of modern thought that conceives of positing (*setzen*), *qua* absolute and unconditioned

positing, as the very principle of identity. I propose inscribing Derrida's thought of the arche-performative in this contemporary tradition of coming to grips with the positional structure of the auto-performative. However, within this context, I aim to prove that Derrida refers his understanding of the arche-performative (as I argue, for instance, in my reading of the structure of the 'yes') back to the notion of positing elaborated by Hegel in Chapter IV of *Phenomenology*, in which, according to the reading given by Hyppolite, the Fichtean principle of identity is rewritten along the trajectory that goes from desire to recognition and mastery. In so doing, I intend to demarcate the thought of the arche-performative from the readings of the Fichtean positing elaborated by Gasché and Hamacher in the wake of Henrich's seminal essay on Fichte's original insight into the question of self-consciousness. As I propose in Chapter 2, in which I focus on the theoretical premises of the arche-performative, Derrida reads the Hegelian positing (when I say 'Hegelian', I imply a close confrontation with the French tradition of Hegel around the Hegelian source) as the self-positing of a finite totality (ipseity) which grants the access to the other as other and, at the same time, exposes itself to the positing of the other (this is the war among finite totalities). My overall argument is that Derrida's arche-performative is this self-positing. As the study develops, it will become explicit that, in my view, self-positing is understood by Derrida as the positing of the master (positing by force, self-imposing, etc.) which unfolds itself as a certain (speech) act of self-recognizing (self-designating, diktat, etc.). The analyses developed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 point out that the structure of this self-positing or arche-performative originally admits *différance* (or iterability), that is, the movement of the economic sublimation (or substitution) of positing with a temporalizing synthesis, a supplement, a text, a slave, a call for repetition or credit, etc. In particular, this original allowance accounts for the minimal structure of the living as a restricted economy of life (death). Ultimately, it is along this trajectory, which goes from the reading of the autoperformative, in light of a certain understanding of the Hegelian positing, to the rewriting of this positing in terms of master/slave dialectics and economic sublimation, that I intend to develop my investigation into Derrida's thought of the arche-performative.

The *dispositio* of issues and texts in the study aims to describe the trajectory of the argument that I attempted to trace out above. From this perspective, let me explore the role played by each chapter in the overall design. Simultaneously, this operation will allow me to account for the *inventio* of the texts of Derrida's corpus which I decided to take into primary consideration. Chapter 1 aims to reconsider Derrida's thought of the performative within a specific, contemporary tradition that understands the performative speech act as auto-performative and, ultimately, as absolute and unconditioned self-positing. To this extent, I put emphasis first on the text that inaugurates this interpretation of Austin's notion of the performative, Benveniste's essay 'Analytical Philosophy and Language' (1963), and on the elaboration of the text proposed by Gasché in the wake of Heidegger's questioning of the modern (Fichtean) notion of positing. Second, I draw attention to de Man's seminal reading of Nietzsche's concept of the indecidability of *kennen* and *setzen* and of Rousseau's aporia of the promissory structure of the law. Finally, I dedicate a large part of the chapter to the examination of Hamacher's thought of the affirmative that I present as the most radical questioning of the modern theory of positing (as the reorientation of absolute and unconditioned positing, the unposited, into the *fait accompli* of a self-positing subjectivity). In this context, I take up Derrida's reading of de Certeau's concept of *volo*, that displays a remarkable interpretation of the auto-performative as a certain unconditional affirmation. The reference to this reading and, in particular, to the original duplication (that is, the servile condition) of the unconditional affirmation, allows me to relate Derrida's elaboration of the auto-performative back to an *Hegelian* notion of positing, which is that of the finite totality or of the master.

The following chapters develop this insight, which can be taken as the first step of my overall argument. Chapter 2 investigates the premises of Derrida's thought of the autoperformative as the self-positing of ipseity by taking into account the early elaboration of this concept of positing in the reading of Lévinas's oeuvre (in 'Violence and Metaphysics', 1964). Here I single out Derrida's confrontation with Lévinas's anti-Hegelianism (in the wake of Hyppolite) around the tradition of the development of self-consciousness from desire to recognition, as it is exposed in Chapter IV of *Phenomenology*. My argument is that, in this confrontation, Derrida

elaborates the notion of phenomenology as a thought of the structural war or of the self-positing of finite totality (from this perspective, it is worth remarking that he refers Husserl's transcendental descriptions of the relations among finite ipseities back to the movements described in Hegel's *Phenomenology*). Therefore, the chapter focuses on a concept of finite self-positing that recurs to account for the structure of the master and of the performative.

Chapter 3 proposes following the thread of this concept of self-positing by taking into account its elaboration in two of the key late texts by Derrida. In my view, this proposal of reading allows to verify the working hypothesis elaborated in Chapter 2 and, at the same time, to develop it further through the investigation of the systematic link of mastery, ipseity and the performative and through the exploration of a certain Aristotelian line of this link. First, I draw attention to Derrida's elaboration, in particular in Chapter I of *Rogues. Two essays on Reason*, of the concept of ipseity as the very movement of self-positing and, thus, as accounting for mastery (*qua* the self's recognizing and designating itself as such or as the same). Here, I argue that, by referring to Benveniste's remarks on the etymological link between mastery and identity, Derrida puts into relief the arche-performative of self-positing/self-recognizing. Moreover, I point out that the arche-performative structurally implies a certain repeatability (or iterability) in the form of performative call for credit or repetition. Finally, by putting emphasis on the references to the work of Aristotle's notion of autarchy (from the master to the Prime Mover, from politics to metaphysics) I suggest that Derrida finds in Aristotle a certain tradition of the arche-performative. Along this line, I relate the analyses of Aristotle developed in *Rogues* back to the reading of the Aristotelian notion of friendship discussed in *Politics of Friendship*. The elaboration of friendship as a movement of self-knowledge through the mediation of the other, in the wake of Aubenque's studies on the concept, allows me to bring to light a certain thought of the arche-performative structure of mastery/ipseity as the operation of enslaving time or as idealization. Therefore, Chapter 3 demands to be read as a development of the investigation inaugurated in Chapter 2, along the double direction of the arche-performative of ipseity (self-recognizing and self-designating) and of its Aristotelian paradigm (the oath of primary friendship).

Chapter 4 returns to the initial question of the Hegelian tradition of finite self-positing by focusing on the confrontation that Derrida engages with the contemporary French tradition (Kojève, Hyppolite and Bataille) of Chapter IV of *Phenomenology* (in particular, the dialectic of the master and the slave), in 'From restricted to general Economy. A Hegelianism without Reserve'. I focus on the key conceptual knots of Derrida's rereading of the Hegelian notion of mastery as the performative operation of putting (life and sense) at stake and as the sublimation of desire into labour. By carefully following the rewriting of the French tradition of the Hegelian text, I aim to prove that Derrida understands the performative of putting at stake as the movement of determinate negation (*Aufhebung*) and of the restricted economy of life (/death). As my reading develops, I point out that, in light of Kojève, Bataille and Hyppolite's interpretations of the Hegelian notion of sense, Derrida finds in *Hegelianism* (*qua* philosophy of *essential* life and sense) the arche-performative of putting at stake. Finally I argue that chance (the absolute risk of death or a certain death drive of desire) is the blind spot of Hegelianism and, on a more general level, the removed presupposition of the arche-performative. Chapter 4 is followed by a 'Supplement' that focuses on the rereading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* through the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave, that Derrida proposes in 'To Speculate – On "Freud"' (1974/1975). The text, as I attempt to demonstrate, accounts for the performative structure of the relation between pleasure principle and reality principle. My argument articulates through the following steps: (a) the mastery of the pleasure principle is understood in terms of the Hegelian notions of mastery and the sublimation of desire; (b) this mastery consists in the arche-performative of a self-engagement or a promise addressed to oneself; (c) this arche-performative reproduces the movement of self-posting or self-writing (admitting divisibility, exposure to death, etc.) as the minimal movement of the living.

The last chapter unfolds as a tentative reconstruction of Derrida's thought of force from the earliest elaborations of the concept, in 'Différance' and 'Freud and the scene of Writing', to the late discussions of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (in 'Negotiations' and 'Nietzsche and the Machine'). This reconstruction is organized around the confrontation with Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's

Genealogy. My argument is that Derrida's notion of force reproduces the arche-performative of self-recognizing: from this perspective, I propose reading the key-articulations of the iterability and the unreliability of force. First, I develop a comparative reading of Derrida's early engagement with the notion of qualitative difference in Nietzsche and Freud, on one side, and Deleuze's elaboration of the quantitative determination in Nietzsche's thought of force, on the other. Second, I trace out in 'Force of Law' a thought of the iterability of positing/promising that accounts for the structural replacement of the law with a text (a legitimate fiction) that calls for credit and repetition. Finally, I bring to light the close confrontation between Derrida and Deleuze around the interpretation of a specific articulation of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, namely, the deposition of the masters by the slaves. In my reading, Derrida demarcates his interpretation from Deleuze's idea of the becoming-reactive of active forces by isolating that articulation and by understanding it as the very movement of the unreliability (that is, heteronomy, iterability, etc.) of force in general.

Appendix on SEC

As it emerges from this recognition of the general argument of my study and of its development through the different chapters, the canon of texts responds to a precise plan of investigation. Each chapter elaborates a careful examination of the relations between the selected texts by Derrida and their sources and, in particular, takes into account their more or less implicit engagement with contemporary French thought (Benveniste, de Certeau, Hyppolite, Aubenque, Bataille, Deleuze, etc.). In this study, I do not offer a full reading of the essay 'Signature, Event, Context' (1971), which is generally considered as a key-moment of Derrida's elaboration of Austin's notion of the performative.[1] Certainly, I propose reinscribing this text within what I determine as Derrida's thought of the arche-performative, by referring to it in several footnotes: for instance, in relation to a certain Nietzschean understanding of performatives as differences of forces or to a certain interpretation of (the subject of) the performative as self-recognizing. The reason of this (sovereign and, necessarily, deconstructible) choice should be

[1] For an exploration of the debate around SEC see, for instance, Glendinning 2001.

looked for in the trajectory of my argument. For instance, in Chapter 1, I decided to take up Derrida's reading of de Certeau as it allows me to bring to light de Certeau's singular contribution to the French contemporary tradition of the notion of the performative and, at the same time, to raise the question of a certain Hegelian tradition of the iterability of positing. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 focus on Derrida's elaborations of this tradition in his early reading of Lévinas's anti-Hegelianism and in his late reconsideration of the notion of mastery/ipseity. Chapter 4 engages in the reading of Derrida's early elaboration of the arche-performative of the master as sublimation of desire, *Aufhebung*, Hegelianism, restricted economy of life and sense, etc. Finally, Chapter 5 develops along the line of a constant confrontation with Nietzsche's thought of force and its Deleuzian interpretation. Therefore, SEC plays a secondary role with respect to the elaboration of my overall argument. Furthermore, within the context of Derrida scholarship, the gesture itself of leaving this text aside aims to put emphasis on the singularity of the trajectory (autoperformative / finite self-positing / differantial representativity) which I aim to describe in my attempt to account for Derrida's thought of the arche-performative of ipseity.

CHAPTER 1

'POSITING IS ALREADY ITERABILITY'
(On Positing, the Performative and the Supplement)

> Every positing (*Setzung*) permits and promises [*permet et pro-met*], posits ahead; it posits by setting [*mettant*] and by promising [*promettant*]. And even if a promise is not kept in fact, iterability inscribes the promise as guard in the most irruptive instant of foundation. Thus it inscribes the possibility of repetition at the heart of the originary. [...] Positing is already iterability, a call for self-preserving repetition. (AR, 272)

In this chapter I draw attention to a certain tradition of the deconstruction of the performative condition of the performative (the performativity of the performative or the auto-performative) as the ultimate elaboration of a modern theory of positing inaugurated by Fichte's account of the principle of identity as absolute and unconditioned positing. My argument is that this tradition is marked out by the attempt to think of certain unconditioned premises of the auto-performative (like *thesis*, aporia, afformative, iterability). Within this tradition, I propose reading Derrida's thought of the performative (as the very [speech] act of a self-positing I [master, ipseity, etc.]) as the elaboration of a certain Hegelian rewriting of the Fichtean tradition of positing.

1.1 The Performativity of the Performative

There is a certain theoretical configuration of deconstruction and the performative accounting for the gesture of retracing Austin's theory of the performative back to the modern philosophical tradition of positing (*Setzung*).[1] This configuration is

[1] This chapter is indebted to the first Part of Gasché's *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (1986), that I consider as a fundamental source for any attempt to address the post-Kantian tradition of the philosophy of reflection, where the stakes of positing (*setzen*, *Setzung*) are at play, and to measure Derrida's work against this tradition. Let me recall how Gasché determines Austin's notion of the performative in relation to a certain philosophy of reflection: 'Thus, Austin's so-called revolution of analytic philosophy amounts to nothing more nor less than the surreptitious

evoked by Werner Hamacher in a passage of his formidable essay '*Lingua Amissa*: the Messianism of Commodity-Language and Derrida's *Specters of Marx*' (1999), where he singles out the question of the performativity of the performative and, thus, of the ultimately performative condition of the performative in general, of the absolute or auto- performative. First, Hamacher sheds light on a certain tradition, within the history of modern European philosophy, that takes account of that 'mode of saying which corresponds to nothing given, nothing present, nothing extant' and, furthermore, of 'the prospective structure of language in general'. This tradition unfolds itself through the multiple elaborations of the 'discourse of action' from Hobbes on, up to Fichte's 'discourse of the originary act' (*Tathandlung*), which amounts to the fundamental or self-founding proposition (I=I), namely, 'the autothesis of the transcendental I'.[2] Hamacher acknowledges in the act (or, perhaps, as Derrida would say, the operation)[3] of self-positing or autothesis the general trait of this tradition: 'Language was no longer thought of as the correspondence of a statement or a pre-existing object but as the autonomous or autonomizing act of a social or individual subject positing itself' (Sprinker 1999, 189). Ultimately, language itself amounts to the very self positing itself in the autothesis.

According to Hamacher, what is known as speech act theory and, therefore, the notion of the performative, must be read in light of the above elaborated tradition. Following the classical or Austinian formulation, he explains that the performative is a successful speech act when 'conducted within certain conventions'.[4] As the term itself suggests, Hamacher writes, it must 'perform',

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reintroduction of the problem of reflection in order to solve the problems left in the wake of logical positivism. His revolution consisted of hinging the entire representational function of language, with which Russell and Whitehead were exclusively concerned, on a constituting self-reflexivity of the linguistic act. To speak of the "performative function" of speech acts is to apply a new word to a very old problem' (Gasché 1986, 76).

[2] For a reading of Fichte's theory of positing I refer to the following examination of Gasché's and Hamacher's readings of the fundamental proposition of self-identity. See also Warminski 2001.

[3] On Hyppolite's translation of the Hegelian *Tathandlung* into the French '*opération*' (with regards to the master's condition of putting life at stake, as it is posited in the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness), see Chapter 4.

[4] Cf. Austin 1962, 14-15: 'Besides the uttering of the words of the so called performatives, a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and to go right

that is, realize, execute or fulfil those pre-established conventions or rules. Therefore, 'classical speech act theory does not inquire after the conditions under which conventions can be linguistically prepared and established – and precisely for this reason, it cannot account for the performativity of its performatives'. The preparation and establishment of those conventions consist in the very act of self-positing or autothesis and, therefore, in the very performativity of the performative as auto-performative. The essence of the performative speech act can also be understood as its being self-founding, self-referring and independent from any instance outside language itself. Finally, according to Hamacher, speech act theory is unable to explain the constitution of the subject: 'it proceeds from self-governed, intentional subjects who merely reproduce themselves in their linguistic conventions' (190).[5] In this chapter, I will trace out a certain line of deconstruction reading the performativity of the performative as self-positing or autothesis. Along this line I will *affirm* the necessity to *detach* autothesis or the auto-performative from an unconditioned unposited or unperformed that cannot be encompassed by autothesis itself and, yet, accounts for its very heteronomy and iterability. This affirmation claims for a certain affinity with the announcement elaborated in the Preface to *Rogues. Two Essays on Reason* (2003), in which Derrida calls for the *urgency* of thinking a certain unconditionality *without* sovereignty, and which I propose reading as a reformulation of the early, decisive reading of the Hegelian notion of recognition advanced by Derrida in 'Violence and Metaphysics' (1964).

1.2 Auto-performative and Self-positing

Emile Benveniste's essay 'Analytical Philosophy and Language', first published in *Les études philosophiques* (1963) and, then, included in *Problems in general Linguistics* (1966), is a seminal text for the deconstructive tradition I aim to elaborate here. The essay reads the proceedings of a conference held in

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if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action. [...] Now if we sin against any one (or more) of these six rules our performative utterance will be unhappy.'

[5] On the question of the subject of the performance see Lecture V in Austin 1962, 53-66 (in particular, 60-61).

Royaumont in 1962 and devoted to the analyses of the ordinary language developed by the 'Oxford philosophers'. The publication, entitled *La philosophie analytique*, includes Austin's essay 'Performatif/Constatif', which represents the main source of Benveniste's reading. Firstly, Benveniste identifies the contribution of the Oxford philosophers to the understanding of language with a certain operation of freeing it 'from the conventional frames of reference' (Benveniste 1971, 231). This remark anticipates Benveniste's reading of Austin's notion of the performative in terms of self-referring. Secondly, the text focuses on Austin's essay published in the proceedings recalling the distinction between performative and constative (or declarative) speech acts and the notion of the 'unhappiness' of the performative ('the circumstances which can render it null and void', 233). Benveniste attempts to demonstrate that the notion of the performative effectively accounts for the general structure shared by certain kinds of statements. In this perspective, he points out that the performative in general must be understood as an 'act of authority' (having the 'force of law') insofar as it presupposes a constituted authority or right to produce a certain statement. 'A performative utterance that is not an act does not exist. It has existence only as an act of authority.' This authority refers to a constituted subject, 'the person making the utterance', that Benveniste identifies, through a remarkable gesture, with the chairman of an institutional session. 'A meeting of an official nature cannot begin until the chairman has said, *la séance est ouverte.*'[6] He does not inquire into the constitution of the authority or the right of the chair, that is, into the 'force of law' as the ultimate foundation (or the performativity) of the performative in general.[7] However, a few paragraph later, when reckoning with the 'self-referential' trait of performative statements he brings to light a certain movement of self-constituting, which drives the performative back within a peculiar philosophical tradition. 'This leads us to recognize in the performative a peculiar quality, that of being self-

[6] For Derrida's elaboration of the figure of the chairman as a trope of a certain Aristotelian-Hegelian tradition of master and ipseity, and in relation to another text by Benveniste (in *Rogue* and in *The Beast and the Sovereign 1 2001-2002*), see Chapter 3. Moreover, let me recall two other works where Derrida takes up this figure: (a) 'Signature, Event, Context' (1971), where he recognizes this position to Paul Ricoeur; (b) 'Psychoanalysis searches the States of its Souls. The impossible Beyond of the sovereign Cruelty' (1996), where he reckons with the irreducible call for recognition inscribed in the very character of the chairman.

[7] On the notion of the enforceability of the law let me refer to my account of the Nietzschean tradition of force at work in Derrida's reading of Benjamin in Chapter 5.

referential, of referring to a reality that it itself constitutes by the fact that it is actually uttered in conditions that make it an act.' Self-referring, as the self's referring to what it constitutes, namely, itself, is absolute and unconditioned self-constituting. To this extent, it accounts for the very authority of the uttering subject, that is, for the very self-constituting (force) of authority itself. By putting into relief this self-referential trait Benveniste reckons with the very performativity of the performative, the auto-performative. He points toward the ultimate ground of singular performatives, the uttering subjectivity positing itself as such: 'the act is thus identical with the utterance of the act' (236).

In his close-reading of Austin's performative, in the essay '*Setzung* and *Ubersetezung*', first appeared in *Diacritics* (1981) and, then, published in the study on de Man entitled *The wild Card of Reading: on Paul de Man* (1998), Rodolphe Gasché draws attention to Benveniste's passage on the act of self-referring/self-constituting. He finds in this reading of the performative the theoretical elaboration of 'an act within the act of language', that is, of 'a self-reflexive or self-referential act', which grounds every particular performative and, on a more profound level, language in general. In the following paragraphs, I propose to reread Gasché's essay as a key articulation of the deconstruction of the auto- performative which I attempt to elaborate in this introduction. The aim of the essay is to measure the effects of de Man's reelaboration of Austin's notion of the performative in light of the modern European philosophical tradition (from Fichte on). I will focus on Gasché's proposal to retrace the performative back to Fichte's notion of self-positing and, in Heidegger's terms, to the positing of metaphysics. The initial gesture of the essay resonates with Benveniste's declaration of interest for the Oxford philosophy: Gasché affirms that Austin's revolution in philosophy consists in isolating the general situation of the 'total speech act' to which the constative statements must be referred back as a linguistic function among others.[8] Austin demonstrates, he observes, that 'the assumption by analytical philosophers that the business of language is to make statements upon facts depends on an illicit abstraction of the constative function

[8] For the understanding of 'stating' as a function of the 'illocutionary act' and, more in general, for the concept of 'total speech act' see in particular Austin 1962, 132-146, Lecture XI, and Austin 1962, 146-163, Lecture XII.

from the total speech act situation' (Gasché 1998, 12). The total speech act must be thought as the general structure of the performance of every singular speech act or the performative condition of speech act in general, the auto-performative or the self-referential speech act, the foundation of language in general. In this perspective, Gasché reformulates Austin's revolution as 'the attempt to reinscribe the linguistic functions of stating, denominating, describing, referring, etc., within the situation of the performance of these functions', which 'determines itself as a performative act, itself no longer referential but which can include within itself, as part of itself, an act of reference' (12-13).[9]

According to Gasché, the first trait of the total speech act (or the auto-performative) consists in its 'being enacted by a subject fully present to itself' or a 'self-present "I"' (13). From the perspective of the total speech act this enactment does not simply account for the already constituted subject ('I') of a singular utterance but for the general situation of performance, that is, for the auto-performative as (the act of) a self-constituting subject ('I'). Therefore, Gasché observes, the total speech act must be considered as an '*absolute act*' or '*pure doing*' (14) to the extent that it is related to a subject absolutely present to itself, and, therefore, that it is the act of a self-constituting subject, or it is itself self-constituting. He advances a definition of the total speech act as the ultimate foundation of language in general: 'it is a fully present act of a self-asserting subject that is fully present to itself'. The second trait of the total speech act, in Gasché's examination, is identified with its illocutionary structure, which amounts 'to perform an act in saying something' and, therefore, to the general situation of performance. He explains that the priority of the illocutionary in accounting for the structure of the total speech act is due to 'systematic' reasons insofar as it is by definition a self-referential act ('an act *within* the act of language') encompassing the linguistic function of referring, and, therefore, the self-referring and self-constituting ground of language. The illocutionary articulation of the total speech act can be detached from the singular act of language only by means of a

[9] As Gasché himself points out at the end of the section on Austin ('The total Speech Act'), his reading of the performative as auto-performative draws on the interpretation of the second part of *How to do Things with Words* as the theoretical operation of the 'generalization of the performative' and thus, 'of reflexivity' (Gasché 1998, 18).

theoretical operation, which Austin's revolution amounts to.[10] As Gasché points out, Austin recognizes 'a "*natural break*" between the illocutionary act and its consequences' (15), a break which cannot be registered in any physical speech act. Reckoning with this break, speech act theory and, on a more specific level, a certain reading of the illocutionary, bring into focus the non-physical premise of language in general, the general situation of performance, absolute or pure doing, etc.[11] To name the illocutionary premise of language Gasché retrieves the overdetermined term of self-affecting, which, in this case, plays out as a trope of self-referring, self-constituting, pure doing and so on, and, at the same time, conjures up a certain reading of the modern philosophical tradition of the absolute subjective ground. The illocutionary, *qua* self-referential or self-constituting act, can be described as the *speculative* movement of self-return (in Gasché's terms, of 'folding back upon itself', 'reflecting upon itself') or self-re-appropriation, which Derrida identifies with the Hegelian operation of mastery and takes up as the primary target of a certain deconstruction of positing and of the performative.[12] In this perspective, Austin's revolution can be measured, according to Gasché, against a certain understanding of the modern European philosophy: it thus consists in 'the re-introduction of the notion of self-reflection and self-referentiality' (18). One can legitimately speak of 'revolution', Gasché notes, within the context of the analytical philosophy, whereas, 'to a reader familiar to

[10] See Gasché 1998, 18, where he argues that Austin's theory refers to 'a purely theoretical construct and ideal object'.

[11] Referring to Recanati's remarks on Austin's performative, Gasché evokes the term 'prefix' to account for the illocutionary structure of the utterance: 'The performative prefix of the utterance is analogous to the Cartesian *cogito* that must accompany all *cogitationes*. The reflection that an utterance makes upon itself is the very condition of that utterance's possibility of referring' (Gasché 1998, 17).

[12] On Derrida's tropological reading of the notion of mastery and of the master/slave dialectic as the matrix of speculative idealism see the Supplement to Chapter 4. Gasché gives the following, excellent definition of speculative self-return in Gasché 1986, 21: 'Thomas Aquinas had remarked in *De veritate* that reflection is directed both at the reproduced image or concept of an object and at the act of reflecting itself. Indeed, such a reflection provides the missing link; the third, in truth, first moment of reflection is found in the recognition that the object reflected by the mirroring subject is not just any object but rather this subject's symmetric Other in other words, a representation of its alienated self. With such an alienating positing of itself as object, its reflection truly becomes an act of bringing back, a recapturing recognition. In the reflection of the mirror-subject as an annulment of the mirroring subject's former alienation, the reflection of Other becomes a reflection of self. The mirror's self-reflection is the embracing whole that allows it to release itself into Other, which explains why it faces an object in the first place and why it returns reflexively to itself.'

the development of continental philosophy', Austin's move must result as 'suspect', at least, 'because of the amazing lack of historical comprehension' (for instance, testified by the fact that 'Austin does not employ the philosophical terminology of reflexivity'). In my view, Austin's theory of the performative is seminal precisely because it inaugurates a new, singular field of notions and relations for the rewriting of the texts of tradition, as I will attempt to demonstrate through the examination of the different elaborations of the performative developed, among others, by de Man, Derrida and Hamacher.

After the reading of de Man's disruption of Austin's theorems, Gasché addresses the metaphysical tradition, in light of which the theory of the performative should be reconsidered, and Heidegger's reading of this tradition. He proposes to find in Fichte's elaboration of the notion of positing a fundamental source of speech act theory and, therefore, to outline the 'positional' trait of the performative. Fichte's notion of positing, Gasché explains, accounts for the active positing of being. To this extent, 'all objective positing' (as singular positing) 'presupposes a self-positing' (38), namely, the ultimate foundation of all singular positing or the act of a self-positing I. The self of self-positing does not relate to the 'subject', which is determined in opposition to a posited object and, thus, to the subject of a particular positing, but to the unconditioned and absolute subjectivity ('a self (*Ich*)') of positing itself *qua* 'reflecting' or 'returning' upon itself.[13] As Gasché notes, 'the infinite activity of the self-positing self secures the self's being through its reflection of itself into itself'. Moreover, he evokes the notion of constitution suggesting the affinity between self-positing and self-constituting: 'the self has constituted itself in the act of self-positing'. Referring to Fichte's text, Gasché outlines that self-positing as pure activity grounds every objective positing or activity of a subject: 'the pure activity of the self is, as such, a condition of any activity that posits an object'.[14] Therefore, Fichte's deduction of self-positing is a 'genuinely speculative theory' to the extent that it isolates the 'non-empirical act (*Thathandlung*)' (39) of the unconditioned ground of all objective/subjective

[13] Cf. Gasché 1998, 39: 'This pure activity of the self "has no sort of object, but returns upon itself."'

[14] Cf. Gasché 1998, 39: 'The pure activity is the condition of possibility of the objective activity of the subject.'

positing. As results from Gasché's brief survey, Austin's theory of the performative (*qua* auto-performative) reproduces the theoretical gesture of Fichte's theory of self-positing. Gasché remarks that this affinity can be reformulated in relation to their notions of presence. Both Fichte's and Austin's acts describe a movement of self-reflection or self-return by which they constitute their own present being or presence. In both cases, there is no present being, no presence, before that movement. 'Before this inversion of the self [upon itself] there is no self.'

Here Gasché countersigns Heidegger's reading of a certain philosophical tradition as 'a metaphysics of subjectivity', where he attempts to reinscribe the examined notions of positing and of the performative. According to Heidegger, this tradition presupposes the theory of the unconditioned or unposited foundation of all intentional or linguistic act (namely, the 'spirit') as subjectivity.

> Positing, then, as the act through which the self asserts itself in its being before all intentionality, or as the act through which the self asserts itself in its being before all intentionality, or as the act that precedes the speech act's becoming an act of denomination or of communication, is dependent on the conception of the spirit as a subject or of language as the predominant manifestation of the subject's subjectivity. Such a notion of positing is the positing of metaphysics. (40)

Let me focus on Gasché's remarks on Heidegger's elaboration of the 'original meaning of positing' in the essay 'Hegel and the Greeks' (1958). Heidegger contests Hegel's 'dialectical' and 'speculative' reading of the Greek notion of being ('as the indeterminate immediate') 'from the perspective of absolute subjectivity'. As Gasché points out, according to Heidegger the reading of indeterminateness or abstraction of the Greek being presupposes a certain understanding of the 'essence of being' as absolute subjectivity. 'When Hegel conceives of being as the indeterminate immediate – Heidegger observes – he experiences it as what is posited by a determining and conceiving subject.' Therefore, being is bound to the relationship with a self-positing subject, to the presupposition of an unconditioned and absolute self (in Gasché's terms, the spirit). In Heidegger's interpretation, Hegel is acknowledged as unable to set

being 'free into its own essence' and, therefore, to account for 'presencing, that is to say, an enduring *coming forth* from concealment into unconcealment' (Heidegger 1998, 333). Thus, he point towards a notion of being which is more original than absolute self-positing, which is, indeed, allowed by the latter. To this extent, Gasché quotes a long passage from the essay where Heidegger insinuates the idea of a certain 'disclosure' (Gasché translates it 'unconcealing') that might have been already 'at play' or, perhaps, the very 'site' of 'being' as 'the first emergence and first manifestation of spirit' and, therefore, of absolute subjectivity (332). As Gasché notes, this disclosure might 'have already taken place' before, or, I would propose, given place to, self-positing. Referring to Heidegger's 'The Origin of the work of Art', he suggests that this movement of unconcealing, more original and freed from self-positing, can be referred back to 'the Greek sense of *thesis*' (Gasché 1998, 43). Therefore, through a different elaboration of the notion of being, here Heidegger dissociates the Greek tradition of *thesis* from the modern philosophy of positing, opening onto other unconditioned premises. The following analyses will touch upon some deconstructive readings of the performative and of positing in general (see, in particular, Derrida and Hamacher) refusing the break between *thesis* and positing and taking into account the unconditioned exposure of positing to the other or to the risk of death (once again, the very iterability of positing).

1.3 The Text of the Archi-Promise

In this section I propose focusing on Michel de Certeau's elaboration of the performativity of the performative in the chapter 'The Circumstances of the mystic Utterance' from *The mystic Fable* (1982). He conjures up the notion of the performative *qua* auto-performative in order to account for the preliminary condition of mystic communication. Derrida's reading of de Certeau's text in 'A Number of Yes' (1987) allows me to bring into focus a certain elaboration of the movement of representation or substitution (perhaps, of the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave) inscribed in the very operation of self-positing (or of the auto-performative). De Certeau identifies the a priori of dialogical spaces with the

volo, that is, with a certain will to speak and read the other. 'The relation – he observes – is *only* possible for persons who are entirely, resolved, or who wanted it' (de Certeau 1995, 165-166). Referring to Meister Eckhart's understanding of the *volo*, de Certau proposes to speak of 'a performative verb' or a speech act: '"Not: I would like [...], but: I will"' (166). This act is associated to the self-positing of the subject of mystical communication: 'the position of a subject fit to "hear" mystic discourse' (167). Ultimately, the *volo* is the performative speech act of the foundation or inauguration of the textual space where mystic discourse and readings can be always repeated.[15] As a certain openness of the reader, the *volo* must be absolute (that is, 'not bound by any precise', 166). Therefore, the performative speech act "I will" can be rewritten as "I want (everything, nothing, God)". To this extent it formulates a demand that necessarily overflows the textual space of the mystic discourse: 'discourse postulates, to be read, a demand it cannot satisfy'. Finally, the *volo* is the opening and, at the same time, the 'vanishing point' of mystic discourses (167). Retrieving a distinction that could be referred back to Nietzsche's demarcation between *erkennen* and *setzen* (and, thus, according to de Man's interpretation of Nietzsche, between constative and performative), de Certeau describes the *volo* as the very beginning of science, as a postulate: 'knowledge is made possible by an initial decision'.[16] Furthermore, given the elimination of the predicates and complements of the verb and, therefore, the absolute reference to the presence, he reformulates the *volo* more generally as 'origin in the present, the principle of beginning'. In a passage that would deserve a further examination he accounts for absolute wanting as a movement of self-return and, at the same time, self-refusal. He explains that 'once this link to a particular [particular object and particular subject] has been removed, the will turns back upon itself and identifies itself with its opposite'. Therefore, 'to want all' and 'not to want anything' are the same. The *volo* amounts to the very act of 'renonciation of one's will', to Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* or

[15] De Certeau outlines the trait of the iterability as characterizing the mystic communication: 'I founds a textual space amenable to returns, the repetition and reversibility of readings' (FM, 167). Cf. also de Certeau 1995, 169: 'It [to will] posits from the very beginning what will be repeated in mystic discourse by many other verbs (to love, to wound, to seek to pray, to die, etc.).' On Derrida's reading of de Certeau's mystical postulate see the excellent de Vries 1992.

[16] For de Man's reading of Nietzsche's distinction between positing and knowing see next section.

Abgeschiedenheit.[17] Finally, de Certeau engages in a direct confrontation with Austin's notion of the performative in order to demarcate the performative speech act of the *volo*. He takes up the essential requisite of the performative as self-referring ('that act does not postulate a reality or knowledge prior to its utterance') and, thus, as auto-performative ('it is the accomplishment of a beginning'). At this point, he remarks the first difference between the "I will" and Austin's performative, between the "yes" of the *volo* and the "yes" of a contract. The *a priori* of mystic communication (*qua* absolute wanting) presupposes the elimination of all conventions and conditions: this elimination is the very requisite of its *felicity*. 'It leaves the field – de Certeau outlines – in which efficacy is measured in terms of the transformation of linguistic acts into social contracts' (173). Therefore, the very 'performativity' of the performative "I will" is its founding or institutive trait (and its *deconstructive* implications). Finally, de Certeau determines this speech act as the act of 'forgetting oneself', which creates the void of pure volition ('the *a priori* for the "I"'), and as the absolute "yes" ('a "yes" as absolute as the *volo*, without objects, without goals', 174).

Let me address Derrida's elaboration of the unconditioned iterability of the absolute performative in the essay 'A Number of Yes', written in homage to Michel de Certeau and devoted to the above commented chapter from *The Mystic Fable*. Resting on the relation between the *volo* and the absolute "yes", Derrida describes the latter in terms of 'absolute performative', as an unconditioned engagement or promise giving place to any utterance: 'it [the archi-originary *yes*] engages one in a kind of archi-engagement, alliance, consent or promise that merges with the acquiescence given to the utterance it always accompanies' (PS, II 238). Being presupposed as 'the very condition of any determinable performative', it accounts for the very performativity of the performative. And,

[17] Let me follow Derrida's commentary on this point. First, he questions whether 'this determination of the *yes* is still dominated by what Heidegger calls a metaphysics of the will, in other words by the interpretation of Being as the unconditional will of a subjectivity whose hegemony marks all modernity, at least from Descartes to Hegel and to Nietzsche?' (Ps II, 236). Then, taking into account the reference to Eckhart and Heidegger, he observes: 'This *Gelassenheit* bespeaks the non-willing in the most unconditional willing. Such that the very unconditionality of a willing without end and without object turns the will into a non-will' (237). Therefore, he concludes, 'if the very unconditionality of willing turns into non-willing [...] then no "metaphysics of will" is rigorously identifiable' (238).

yet, Derrida remarks that this *yes* only 'resembles' the absolute performative, that it is only a '*quasi*-transcendental' performative and it is 'almost at the origin' (238-239). Here he brings to light the process of representation (the detour or the *différance* of a representative) that is always allowed by the archi-engagement or archi-promise of the *yes*. 'Let us suppose a first *yes*, the archi-originary yes that engages, promises and acquiesces before all else', Derrida writes. This *yes* is *'first second'* to the extent that it presupposes another *yes* which it comes to confirm, repeat or preserve. From this perspective, it originally posits itself as the representative or the supplement that the other *yes* has admitted since its positing.[18] Therefore, positing is already iterability: 'it is originarily, in its very structure, a response'.[19] Furthermore, the supposed first (already second) *yes* always presupposes the possibility of its confirmation, repetition, preservation. It demands for another *yes*, for a *yes* to come. As Derrida explains, 'it must *at least* in advance be tied to a confirmation in another *yes*'. This original duplication of the *yes* accounts for the original process of replacement or substitution (*différance* itself) according to which the *yes* posits itself by always presupposing its own iterability and, thus, by always releasing a repeatable substitute (a slave, perhaps), or the very text of the archi- or self- engagement of the *yes*, and a demand for confirmation, repetition or preservation. Derrida suggests that this process amounts to the very 'institution' of the I (saying *yes*), that is, to the self-positing of the I as the other's other or to the very operation of mastery and ipseity. Since 'this "second" *yes* [the *yes* of confirmation or the *yes* to come] is *a priori* enveloped in the "first" [the archi-originary *yes*]', or, in other words, since the first one already allows and demands to be repeated, then, the first *yes* is already second, a representative or a substitute, the repeatable text of the original (self-)engagement. 'This last, the first, is doubled in advance': its absolute positing allows the 'project', the 'mission' or 'emission', the 'send-off' [*envoi*] of the

[18] Simon Morgan Wortham remarks that 'the founding "yes" cannot be thought simply to precede the trace structure of affirmation – "yes, yes" – which brings it into play'. In this perspective, he suggests, one must reckon with an 'affirmation' that is 'the irreducible or inseparable supplement of the unconditional' (Morgan Wortham 2010, 139-140).

[19] For a parallel development of this thought of the iterability of positing in 'Force of Law' (1989) see Chapter 5. Here I am referring to the passage chosen as the exergue of this introduction. I consider the elaboration of positing in terms of '*differantial* representativity' (and, thus, in light of a certain interpretation of the *Phenomenology*'s notion of mastery) as the key articulation of Derrida's investigation of the performativity of the performative.

second, a certain servile condition of the first and of the self-positing of the I. Derrida notes that this duplication 'divides, splits in advance the archi-originary *yes*' insofar as it can always be a mechanical repetition or a forgetting. Therefore, the movement of representation (or, the master/slave dialectic at work in this movement) constitutes the very chance and, at the same time, threat of the *yes* and of the foundation of the I. 'This repetition threatens the *yes* as well: mechanical repetition, mimicry, thus forgetting, simulacrum, fiction, fable' (240).

1.4 The Fore-Structure of Language

In the third essay of *Memoires for Paul de Man* (1986), entitled 'Acts', Derrida recognizes in de Man's work the 'movement' of 'an unprecedented bringing into play and a subversive reelaboration of Austin's theorems and of speech act theory', which he deems as 'indispensable' for a 'rigorous deconstruction' (MPM, 111).[20] In this section I aim to take into account de Man's notion of the performative as the positional *perspective* of language and Derrida's and Hamacher's elaborations of this notion. In the pages below, I will focus on the essay 'Rhetoric of Persuasion (Nietzsche)' (1975, 1979)[21], where de Man refers the performative back to Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysics as 'positing', and on 'Promises' (1978, 1979)[22], where he draws attention to the promissory structure of language in general. A certain notion of the performative is put to work by de Man within his search for 'the "definition" of *text* as contradictory interference of the grammatical with the figural field' (de Man 1979, 270), that is, for the fact ('aporia') that a *text* can be read from 'such a double perspective', which, at the same time, makes it possible and impossible, readable and unreadable. As de Man suggests in the conclusions of 'Rhetoric of Persuasion

[20] Along this line of deconstruction, let me refer to the forthcoming works of Andrzej Warminski *Material Inscriptions: Rhetorical Reading in Practice and Theory* and *Ideology, Rhetoric, Aesthetics: For De Man* (in press), which are expected to be essential contributions on the configuration of deconstruction and the performative that I attempt to bring into focus in this introduction.

[21] First published in 1975 with the title 'Action and Identity in Nietzsche' in *Yale French Studies* (1975), and, then, included in AR: 119-131.

[22] First published as 'Political Allegory in Rousseau' in *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1978) and, then, included in AR: 246-277.

(Nietzsche)', the performative and the constative are the 'two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view' that rhetoric as text allows for. Therefore, the performative is conceived as one of the polarities of the aporia that, at the same time, 'generates and paralyses' a text (131). In this context, de Man announces a certain 'compulsion' to deconstruction and, therefore, to the 'allegorical narrative' of the impossibility (and the unreadability) of text, which, unavoidably, relapses into the constitutive aporia of text, for example, the aporia between performative and constative language.[23] However, it is worth anticipating, that, when he deals with the promissory dimension of language in 'Promises', de Man thinks of the performative (*qua* auto-performative) as the ultimate foundation of language or as self-positing language.

Let me read, first, de Man's attempt, in 'Rhetoric of Persuasion', to rearticulate Austin's notion of the performative within Nietzsche's deconstruction of a certain philosophical tradition of positing, namely, metaphysics, which begins with Aristotle. In his remarks upon Nietzsche's fragment on Aristotle's 'law of contradiction' (120), de Man reformulates the distinction between '*erkennen*' and '*setzen*' in terms of 'speech acts', retrieving Austin's general distinction between constative and performative utterances. 'To know' is characterized as 'assuming the prior existence of an entity to be known' and, therefore, 'not itself predicating attributes but receiving them' (122). Putting emphasis on the 'nonpositional' trait of the predication of attributes in relation to a preexistent and independent state of things, de Man suggests that 'to know' should be named, perhaps, more appropriately, as 'a speech fact or a fact that can be spoken'. Therefore, as Nietzsche remarks, the principle of contradiction is the ultimate ground of knowledge, for it secures the self-identity of entities, and, at the same time, it is already knowledge since it presupposes that self-identity as given. In fact, the fragment reads that 'one should consider all the more rigorously what presuppositions [*Voraussetzungen*] already lie at the bottom of it [the principle]' (120). I will return to this point after considering de Man's definition of 'positing'. Following Nietzsche's fragment, he observes that it accounts for the ability of language to 'predicate entities' and, thus, is 'a genuine act of speech'. At

[23] For the notion of deconstruction compulsion and the definition of figural allegories see, respectively, de Man 1979, 125 and 275.

this point, de Man remarks that, according to a certain 'classical' tradition, the principle of contradiction consists (or *must* consist) in a fact of speech or a constative statement: 'it is the ground of all knowledge and can only be so by being a priori given and not "put up", "*gesetzt*"'.[24] As de Man points out, Nietzsche's 'deconstructive' reading of tradition amounts exactly to 'showing that this is not the case', that the ultimate ground of knowledge is a positing or a so called speech act. De Man explains that the principle of contradiction is a 'verbal process' or a 'trope' (a metaphor) analogous to 'conceptualization', carrying out the 'substitution of a semiotic' (in this case, 'the sensation of things' or 'the contingent, metonymic link of the sensation') 'with a substantial mode of reference' (that is, 'the knowledge of things' or 'the necessary, metaphorical link of the concept'). This unwarranted substitution, which leads to ontological and epistemological claims, is understood by de Man as an uncontrollable 'aberration' to the extent that it is inscribed in the very structure of language. 'It cannot be refuted, but we can be made aware of the rhetorical substratum and of a subsequent possibility of error that escapes our control' (123). This account of text in terms of 'rhetorical substratum' points toward a certain definition of text itself as an aporetic structure allowing for two incompatible perspectives (for example, grammar and referential meaning, but also predicative and non-predicative language) and, therefore, for deconstruction.

De Man proposes a remarkable description of positional speech acts under the perspective of their temporal structure. Positional language is by definition 'hypothetical', 'future-projected' or prospective': 'all "*setzen*" is "*voraussetzen*", positional language is necessarily hypothetical'. However, this description already finds in positional language the uncontrollable aberration of the unwarranted substitution of 'a pre-positional statement' for 'an established, present knowledge'. The temporal structure of positional language must be deconstructed as a trope, a 'metaleptic reversal' of 'past errors' into 'future truths'. Ultimately, according to de Man, 'position' is structurally 'aberrant' (124) to the extent that it always carries out that temporal reversal: it sets in motion the deconstructive

[24] On de Man's notion of the imperative see de Man 1979, 123-124 and, below, the fourth section of this introduction, in which I read Hamacher's reelaboration (in the wake of Schelling) of de Man's imperative as the original project of language.

reading of *its* aberration. Now, if one follows, with de Man, 'the play of the verb-root "*setzen*"' in Nietzsche's text, one can verify that the deconstructive reading of the traditional principle is again elaborated in 'a positional mode', that is, for instance, it projects a past assumption as a future knowledge.[25] This complication seems to refer back to the formulation of the temporal aberration of positional language. However, as de Man suggests, it can be thought more generally as the error which necessarily affects deconstruction *qua* the deconstruction of the referential mode. 'This complication is characteristic for all deconstructive discourse: the deconstruction states the fallacy of reference in a necessarily referential mode' (125). Perhaps, we can suppose that text in general (including deconstructive texts) is an aberrant positing. At this point, de Man introduces Austin's notion of the performative to account for positional or predicative language and, therefore, for a certain structural perspective from which language *tout court* can be looked at. Interestingly, he uncovers in performative language 'a referential mode' and, therefore, the very aberration affecting language as positional language. 'Performative language is no less ambivalent in its referential function than the language of constatation' (127). Referring to other Nietzschean texts that would confirm this ambivalence, de Man proposes to understand Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics as a deconstruction of the performative ('of the illusion that the language of truth (*episteme*) could be replaced by a language of persuasion (*doxa*)') and, therefore, on a more profound level, as a narrative of the structural 'indecidability' between the performative and the constative. Perhaps, I would suggest, a deconstruction of the structural complication of deconstruction, that is, of the referential mode of the deconstruction of reference. Finally, the critique of metaphysics would be an elaboration of text as what can be seen from two incompatible and indecidable perspectives. In fact, de Man observes, 'the episteme has hardly been restored intact to its former glory, but it has not been definitively eliminated either' (130). Therefore, the notion of the performative, as it is elaborated in this essay, that is, as structurally articulated to the constative and, thus, as structurally *ambivalent*, accounts for the rhetorical substratum of text in general.

[25] Cf. de Man 1979,125: '*Gesetzt, es gäbe ein solches Sich-selbst-identisches A gar nicht* ...'

In 'Promises' de Man conjures up the performative mode of promise to account for the structure of law, institution, foundation. From this perspective, I anticipate that that mode describes the very structure of the auto-performative as the act of a self-founding subjectivity. De Man is commenting on a passage from the *Social Contract* (1762), in which Rousseau outlines the future-oriented dimension of legal acts.[26] In his reading he rearticulates Rousseau's text in light of speech act theory by evoking the temporal dimension of positional language. 'The speech act of the contractual text [...] signals toward a hypothetical future.' 'Promise' comes to name this future-projected, prospective or hypothetical language of the social contract. 'All laws are future-oriented and prospective; their illocutionary mode is that of the promise.' As the occurrence of the term 'illocutionary' testifies, de Man develops his confrontation with Austin's theory taking up the notion of promise as a performative feature.[27] The law displays the temporal articulation of promissory language according to which there is an irreducible split between the time of the promise and its realization: 'the present of the promise is always a past with regard to its realization'. This articulation can be retraced back to de Man's elaboration of the aberration of positional language as substituting past assumptions with future facts.

In Rousseau's text the promissory structure of law poses the question of 'the people' in the name of which law speaks and which is still to come, or, in other terms, of the non-coincidence between the time of the law and that of the people, that is, of the future-projected dimension of the speech act of the law. Rousseau writes: 'it follows that when the Law speaks in the name of the people, it is in the name of the people of today and not of the past'. Firstly, de Man proposes to understand the temporal split by recalling the aporetic articulation of grammar and referential meaning that constitutes text in general and, thus, by supposing that this split can be seen from the perspective of a non-referential and non-applicable language. Therefore, 'the eternal present of the contract' would never 'apply as

[26] Cf. de Man 1979, 273: 'Far from preventing the evils that attack the State, [the members of the State] are rarely on time to remedy them when they begin to perceive their effects. One has to foresee them well in advance in order to avoid or to cure them.'
[27] On the notion of the illocutionary act see Austin 1962, 99: '[...] the performance of an illocutionary act, i.e. performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something.'

such to any particular present' like 'the people of today' (273). But, he takes his investigation of the temporal articulation of the law further by reformulating it as the impossibility of the '*état present*' of the people of today. At this point, it becomes evident that, through the reading of Rousseau's text, de Man is reckoning with the movement of the self-founding or self-constituting of the law (or the people) and, thus, with the split inscribed in the movement itself and dividing the law (or the people) from itself. Promising is the speech act accounting for this movement, auto-performative or self-promising, where the self can be thought as law, people, general will, etc. Following Rousseau's text, de Man explains the impossibility of the people of today with its being 'voiceless'. According to Rousseau, the question is to find 'an organ with which it can state the will of the people', that is, to fill the structural division found in the movement of self-constituting. Rousseau continues by suggesting the affinity between the mode of promising and that of announcing: 'who will give it the necessary foresight to shape the people's actions and to announce them in advance?' In other words, how can the people constitute itself, namely, what it is not constituted yet, through the speech act of the law? From this perspective, de Man seems to suggest that promising would consist in the self's giving itself the organ required to articulate the promise. The use or the term 'restoring' ('the promise that will restore its voice and its sight') evokes once again a movement of self-return or self-re-appropriation. Here de Man is outlining the promissory articulation of the self-constituting act of the people formulated by Rousseau in the following terms: '"the people subject to the Law must be the authors of the Law"'. Finally, de Man remarks, the situation is without solution, 'only a subterfuge can put this paralysis in motion'. According to Rousseau, this subterfuge is represented by the 'lawgiver' who, being an individual, can 'give' a face/sight to the people to come and, therefore, unblock the aporia of self-constituting. However, de Man remarks, the lawgiver is not simply an individual but also a rhetorical figure or a trope of the very movement of self-constituting, of the re- of re-turn and re-appropriation. 'But this individual is also a rhetorical figure, for his ability to promise depends on the metaleptic reversal [I outline '*re*versal'] of cause and effect'. The lawgiver who can articulate the promise is exactly the self or the people that constitutes itself and, thus, its right to do it or to promise, the very possibility of its self-

constituting. As Rousseau's text puts it, 'men should be, prior to the laws, what they are to become through them'. Let me remark that, while the metaleptic reversal is understood in 'Rhetoric of Persuasion' as the general structure of positional language, here it accounts for the aporetic movement of the self-constituting, self-promising or self-positing of language.

At this point, Rousseau finds in God ('the forceful genius that presides over enduring laws') the ultimate ground of that movement, of the auto-constitution of the people and the law. It is only within a teleological horizon that the people or the law can be constituted, that the promise can be articulated. 'The temporal and causal reversal that puts the realization of the promise before its utterance – de Man points out – can only occur within a teleological system oriented toward the convergence of figure and meaning.' With this remark he returns to the initial exposition of the temporal dimension of promissory language as the non-coincidence of the time of articulation with that of actualization and suggests re-reading it as the very aporia of self-constituting (*qua* self-promising). In this context, 'the notion of the divine authority' (274) consists in a traditional attempt to remove this aporia, which, instead, a certain deconstruction of the performative commits itself to take into account.[28] Now, de Man observes, despite the deconstruction of promising at work in the *Social Contract*, this text articulates further promises and can be looked at from the perspective of a promissory mode. 'Yet it promises a great deal. For example ...' (274). This possibility is determined as uncontrollable and unmasterable; perhaps, it attains the very structure of language *tout court* as positional, future-oriented, prospective and, ultimately, promissory (or, somehow, metaleptic): 'this model is a fact of language over which Rousseau himself has no control'. Text in general is promising or promissory to the extent that it constitutes or promises itself, or, in other words, it gives itself the right to constitute or promise itself.[29] Promising is already absolute self-promising. At this point, de Man retrieves Heidegger's

[28] I remind that Derrida develops an analogous reading in 'Declarations of Independence' (1986), in which he interprets the American declaration as the auto-constitution of the people. On this text, see De Ville 2008, that, however, does not reckon with the very tradition in which this exercise of 'comparative literature', as Derrida calls it, should be reinscribed.

[29] de Man 1979, 276: 'Just as any other reader, he [Rousseau] is bound to misread his text as a promise of political change.'

expression '*Die Sprache spricht*' by bringing to light the promissory dimension of language and, therefore, by proposing to reformulate it as '*Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*'. This version of Heidegger's formula can be read as the fundamental proposition of self-founding language, which is necessarily self-promising and, therefore, re-appropriating its ability to articulate promises. '*Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*; to the extent that it is necessarily misleading, language just as necessarily conveys the promise of its own truth' (277). In my reading, this operation of rewriting testifies that de Man's elaboration of the performative mode of the promise points toward a deconstruction of the philosophical tradition of self-founding or self-positing.

In the following pages I propose reconsidering Derrida's and Hamacher's readings of de Man's reading of the performative. In particular, I will focus on Derrida's remarks on de Man's 'Promises' in the third essay of *Memoires for Paul de Man* (1986) and on Hamacher's development of de Man's elaboration of the performative in relation to a certain tradition of positing. Derrida's essay, entitled 'Acts', rewrites the notion of the promissory articulation of text as auto-deconstruction and, thus, as the very deconstruction of self-constituting. In the first pages of the essay, he draws attention to de Man's generalization of the performative mode of promising as the very structure of text and to its formulation through a certain rewriting of Heidegger. In this perspective, Derrida observes, de Man's text has already presupposed the articulation of a promise. 'These texts do not just present themselves on theme of promise; they demonstrate the performative structure of the text in general, including that of the demonstrative text, that which Paul de Man signs' (MPM, 93). These remarks allow Derrida to point out from the beginning of his commentary that the generalization of promising touches upon the very movement of signature and, more generally, of the auto-performative. In fact, he adds that this generalization 'disturbs the tranquil assurance of the subject of what we call today a "performative"', which is, ultimately, an auto-assurance. At this point, the text develops a remarkable reformulation of the aporetic structure of promising which rests on another thought of the performative and of positing in general. Implicitly referring to de Man's analysis of the temporal dimension of promising, Derrida

suggests that prospective or future-oriented language implies an irreducible and structural excess: it is always 'too-much-promising' or 'too-much-anticipating'. This excess would be the very essence of promising, which is by definition positional with respect to what/who is yet to come and, for this reason, demarcates itself from the constative language that refers to a constituted order of things. In other words, promising originally implies the very opening of time, the relation with the other (as other) and its very repeatability. 'A promise – Derrida explains – is always excessive. Without this essential excess it would return to a description or knowledge of the future' (93-94). Therefore, the generalization of promising brings about the essential 'disturbance' or 'perversion' of the performative as positional or prospective language. Here, in this essentiality, Derrida finds 'the *unbelievable*, comical aspect of every promise' (94) bearing a certain engagement toward itself. As de Man suggests in a formidable expression, 'it is impossible to read the Social Contract without experiencing the exhilarating feeling inspired by a firm promise' (de Man 1979, 276). The search for the general structure of language and positing develops as a certain emphasis on the comical.

According to Derrida, within this emphasis it is possible to reinscribe de Man's rewriting of Heidegger's sentence on speaking speech or language. 'Heidegger does not laugh often in his text [...] Paul de Man smiles and thus mocks him a bit' (MPM, 96). As Derrida observes, de Man seems to shed light on the comical aspect of self-referential or self-reflexive language by re-reading the essence of language as promising or as future-oriented, prospective or positional language ('the essence of speech is the promise', 97). More generally, de Man announces (or promises) that self-positing is always self-promising. Certainly, this announcement carries with itself the structural perversion of promising as the German prefix *ver-* suggests. Therefore, the promise also *affects itself* with a certain perversion or corruption. Perhaps, auto-affection *qua* (self-)promising implies a certain exhilarating aspect. As Derrida points out, 'the *sprechen* of speech is affected by a *ver-*, not only does it become a promisor, but it also finds itself unsettled, disturbed, corrupted, perverted, *affected* [italics are mine] by a kind of fatal drift'. Remarkably, he notes that this perversion pertains the very

movement of the auto-affection of language, which also explains the choice to add the *reflexive* pronoun '*sich*' within parentheses: *Die Sprechen verspricht (sich)*. 'Speaking affects itself of/with the outside ['*La parole s'affecte du dehors*', the translation is mine] (100).[30] In fact, Derrida adds, language could not speak without the reflexive pronoun. This supplement betrays the effects of de Man's reading of self-promising language over the notions of self-constituting and, thus, of deconstruction itself. Firstly, Derrida proposes reading, through de Man's announcement, the movement of self-constituting as essentially allowing a certain unconditioned perversion or repeatability, a certain essential deconstruction. 'The "sich" is, at the same time, constituted and de-constituted, deconstructed, by the very *act* of the promise.' To this extent, deconstruction as auto-deconstruction or self-deconstructing concerns the very notions of the '*autos*' or the 'self' implied in the former expressions. Derrida will develop this point when elaborating on the notion of autoimmunity in his reading of Nancy's critique of ipseity in *Rogues*.[31] Here he points out that 'the *itself* of auto-deconstruction does not escape what I will call the aporetic event' (101). Ultimately, the essential perversion of promising touches upon the self- or the auto- of promising itself. And, thus, promising, de Man's promising, what Derrida names 'arche-promise', posits, that is, promises itself, by admitting a perversion within itself, namely, by exposing itself to the risk of death and conjuring others to credit and preservation.[32]

In the essay '*Lectio*. On de Man's Imperative' (first published in 1989, and, then, included in *Premises*, 1999) Hamacher reads de Man's elaboration of the notion of the imperative as an investigation into the original constitution of language. Furthermore, referring to his reading of the promissory structure of law, he finds in the promise the very movement of the imperative and, thus, of that original constitution. In 'Rhetoric of Persuasion', de Man determines Nietzsche's

[30] As Derrida remarks, the pronoun appears only in the second edition.

[31] For my reading of the notion of autoimmunity (as self-refuting) in light of an Hegelian articulation of ipseity (as mastery or forced recognition) see Chapter 3.

[32] Derrida gives the following definition of promising as auto-performative: 'We have also just seen why this arche-promise, which promises truth and meaning, is finally neither true nor meaningful in its proper and original moment [...] This moment calls for new conventions which it itself proposes or promises, but which for that reason, it cannot without artifice take advantage of or found its authority on at the very moment it calls, when it calls for new laws' (MPM, 135). On the conjuration of the credit of others see my reading of 'Force of Law' in Chapter 5.

deconstructive reading of Aristotle's principle of contradiction as 'an imperative concerning that which should count as true'. He understands the notion of the imperative as a performative mode implying a certain failure or inability 'to do things' in the present of the utterance itself. 'Something one has failed to do can become feasible again only in the mode of compulsion; the performative correlate of "I cannot" is "I [or you] must"' (de Man 1979, 123). It seems that, here, 'compulsion' refers to the very speech act of the imperative. According to de Man, positional language presupposes this imperative mode and, thus, the temporal dimension by which language itself demands or compels what, in fact, cannot be done. Hamacher proposes reading the notion of the imperative as the very scene of the constitution of language and, therefore, as the process of self-constituting (or self-positing) language. Language constitutes (or posits) itself by demanding or compelling that there is a language, that '"there shall be language, a language, one language"', as Hamacher suggests. This is what is commanded, first of all, 'in all demands' (Hamacher 1999, 210), that is, in all positings of language. Therefore, the imperative of language is the ultimate ground of all linguistic acts, the very auto-performative of language itself.

As Hamacher points out, '"language" is not to be understood as a given structure or a teleological process but as the imperative that there ought to be (one) language'. Every singular linguistic act implies the need and demand of language itself. Perhaps, one can think of a 'linguistic function', the very scene of the imperative, claiming for the independent subject of a linguistic act. 'We do not make use of language without first being in need of it and therefore demanding it – and with it ourselves' (211).[33] The principle of language *qua* imperative is not a transcendental condition of possibility but a demand or a compulsion allowed by the condition itself. Paraphrasing the above quoted passage from de Man, Hamacher remarks that the "it must be" of language also means "it cannot be". And, therefore, speaking is not simply speaking of language, that is, presupposing the absolute constitution of language, but also to admit the imperative structure of

[33] Hamacher identifies this linguistic function with referentiality: 'Referentiality is a function rather than a contingent possibility that we could simply neglect, because the very possibility of language depends on the imperative demand to engage in its referential project' (Hamacher 1999, 211-212).

that constitution. In other terms, speaking precedes the very constitution of language and remains suspended at the demand of it. 'Speaking – and therefore speaking of language – we are still speaking *before* language, before its arrival, and do not stop speaking it away from us' (212). Here I single out the reference to a certain fore-structure of language which accounts for the scene of its self-constitution. This reference is developed further when Hamacher proposes retracing the performative of language back to the reading of the structure of the law elaborated by de Man in 'Promises'. Firstly, that imperative is assumed as a law of language and, thus, as the speech act of its constitution. 'The proleptic trait of the imperative turns into a law – a law of language.' But this means that the imperative as the law of language articulates itself as a promise: it articulates the promise of language. (Self-)promising comes to account for the very structure of the auto-constitution of language. Language speaks *before* or *ahead of* itself in the performative mode of promise, it promises itself. 'Language is promised in the law of language, [...] is "foresworn", "forespoken", spoken in advance of itself, spoken before it, as constituted, can speak' (215).

Let me examine more closely the reading of de Man's account of the promise as the speech act of the law (of language). Hamacher remarks that the promise describing the imperative of language, the promise of language, is the promise of the ultimate ground of all individual, linguistic acts. 'The imperative of language, of reading [...] contains the promise of a future language, a future understanding, in such a way that the formal conditions of all individual acts of understanding are outlined in this project.' This project can be called 'transcendental' to the extent that it concerns the auto-constitution of language. Hamacher reelaborates de Man's argument about the metaleptic movement of the speech act of the law and, more in general, of self-constituting, to account for the transcendental project of language. This transcendental character, he observes, implies that movement to the extent that it amounts to the constative description of a matter of fact (that there is language) which is the very content of the promise (there will/must be language). In other words, it amounts to the speech act of a self-constituting (self-promising or self-demanding) language. 'The performative act of promising a possible understanding must be structured as an epistemologically illegitimate

figure, as metalepsis [...] For what is announced by the promise only for the future is asserted to be already effective in the present.' In de Man's language, the promise of language can be looked at from these two incompatible perspectives. Hamacher suggests that this rhetorical figure ('of confounding a future with a present', 217) describes the very movement of all logic or dialectic of presupposition, that is, of self-positing. In Hamacher's reading, de Man's investigation into the metaleptic figure of the absolute self-constitution (of the people) becomes an investigation into the original constitution of language and understanding. It brings into focus the aporia between the constative and the performative, which, at the same time, is allowed by that constitution and paralyses it.

> So the constative moment of disclosing a possible understanding is not only in constant conflict with its performative function – and thus makes the establishment of the law itself into an illegitimate act – but this unavoidable and irreconcilable conflict within the original constitution of understanding becomes valid as an endless suspension of this very constitution. The interlacing of constative with performative brackets both: the presupposition of a possible understanding could be formulated only under the condition that it is given, and is givenness only under the condition of presupposition. (218)

The aporia, or conflict, within the promise of language operates simultaneously as a condition of possibility and of suspension. It accounts for an irreducible oscillation between the 'presupposition' and the 'givenness' of a self-constituting or self-promising language. It makes the transcendental and original project 'a fiction that can neither be proved nor verified'. Consequently, this situation of structural suspension concerns the promise as the speech act of the law of language and, therefore, the imperative of language. Hamacher reconsiders de Man's rewriting of Heidegger's sentence '*Die Sprache spricht*' in the context of this examination of the promissory movement of the transcendental and original project of language. Heidegger's sentence is interpreted as the constative description of a fact, an already constituted (and self-constituting) language or the very ground of all linguistic act. In other words, the sentence simply affirms the original project of language. 'Heidegger's apophthegm "language speaks" still courts the misunderstanding that there is an already constituted language and that

this language could correspond to its own Being' (218). As Hamacher's note suggests, the (self-)constitution of language unfolds itself as the performative mode of the imperative and, thus, as the law of language, the speech act of the promise. It betrays a certain fore-structure by which language constitutes itself by demanding or promising itself and, therefore, by remaining suspended in this demand or promise. Therefore, Hamacher proposes to read de Man's rewriting as a more *profound* insight into the structure of the transcendental project of language. Firstly, there can only be a promise of (a not yet constituted) language. 'As finite, language is never already constituted but is always in the process of its constitution; it is language always only as promised.'[34] Secondly, this promise remains always paralysed by its own aporetic structure. Therefore, there can only be a suspended promise of language. 'Since its promise can never be fulfilled by itself as promised, this promise, which is also the suspension of language, brackets itself' (219).

At this point, let me return to a remarkable footnote on the deconstruction of the original project of language. Here Hamacher refers to a certain 'play of the affirmative in language', which, in my examination below, I propose reading as the very deconstruction (heteronomy or repeatability) of the auto-performative. The affirmative is allowed by the original constitution of language, which, somehow, the auto-performative is unable to account for. One could also affirm that it is always at work within the very structure of the auto-performative.

> If the very constitution of language is not only one speech act among others but is the performative, the formative *par excellence*, and if the operation remains suspended and thus keeps all its dependent performatives suspended as a result of its fore-structure, [...] then the "operation" cannot be thought simply under the rubric of *performative* alone. (218)

The transcendental project of language, as it has been described through the reading of de Man's text, only admits an operation that can explain its aporetic

[34] Hamacher 1999, 218-219: 'In an, as it were, objectively ironic combination of Heidegger's sentence with the vocabulary of Freud, de Man writes at the end of his essay on promises: "*Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*."'

structure and, therefore, its remaining suspended. According to Hamacher, this operation must be thought as 'its condition of formation *and* as de-formation, as pure positing *and* as deposing, ex-position – as *affirmative*' (218). At this stage, he does not uncover the relation between the affirmative and the auto-performative of the transcendental project. Rather, he seems to detach 'pure positing' from a certain thinking of self-positing (self-constituting, self-promising, etc.) and to anticipate that, as *simultaneously* 'de-posing', it prevents self-positing from closing upon itself (as, I would suggest, a certain unconditioned exposure to the other or to the risk of death, a certain finitude or repeatability of self-positing). The thinking of this 'pure positing' is the ultimate development of the deconstruction of the auto-performative and of the original constitution of language. I will comment some key-articulations of Hamacher's notion of the affirmative in the following section. However, I am referring below to a note of 'Affirmative, Strike' (1991-1992), where he elaborates the affirmative function of language in relation to the fore-structure of language.

In a footnote of the essay on Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* entitled 'Affirmative, Strike', Hamacher introduces the notion of the affirmative within a certain reading of the original constitution of language. Notably, in this text, he demarcates a specific tradition of thinking the pre- or fore- structure of language, represented by de Man and Derrida ('following Heidegger' Hamacher 1991, 1143, he suggests), from the theory of the (auto-)performative as the act of an absolute subjectivity positing itself. Firstly, Hamacher points out that his examination is concerned with the performativity of the performative or the auto-performative, that is, with the speech act of the conventions or institutions which, according to a certain tradition, the performative requires as pre-established conditions of validity ('only those [performatives] capable of instituting such conditions themselves', 1142). On a more profound level, Hamacher adds, the auto-performative accounts for the ultimate foundation of language, the very ground of all linguistic act. (Here the performative is always associated to the activity of positing, instituting, founding, constituting, etc.) The auto-performative is the very act of a self-constituting or self-positing language. 'It [language] posits itself in an act of absolute autothesis.' I propose to read this perspective as the elaboration of

de Man's remarks on positional language. As I pointed out in my examination of '*Lectio*', this reading of the auto-performative of language brings to light the irreducible fore-structure of language, its articulation as/of a transcendental project or promise. Ultimately, the auto-performative of language rests on the aporia between the constative and the performative, givenness and presupposition, which is the very condition of its possibility and suspension. 'In order to be language, it must always presuppose itself. [...] language would permanently – and this is the sign of its finitude – announce itself, speak before itself' (1142). The transcendental performative of language, that is, the performative of its constitution or foundation, draws together the possibility of 'a language which is always arriving' and the very paralysis of this possibility, since it is 'always yet to come' and, therefore, 'never language *itself*'. That performative is the very promise of language, the promise of a self-promising language, which, at the same time, is a paralysed promise, that does not promise at all. 'The absolute performative of language would be the promise of language.' This promise is the original constitution of language, the very ground of all linguistic act: 'language speaks precisely – Hamacher notes – in that it promises'. As he suggests above, the promissory structure of language accounts for its very 'finitude', that is, for a certain function of self-positing language, which cannot ever be encompassed by language itself and, thus, interrupts it (in another vocabulary, I would speak of a certain being-for-the-other of language itself)[35]. Hamacher evokes a certain line of deconstruction referring to the already examined texts on the promise by de Man and Derrida and characterized by a singular concern with 'the pre-structure of the performative trait of language', what he names the promise of language. As Hamacher anticipated, the promise of language is always promise of promise or non-verifiable promise, perhaps, non-promise, to the extent that 'the fact [I outline, 'the fact'] that it is infinitely yet-to-come coincides with its infinite non-arrival'. Therefore, the promissory structure of the auto-performative of language entails a certain non-performativity or non-performative operation. In Hamacher's terms, there *must* be a *linguistic* dimension which does not allow language itself, as the auto-performative, the act of self-positing language, to fold upon itself, which, in fact, resists the movement of the self's folding upon itself. Toward this

[35] On Derrida's reading of Lévinas's notion of the originally dative dimension of language see Chapter 2.

dimension, which Hamacher names "afformative", a certain deconstruction of the auto-performative should ultimately point: 'a dimension in which language itself does not correspond to itself as *act* and in which, instead of acting, language abstains from any action'. Therefore, the auto-performative of language is originally finite (and repeatable) since it always opens onto a non-encompassable dimension of language, an absolutely other. Perhaps, it is always 'exposed' *tout court*. Hamacher uses the term 'exposed' to account for this opening of the performative onto a certain 'abyss of language'; yet, I would suggest, the term can be used absolutely, as a sign of the original finitude (and repeatability) of language itself. This abyssal dimension of language, which is irreducible to any self-positing, could perhaps be thought as a certain unconditioned unposited which articulates the structural traits of pure positing *and* de-posing. Therefore, the auto-performative is necessarily 'exposed' to this unposited. Finally, as Hamacher notes, '*afformation* means also exposing to the unposited': it names the linguistic function of the exposure (to a certain unposited or abyss).

1.5 The Aporia of Positing

This section aims to focus on Hamacher's attempt to think of the afformative as the structural dimension of the exposure of (self-)positing to a certain unconditioned unposited. In the pages below I aim to demonstrate that this attempt mobilizes a rigorous elaboration of the tradition and the vocabulary of positing by taking into account the removed functions of de-posing, ex-pos(-it-)ing and of the un-posited.[36] To this extent, a certain line of deconstruction, the deconstruction of the auto-performative, can be read as theoretically and terminologically welded to a line of modern European thought, the tradition of positing from Kant on. In the following reading of Hamacher's text one can touch

[36] In a footnote of 'Premises' Hamacher explains that a thinking of the structural possibility of non-understanding (as well as non-positing) brings about devastating effects upon the vocabulary of positing and the topology of metaphysics as onto-theseology (that is, as assuming the Kantian notion of Being as absolute position). Cf. Hamacher 1999, 19-20: 'And this affected the entire vocabulary by which the concept of understanding had been defined: not only the vocabulary of thesis, position, positing, *Setzung*, *Gegenständlichkeit*, *Stellung*, *Vorstellung*, and *Darstellung* but also that of substance, constancy and consistency.'

upon the deconstruction of the theory of the performative as a thinking of the unconditioned exposure (and – as resulting from my reading of Derrida's deconstruction of the performative – iterability) of positing. In this perspective, my examination will centre on Hamacher's elaboration of the aporia of positing in his readings of Fichte's proposition of self-identity and Hegel's speculative inversion.

In the opening essay of his book *Premises. Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan* (1999), entitled 'Premises', Hamacher brings into focus the movement of finite understanding. Firstly, he evokes the traditional representation of this movement as the act of 'stabilization' of 'the incomprehensible' ('the foreign' or 'the irreducibly other') into an 'object of representation' and, therefore, as the mastery or domination of the subject. The irreducibly other is 'made into a cognized, controlled, reduced other of this subject'. In other words, the act of the understanding is the very 'constitution' of the object and, therefore, of the master/subject, its auto-constitution. Hamacher remarks that this so called movement of understanding describes a 'leap' to the extent that it goes from 'an understanding exposed to the incomprehensible' to 'a self-consciousness that posits its object' (Hamacher 1999, 5), from the exposure to what, by definition, cannot be comprehended to the mastery of a self-positing subjectivity. Therefore, he proposes to discuss this leap through the reading of Hegel's account of Greek mantics as 'intuition of nature' (proceeding from a certain wonder, *thaumazein*), as it is elaborated in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837). Hegel finds the beginning of mantics in *thaumazein*, that, according to Aristotle, is also the beginning of philosophy and which Aristotle himself defines in *Metaphysics* I, 982b,12 as an *aporon*, that is, as Hamacher explains, 'a place without any outlet, an impasse, something incomprehensible'. Therefore, the starting point of the movement of the understanding of nature is an aporia, a certain relation to an irreducibly other. But, it implies that this relation cannot *ever* be sublated and, thus, that the understanding of nature is *always* accompanied by the relation itself: 'in every one of its steps philosophy [understanding, in general] remains bound to it [the aporia]'. Hegel seems well aware of this point insofar as he accounts for the intuition of nature as self-positing. At the beginning, he sees a relation of the spirit

to the natural of nature as 'to something that is at first foreign'. According to Hamacher, it is the very relation to the aporia, what cannot ever be sublated, and, thus, the very beginning of finite thinking and understanding, a certain structural exposure. The aporia is determined as 'a non-given, something that holds itself back, something foreign to which spirit entertains no "positive" relation', perhaps, a certain unposited to which understanding is, by definition, exposed.

However, as Hamacher suggests, there is a 'nevertheless' at some point, which announces the exchange of perspectives: from the relation with the aporia to the positive relation of a self-positing spirit with the object. Hegel writes: 'Greek spirit relates to [...] something to which it *nevertheless* [my italics] have the intimating confidence and the faith that the natural bears something within itself that would be friendly to spirit, something to which the spirit could relate in a positive manner' (6). As the reference to a certain 'positive' relation specifies, what the natural bears within itself is posited, or, as Hamacher suggests, 'presupposed', and, thus, requires the very position or the mastery of a self-positing spirit. This position consists in the performative of supposition or faith to the extent that the ultimate ground of position itself is a self-positing subjectivity. In other terms, the spirit recognizes itself the authority, the power or the credit to posit its object and, therefore, to master the foreign. 'It is this *supposition* of faith – Hamacher notes – that turns the foreign something into 'a "positive" relation to it.' The movement of supposition and, thus, of self-positing does not absolve the spirit from the aporetic relation to the foreign or the irreducibly other, yet this relation is the very condition of that movement.[37] It can be read as the structure which allows for the spirit to fold back upon itself, for the very self-reflexivity of the self-positing spirit: in Hamacher's terms, 'the resistance from which experience must rebound and turn back on itself'.[38] This structural resistance opens up 'positionality itself', that is, a certain economy where the object is only 'the positing and self-positing of the spirit' (7). Therefore, the movement of the

[37] For a certain Hegelian tradition of this notion of faith I refer to Robert Williams's remarks on the dimension of belief in the *Phenomenology*'s exposition of the character of the master (see Chapter 3) and to my reading of Derrida's elaboration of 'believing' in 'Force of Law' (see Chapter 5).

[38] It is worth remarking that Hamacher determines the leap from the aporia to the object as 'the contraction of difference into position' supposing a certain relation between difference, as the irreducibly other, and position as auto-position.

understanding of the natural describes the circular path (or economy) of the self-return and self-re-appropriation of the spirit, that *always* admits the relation to the aporia, what, in Derrida's terms, can be called restricted economy or the speculative engagement of the self with itself.[39] In fact, the spirit begins with its relation to the aporia and, thus, by positing the object, it posits itself, its mastery; to this extent it returns to or re-appropriates itself within a circle. Hamacher determines positionality in the following passage: 'The path of spirit [...] leads it from its presupposition of an absolute other to this other as other *of itself*, and in this way it returns spirit to itself'. It is worth remarking that Hamacher speaks of the relation to aporia in terms of 'presupposition' anticipating the distinction between the presupposition of the positing and the self-positing of the spirit, the self-presupposition, and the structural condition of its exposure to a certain unposited.[40] The presupposition of aporia accounts for what provokes understanding 'remaining incomprehensible' and, therefore, for what makes understanding 'incomprehensible', that is, unable to comprehend itself if not always exposed. Perhaps, these remarks on the aporia of understanding could be retraced back to Lévinas's analyses of the vocative dimension of language in general and the structural incomprehensibility of its origin, which I will examine in the second chapter of the present work, through Derrida's reading of *Totality and Infinity* (1961). Hamacher reformulates these questions affirming 'the double law' of understanding: 'the law of hermeneutic reduction', which corresponds to stabilization, appropriation, mastery, etc., and 'the dismaying law of de-posing', which prevents any position, understanding and so on. He points out that understanding is possible only if it does not understand (itself). In fact, by understanding, it does not understand the aporia, the non-understandable, its very origin or condition; whereas, by holding on the aporia, it does not understand yet. Therefore, Hamacher concludes, 'understanding is possible only between these two impossibilities – the hermeneutic *parousia* of spirit in its autoposition and de-

[39] On my reading of Derrida's understanding of the Hegelian notion of mastery as restricted economy and self-engagement see Chapters 4 and Supplement.

[40] For the presupposition of the spirit see Pr, 9: 'Wherever this speculative inversion takes place there must be a circular path between spirit and nature. Its logical form is the self-presupposition of spirit in its other – and "spirit" is nothing but this self-presupposition.'

posing' (10), which amounts to say that, in de Man's terms, it admits an aporetic condition of possibility.[41]

At this point, let me draw attention to the beginning of the essay 'The Second of Inversion' (1999), where Hamacher finds the 'greatest performance' of Hegel's speculative inversion 'in death as the abstract negation of entities as such'. He recalls the overdetermined passage from the Preface of *Phenomenology of Spirit* about the 'magical force' of the spirit performing the speculative inversion of the negative into Being. This passage is the key-source of a certain French tradition of Hegelianism from Kojève on.[42] According to the circular path of self-presupposing described above, Hamacher accounts for the movement of self-showing or self-positing subjectivity taking its departure from an aporetic condition of dismemberment or negativity and reappropriating itself. The speculative inversion would consist in 'turning its own non-reality into Being' (339) and, thus, in the absolute position of the spirit. Let me quote the seminal text of the *Phenomenology*'s Preface:

> Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass onto something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and dwelling with it. This dwelling with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. (PS, 19)

Hamacher observes that what makes the inversion possible and, therefore, what grants the magical force of spirit, is the 'transformation of death into something dead', 'into a face', that is, a finite determination or a determinate negation.

[41] Cf. Hamacher 1999, 10: 'There is understanding, including self-understanding, only from the aporia – and the aporia is what asemantically, alogically, adialectically grants understanding, including dialectical, by refusing it.'

[42] See my examination of the notion of the putting life at stake (Hegel's *wagen* and Bataille's *mettre en jeu*) in Chapter 4.

Ultimately, this transformation is a performative supposition and auto-supposition. To this extent, Hamacher speaks also of the conversion of 'the negation of the I into the pure energy of the I'. Remarkably, the speculative inversion, as Hamacher notes, inheriting a gesture typical of de Man's deconstruction, can be thought as the rhetorical figure of *prosopopeia* in the sense that it exchanges the abstract negation of death for a finite determination.[43] Death *as such* has always already been reappropriated within the circular path of the spirit, the restricted economy of sense and life, or a speculative self-engagement. Somehow, from Derrida's perspective, the prosopopeia can be seen as the text of this engagement, the contract that the spirit sends to itself allowing repeatability and the call for the credit of others.[44] Perhaps, I remark, the irreducible alterity of death is the very origin, the structural condition of all determination (or *prosopopeia*) and of self-positing I, namely, of positionality itself; it has already given place to it. 'The abyssal shapelessness of death' is the unposited to which every shape or positing and, thus, the self-positing ground of all shape and positing are structurally exposed.

In what follows, I return to the interrupted reading of 'Premises' to follow Hamacher's elaboration of a certain modern line of thinking 'positing' from Kant to Heidegger, which can be compared to the above examined elaboration by Gasché. I will linger on this passage of Hamacher's essay in order to reconsider the position of deconstruction (as the thought of the aporia of positing and of de-posing) in relation to the modern philosophical tradition. Hamacher evokes Kant's thesis on Being as absolute position (*Position oder Setzung*), that is elaborated in the treatise *The One possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763), as the initial formula 'for the fundamental thought of modern metaphysics' and, therefore, I add, for a certain tradition of positing, in which Hegel's speculative inversion and, finally, the entire line of deconstruction I am reckoning with can be reinscribed. Kant's text reads: 'Existence [*Dasein*] is the absolute position of a thing. [...] If a thing is considered posited in and for itself,

[43] Cf. Hamacher 1999, 340: 'Meaning can only be affixed to a death for which subjectivity has lent an aspect, a countenance, according to the pattern of its own shape'. For a more in-depth commentary on the tradition of the Hegelian text see Chapter 4.

[44] I refer once again to Chapter 5 for the examination of the notion of the enforceability of the law.

then Being [*Sein*] is as much as existence.' Firstly, Hamacher observes that Kant understands the absolute position as the pre-predicative and relationless presupposition of the *Dasein* of a thing and, therefore, of *Sein* in general: 'it refers purely to the existence of "a thing in and for itself" regardless of all relations to possible predicates'. Secondly, he explains that the relationless and absolute presupposition must presuppose in turn a relation to a subjectivity ('the subject'). As the *Critique of Pure Reason* suggests, in relation to the modalities of Being, this subjectivity is 'the subject of knowledge' (11). Therefore, Hamacher comments, the absolute position is 'the original act of the cognitive subject'. In other words, the absolute positing of Being, or of the existence of a thing, is 'a positing of knowledge' of the cognitive subject. This positing is the absolute foundation of Being and of the existence of a thing. It is worth noting that Hamacher accounts for this original act of positing as a 'dictate' of a subjective and self-dictating consciousness, that is, as the (speech) act of a self-constituting or self-recognizing master. Finally, looking at the theory of positing as the cornerstone of Kant's ontology, he proposes speaking of 'auto-' and 'onto-' theseology (12). Referring to Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Hamacher adds that ontology is also 'ontotautology'. In fact, he explains, the being-posited of existence requires that the positing subject posits itself in what it has posited and, therefore, in Hamacher's terms, 'the "absolute presupposition" in which positing bends back on itself and reflects itself'. The Hegelian text commented by Hamacher reads: 'Being-posited is thus a determination of reflection [...] is a relation to other, but to reflectedness-in-itself.' Therefore, Kant's absolute position is made into a reflection. As Hamacher points out, Being, *qua* being-posited, is a being-other which is driven back by reflection into itself. He writes: 'the absolute premise of this other – that it is posited unconditionally and thus as something unconditioned – refers the other back to its positing and turns its existence into reflectedness.' Here one can find at work again the speculative inversion or the absolute presupposition rebounded by the relation to a certain aporia (a certain absolutely other). Reflection describes a circular path of positing, where 'in every relation to the other the original positing returns to itself'. To this

extent, according to Hamacher, Hegel has given a foundation to the absolute position of Being, reformulating ontology in terms of speculative dialectics.[45]

But, the most remarkable conclusion of this reading is that the ontotautology remains necessarily exposed to aporia. In Hamacher's terms, the aporia of positing (as self-positing) is necessarily not yet 'comprehended'. At this point, the text attempts to account for the articulation of pure positing and deposing, namely, the affirmative, which is structurally admitted by absolute or auto-position and, yet, being irreducible to self-positing, necessarily interrupts its circular movement. Hamacher shows that the unconditioned positing cannot simply be self-positing and, therefore, that it is necessary to detach self-positing itself from what he calls the affirmative dimension of positing. Firstly, the unconditioned positing, that is, the very auto-presupposition (spirit, etc.) '*must* be without presupposition and a subjectless positing'. However, 'by positing itself, *it* already posits *itself*, and so the positing that it is first supposed to perform must already allow itself to be presupposed'. As Hamacher points out, this presupposition cannot be reappropriated within a certain positionality or domination of positing to the extent that it is allowed by the very movement of self-positing. It accounts for the being of absolute positing ahead of itself, for its fore-structure, for the fact that positing promises itself, it is never yet arrived and, therefore, never arrives, and so on. 'Such an allowance, admission, or concession of a presupposition – Hamacher notes – can no longer be thought according to the logic of positing.' Rather, it is the very origin or structural condition of self-positing: perhaps, what has already given place to and, at the same time, suspended self-positing. Following Hamacher's reading, it can be thought as 'the opening that remains independent of the positing' (13), that, by definition, resists it, perhaps, as an exposure which is necessarily related to an aporia or an irreducibly other. More in general, the movement of self-positing opens onto another which 'withdraws from the power, the faculty and the possibility of positing', which, therefore, prevents any original positing from reflecting or bending back on itself, or, in other words, from being '*performed*'. Ultimately, this opening is the structural difference dividing the original (self-)positing from itself: 'it is in need of a difference with respect to

[45] For a convincing reading of Hegel's 'speculative' or 'absolute' reflection in relation to the tradition of philosophical reflection see Gasché 1986, 43-46.

itself that can under no condition be reduced to a thetic act.' Therefore, the performative of faith and supposition finds in a self-positing subjectivity, in the spirit, its ultimate foundation only if the latter has already admitted a certain difference with respect to itself. The original positing is self-founding at the very condition of opening onto an absolutely other, which is also the condition of the infelicity (perhaps, restlessness) of its *performative*.[46] As Hamacher explains, 'only by allowing something other that itself can it then grant admission to itself' (14). What is at stake is the very origin of absolute positing, a certain *thaumazein*, a relation to aporia, which can at no moment be conjured away. From this perspective, Hamacher's reading of the fore-structure of the original positing can be retraced back to his reading of the origin of Greek mantics and, more generally, to Aristotle's idea of the beginning of philosophy. It is worth remarking that the unposited aporia is called also 'non-positing' as it resists positionality in general, it does not collaborate at all to the positing and the self-positing of spirit; rather, it abstains from them. 'Positing must leave out to a non-positing.' The structural concession to non-positing consists in a condition of possibility and of interruption for the original positing and, thus, for positing in general: it opens up their very possibility and, at the same time, it remains independent from them. A certain deconstruction of modern metaphysics must take into account this condition of the original positing.

Hamacher proposes to reformulate the very structure of the original positing in light of this condition. 'It must not be able to be what it must be able to become. It can claim to be only in the form of a demand for Being, not as a thetic Being but only as an imperative "Be!"' Therefore, the auto-performative of the original positing must be understood as the performative mode of the imperative. From this perspective, de Man's reading of the imperative dimension of positional language ('it must' *and* 'it cannot') can be understood as the ultimate term of a certain deconstruction of the tradition of positing. At the same time, as Hamacher suggests in evoking the mode of a 'dictate', this imperative can be taken as a reformulation of mastery as the auto-performative of a self-dictating I. As de Man brings into focus in his reading of the imperative, it accounts for the future-

[46] As I point out in Chapter 2, Derrida owes this notion of restlessness to Hyppolite's elaboration of the Hegelian predicate *unruhig*.

oriented dimension of language and positing in general. Hamacher seems to find in the imperative the very finitude of positing, that is, its exposure to an unposited or non-positing other and, perhaps, its iterability. 'Finite reason cannot ground itself' (14), he concludes. Therefore, the imperative implies the finitude of positing as heteronomy or unconditioned exposure to a certain idea of future as aporia (pure positing *and* deposing), to the other (as other). In the tradition of positing supposed by Hamacher, Schelling's line "Be! That is the supreme demand of criticism" stands for 'the most pregnant formula of the [*already*, I dare add] Kantian aporia of positing', insofar as it uncovers the imperative mode of the original positing and the implications of its finitude. 'The principle of being' is transformed into 'the unfounded demand for Being', where 'unfounded' alludes to the fact that it is the very demand or imperative of foundation. The effects of the imperative mode of the original positing or of foundation are that 'from its inception, positing is exposed to something else' or it is 'exposed positing' *tout court* ('it is thus ex-position', 15), the *Aussetzung der Setzung*, to use a Heideggerian expression, since the exposure is necessarily related to the absolutely other, the aporia, and so on.[47] Finally, the deconstruction of the fundamental thought of modern metaphysics is a rearticulation of the vocabulary of positing taking into account the functions of the structural prefixes un-, non-, ex-, and de-. This rearticulation brings about a certain reelaboration of the notion of 'premise', which, according to the metaphysical tradition described above, the auto-performative of the original positing should account for. In fact, at the end of the essay, Hamacher observes: 'Just as exposure can no longer be thought in accordance with the logic of positing and that of Being conceived as position, it is no longer possible to think of the "pre" of this "premise" simply as something that still "belongs" to positing' (38).

[47] In the final pages of 'Premises' Hamacher draws attention to Heidegger's remarkable attempt, in 'On the essence of truth', to depose a certain ontotheseological and ontotautological terminology. As he remarks, Heidegger singles out a certain 'letting-be' as 'freedom' and 'ex-posing itself to beings as such [...] into the open' (or 'exposing' *tout court*). This 'exposure to an open arena', as Hamacher puts it, cannot be looked under the perspective of positing and positionality. Cf. Hamacher 1999, 38: 'As the exposure of positing – the *Aussetzung der Setzung*, the interruption of every positional act, the exposition of every possible position – it draws on an opening, an unposited space, and a place impossible to posit.' It is not possible to compare here this reading of Heidegger's text with Gasché's investigation of 'Hegel and the Greeks', but it is worth drawing attention to their parallel elaboration, in light of Heidegger's work, on a certain implicit prefix of positing, the ex-, referring to the unposited place of positing itself.

Now, let me conclude by focusing on Hamacher's early encounter with Fichte's theory of positing. In the essay 'Position exposed. Friedrich Schlegel's poetological Transposition of Fichte's absolute Proposition' (first presented in 1979 and, then, revised and included in *Premises*) he takes into examination Fichte's 'fundamental' proposition (which he identifies as 'the principle of modern ontology', p.237) by attempting to think of the pure positing (and deposing) – a certain affomative function – that is structurally admitted by the self-positing subjectivity.[48] Here the key-concepts of speech act theory, the constative and the performative, are conjured up and rearticulated so as to account for the structural 'inconsistency' of Fichte's proposition. At the beginning of his examination, following Fichte's exposition, Hamacher demarcates the proposition 'I=I' from the 'continuum' of conditioned propositions to the extent that it is a performance of absolute and unconditioned positing. 'It performs – Hamacher explains – the unconditioned, pre-logical positing that is not itself posited because it is pure positing, sheer thesis with no other actor and no other content than itself.' The proposition is 'not itself posited' and, thus, does not allow by definition any pre-structure or presupposition (of itself). Therefore, it is 'fundamental' as it is the self-positing ground of the continuum of particular propositions: 'a proposition in which the ground *is posited* for all thinkable propositions as long as it *posits* itself as this ground'. Hamacher suggests measuring this proposition against Kant's onto-theseology according to which Being is absolute position. 'In contrast to Kant', he notes, Being is not a position of the subject of knowledge but 'is itself the position of the self' (p.231), and, thus, self-positing. In other words, the proposition does not presuppose any subject ('it is the subject itself as mere speaking', pp.231-232) or place ('it cannot be posed from somewhere outside', p.231) from which it would be pronounced. (Therefore, from the perspective of language, the fundamental proposition is mere and unconditioned speaking as well as sheer thesis.) Finally, it consists in the positing or the accomplishment of the Being as I and of the I as Being.

At this point, Hamacher brings to light a certain structural asymmetry within the sentence 'I=I' by acknowledging that 'in the very proposition the proposition

[48] I recall that in a note of 'Setzung and Übersetzung' Gasché recognizes the originality of Hamacher's deconstruction of Fichte's notion of positing (see Gasché, 1998, p.275).

itself is posited *as posited*', that is, as *self*-positing and, therefore, as self-presupposing, etc. According to Fichte, he remarks, this double perspective from which it is possible to look at the fundamental proposition, unconditioned positing and being posited, must be understood in terms of 'a unity of active positing and of the resulting fact of the I' (which can be identified with the very movement of reflection). Fichte's text reads: 'the "I am" is an expression of both an enactment and a deed done [namely, *Thathandlung*]'. Following Hamacher's commentary, the fundamental proposition draws together, by definition, the incompatible elements of 'pure positing' (or 'the action of the proposition') and 'positivity' (or 'the fact of the proposition', p.232), that is, of absolute and unconditioned positing and of the self-positing ground or subjectivity. Here Hamacher seems to retrieve de Man's account of the aporia of text in general, according to which it can be looked at, simultaneously, from the double perspective of grammar and referential meaning.[49] In fact, he transposes de Man's analysis, which takes its leave from the reading of the structure of the law, into the examination of the foundation of all proposition. Rewriting de Man's passage, Hamacher establishes the two incompatible elements of the fundamental proposition as 'action' (*Handlung*) and 'deed' (*Tat*) and applies to them demanian predicates such as, on the one hand, 'open', 'irreferential', and, on the other hand, 'closed' or 'determined'. The synthesis of those elements and of their predicates, the fundamental proposition amounts to according to Fichte, must be read as the movement of the 'translation' or 'limitation' of a certain positing into a certain posited.

> Because it [this proposition] posits itself, transposing and translating itself into an 'itself', it must always re-orient and once again limit the relationless enactment of mere positing by means of its product in which alone it can find an object of reference and the fixed point of its provenance, namely the reflective subject. (p.233)

[49] Cf. de Man, 1979, p.270: 'We call text an entity that can be considered from such a double perspective: as a generative, open-ended, non-referential grammatical system and as a figural system closed off by a transcendental signification that subverts the grammatical code to which the text owes its existence.'

Hamacher proposes reformulating the structural aporia between the two series of act and fact in terms of incompatible propositions. They would account for the two incompatible functions of the fundamental proposition, pure and unconditioned performance, on the one side, and its description as posited or as such, on the other side. 'One is absolute, subjectless, and objectless performance, and another which grasps this performance as a form of free subjectivity and knows it in a reflective manner'. Therefore, the synthesis of these propositions (the copula of self-identity) is understood by Hamacher as a 'leap' or 'a *metabasis eis allo genos*' (p.233): it unfolds itself as the re-orientation of pure positing within the limits of a self-positing subjectivity. At this point, it seems unavoidable to rethink the aporia of the fundamental proposition and, therefore, the two corresponding propositions without calling into play 'the concepts drawn from speech act theory of the performative and the constative' (pp.233-234). However, as Hamacher points out, these concepts can be taken up only by reconsidering their functions in relation to the fundamental character of Fichte's proposition. First, the performative must be conceived as performance of pure and unconditioned positing or, as Hamacher suggests, as 'a positing without presuppositions' and, therefore, as 'a positing of the minimal conditions for the conventions, rules or norms of linguistics and social intercourse'. The constative, in turn, cannot simply refer to a pre-existing state of things, but to absolute and unconditioned positing as posited, that is, 'the imposing act of the transcendental I' (or, self-positing). Therefore they represent the two irreducible and incompatible perspectives of the fundamental proposition, pure performance and self-positing subjectivity. As Hamacher observes, Fichte's proposition can accomplish itself as a constative proposition, that is, as the description of self-positing ground or subjectivity, only by presupposing the pure performance of unconditioned positing. 'In order for the proposition to be able to realize its constative character... it needs an absolutely nonrelational, performative positing.' This positing should not be 'the action of an I' and, thus, a self-positing subjectivity, that implies a presupposition and, therefore, the limitation of pure positing, and, yet, is the very content of the constative proposition. But, in fact, Hamacher points out, Fichte supposes positing precisely as 'a subjective action directed by and toward a subject' and, therefore, as the very positing of the

content or object of the related constative. Hamacher calls this positing as an operation of *petitio principii*, as the conditioned positing of a presupposed self-positing subjectivity. 'The entire principle of the I would be a *petitio principii* that would contain nothing but an affirmation unable to clarify its structure.' This reading of the structural aporia of the fundamental proposition points toward a thinking of unconditioned positing (or performance) as the articulation of pure positing and deposing, as the unconditioned unposited or athesis admitted by self-positing subjectivity and interrupting its return to itself, as affirmative, iterability, etc. The movement of *petitio principii* accounts for the very structure of the fundamental proposition as the constative description of a self-positing subjectivity. Hamacher writes that 'if Fichte characterizes mere positing, pure performance, as an action of the I, he hastens to anticipate the result of this positing, refers it to something already posited and interprets it *ex post facto*, as its production' (p.234). This is precisely what always happens when the fundamental proposition turns into its own *fait accompli*. In this case, the performative is taken to posit what the related constative describes as posited and, therefore, to presuppose itself, as self-positing, self-promising, self-engaging and, perhaps, conjuring Derrida's ghost, as self-writing...

Conclusion

As I attempted to demonstrate, there is a certain line of deconstruction that revolves around Austin's notions of the self-referentiality of the performative and of the illocutionary dimension of language. These traits of Austin's performative are reinscribed into a modern tradition of the Fichtean notion of positing. From this perspective, Werner Hamacher's reading of Fichte's rewriting of the principle of identity in terms of absolute and unconditioned positing is understood as the most radical attempt to think of the irreducibility of a certain unconditioned unposited to self-positing (that is, the structural *exposure* of positing). Finally, through the reading of Derrida's remarks on de Certeau, I singled out a certain elaboration of the positional structure of the performative (*yes*). This elaboration brings to light the irreducible iterability of positing (as a call for repetition and

credit) and deflects the investigation into Derrida's thought of the performative towards a certain Hegelian tradition of positing.

CHAPTER 2

'AND WAR THERE IS'

(Derrida on Lévinas's Anti-Hegelianism)

War [*guerre*], therefore, is congenital to phenomenality, it is the very emergence of speech and appearing. Hegel does not abstain by chance from pronouncing the word 'man' in the *Phenomenology of Mind*; and he describes war (for example, the dialectic of the Master and the Slave) without anthropological reference, within the realm of a science of *consciousness*, that is, of phenomenality itself, in the necessary structure of its movement: a science of experience and of consciousness. (WD, 129-30)

In this chapter I propose to focus on the elaboration of Derrida's notion of positing in his early reading of Lévinas's notion of war (*guerre*) in 'Violence and Metaphysics: an Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas' (1964).[1] My argument is that what is at stake in this elaboration is the French tradition of the Hegelian process of recognition (*Anerkennung*), as it is exposed in the chapter on 'Self-consciousness' of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and, more generally, of the Hegelian notion of positing (*setzen*, *Setzung*).[2] By taking into account the relations among the texts of Derrida, Lévinas, Hegel and others, and, thus, by outlining Derrida's thought of the original war *in* positing, I aim to describe the theoretical

[1] This chapter on Derrida's early reading of Lévinas is indebted to Hägglund 2008 (in particular, Chapter 3, entitled 'Arche-Violence: Derrida and Lévinas') and to Morgan Wortham 2010. The former is noteworthy because it brings to light a *Hegelian* articulation of violence, which, in my reading, results from Derrida's engagement with a certain French tradition (Lévinas, Hyppolite, etc.) of Hegel. To the latter I owe the philological vigilance on the 'deeper affinity' between Lévinas's thought and deconstruction's discourse on the other (Morgan Wortham 2010, 137). Finally, it is worth remarking that, to my knowledge, there exists no interpretation of Derrida's reading of Lévinas's notion of war as a confrontation (perhaps, a struggle for recognition) waged around the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness.

[2] For a certain tradition of "positing" as a key-articulation of the Hegelian dialectics see the following formulation in *Positions* (1978): 'The position-of-the-other, in Hegel's dialectics, is always, finally, to pose-oneself by oneself as the other of the Idea, as other than oneself in a finite determination, with the aim of repatriating and reappropriating oneself, of returning close to oneself in the infinite richness of one's determinations, etc.' (Po, 98). See also Part I of Gasché 1986, 12-105. Furthermore, for Derrida's direct confrontation with the French tradition of *Phenomenology* (in particular, Kojève and Bataille), I refer to Chapter 4 of the present work.

premises to which a certain reading of the performativity of the performative can be retraced back.

2.1 The Opening of the Opening

In 'Violence and Metaphysics' Derrida introduces Lévinas's thought by putting emphasis on its aim to liberate itself, through the recourse to the 'nudity' of experience, from a certain philosophical tradition of thinking which it identifies with the very 'origin' and 'alibi' of all oppression of the world: 'the Greek domination of the Same and the One'. As Lévinas puts it in *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority* (1961), this tradition would be captured by the 'fascination' for 'the visage of being that shows itself in war' and that 'is fixed in the concept of totality' (TI, 21; WD, 83). Derrida explains in his introduction that Lévinas's thought presents itself as 'metaphysics', namely, as the thought of the excess of totality, of what totality cannot encompass and, therefore, remains beyond or outside totality itself: transcendence, the infinitely other, the Other. The paradigm of this thought is the ethical (or 'nonviolent') relationship of respect, which only permits the opening onto the excess of totality and, thus, the aimed liberation from the domination of the same.

> This thought calls upon the ethical relationship – a nonviolent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other – as the only one capable of opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics. (WD, 83)[3]

As Derrida suggests, Lévinas elaborates a 'messianic eschatology' that claims to account for the very nudity of experience itself as 'passage and departure toward

[3] In Chapter V of *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, that is devoted to the reading of *Totality and Infinity*, Adrian Peperzak observes that it would be a mistake 'to present Lévinas's work as an ethics or as a welcome addition to the phenomenological movement. Its aim is more radical, *at least* [the italics are mine] as radical as that of Aristotle's *prote philosophia*, Hegel's *Logic* or Heidegger's *Being and Time*. The "dimension" or "perspective" thematized in *Totality and Infinity* is that of the most originary and primordial, in which [...] metaphysics and ethics have not yet separated' (Peperzak 1993, 124). For a subtle presentation of Lévinas as a thinker of transcendence and not of ethics, I refer to Bernasconi 2005.

the other', toward 'what is most irreducibly other within it, Others'.[4] The ethico-metaphysical transcendence would allow for a thinking of the very movement of one's going outside oneself toward the other as other, which inaugurates experience itself. Therefore, Lévinas's eschatology seeks 'within naked experience' the 'space' for the relationship with the other as other, and, thus, for the opening of experience itself. Now, Derrida observes, this space is not an opening among others but 'the opening itself, the opening of the opening, which can be enclosed within no category or totality, [...] which can no longer be described by traditional concepts and resists every philosopheme' (83). This presentation of the space of Lévinas's eschatology 'uncannily' evokes the descriptions of différance and of its tropes elaborated by Derrida throughout his work.[5] I will elaborate the distinction between Lévinas's and Derrida's thinking of the opening of the opening by focusing on their elaborations of the concept of war. In particular, I will point out that Derrida announces the original state of war *among* finite totalities or positings and, thus, *in* positing (as absolute or self-positing), through the reading of Lévinas's elaboration of the ethico-metaphysical essence of language.

In the preface of *Totality and Infinity* Lévinas elaborates an 'eschatology of messianic peace' by means of which 'the certitude of peace dominates the evidence of war'.[6] This eschatology aims to ground that certitude on 'a primordial and original relation with being' in order to break with the 'ontology of war' (or

[4] Here I refer to the second paragraph of the first section of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness, PS 111: 'Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself*'. The following pages can also be taken as a comparative reading of Lévinas's and Derrida's elaborations of this Hegelian concept of transcendence.

[5] On the uncanny affinity between Lévinas's *space* of the Other (which is identified with 'the face' in the text quoted below) and différance, Morgan Wortham writes: 'Uncannily akin, perhaps, to *différance* as the non-signifying difference that traverses every mark, the face does not itself signify, yet in a certain way marks a more original difference which nonetheless gives the possibility of ethics and metaphysics, opening a passage to philosophy and language. (Derrida is nonetheless aware that Lévinas treats the transcendental principle of the face in terms of a logo-phonocentric discourse which aligns it to the expression of a living presence prior to the sign.)' (Morgan Wortham 2010, 141).

[6] On Lévinas's elaboration of war in *Totality and Infinity* see the third chapter of Caygill 2002, entitled 'Between War and Peace: the Burdens of *Totality and Infinity*'. In particular, I refer to the section 'War in Peace', where Caygill comments upon the Preface putting into relief the self-destructive tendencies of war and the eschatological dimension of politics.

polemology) that dominates the Western tradition of philosophical thought (Lévinas 1969, 22). As Lévinas explains, 'being manifests itself as war to philosophical thought' to the extent 'that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency, or the truth, of the real'. Interestingly, Lévinas points out that violence (and, thus, war) 'does not consist so much' in the injury and annihilation of individuals but in the fact that they are encompassed within a system which does not admit 'exteriority and the other as other', which is the system of the same. In fact, war leaves no *space* for the relation with the other (as other), for peace or nonviolence, and, therefore, ignores what exceeds the system of the same, an infinitely beyond or outside, the infinitely other or the Other. War can, therefore, be understood as the very movement of the self-destruction of the same. As Derrida notes, the concept of totality, 'which dominates the Western philosophy', accounts for being as war and, thus, for the system of the same. Within totality individuals are submitted to the movement of war and of the self-destruction of the same: they 'are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them' (21). Therefore, Lévinas speaks also of an 'ontology of totality issued from war'. Certainly, the eschatology of messianic peace does not simply aim *to oppose itself* to the ontology of war so as to fall back into the system of war and totality. 'Such a certitude [of peace] is not obtained by a simple play of antitheses. The peace of empire issued from war rests on war'. Rather, eschatology must account for 'a relation with being' which cannot be dominated by the ontology of war.[7] Thinking can only liberate itself from the ontology of war by instituting 'a relation with being beyond the totality' (22). It is a being 'always exterior' to totality and, therefore, infinitely other, non-encompassable and equally primordial. Moreover, it 'affects' totality to the extent that it calls individuals to their responsibility (and subjectivity), to peace, nonviolence, or to the respect of the other as other, of the Other. According to Lévinas, only 'the eschatological vision breaks with the totality of war and empires in which one does not speak. [...] It institutes a relation with the infinity of being which exceeds totality' (23).[8] The opening of speech marks out the liberation of

[7] On the distinction between historical (or dialectical) and eschatological peace see Peperzak 1993, 127 and 128-129.

[8] In his comparative reading of Rosenszweig and Lévinas's reflections on war, entitled 'From Rosenszweig to Lévinas. Philosophy of War' and included in the collective volume *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a post-secular World* (2006), Stéphane

individuals from totality or the system of the same and, thus, a certain affirmation of subjectivity in relation to the infinitely other. Eschatology founds its primacy over the ontology of war, which identifies war with 'experience and evidence as such', on the primordial and original nature of the relation with the infinitely other. If one understands experience as the encounter with the other as other, which exceeds the totality of the same, then, Lévinas claims, one must necessarily recognize that eschatology reckons with 'experience in the fullest sense of the word' (25).[9]

2.2 An anti-Hegelian Concept of Desire

The very movement of experience, that is, the trajectory of one's adventuring outside oneself toward the infinitely other, is thought by Lévinas in terms of ethico-metaphysical transcendence. He names this movement 'desire' (*désir*) by referring to a close reelaboration of Hegel's treatment of desire (*Begierde*), in Chapter IV of *Phenomenology*, as the very movement of the self-certainty of self-consciousness and, thus, of the unity of self-consciousness with itself. According to Lévinas, desire describes the primordial and original relation with the other as other. Derrida designates it as 'positive' to the extent that it opens up the space of the other through the nonviolent relation of respect (of letting be): it 'takes itself beyond the disdain or disregard of the other, that is, beyond the appreciation or possession, understanding and knowledge of the other'. In his remarks on Lévinas's elaboration of desire, Derrida brings to light the textual relationship

Mosès writes: 'Hence the completely radical reversal of perspective Levinas carries out in relation to Rosenzweig. There is, exterior to the system of totality, no place for any substance whatsoever, *except for exteriority itself*. There is, in fact, something that infinitely exceeds the idea of an all-encompassing totality in which all differences, all particularities (whatever their place in the hierarchy of the system), are ultimately absorbed into the identity of the same: namely, the notion of a pure exteriority itself' (Mosès 2006, 220-231).

[9] Focusing on the movement of 'superposition', to which Lévinas recurs to account for the relation between eschatology and ontology, Caygill observes: 'Eschatology is not oriented according to the telos of a given totality, but is "a relationship with *a surplus always exterior to the totality*, as though the objective totality did not fill out the true measure of being, as though another concept, the concept of *infinity* were needed to express this transcendence with respect to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and as primordial as totality" (Lévinas 1969, 22–3). In eschatology transcendence is manifest as exteriority, a surplus that does not appear in the self-destructive drive to totality, nor in the void surrounding totality, but as its other' (Caygill 2002, 105-106).

between the first two sections of the first chapter of *Totality and Infinity* ('Metaphysics and Transcendence') and the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on 'Self-consciousness'. He calls for a comparative reading that I will attempt to develop carefully. Lévinas's concept of desire is defined as 'anti-Hegelian' ('as it can possibly be') to the extent that it contrasts a certain interpretation of Hegel's desire as 'the movement of negation and assimilation, the negation of alterity first [I highlight *first*] necessary in order to become a "self-consciousness" that is "certain of itself"'. Derrida presents Lévinas's desire as the 'ethico-metaphysical' opening onto the other as other ('respect and knowledge'), in other words, as the 'moment' of a *positive* movement, which is more original than the movement of negation or assimilation that Hegel considers as *first* 'essential' to the constitution of a self-certain self-consciousness. According to Lévinas, Hegel would not pay attention to the distinction between the ethico-metaphysical moment of respect and its 'transgression' through negation and, thus, would reduce desire to 'need' (*besoin*).[10] Here Derrida refers to the analyses of the second part of *Totality and Infinity* ('Interiority and Economy') where Lévinas claims 'to separate desire', as respect, 'from enjoyment' or satisfaction, as the end point of the 'work' of assimilation, and, therefore, from need, which requires this work (or labour) (92). He outlines the anti-Hegelian character of these analyses but does not take issue directly with them. Rather, he observes that 'things would appear more complicate if one followed closely the movement of certitude and the truth of desire in the *Phenomenology of Mind*' (93).

In the first section of *Totality and Infinity*, entitled 'Desire for the Invisible', Lévinas recurs to 'desire' to resume the traditional definition of metaphysics as 'a movement going forth from a world that is familiar to us ... from 'at home' [*chez soi*, which is also for-itself] which we inhabit, toward an alien outside-of-oneself'. This movement frees thinking from the system of the same, since it accounts for the opening onto what cannot be encompassed by the totality of the for-itself, that is, for the ethical or nonviolent relation with the other as other. As Lévinas

[10] See Peperzak 1993, 133: '*Desire* is the concrete way of human transcendence to the (truly or absolutely) Other. It must be sharply distinguished from any form of *need*. While the satisfaction of needs stands for the whole economy of the Western way of life and thought, desire is a radically different "principle" [...] "Need" is the name for all human orientations toward something that is lacking or makes an achievement incomplete.'

observes, the term of the metaphysical movement of desire 'is called *other* in an eminent sense', it is the infinitely other which exceeds the system of the same or remains beyond or outside its totality. Therefore, desire cannot find 'satisfaction' within the 'world' of the for-itself. Lévinas marks out the difference between the 'alterity' of this other, of the infinitely other, and the alterity of the object of a 'need' or a 'contemplation'.

> The other metaphysically desired is not "other" like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate [...] I can "feed" on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself [...] Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my identity. (Lévinas 1969, 33)

Desire must be distinguished from the movement of the I's return to itself through the assimilation of the alterity of the object, which takes place within the world and terminates with satisfaction. It is a 'tension' toward 'something else entirely', toward 'the absolutely other'. According to Lévinas, 'the customary analysis of desire' puts need 'at the basis of desire' itself by finding its essence in 'a nostalgia, a longing for return' (33) and, thus, it thinks of it as a movement of self-return, self-reappropriation or self-reflection (which coincides also with war and the very self-annihilation of the same). The absolute alterity of the term of the metaphysical desire cannot be encompassed within this circle of self-reappropriation and self-annihilation. Indeed, the metaphysical desire accounts for the movement of transcendence which drives beyond or outside the totality of the same.[11] Lévinas explains that there cannot be a totality 'bringing together' the metaphysician and the desired nor a gaze 'reuniting' the same and the other. The metaphysical desire allows one to think of the relation of absolute separation or distance between the metaphysician and the desired, the same and the other.[12] Since the preface Lévinas has recognized the ethical or nonviolent character of the metaphysical desire by identifying it with the respect of the absolutely other and, therefore, with the imperative of 'letting be': 'the aspiration to radical alterity,

[11] For Lévinas's introduction of the term 'transcendent' see Lévinas 1969, 35: 'This absolute exteriority of the metaphysical term, the irreducibility of movement to an inward play, to a simple presence of the self to self, is, if not demonstrated, claimed by the word transcendent.'

[12] For the elaboration of desire as metaphysical transcendence and opening onto the absolute separation see Lévinas 1969, 35-36.

thus called metaphysical, the respect for this metaphysical exteriority which we, above all, must "let be"' (29). As already suggested in his elaboration of need as the re-absorption of alterity *within the identity* and, thus, as a movement of self-return, Lévinas understands the "I" as the very totality of the same. This identification does not announce a motionless tautology but the very ontology of war. The I corresponds to 'the primordial work of identification', which is a trope of the movement of the self-constitution and self-annihilation of the same (that is, war). 'The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it.' (36)[13] The work of identification, which Lévinas also names 'the play of the same', unfolds itself by negating 'the alterity of the I that takes itself for another' (37), that is, the alterity of the I's alienated *positing* itself as other, and, therefore, describes a movement of self-return or self-reappropriation. To illustrate this movement, Lévinas recalls Hegel's description of self-consciousness as self-knowledge in the first section of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness[14]. In the passage Lévinas refers to, Hegel explains that consciousness, as knowledge of the sensuous world, becomes an object for itself. Therefore, the being other distinguished by consciousness is, at the same time, a *non-distinct* for consciousness itself. 'Hegelian phenomenology, where self-consciousness is the distinguishing of what is not distinct, expresses the universality of the same identifying itself in the alterity of objects thought' (36).

[13] On the concreteness of the Same Peperzak writes: 'This self-identity of Me is more than a logical tautology; it is the concrete activity of self-identification through which I establish myself as inhabitant and owner of my world. The concrete way of my being what I am-in the supposition that we can make an abstraction from all encounters with other people-is the egoism of my enjoying, ruling, and transforming the world in accordance with my needs. This egoism is, thus, a condition for the possibility of transcendence and dedication to the nonego that is the Other' (Peperzak 1993, 136).

[14] For Hegel's text see PS, 104: 'But now there has arisen what did not emerge in these previous relationships, viz. a certainty which is identical with its truth; for the certainty is to itself its own object, and consciousness is to itself the truth. In this there is indeed an otherness; that is to say, consciousness makes a distinction; but one which at the same time is for consciousness not a distinction'. Cf. also Hyppolite's commentary on the passage in the chapter 'Positing Self-Consciousness as Desire: Deduction of Desire' in Hyppolite 1974, 157-8. In the commented section, Lévinas links this text to another passage from *Phenomenology* (translated into French by Hyppolite), where the notion of positing (*setzen*) is conjured up: '[...] I, the self-same being, thrust myself away from myself; but this which is set up [in the French edition: *s'est posé*] as unlike me is immediately, on its being distinguished no distinction for me' (Lévinas 1969, 36). For other occurrences of positing (*se poser*) in Lévinas's text see, for instance, Lévinas 1969, 41: 'The negator and the negated are posited [*se posent*] together, form a system, that is, a totality.'

In this perspective, the self-constituting I is the very play of the same. It is war and violence to the extent that it annihilates the same and ignores the alterity which exceeds its totality. As Lévinas remarks, the work of identification admits 'a difference which is not a difference', namely, the distinction of the non-distinct, and an other, the self-alienated I, which 'is not an "other"' (37).

Need, as it is elaborated since the first section of *Totality and Infinity*, represents the paradigm of the relation with alterity as work of identification, which takes place within the totality of the same. Lévinas develops this paradigm in particular in the second part of the book ('Interiority and Economy') insisting on the distinction from the relation with the alterity of the Other which exceeds any totality.[15] As he explains, the appearance of needs marks the very 'constitution' of the I as an independent and sovereign (*souverain*) subject, as the very play of the same or the movement of identification. The independent and sovereign I posits itself as such by relating to the world through needs. They represent the dependence on the other and the world that the I reverts into its own independence or sovereignty by assimilating them and, therefore, returning to itself or identifying itself with itself.

> To be cold, hungry, thirsty, naked, to seek shelter – all these dependencies with regard to the world, having become needs, save the instinctive being from anonymous menaces and constitute a being independent of the world, a veritable *subject* capable of ensuring the satisfaction of its needs, which are recognized as material, that is, as admitting satisfaction. Needs are in my power ; they constitute me as the same and not as dependent on the other. (116)

Satisfaction is the end point at which the assimilation of the world and, thus, the constitution of the independent and sovereign I are accomplished. Therefore, it is essentially related to needs as they describe the movement of the identification of the I in the world. Desire does not admit satisfaction and cannot tend to it to the extent that it is not a need and it accounts for the ethico-metaphysical

[15] Peperzak explains that 'this section unfolds, through the phenomenological method of intentional analysis, the self-identification of the Same in the concrete form of a self-centered existence, which is at the same time independent as well as separated *and* capable of entering (of having-always-already-entered) into the relation with the Other' (Peperzak 1993, 147).

transcendence, that is, for the movement beyond or outside the world towards the other as other. A few pages earlier, need is defined as 'the first movement of the same', since it sets in motion the work of identification and the constitution of the independent and sovereign I.[16] The dependence on the world, its very independence and resistance, which needs amount to, are purely temporal to the extent that they presuppose the work of identification and the sovereignty of the I: 'need is also a dependence with regard to the other, but it is a dependence across time' (116).[17] Among different needs Lévinas recognizes 'nourishment' (*nourriture*) as the matrix of the relation of dependence/assimilation between the world and the sovereign I: 'nourishment ... is the transmutation of the other into the same ... an energy that is other, recognized as other, recognized, we will see, as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me. (111). From this perspective, a certain sinking one's teeth into things (*morsure*), as the starting point of the process of nourishment, becomes the trope of the beginning of the work of assimilation in general, whereas 'satiety' stands for the moment of its general accomplishment: 'the real I sank my teeth into is assimilated, the forces that were in the other become *my* forces, become me' (129).[18]

2.3. Another Tradition of the Hegelian Desire

In what follows I propose taking into serious consideration Derrida's proposal to reread the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on 'Self-consciousness' and to focus on a *Hegelian* elaboration of desire and war which cannot be hastily identified with

[16] Cf. Peperzak 1993, 151: 'With regard to the food, the air, and the means "on" and "from" which we live, we experience them as being integrated into our enjoying ourselves. Their otherness – a nonabsolute but relative and integratable otherness – is "transmuted" in the Same of ego's economy. They are assimilated. In experiencing this sort of otherness, I experience, at the same time, the possibility and the desirability of their being transformed into parts or appendices of my own being. Enjoyment is always appropriation, assimilation, stilling of a need. Hunger is the paradigm: a privation that needs fulfillment.'

[17] On a certain idea of 'independence through dependence', 'mastery on the basis of needs' and 'happy dependence' see Peperzak 1993, 152.

[18] For Lévinas's paradigmatic use of the figure of *mordre/morsure* see Lévinas 1969, 135: 'This sinking one's teeth into things which the act of eating involves above all measures the surplus of the reality of the aliment over every represented reality, a surplus that is not quantitative, but is the way the I, the absolute commencement, is suspended on the non-I.'

what Lévinas names the play of the same. I will read Hegel's text by referring to the commentary developed by Jean Hyppolite in his *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1946). It is worth observing that Derrida recalls this commentary in a note of 'Violence and Metaphysics', in which he makes an explicit reference to the chapter devoted to self-consciousness ('The Transition from natural Self-Consciousness to universal Self-Consciousness') and he acknowledges it as essential 'to confront Hegel and Lévinas'.[19] Hyppolite's text will allow me to put into relief a certain *Hegelian* articulation of desire, war and positing elaborated by Derrida in his reading of Lévinas's thought. In the opening of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on 'Self-consciousness' Hegel describes self-consciousness as a movement of 'reflection' or 'return' taking the world of consciousness as its starting point: 'self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from *otherness*'. This movement is distinguished from Fichte's 'motionless tautology of "I am I"', which amounts to a pure abstraction to the extent that, in this case, the difference to be 'superseded' has not even 'the figure of being' (PS, 105). Therefore, as Hyppolite remarks, the movement of self-consciousness requires a certain 'otherness', that is, 'the world of consciousness which in this way is preserved for self-consciousness' (Hyppolite 1974, 158).[20] Hegel speaks of two moments of this otherness (or being-other) with respect to self-consciousness and, thus, to the movement of reflection: as 'being' and 'distinct moment' and as 'the unity of itself with this difference'. In other words, the sensuous world stands before me as 'appearance' or as 'a difference which, *in itself*, is no difference' (PS, 105). Hyppolite explains that self-consciousness is the truth of the sensuous world, which is no longer 'in-itself' but only 'in relation to' self-consciousness. The I *posits* itself by reappropriating the being other as being 'in relation to' itself.[21] The self-positing I is a movement of reappropriation of the alienated self or of self-return. Hegel thinks that the suppression [*Aufhebung*] of the 'opposition

[19] Cf. WD, 315: 'On these decisive themes of identity, ipseity and equality, and to confront Hegel and Lévinas, cf. notably Jean Hyppolite, *Génèse et structure de la Phénomenologie de l'Esprit*, I: 147 ff.; and Heidegger's *Identity and Difference*.'

[20] Cf. Hyppolite 1974, 159: 'Self-consciousness, then, is not "the inert tautology, I=I"; it presents itself as engaged in a debate with the world. For self-consciousness, this world is what disappears and does not subsist, but this very disappearance is necessary for self-consciousness to pose itself.'

[21] Hyppolite notes that 'the I is the truth of being, for being exists only for the I which appropriates it and thus poses itself [*se pose*]' (Hyppolite 1974, 158).

between appearance and truth' and, thus, the 'unity of self-consciousness with itself' is 'essential' to self-consciousness. This movement of suppression and essential unity is called 'desire' (PS, 105). Interestingly, Hyppolite defines desire by referring to the ethical element of 'respect' and by opposing it to the movement of negation and appropriation: 'this movement of consciousness does not respect being but negates it' (Hyppolite 1974, 159). From the very description of self-consciousness as the movement of desire Hegel deduces a double or ambiguous object for it. Self-consciousness has an 'immediate' and 'negative' object ('that of sense-certainty and perception') and another object, that is, 'itself', 'which is the true essence, and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object' (PS, 105). Therefore, the essence of desire is the unity of self-consciousness with itself: self-consciousness seeks itself in desire, it is desire of itself. Commenting on this passage Hyppolite points out that desire is more than a sensuous appetite and, therefore, Hegel's term *Begierde* would be translated more accurately as 'desire' than as 'appetite'. 'The end point of desire is not, as one might think superficially, the sensuous object but the unity of the I with itself'. Hyppolite observes that, if self-consciousness 'desires its own desire', it will be able 'to attain itself only through finding another desire, another self-consciousness' (Hyppolite 1974, 160). So he anticipates the teleological dialectic of *Phenomenology*, which progressively unfolds the horizons of desire, by recalling that the final object of desire can only be the recognition of another desire.

A few paragraphs later, Hegel identifies satisfaction with the term of the movement of desire at which self-consciousness obtains the certainty of itself. Now, precisely in satisfaction, self-consciousness as desire experiences the 'independence' of the object. In fact, if satisfaction always requires the object or the other to be negated in the movement of desire, then 'self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it [...] it produces the object again, and the desire as well'. Through the experience of the independence of the object self-consciousness becomes aware that the true essence of desire is something other than itself. At this point, one can say that desire presupposes an 'essential' otherness. The independent or essential other must be another self-consciousness to the extent that self-consciousness can achieve satisfaction only through the negation of an independent other, that is, 'only when the object itself

effects the negation within itself'. Only another consciousness can be negation 'in its own self' (PS, 109). Hegel's description of self-consciousness as the movement of desire leads to the duplication of self-consciousness and, thus, as I will suggest following Derrida, to the position of the original war among self-consciousnesses. Ultimately, the truth of desire, which Derrida invites to reconsider carefully, is another desire. Consequently, Hyppolite notes that 'desire is able to pose [*se poser*] itself in being, to reach a truth and not merely remain at the subjective state of certainty, only if life appears as another desire' (Hyppolite 1974, 163), that is, only when encountering another desire, or when standing before it. But this entails that desire is originally finite, that it thinks or posits itself as the other of an other (desire), that, by thinking or positing itself, somehow, it already *thinks* or *posits* an absolutely other[22]. Therefore, each desire already enters into war (in Lévinas's terms) with an other by doing violence to it and exposing itself to its violence. By positing itself as such (as a self-positing desire), it unconditionally exposes itself to the other as other. As I will attempt to demonstrate, this reading of the truth of Hegel's desire is the paradigm of the original state of war among finite totalities or positings as it is announced by Derrida in 'Violence and Metaphysics'. In my reading, Derrida understands the Hegelian notion of recognition, that is, of the finitude or heteronomy of thinking/positing, in terms of war (*guerre*). Hence, the struggle (*Kampf*) triggered by the desire for recognition, which the exergue of the present chapter refers to and which leads to the constitution of the master and the slave in Hegel's text, becomes an 'instance' of the original war among positings.[23]

2.4 The Being-for-the-Other of Language

After reading the anti-Hegelian elaboration of desire, Derrida brings into focus Lévinas's interpretation of the concrete movement of self-consciousness. He

[22] Cf. Hyppolite 1974, 163: 'Desire must bear on desire and discover itself as such in being; it must discover itself and be discovered; it must appear to itself as an other'. For the articulation between (self-)thinking and (self-)positing I refer to the remarks developed below on Derrida's deconstruction of Lévinas's anti-Hegelianism.

[23] For a close reading of the process of recognition as it is exposed in the first section of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness (and of its French tradition) see the following chapters.

remarks that the coincidence of the I and the same ('the ego is the same') does not amount to a 'formal tautology', to the abstract position which Hegel designates as 'motionless' and discriminates from the movement of desire. He speaks of alterity or negativity, which stands before the ego, in terms of 'appearance', that is, recalling Hegel's definition of the negative object of desire and of that opposition whose suppression accomplishes the unity of self-consciousness with itself. The play of the same, Derrida observes, 'entails a *certain* negativity', but this dependence on the other's sight, as Lévinas calls it, this independence of the object, which is the very difference of work, is merely provisional: 'it remains a moment of the same' (WD, 93). To this extent, Derrida explains that Lévinas's I 'alters itself toward itself within itself' and concludes that the Hegelian movement of desire, in which self-consciousness posits itself, is understood by Lévinas as the movement of the self-alteration of the same (of a self-constituting and self-annihilating I). This understanding brings about a 'consequent displacement of the concept of history'. If 'history begins with the encounter with the other', as Derrida observes, then, there is no space for history, the opening of the opening, within the movement of identification or the play of the same, where 'work does not truly meet alterity'. One should posit history 'beyond history' itself, in other words, 'outside' the totality of the same. Here Derrida is concerned with the 'logical' consistency of a certain anti-Hegelianism presenting itself through this theoretical displacement.[24] As remarked in my reading of the Preface to *Totality and Infinity*, if we think of experience as war or totality, then we can free experience from the domination of the same and reach its fullest sense only by admitting a metaphysical relation with what exceeds the very totality of experience. 'It must be acknowledged that without this displacement [of the concept of historicity] no anti-Hegelianism could be logically consequent. The necessary condition for this anti-Hegelianism is fulfilled' (94). It is worth observing that, as I am attempting to demonstrate, Derrida's reading of Lévinas's thought aims to take into account the Hegelian presuppositions of a certain anti-

[24] On the concept of history beyond history see Bernasconi 1988, in which, he interestingly remarks: 'History is condemned as blind to human relation. "When man truly approaches the other he is uprooted from history" (TI, 53). This is applied not only to the Hegelian philosophy of history, but also to Heidegger's history of Being. Lévinas accuses both histories of ignoring the Other. [...] neither Hegel's account of the master-slave dialectic, nor 'the neutral intersubjectivity' of Heidegger's *Mitsein* (TI, 68) manage to sustain the asymmetrical character of the separated I in the face of the Other who commands from height' (Bernasconi 1988, 234).

Hegelianism. For instance, it announces the original war among finite totalities as irreducibly presupposed by Lévinas's claim for the ethico-metaphysical relationship with the absolutely other.

The paragraph of Derrida's essay which I examined above refers to the passage of the second section of the first chapter of *Totality and Infinity* ('The Breach of Totality') in which Lévinas rethinks the movement of identification in terms of 'concrete egoism'. He takes up Hegel's distinction between the movement of the negation of the sensuous world and Fichte's 'monotonous' or 'formal' tautology "I am I" ('the abstract representation of self by self') to draw attention to 'the concrete relationship between an I and a world', that is, the work of identification, the way of the same, history, war, etc. According to Lévinas, this relation takes the form of the 'sojourn in the world', or of 'identifying oneself by existing here *at home with oneself*'. The 'hostility' of the world and of the other, which stand *against* the I, is apparent to the extent that it is solved into the movement of identification and constitution of the I itself. For this reason, Lévinas argues that the true violence of war should be found in the repression or ignorance of the true alterity, of the true encounter (and, perhaps, of the true war...). The being-at-home of the I in the world is 'the very reversion' of the alterity, the independence and the hostility of the world itself into the relation of identification and sovereignty. Lévinas speaks of the reduction of the world to 'a site and a home'. The appearance of the site marks the self-constitution of the I as 'I can', that is, a relation of dependence on the other by which I affirm my independence and sovereignty. 'The "at home" is [...] a site where *I can*, where, depending on a reality that is other, I am, *despite or thanks* [italics mine] to it, free' (Lévinas 1969, 37). The dependence on the world is the first moment of the movement of self-constitution of the "I can". Lévinas observes that, within the site, everything is under the sovereignty of the self-identifying I, which can, for example, 'grasp', 'calculate', 'comprehend' it. Therefore, the work of identification, as the self-constituting "I can" within the site, describes 'the concreteness of egoism'. It coincides with the totality or the absolute of ontology and, for this reason, cannot be understood as 'a dialectical opposition to the other'. In this perspective, the "I can" is the same: according to the Hegelian paradigm of self-consciousness, it posits itself as such through its relation to the world and the other (the sojourn, the

movement of need, the assimilation, etc.). In other words, the 'dialectical opposition' is the *first* moment of the very movement of the identification and self-constitution of the "I can". The I is not 'a part of a totality encompassing the same and the other' but the totality itself (or war). As Lévinas makes clear, 'this is important for the possibility of metaphysics', since it allows one to think of the movement of the metaphysical desire outside the same toward the Other (38). How the same (the "I can") can enter into a relation with the other which is not of negation or identification? What would be the nature of this relationship? Lévinas responds to these questions by supposing that the metaphysical other is an absolute outside or beyond, that is, outside or beyond the site itself ('it is not simply in another locality') and, therefore, cannot be encompassed by the movement of the self-identification or self-constitution of the sovereign and independent "I can": 'an alterity that is not formal [...] not formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior [...] to all imperialism of the same' (38-9). Regarding the expression 'imperialism of the same', I outline, one should think of a system where self-constitution and self-destruction coincide. Moreover, the resistance to the same is the very definition of the negativity of the world, that is, of its first or temporal independence and of the work necessary to assimilate it and accomplish the identification. To this extent, negativity (and resistance) 'presupposes a being established, placed in a site' (40) where the I is at-home-with-itself or for-itself. Towards the end of the first part of *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas argues that 'history as a relationship between men' is cruel and unjust since it overlooks the relation with the absolutely other. According to Lévinas, there is 'a position of the I before the other in which the other remains transcendent with respect to me'. In other words, there is a metaphysical moment of the self-positing I which cannot be encompassed by the I in general as the totality of the same. As I will outline below, Lévinas finds in language as conversation the paradigm of this movement. This metaphysical moment, that accounts for the relation between the I, who is 'not exterior to history' and the other as other, who is 'absolute' with respect to it, is the movement of transcendence taking subjectivity outside or beyond history and the totality of the same in general. It is a 'rupture' of history in the form of desire or respect (52).

In developing his reading of the ethico-metaphysical desire, Derrida takes into account the paradoxical structure of the movement conceived by Lévinas: 'the movement of desire can be what it is only paradoxically, as the renunciation of desire'. In fact, desire describes the ethico-metaphysical movement of transcendence and respect opening the space for the absolutely other. It is the imperative of letting be its own *telos*, the very renunciation of desire. Then, referring to the figure of the call to responsibility that comes from the 'beyond of history', Derrida describes Lévinas's desire as a response to this call. It addresses the absolutely outside or beyond of any totality: 'desire permits itself to be appealed to by the absolutely irreducible exteriority of the other to which it must remain infinitely inadequate' (93). Therefore, the *relation* with the other which exceeds all totality is infinitely inadequate. In the first section of the first chapter ('Desire for the Invisible') Lévinas explains that the intended end of metaphysical desire, 'the Desired', is not an object of the world that can be encompassed by any totality or negated by any work of identification. Desire is directed 'beyond everything that can simply complete it', towards the absolute and non-encompassable alterity. The Desired 'does not fulfill' desire through work, as it happens with the world or the objects of needs. Therefore, Lévinas thinks of desire as 'a relationship that is not the disappearance of distance, not a bringing together', but 'generosity' and respect of the absolute separation of the Desired. Here one can find the paradoxical structure of the ethico-metaphysical brought into focus by Derrida: ultimately, desire must have no intention, no telos, no direction. To respect the 'radical remoteness' of the Desired, it should not 'anticipate' it and 'go toward it aimlessly', it should renounce to the Desired itself. One understands, therefore, why, according to Lévinas, the Desired should be 'invisible'. This determination would not imply 'an absence of relation' but the very relation with the absolutely other, the ethico-metaphysical desire or respect. Therefore, the absoluteness of the other would not entail the absence of all relation but the renunciation to relation as the very relation with the other. Finally, Lévinas accounts for the structure of the relation with the absolutely other in terms of 'understanding' [*entendre*], claiming for its ethico-metaphysical primacy over theory: 'a desire, without satisfaction, *understands* [*entend*] the remoteness, the alterity and the exteriority of the other' (34).[25] As already observed,

[25] For a comparative reading of Hegel's and Lévinas's theories of senses see WD, 98-100.

'language' is conjured up to describe 'the relation between the same and the other', where the 'and' implies a certain respect of the absolutely other, a certain imperative letting be. According to Lévinas, language as 'conversation' reproduces the ethico-metaphysical movement of desire or transcendence toward the other 'which remains transcendent to the same'. Then, since language is essentially conversation, there must be an original movement of language in general beyond or outside itself. I already outlined in the above remarks on the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* that the opening of speech originally coincides with the movement of departure of the singular I, or the metaphysician, from itself (and, thus, from the play of the same) toward the absolutely other. This movement drives subjectivity outside history and opens up the encounter with the other: 'the same, gathered up in its ipseity as an I, a particular existent unique and autochthonous, leaves itself'. (39) One could observe that here no I can comprehend or dominate its original departure from itself toward the other, as the liberation of speech, of subjectivity and of the encounter.

In the second chapter of *Totality and Infinity* ('Separation and Discourse'), Lévinas accounts for the linguistic structure of the relation with the other by drawing attention to a certain vocative essence of language. The vocative ('interpellation' or 'call') reflects the ethico-metaphysical movement of desire as respect and responsibility (as the confirmation of the alterity of the other). 'The other is maintained and confirmed in his heterogeneity as soon as one calls upon him.' According to Lévinas, there is a vocative prefix of language in general, which institutes a relation of respect with the other as other and precedes language itself as the work of negation or identification: 'at the same time as grasped, wounded, outraged, he [the other] is "respected"'. In other words, in positing itself as the same, war, totality, etc. language already goes outside itself as respect, toward the radical alterity. The *telos* of the vocative prefix, 'the invoked', which is the very *telos* of language in general, cannot be made by language itself into a totality (it 'is not what I comprehend'). The text suggests that this ethico-metaphysical structure of language can also be thought in terms of address or gift to the extent that the other is 'the one to whom I speak' (68). This *being addressed to* or *being for* the other is the non-encompassable condition of speech in general. In his reading of the first chapter of *Totality and Infinity*, Derrida

focuses on this dative or vocative possibility of concept and language in general. He remarks that no relationship can encompass the other to the extent that its very medium, that is, language, is originally 'given' to the other, and, therefore, is already driven beyond or outside itself.

> The ego and the other do not permit themselves to be dominated by a concept of relationship. And first of all because the concept (material of language), which is always *given to the other*, cannot encompass the other. (WD, 95)

The other (as other) is the original direction of language in general, as essentially dative or vocative. One cannot think of a language encompassing it (or reducing it to an object) without violence, that is, without ignoring the radical alterity of the other and repressing the original nonviolence of language itself. 'The dative and vocative dimension which opens the original direction of language, cannot lend itself to inclusion in and modification by the accusative or attributive dimension of the object without violence.' The dative or vocative dimension of language implies an original rupture which already takes language in general beyond or outside itself. Therefore, no language can fold and close itself upon this original rupture: it posits itself by structurally calling upon the other, or, in other words, leaving itself towards the other. Therefore, one should conclude with Derrida that language 'cannot make its own possibility a totality and *include* within itself its own origin and its own end' (95). A few pages later, Derrida explains that the vocative structure of language and, thus, its essential movement of transcendence and respect, necessarily overflow every ontology: 'no logos as absolute knowledge can comprehend *dialogue* and the trajectory toward the other'. Language is originally directed beyond or outside itself as logos or totality. This original trajectory announces a certain excess or rupture within logos, that is its very condition or possibility. 'This incomprehensibility, this rupture of logos is not the beginning of irrationalism but the wound or inspiration which opens speech and then makes possible every logos or every rationalism.' (98) One cannot posit language as logos or totality without admitting this original excess, this unconditioned heteronomy or exposure to the other as other.[26]

[26] For a later development of these remarks on Lévinas's concept of language see Derrida's elaboration, in *Politics of Friendship* (1994), on the 'world of difference' between 'talking to' a friend/enemy and 'speaking of' them, and on the structure of

2.5 The original War in Language

In this section I propose examining Derrida's reading of Lévinas's treatment of exteriority, which prompts him to declare the war within discourse. Lévinas speaks of a 'true', 'absolute' or 'infinite' exteriority, which is non-spatial, a non-exteriority, beyond or outside space as 'the site of the same'. As Derrida remarks, the expression 'true exteriority' rests on the supposition that 'space is always the site of the Same' and that the same must go outside itself, outside its site, outside space in general, that is, absolutely outside, to encounter the absolutely other. He poses the question of the meaning of this expression and, thus, of the necessity according to which one must speak of exteriority 'to signify a nonspatial relation', or of 'relationship' (which is still a spatial term) 'to designate as a nonspatial "relationship" the respect which absolves the other'. What does 'absolute outside' mean? Why should one recur to the term 'outside' to account for the movement of transcendence beyond space? Derrida is concerned with a certain resistance of the spatial reference despite the intention to define what remains beyond or outside space. 'Why is it necessary to *obliterate* this notion of exteriority without erasing it, without making it illegible, by stating that its truth is its untruth, that *true* exteriority is not spatial, that is, is not exteriority?' Perhaps, one cannot think the true or absolute exteriority if not in a negative fashion, as non-exteriority or non-spatiality. As Derrida explains, 'it is necessary to state the other in the language of the Same'. Hence he deduces the original implication of language and space (as the structure Inside-Outside): 'all this means, perhaps, that there is no philosophical logos which must not *first* let itself be expatriated into the structure Inside-Outside' (WD, 112). Besides this original expatriation, there is another meaning imposing itself upon the expression 'true exteriority': the other, which would be absolved from expatriation itself, the absolutely or infinitely other, as

'speaking of' at work in both messianic and teleiopoetic sentences. By taking into account the *double bind* or *contretemps* of that structure he writes: 'When you speak to someone, to a friend or an enemy, does it make any sense to distinguish between his presence or absence? In one respect, I have him come, he is present for me; I *presuppose* his presence, if only at the end of my sentence, on the other end of the line [*au bout du fil*], at the intentional pole of my allocution. But in another respect, my very sentence simultaneously puts him at a distance or retards his arrival, since it must always ask or presuppose the question 'are you there?' (PF, 173).

positive infinity, cannot be said, and, therefore, the meaning of the other, as absolutely or infinitely other, is irreducibly *finite*.

To be unable to designate it [the infinite exteriority] otherwise than negatively – is this not to acknowledge that the infinite (also designated negatively in its current positivity: in-finite) cannot be stated? (WD, 113)

Language, as originally expatriated into space, is necessarily finite and can only designate something finite. Therefore, the infinitely other of language is originally finite. 'The structure "inside-outside", which is language itself, marks the original finitude of speech and of whatever befalls it'. One should affirm the original finitude of language by acknowledging its very necessity and, at the same time, by watching over all philosophical dream to reduce 'the naturality of a spatial praxis in language' and its effects (113). Consequently, one should admit that the meaning of Lévinas's (infinitely) other is finite and that the distinction between the infinitely other and the *apeiron* as bad infinite or indefinite, which is elaborated in *Totality and Infinity*, does not make sense. To this extent, Derrida suggests thinking of the infinitely other (or the other as other), as maintaining 'within itself the negativity of the indefinite, of the *apeiron*' (114). As Lévinas's definition of the *apeiron* testifies, it stands for the infinitely other of the work of identification, that is, for the other which the work of identification cannot ever encompass. 'It is the *apeiron* distinct from the infinite, and which, by contrast with things, presents itself as a quality refractory to identification' (Lévinas 1969, 141). Evoking this thinking of the *apeiron* ('that which does not come to an end, despite my interminable labor and experience'), Derrida explains that no respect is possible if one posits the infinitely other as the positive infinity absolved from the work of identification and, therefore, from language and space. 'Can one respect the Other as Other and expel negativity – labor – from transcendence?' Therefore, transcendence and work of identification, the other and language originally imply one another. The possibility of respect is irreducibly inscribed within the language of the same, that is, within language *tout court*. Or, in other terms, language *describes* the movement of transcendence by always remaining within itself.[27] If

[27] See on this point Hägglund's comment: 'The aim of the present chapter is to elucidate how Derrida pursues his thinking of violence via a reading of Lévinas. I will thus seek to clarify why Derrida has devoted so much attention to Lévinas's work. What interests

one dreams to think the other as positive infinity, one must 'renounce all language' (WD, 114).

These conclusions prompt Derrida to rewrite Lévinas's position of the linguistic structure of respect and of the nonviolent essence of language in general. If language is the medium of all relationships and is originally finite, then no discourse can open onto the other as other ('be righteous') without 'retaining within it space and the Same', that is, without 'being originally violent', in Lévinas's terms. If war is the very work of identification, language cannot detach war from the respect of the other. Derrida declares a *transcendental* war within language, which is the very condition of the relationship with the other. 'The philosophical logos, the only one in which peace may be declared, is inhabited by war'. Here 'philosophical logos' can be read as a finite and spatial language, that is, as language in general. The passage recalls the inability of the philosophical logos to liberate itself from the original finitude of language in general. As originally violent, discourse opens up the possibility, *telos* or horizon of nonviolence, peace or justice, without being able to access it.[28] 'The distinction between discourse and violence always will be an inaccessible horizon. Nonviolence would be the *telos'* (WD, 116). Evoking Lévinas's figure of the call coming from the outside or the other, Derrida speaks of peace as 'the strange vocation of a language called outside itself by itself'. Discourse can detach itself from violence only indefinitely and, therefore, can only keep on calling itself outside itself. This implies that, being originally and essentially inhabited by war, discourse must be at war with itself; it must oppose violence to violence. 'Language can only indefinitely tend toward justice by acknowledging and

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Derrida is Lévinas's insistence that the ethical must be thought on the basis of an alterity that cannot be appropriated. But alterity has a radically different sense in Derrida's work. It does not testify to a Good beyond being, and "the other" does not primarily designate another human being. Spacing is "arche-violent" because it breaches any interiority and exposes everyone – myself as well as every other – to the essential corruptibility of finitude' (Hägglund 2008, 84-85). I understand Hägglund's remarks on the non-primary identification between 'the other' and 'another human being', but I also recall that, in this context, the other is, in *Hegelian* terms, another self-consciousness (desire, finite totality or positing, ipseity, finitude, etc.).

[28] Derrida suggests that discourse is a *promise* of justice and, therefore, that there is a *promissory* (or eschatological) prefix of language in general. For this suggestion see WD, 130: 'For this not to be so, the eschatology which animates Lévinas's discourse would have to have kept its promise already, even to the extent of no longer being able to occur within discourse as eschatology, as the idea of a peace "beyond history."'

practicing the violence within it.' The announcement that war originally inhabits discourse wavers between the constative pole of the acknowledgement of a fact (what Husserl would call archi-, non-empirical or transcendental factuality)[29] and the performative pole of an indefinite engagement. One must indefinitely choose the violence *of* (and *in*) discourse as the least violence, to maintain the possibility of justice. 'One must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse.' Derrida calls this option for the least violence (and, thus, for the indefinite possibility of justice) 'vigilance' and recognizes it as the practice of 'a philosophy which takes history, that is, finitude, seriously'. The knowledge of original finitude demands since the beginning the performative engagement with the least violence, the war in discourse, the war upon war.

> The philosopher (man) *must* speak and write within this war of light, a war in which he always already knows himself to be engaged; a war which he knows is inescapable, except by denying discourse, that is, by risking the worst violence. (WD, 117)

Here, perhaps, resides the greatest distance between Lévinas's and Derrida's thoughts of war. The latter does not simply affirm that only war grants the indefinite horizon of justice but also that every philosopher must take seriously this affirmation and, therefore, practice violence and violence against violence to avoid 'the worst violence'. These remarks on the fact that discourse is at war with itself prompts Derrida to develop a radical rereading of Lévinas's understanding of messianic eschatology. A few pages later, in the chapter 'On transcendental Violence', he speaks of the *telos* of discourse as an inappropriable negativity. If the detachment of discourse from violence is the *telos* of discourse itself, it can tend only indefinitely to it and, therefore, be always already at war with itself as originally violent. The war of discourse with itself, the war within discourse, is described as an indefinite work of self-negation. 'Discourse can only *do itself violence*, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself, make war upon the war which institutes it without ever *being able* to reappropriate this negativity.' Discourse *cannot* put an end to this war with itself, to the war within itself, to its

[29] Cf. WD, 131: 'He [Husserl] called the irreducibly egoic essence of experience "archi-factuality" (*Urtatsache*), non-empirical factuality, transcendental factuality.'

self-negation, and, moreover, *must not* do so, to maintain the horizon of justice and avoid the worst violence: 'the horizon of peace would disappear into the night'. If one acknowledges the original finitude of language, one must be vigilant on it and choose the 'secondary war', the war upon war, as 'the least possible violence, the only way to repress the worst violence'. At this point, Derrida observes that eschato*logy* as such, that is, as stating the end (or the *telos*), and, thus, as discourse, is only possible '*through violence*' and, thus, it requires vigilance (WD, 130). Lévinas's eschatology, which claims for a respectful discourse, is no more eschatology to the extent that discourse is originally violent and, therefore, tends indefinitely to justice. It would be the 'messianic triumph', the presence in the present of positive infinity or God, and, thus, the suspension of the difference between the same and the other.

2.6 The Restlessness of Positing

Commenting on Lévinas's understanding of the false infinity, Derrida announces the state of the original war among finite totalities. Lévinas posits the totality of the same as the false infinity when he reads Husserl's concept of horizon as the *cogito*'s self-constituting opening onto the infinite. He explains that the horizon cannot be taken as a true infinity, to the extent that it is not an absolute exteriority but an object or a negativity, the very I's alienated position of itself as other. 'If Husserl sees in the *cogito* a subjectivity with no support outside of itself, he is constituting the idea of infinity itself, giving it to himself as an object' (Lévinas 1969, 230). Therefore, the totality encompassing the horizon (what Derrida calls an 'object-infinity' or 'infinity without alterity') is a false infinity itself since it is always exceeded by the 'true' infinity of the absolutely other. As Derrida remarks by referring to this passage, 'Lévinas conceives *true* alterity as nonnegativity (nonnegative transcendence), he can make the other the true infinity, and make the same (in strange complicity with negativity) the false-infinity'. Here Derrida finds the paradigm of an anti-Hegelianism which would appear radically meaningless to the tradition of Hegelianism, in which the alterity, as negativity, is encompassed

by the same and the absolute sameness is true infinity.[30] At this point, I am concerned with Derrida's *deconstruction* of Lévinas's anti-Hegelianism, which brings to light the *irreducible* meaning that imposes itself on Lévinas's paradigm and affirms the *Hegelian* movement of the original war. Firstly, Derrida observes that the same, as a violent totality, can only be a 'finite' or 'abstract' totality and, therefore, 'the other' of another totality. Put differently, a violent totality implies the essential or irreducible otherness of another totality. Secondly, he explains that a finite totality cannot 'be thought [*se penser*]' or 'posed [*se poser*]' as the same 'without becoming other than itself', namely, the other's other, or other with respect to another totality. In fact, this totality must be violent and, therefore, 'entering into war' with other totalities. But, as Derrida writes, 'entering into war – and war there is [*et il y a la guerre*] – it [a totality] is conceived [*se pense*] as the other's other', 'it gains access to the other as an other (self)' (WD, 119). Therefore, every finite totality posits itself by entering into war with every other totality and, thus, by gaining access to every other as other, that is, as its inaccessible *telos* or horizon. Positing, the medium of which is language, is originally inhabited by war and can only detach from it indefinitely and indefinitely tend to justice. The end point of Derrida's text is the reelaboration of the Hegelian process of recognition as the very concept of the encounter with the other.[31] This notion of the original state of war among finite totalities or positings reckons with the very possibility of a messianic eschatology since it affirms the unconditioned heteronomy of positing, its exposure to the other as other (or to come) and, thus, to other positings.

[30] On true infinity as the very object of philosophy (as *protè philosophia*) see Gasché's seminal essay 'Structural Infinity' in Gasché 1994, 130-136. Describing a *Hegelian* trajectory from Aristotle's *Physics* to Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Gasché defines true infinity as the all-embracing essence of everything determinate: 'The true infinity must be a unity that embraces itself – itself under the form of spurious infinity and its reflexive opposite, the finite – and its Other. The true infinity is necessarily characterized by absolute wholeness, in other words, by a wholeness that is also self-inclusive to the extent that it is not in opposition to that of which it is the totality' (Gasché 1994, 133).

[31] Without referring to war, Hägglund gives a remarkably *Hegelian* definition of the 'economy of violence' as mutual violation of finite positions, which, somehow, presupposes Derrida's elaboration of the process of recognition. Cf. Hägglund 2008, 82: 'Thus, a rigorous deconstructive thinking maintains that we are always already inscribed in an "economy of violence", where we are both excluding and being excluded. No position can be autonomous or absolute; it is necessarily bound to other positions that it violates and by which it is violated.'

Finally, developing a passage from Derrida's text, in which he speaks of the restlessness ('anxiety' [*inquiétude*]) of the infinite, I propose to single out a thinking of the restlessness of positing. Derrida uses the expression to account for the movement of the history of Hegel's infinite, which 'determines and negates itself' (WD, 129). Hyppolite recalls in his commentary on the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness that 'disquiet' (*unruhig* [*inquiète*]) is 'the attributed adjective which recurs more frequently in Hegel's dialectic' (Hyppolite 1974, 149). As he explains, the term accounts for the fact that the self can never coincide with itself in its movement of self-return and can only find itself in its alterity. Hyppolite's reading of 'disquiet' can be taken here as an explanation of the movement evoked by Derrida's expression: 'it [the self] always poses itself [*se pose*] in a determination and, because this determination is, as such, already its first negation, it always negates itself so as to be itself' (Hyppolite 1974, 150). A few sentences later, Derrida seems to understand 'anxiety' (restlessness), 'negativity' and 'war' as tropes of a certain movement 'in' the infinite (WD, 129). He suggests that the war among self-positing totalities prevents any absolute positing from coinciding with itself and, therefore, amounts to the very restlessness of the infinite. As I pointed out in my reading of Derrida's text, positing, as *originally* finite, and, thus, each self-positing I, has always set itself against another (self-)positing (I) and, thus, has always been exposed to the other as other or to other positings. Therefore, original finitude and heteronomy could be thought as the very restlessness of positing in general *qua* absolute or infinite.

Conclusion

This chapter is an investigation into the early elaboration of what I propose reading as Derrida's thought of positing. To this purpose, I brought to light the confrontation that Derrida engages with Lévinas around Hegelianism in the early essay entitled "Violence and Metaphysics". Following the more or less evident traces of this confrontation and outlining the essential role played by Hyppolite's interpretation of Hegel, I pointed out that at stake here is the tradition of the trajectory of self-consciousness (from desire to recognition) as it is exposed by Hegel in Chapter IV of *Phenomenology*. In my reading, Derrida rewrites this

tradition putting emphasis on the primordial war in which each self-positing totality (or ipseity) is always already caught up. I argued that this war accounts for the structural inability of positing to close upon itself and, thus, for its structural heteronomy and iterability.

CHAPTER 3

' MAN THINKS, AND THINKS THE OTHER'
(On Ipseity and the Oath)

A performative produces an event only by securing for itself, in the first-person singular or plural, in the present, and with the guarantee offered by conventions or legitimated fictions, the power that an ipseity gives itself to produce the event of which it speaks – the event that it neutralizes forthwith insofar as it appropriates for itself a calculable mastery over it. If an event worthy of this name is to arrive or happen, it must, beyond all mastery, affect a passivity. It must touch an exposed vulnerability, one without absolute immunity, without indemnity; it must touch this vulnerability in its finitude and in a nonhorizontal fashion, there where it is not yet or is already no longer possible to face or face up to the unforeseeability of the other. In this regard, autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to what and to who comes – which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, without absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event. (Ro, 152)

This chapter focuses on the notion of positing at stake in Derrida's late elaboration of ipseity as the operation of mastery, forced recognition and enslavement of time. My argument is that this elaboration *rearticulates* the early thought of positing developed in the reading of Lévinas's anti-Hegelianism and brings to light an Aristotelian tradition of the war *among* ipseities. In this context I aim to demonstrate that the (auto-)performative (for instance, a certain Hegelian notion of belief or a certain Aristotelian notion of the oath) is understood by Derrida as the very (speech) act of ipseity (*qua* finite self-positing).

3.1 Sovereignty and Recognition

In this section, I propose reconsidering Derrida's affirmation of the unconditioned heteronomy of sovereignty in the Preface to *Rogues* and rereading it as a textual interpretation of Hegel's exposition of the notion of recognition in the

Phenomenology's chapter on self-consciousnesses. In so doing I aim to draw attention to the theoretical premises of a certain deconstruction of the tradition of sovereignty ('from Plato to Schmitt' Ro, XI) and, more generally, of the theological paradigm of ipseity.[1] As my reading will try to outline, the interpretation of the Hegelian text elaborated in *Rogues* presupposes the vocabulary and conceptuality of the confrontation around Hegel's text engaged with Lévinas and Hyppolite in 'Violence and Metaphysics'. Let me return to the opening paragraph of the first section of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness. I will follow the commentary by Robert W. Williams, who also devoted the final pages of his authoritative study on recognition, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (1998), to Derrida's interpretation of the Hegelian concept (focusing on the reading developed in 'From restricted to general Economy' [1967] and, perhaps, as I will attempt to prove in the following chapter, without doing justice to it).[2] Williams understands the notion of recognition as the overcoming of the idealistic "I am I" and, more precisely, the decisive stage of the process of 'the breaking open of the putatively windowless monad' (Williams 1992, 152; Williams 1997, 46) inaugurated by Fichte's and Schelling's philosophies. The first section of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter, entitled 'Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage', begins by affirming that a self-consciousness can *truly* be for-itself only through the mediation of another self-consciousness, that is, when it is recognized as such and, thus, when its self-certainty reaches the order of a shared or intersubjective truth. Therefore,

[1] In Chapter 4 of *Rogues*, in response to Nancy's aim at deconstructing 'the modern, Cartesian or post-Cartesian, figure of a freedom of the subject', Derrida identifies a tradition of freedom ('as power, mastery, and independence') that includes modernity and, notably, begins with Plato and Aristotle. He observes that it is preferable to speak of 'an entire philosophy and ontology of freedom', leaving aside the word *subjectivity*: 'We would not be able to limit (and Nancy does not explicitly do so) this definition of freedom to the modern epoch of this so called subjectivity, this definition of freedom as a faculty "in charge of itself and of its decisions", as the sovereign power to do as one pleases, in short, the power to attain "perfect independence". Plato and Aristotle, to mention just them, would have surely accepted the definition or presentation of freedom as power, mastery, and independence. That is the definition at work in Plato's *Republic* and in Aristotle's *Politics*. What Nancy calls into question is thus an entire philosophy or ontology of freedom' (Ro, 45).

[2] For Williams's analysis of the Hegelian exposition of the notion of recognition in the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness see the chapter 'Recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*' in Williams 1997, 46-68. The last pages of the book are devoted to Derrida and Lévinas (Williams 1997, 399-407). For a commented translation of the *Phenomenology*'s exposition of recognition see also the chapter 'Hegel's Eidetics of Intersubjectivity' in Williams 1992, 141-60.

recognition is the process by which the other mediates the self's relation to itself. 'Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged' (PS, 111).[3] Self-consciousness requires the other's recognition in order to be truly for-itself. In other terms, it can *posit* itself in being, only if it is recognized as such by the other. As Williams remarks, 'the for-itself formulates not the beginning but the result and *telos* of the process of recognition' (Williams 1997, 48). In his commentary on the paragraph, Williams explains that 'the consciousness is constituted (in its truth) by two distinguishable, yet inseparable moments', the 'for-itself' (*Für-sichsein*) and the 'for-an-other' (*Füreinandersein*), so as to coincide with itself only by means of another, of the other's recognition. This account of consciousness excludes the 'Cartesian solipsism' of subjectivity and the 'direct and immediate access to others' (Williams 1992, 150).

I propose developing the above remarks on Hegel's paragraph by taking into account the elaboration of the process of recognition in the passages from 'Violence and Metaphysics' commented above. As Derrida points out, each self-consciousness always posits itself as the other's other and, thus, wages war against any other self-consciousness, by imposing and, at the same time, exposing itself to the other's violence or recognition in general.[4] Therefore, one cannot think of self-positing nor of self-relating without reckoning with the process of recognition in which they are necessarily caught up, namely, the state of the original war among finite positings and, thus, within (self-)positing in general. As I aim to demonstrate, Derrida puts to work this *necessity* in the Preface to *Rogues* when he proposes reconsidering a certain tradition of sovereignty by acknowledging the unconditioned exposure to the other (the absolutely other or the other as other) implied in the movement of the sovereign's self-positing and in

[3] Cf. Williams 1992, 150: 'Its [of consciousness] self-relation is not simply immanent or purely reflective; the self's relation to itself is mediated by its relation to other. Moreover, self-relation conditions relation to other. Self-consciousness thus has a paradoxical structure that explodes the view that it is mere subjectivity exclusive of other.'

[4] Referring to the couple self-positing/self-thinking (*se poser/se penser*), I recall that the act of positing can be read in terms of thinking and, more generally, of language to the extent that, as Derrida remarks, the concept is 'the material of language' (WD, 95). This remark is necessary insofar as Derrida also engages in *Glas* in the reading of the early version of the process of recognition exposed by Hegel in the *Jena Philosophy of Spirit 1803-1804*, in which positing is not simply linguistic but performs a necessary violation. For my remarks on this reading see the appendix of this section.

the corresponding performative of its absolute position. He defines this tradition as identifying sovereignty with the power or right to give power or rights, the ultimate foundation of power and rights. 'But just who – Derrida questions – has the right to give or to take some right, to give him or herself some right *[droit]* or the law *[droit],* to attribute or to make the law in a sovereign fashion?' (Ro, XI). Therefore, sovereignty, or the 'sovereign fashion', accounts for the movement of the self's giving itself the power or right to give power or rights, or, in other terms, positing itself as such (for-itself). In the Hegelian vocabulary, revised through Derrida's interpretation, the sovereign can only attain the truth of its for-itself if it is recognized by another (sovereign) and, therefore, it posits (or thinks) itself as other than the absolutely other. Being necessarily finite, it always allows war within itself and, thus, enters into war with other sovereignties. Affirming the necessity to isolate a certain unconditionality without sovereignty, that is, a certain opening onto the absolutely other, the opening of the opening (as Derrida calls it while commenting on Lévinas's thought of the other), the text sheds light on what a certain tradition of sovereignty does not account for and yet can be found in the *Phenomenology*'s notion of recognition. I suggest reading the following passage from the Preface to *Rogues* by putting into relief a certain engagement with the tradition of the Hegelian text first set in motion in 'Violence and Metaphysics'.

'It would be necessary to distinguish "sovereignty" (which is always in principle indivisible) from "unconditionality". Both of these escape absolutely, like the absolute itself, all relativism. That is their affinity. But through certain experiences that will be central to this book, and, more generally, through the experience that lets itself be affected by what or who comes *[(ce) qui vient],* by what happens or by who happens by, by *the other to come,* a certain unconditional renunciation of sovereignty is required a priori. Even before the act of a decision.' (Ro, XIV) [5]

[5] In my reading of Derrida's text I am concerned with the relations to the *Phenomenology*'s source and the early reading of its French tradition (Lévinas and Hyppolite). From this perspective I propose reconsidering a certain unconditionality without sovereignty in relation to Derrida's elaboration of the absolutely other, the opening of the opening and recognition. To my knowledge, there exists no published commentary on the Preface to *Rogues* that closely reckons with its vocabulary and conceptuality. See, for instance, Hägglund's analysis of the dissociation between sovereignty and the unconditional, which, indeed, plays an essential role in his understanding of Derrida's work: 'Sovereignty defines an instance that is absolutely *in itself.* As such, it conforms to the logic of identity that follows from the principle of

This unconditionality (to be distinguished) can *only* be understood as the indefinite or the *apeiron*, that is, according to a certain reading of Lévinas, as the other of the concrete work of self-identification or self-constitution, sovereignty amounts to. The sovereign posits itself by *unconditionally* driving itself beyond or outside itself, toward the absolutely other. And this other is the very nonencompassable origin or condition of possibility of the self-positing of sovereignty. It consists in the being-for-an-other of the movement of self-positing, or in the for-an-other of the Hegelian process of recognition. From this perspective, the sovereign positing (or thinking) itself as such, 'which is always in principle indivisible', is, in fact, restless and has already entered into war with other sovereignties. It stands for a finite positing originally seeking for recognition and, thus, originally addressing or being addressed to an other (positing). Derrida refers to the unconditionality without sovereignty by recalling the Lévinasian concept of experience as the experience of the absolutely other, as ethico-metaphysical transcendence or desire. This conceptuality must be related back to Derrida's rewriting of the *Phenomenology*'s text and, thus, to a certain Hegelian articulation of self-positing or self-thinking (sovereignty). Here it comes to account for the original restlessness of (self-)positing and its irreducible seeking for recognition. The very notion of experience as opening onto the other or the event and, thus, as unconditioned exposure or pure passivity, is reformulated as the original *being* of the sovereign *for* or *at war with* an other (sovereign).[6]

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noncontradiction. Derrida deconstructs this logic by dissociating sovereignty from "unconditionality", which is unthinkable within the traditional paradigms of reason. Sovereignty is by definition unconditional in the sense that it is not dependent on anything other than itself. In contrast, Derrida argues that the unconditional is the spacing of time that divides every instance in advance and makes it essentially dependent on what is other than itself' (Hägglund 2008, 25).

[6] Regarding the interpretation of the unconditionality without sovereignty as the heteronomy of the master (his exposure to the other or the event), it is worth dwelling on Gasché's reading of Derrida's call for the piercing, perforating, puncturing, or even bursting open of the phenomenological notion of horizon in Chapter 11 of his *Europe, or the infinite Task: a Study of a philosophical Concept* (2009). As Derrida himself points out in 'Violence and Metaphysics', when he refuses Lévinas's interpretation of the horizon as a constituted object the idea of horizons of constitution, the horizon must be understood as having 'the form of an indefinite opening' which 'offers itself without any possible end to the negativity of constitution'. In other words, in his reformulation of Lévinas's language, the horizon accounts for the absolutely other of the work of identification. Derrida's later notion of horizon can be taken as a development of this elaboration into a certain thought of the event. Commenting on the remarks from *Rogues*

Inheriting the traditional definitions of speech act theory and, thus, countersigning the distinction between performative and constative utterances, Derrida supposes the positional essence of the performative (*doing* or making things happen). As he suggests, the performative can be taken as the very operation of sovereignty (namely, a decision) and, therefore, as absolute (or auto-) performative, to the extent that it posits its own power or authority to do or make things happen. Derrida rethinks the sovereign or absolute performative within the process of recognition and, therefore, as an originally finite statement setting itself against other performatives and demanding to be acknowledged. In other words, the performative opens onto the other as other ('to come') and the event ('what/who happens'). The nonperformative exposure to the other and the event is its non-encompassable origin or condition of possibility.[7] 'The coming of this event exceeds the condition of mastery and the conventionally accepted authority of what is called the "performative"' (Ro, XIV). It is worth remarking that here the notion of mastery is conjured up to name the very operation of the sovereign and absolute performative and, thus, of sovereignty. The master is thought as a self-positing sovereign admitting a nonsovereign and nonpositional exposure to the other, namely, the very process of recognition. I would outline the urgency of retracing this understanding of mastery back to Hegel's account of the figure of the master within the process of recognition. The constitution of the master and

according to which 'where there is an horizon "an event worthy of the name cannot arrive"', Gasché observes that 'within the horizon, an event can only take place on the condition that the horizon master it as something possible in advance' (Gasché 2009, 308). Therefore, the horizon plays as a trope of mastery, whereas its openness as 'exposure to the event' (312) amounts to a certain unconditioned heteronomy of the horizon itself. To this extent, Gasché observes that 'if the thought of the event [...] requires exceeding, puncturing, etc. the horizon, this in no way implies abandoning or simply doing away with the horizon altogether' (309). And, a few paragraphs later, he adds that 'an event without horizon merely refers to a given horizon's inability semantically to saturate in advance the sense of such an event' (310). Therefore, as Gasché admits, the exposure to the event accounts for the very finitude of the horizon as the very operation of mastery. However, he does not investigate further this articulation of event and horizon, alterity and mastery, which is the main concern of my work. Moreover, in a footnote to the text, he claims that Derrida's conception of the world is the result of a critical debate with Husserl's analyses of intersubjectivity and Heidegger's concept of death. In my opinion, it cannot be overlooked that this debate presupposes the confrontation with Lévinas in 'Violence and Metaphysics'.

[7] Cf. Ro, 91: 'The *to* of the "to come" wavers between imperative injunction (call or performative) and the patient *perhaps* of messianicity (nonperformative exposure to what comes, to what can always not come or has already come).'

the slave is determined by Hegel as the solution of the struggle for recognition.[8] Self-consciousness becomes master by risking its life, that is, proving that for it 'its essential being is not [just] being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure being-for-self' (PS, 114). As Williams remarks, this self-consciousness wins its freedom by demonstrating the ability to abstract from any determinacy, including life.[9] The other self-consciousness 'has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord' (PS, 117) and, therefore, has not risked its life: it accepts to renounce its claim for recognition and to 'be bound up with an independent consciousness' (116), that is, to become a slave. Therefore, the struggle for recognition ends with the recognition of the master by the slave. Let me focus on the paragraph of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter where Hegel sums up the 'unessential' character of the recognition attained by the master.

> In this recognition the unessential consciousness is for the lord the object, which constitutes the *truth* of his certainty of himself. But it is clear that this object does not correspond to its Notion, but rather that the object in which the lord has achieved his lordship has in reality turned out to be something quite different from an independent consciousness. What now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of *being-for-self* as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action. (PS, 116-7)

The master has posited himself as for himself and, therefore, has elevated his self-certainty to intersubjective truth, through the mediation of another self-consciousness, the slave, which gave up his claim for recognition in order to survive and, therefore, became an object for the master himself. Therefore, the independent self-consciousness has attained the recognition of a dependent consciousness. Its intersubjective truth, the truth of its being for itself or of its

[8] Cf. Williams 1997, 61: 'The master does not fear death and does not undergo a determinate negation. His victory is that he is recognized as master by the slave.'

[9] On the notion of freedom see Williams 1997, 60: 'What each seeks is not the recognition of the mere fact of his existence but the recognition of his freedom. Freedom is the possibility of abstracting from every determinacy, including life. Freedom thus can transcend mere natural existence; this possibility of self-transcendence is concretely demonstrated by a willingness to risk one's life.'

freedom and independence, does not return to itself but depends on the unessential consciousness and action of the slave. In other words, the truth of mastery rests on the fear of death of the slave: the master has imposed himself as such and is necessarily still exposed to the other's recognition, to the other to come and the event. Williams observes that 'in spite of his victory over the slave, the master remains uncertain of his own truth, precisely because the slave's recognition is coerced' and, therefore, that 'the truth of mastery is the servile consciousness' (Williams 1997, 63). Interestingly, he puts the relation between the master and the slave in terms of 'faith'.[10] Can the master believe the unessential consciousness of the slave? Is, for Derrida, this belief the very truth of mastery, perhaps, the absolute performative that the event exceeds by definition? The master always posits himself as such by force or coercion, that is, he imposes himself. The attained recognition is, in fact, a forced or coerced one, which cannot include the very recognition of the other as other, the event.[11] By affirming the nonsovereign and nonperformative exposure of the master to the event and, thus, by countersigning the Hegelian account of mastery as forced recognition, Derrida brings to light the irreducible presuppositions of the movement of sovereignty.

(Let me add a few remarks on the pages of *Glas* (1974) where Derrida comments on Hegel's early exposition of the struggle for recognition in the Jena *Philosophy of Spirit of 1803-1804.*[12] My aim is to focus on the Hegelian elaboration of recognition as absolute contradiction and undecidability. As Derrida explains, in this version of recognition 'the struggle to death opposes consciousnesses, but

[10] On the performative act of faith see Williams 1997, 63: 'Although the slave can and does "recognize" the master, his recognition, as slave, is deficient because it is coerced, and thus provides the master an unreliable, distorted recognition. Believing the slave, the master lapses into false consciousness. Not believing the slave, the master must remain suspicious and "on guard". Thus the "winner" looses.' On Derrida's elaboration of a certain notion of believing let me refer to my reading of 'Force of Law' in Chapter 5 of the present work.

[11] See Williams's important conclusions on this point: 'The slave is not genuinely other, it is only "the master's other". Mastery represents a vain attempt to coerce recognition, that is, reduce mediation by other to self-mediation. Mastery succeeds only in reducing the other to a slave, only to discover that coerced recognition is both phony and worthless' (Williams 1997, 65).

[12] For Hegel's text see 'The Philosophy of Spirit of 1803/4' in Hegel 1979. To my knowledge, the only commentary on the Hegelian source of this passage can be found in Vitale 2001. On Derrida's reading of recognition in *Glas* see also Thompson 1998, and Critchley 1999, that, however, overlook Derrida's reading of the 1803-1804 version of the struggle for recognition.

consciousnesses that the family process has constituted as totalities'. Therefore, a science of the experience of consciousness, namely, a phenomenology of spirit, must take account of the essential moment of family and of its implications. Within the limits of this familiar perspective one can find the critique of pure consciousness and transcendental ego underlying Hegel's project of phenomenology. 'Here is situated the principle of a critique of transcendental consciousness as the formal *I think* (thinking is always said of a member of the family), but also a critique of concrete transcendental consciousness in the style of Husserlian phenomenology' (Gl, 135). Hegel identifies recognition as the necessary process according to which every consciousness can posit itself as such, that is, as absolute singularity or for itself, only in/for another consciousness. 'It is absolutely necessary that the totality which consciousness has reached in the family can recognize itself as the totality it is in another such totality of consciousness' (137).[13] The acknowledgment of another, the being for itself in/for an other, is the mediation required by a self-relating or self-positing consciousness. As Derrida remarks evoking a trope of *différance*, 'consciousness posits itself as for itself only through the detour of another consciousness that posits itself as the same and the other'. I outline that every consciousness posits itself, that is, as the same, only as the other's other and, therefore, as another, or the other; in other terms, every consciousness posits the other (as other). This is the irreducible condition of self-thinking and self-positing taken into consideration by the notion of recognition. The struggle for recognition is the confrontation of two consciousnesses aiming to posit themselves as for itself in/for the other and, therefore, to obtain the acknowledgement of the other. This struggle, as Derrida outlines, has the structure without solution of the aporia or antinomy, of undecidability, since there must always be two singular totalities for recognition. 'Singular totalities, since they also make two, are two: absolute, insoluble contradiction, impossible to live with' (135). As follows from Hegel's text, the confrontation of two singular totalities necessarily solves into a conflict to the extent that one can posit itself as for itself in being only by suppressing itself or the other as other. 'They must injure one another [...] The violation [*Beleidung*] is necessary' (137). Therefore, Derrida reformulates the aporia of the struggle for recognition by explaining that singular totalities 'need' one another

[13] Gl, 135: 'In this recognition [...] each posits itself in the consciousness of the other.'

for recognition and, at the same time, for the same reason, must 'abolish' or 'at least relieve' one another. 'A pure singularity can recognize another singularity only in abolishing itself or in abolishing the other as singularity' (135). Ultimately, every singularity is irreducibly opened onto the struggle for recognition and cannot come to terms with it. Again, Derrida resituates this contradiction by bringing it back to the antinomy between 'knowing' (and 'universal ideality') and singularity.[14] Singularity cannot attain the order of universal ideality since it cannot posit itself as such in/for an other as other (without abolishing the other). Hegel makes an explicit reference to the absolute contradiction of the struggle for recognition explaining that the recognition can be attained only through the suppression of the other and, thus, only through its failure. 'The recognition of the singulars is thus the absolute contradiction within itself; it is just the being of a consciousness as a totality in another consciousness, but as far as it is actual, it relieves the other consciousness; at the same time the recognition relieves itself.'[15] Therefore, as long as there is recognition, it fails to be. How can a singular totality 'be recognized by another' as such, that is, as 'one'? For this reason, Hegel concludes that the struggle between singular totalities 'leads to the nothingness of death' (140), to the death of the suppressed consciousness and the death of what remains (a mere singular). In fact, as Derrida notes, nothing is 'as such when there is only singularity' and, therefore, 'one fights to death for nothing' (136).)

3.2 Self-Recognizing and Self-Designating

In the first chapter of *Rogues*, in retracing sovereignty back to the general concept of ipseity Derrida confirms the articulation of mastery and self-positing and, therefore, the Hegelian elaboration of the master as a moment of the experience of consciousness. '... so many figures and movements that I will call from now on, to

[14] Cf. GI, 135: 'The contradiction, although not explicit here under this form, opposes more precisely knowing (the *kennen* of *erkennen*), which can deal only with universal ideality, and the singularity of the totality "consciousness", being-in-family.'

[15] Vitale observes: 'Finally the struggle for recognition between singularities seems to have no way out. Indeed, this is the Hegelian thesis. Between singularities recognition is necessarily impossible, it cannot not be an absolute contradiction, "therefore, it carries along the nothingness of death"' (Vitale 2001, 138).

save time and speak quickly, to speak in round terms, *ipseity* in general'.[16] Firstly, Derrida defines ipseity by suggesting an absolute positing or performative ("I can"), that is, a (necessarily violent) self-positing, a self-imposing, which *inscribes* itself in the medium of language or time as a symbol or a temporalizing synthesis (I will discuss this point later). 'By *ipseity* I thus wish to suggest some "I can", or at the very least the power that *gives* its own law, its force of law, its self-representation, the sovereign and reappropriating gathering of self in the simultaneity of an assemblage or assembly, being together, or "living together", as we say.' Ipseity, therefore, rests on the very movement of self-positing (the auto-performative), of a self positing itself as such (as for-itself) by coercion, that is, imposing itself, its own power or authority, and, thus, on the very operation of sovereignty, mastery or forced recognition. A few paragraphs later, Derrida explains more clearly his understanding of the term 'ipseity':

> I thus wish to suggest the oneself, the "self-same" of the "self" [...] as well as the power, potency, sovereignty, or possibility implied in every "I can", the *ipse (ipsissimus)* referring always, through a complicated set of relations, as Benveniste shows quite well, to possession, property, and power, to the authority of the lord or seignior, of sovereign, and most often the host *(hospites)*, master of the house or the husband. (Ro, 11)

In this passage Derrida recalls Benveniste's investigation of the etymological family of the Latin term *potis*, which puts into relief the original relation between the notions of the same and the master. I will return to this point later, when taking into account the pages devoted by Derrida to this investigation in the third session of the seminar *The Beast and The Sovereign* (2001-2002). As Derrida concludes, 'ipse alone [...] designates the oneself as master in the masculine' (11-12). There is a paradigm of sovereignty, which is presupposed by any order of sovereignty (from that of the nation-state to that of the people) and consists in the operation of mastery as the movement of the self's imposing itself as such (as for-itself), its own authority, and, therefore, granting itself by force the credit or the recognition of its authority (power, freedom, independence, etc.). The master is the self giving itself (that is, positing) its own accredited or recognized authority.

[16] On the matrix of ipseity and, more generally, on the relevance of *Rogues* in Derrida's corpus I refer to the seminal essay that Michael Naas wrote for the special issue of *Research in Phenomenology* in memory of Jacques Derrida (2006). Cf. Naas 2006.

Therefore, Derrida observes, 'ipseity names a principle of legitimate sovereignty, the accredited or recognized supremacy of a power or a force, a *kratos* or a *cracy*' (12). This relation between ipseity and mastery (as forced recognition) requires that one reinscribe sovereignty (or self-positing) within a certain interpretation of the Hegelian process of recognition, of the original state of struggle between consciousnesses and of its unreliable ending with the constitution of the master and the slave. Ipseity can be taken as the self-recognizing authority waging war against other finite authorities and exposing itself unconditionally to the other's recognition, the other to come or the event.

In the second session of the seminar *The Beast and The Sovereign* Derrida recalls Benveniste's text in order to put into relief the etymological relation between the notions of master and ipse. He suggests that we can find in this relation the minimal trait of sovereignty, which amounts to a self-imposing and, thus, self-recognizing power (or "I can"). 'The sovereign, in the broadest sense of the term, is he who has the right and the strength to be recognized as *himself, the same, properly the same as himself*' (BS, 66). At a certain point of his investigation of the Latin *potis*, in his *Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (1969), Benveniste explains that in the Indo-European area the term, which originally refers to mastery and power, also designates the identity of the same.[17] As Derrida remarks, Benveniste speaks of the later meaning as a diminution with respect to the original reference to mastery.[18] However, this ambiguity can be explained within a theoretical perspective, to the extent that the master is a figure of consciousness corresponding to the movement of the self's positing itself as such (that is, attaining the other's recognition by force) and, therefore, designating itself as the same. 'Benveniste had inscribed the value of ipseity [...] in the same filiation [of power] as though power were first of all recognized in the one who could be designated or who could be the first to designate himself as the same' (66). Here, the act of self-designating stands for the very operation of forced recognition presupposed by mastery. Now, the minimal trait of sovereignty

[17] Cf. Benveniste 1969, 89: '*Ces faits sont bien connus, mais ils méritent un examen attentive, pour l'importance et la singularité du problème qu'ils posent. Dans quelle condition un mot signifiant «maitre» put-il aboutir à signifier l'identité?*'

[18] Cf. Benveniste 1969, 90: '*Autant il est difficile de concevoir comment un mot désignant «maitre» a pu s'affaiblir jusqu'à signifier «lui-même».*'

binding ipseity and mastery should be thought in terms of positing (*setzen*): as self-positing, positing by force, imposing, strongest positing, force to posit, etc. 'The concept of sovereignty – Derrida notes – will always imply the possibility of this positionality, this thesis, this self-thesis, this autoposition of him who posits himself as ipse, the (self-)same, oneself.' This positing is also the performative of self-designating, of making oneself being designated/recognized. In fact, Derrida identifies 'the essence of sovereignty' with dictatorship, which evokes the 'power to say in the form of dictation, prescription, order or *diktat*'. This kind of statement corresponds to the absolute performative of ipseity and mastery, the ultimate foundation of all statement (perhaps, to the strongest statement), to the extent that it gives itself or posits (by force) the credit and the recognition of its authority. It accounts for the performative of decision, of the self-recognizing/designating power that interrupts (without interrupting) the struggle for recognition among a limited number of consciousnesses. As Derrida suggests, it is 'the ultimate saying or the performative verdict that gives orders and has no account to render other than to itself (*ipse*), and not any superior agency, especially not a parliament' (67). The text refers to ipseity as the ultimate or strongest authority, the subject of decision, which terminates what one could call the democratic aporia of recognition, endless and free discussion, indecidability. It is worth remarking that Derrida concludes his reading of Benveniste's text quoting the passage where Benveniste defines the condition according to which the adjective "oneself" can be taken in the sense of "master". This condition stands for the self's positing or crediting its own authority within an assembly: 'a closed circle of people, subordinated to a central personage who takes on the personality and complete identity of the group to the point of summing it up himself; by himself, he embodies it' (BS, 68; Benveniste 1969, 92). The master/ipse is the strongest or ultimate self, the dictator, the decision, the syn-*thesis* or symbol of the circle.

I would call democratic the very medium of decision, the undecidability of the confrontation with the other, which, in fact, the master can break only in an unreliable way, that is, without obtaining the recognition nor encompassing the

other (as other, to come, etc.) or the event.[19] Perhaps, Derrida's distinction of the two poles of democracy, undecidability and decision, openness and sovereignty, can be retraced back to the distinction between the confrontation and the master, the medium and the symbol. It is, in this sense, striking that in the first chapter of *Rogues*, before evoking the relation of ipseity and mastery, while recalling himself to the necessity 'to bring the talk to a close' he speaks of a 'strange necessity that imposes limits on a discussion, on an exchange of words or arguments, a debate or deliberation, within the finite space and time of a democratic politics' (Ro, 9). Derrida seems to find in a pole of democracy the paradigm of the self-recognizing and self-designating authority of the master/ipse, of dictatorship, decision and so on. However, the democratic circularity of free discussion also recalls the medium of the war among self-consciousnesses, of the struggle for recognition, of indecidability, of the nonsovereign and nonperformative seeking for the other's recognition, of the experience of the nonencompassable event, of the unconditioned heteronomy, etc. On the one hand, Derrida sees in a certain 'call for free discussion and indefinite deliberation' (which is 'in accordance [...] with the circular figure of the Athenian assembly in the agora or the semicircular figure of the assemblies of modern parliamentary democracy') the 'essence' of democratic politics. On the other hand, he conjures up the necessity of a self-accrediting decision which comes to interrupt the essential circulation of time and language and synthesize (or symbolize) it: 'the act of sovereignty must and can, by force, put an end in a single, indivisible stroke to the endless discussion' (10). I will return later to the temporal and linguistic element of the democratic *milieu*. Let me remark here Derrida's insistence on its affinity with Lévinas's notion of the *apeiron*, with the absolutely other of the work of negativity. The sovereign and synthetic interruption of the democratic medium cannot structurally put an end to the endless circulation of language and

[19] Cf. Ro, 14-15: '[...] the ipseity of the One, the *autos* of autonomy, symmetry, homogeneity, the same, the like, the semblable or the similar, and even, finally, God, in other words everything that remains incompatible with, even clashes with, another truth of the democratic, namely, the truth of the other, heterogeneity, the heteronomic and the dissymmetric, disseminal multiplicity, the anonymous "anyone", the "no matter who" the indeterminate "each one."'

time, where the struggle for recognition takes place, as it originally inscribes itself into this circulation, into this struggle.[20]

3.3 Autarchy and Self-Knowledge

In the first chapter of *Rogues*, Derrida describes the sovereign form of democracy, namely, the sovereignty of the people, by commenting on Chapter 4 of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835/1840). In Tocqueville's text Derrida isolates a *theological* paradigm of sovereignty which he suggests bringing back to Aristotle's elaboration of the Pure Actuality of the First Mover in Book XII of *Metaphysics*.[21] Derrida begins from the final paragraph of Tocqueville's chapter to outline the supposed distinction between America and other countries, between the sovereignty of the people (democracy) and self-positing or forced sovereignty.[22] Firstly, Tocqueville draws attention to the countries where power coincides only partially or does not coincide at all with society and, therefore, is a forced power or the power of the strongest: it 'forces it to pursue a certain track'. As Derrida outlines, this condition implies a division of force ('the ruling force is divided') since power only imposes itself over a part of society. In the case of the United States, power coincides with society itself to the extent that it 'governs itself for itself' (de Tocqueville 2002, 75). In other words, the principle of sovereignty corresponds to the self-positing power of society itself; society is a (sovereign) self giving itself or recognizing its own power, designating itself as such. Retracing the figure described by Tocqueville back to the very operation of mastery/ipseity, Derrida observes that 'society there acts circularly "by itself"' (Ro, 14). In this context, according to Tocqueville, there would be no division of force or, in other terms, no different forces at work since society itself must give

[20] On the structure of *renvoi* inscribed onto the concept of democracy see the fundamental remarks in Ro, 34-39 and, for a remarkable interpretation of Derrida's text, Hägglund 2008, 174-177. 'It is misleading', Hägglund notes, 'to say that democracy is "always deferred" insofar as this implies that there is a democracy (or an Idea of democracy) that remains out of reach. The point is not that democracy is deferred but that democracy *is* deferral and cannot overcome the movement of deferral without ceasing to be democracy' (Hägglund 2008, 175-176).

[21] Here it is worth recalling the provocative reading of *Rogues* given by Samuel Weber, who puts emphasis, especially in the first part, on Derrida's theoretical and, at the same time, militant reflections upon contemporary historical events. Cf. Weber 2008.

[22] For a rich reading of the articulation Derrida-Tocqueville I refer to Keohane 2011.

itself or recognize its own sovereignty.[23] 'Nothing of the kind is to be seen in the United States' (de Tocqueville 2002, 75), Derrida remarks. Then, Tocqueville gives a brief account of the division of powers within the American society ('what he considers to be', Derrida adds, 'a demonstrative description') by admitting the irreducible divisibility of power and force. Finally, he affirms the affinity between the sovereignty of the people over America and the sovereignty of God over the universe, which consist in their being a self-sufficing and self-returning totality.[24] 'The people reign in the American political world as the Deity does in the universe. They are the cause and the aim of all things; everything comes from them, and everything is absorbed in them' (75). Here Derrida finds what he calls 'the trope of a theological figure' (Ro, 14) or of the theological paradigm which he sees irreducibly at work in the tradition of sovereignty and which he aims to reconsider by drawing attention to the relation between mastery and ipseity. In a footnote to his commentary, Derrida reads the beginning of Tocqueville's chapter by putting into relief a remarkable articulation of sovereignty and recognition. He observes that the chapter begins with what one should begin with when speaking of American political laws, that is, 'the *dogma* [the italics are mine] of the sovereignty of the people' (de Tocqueville 2002, 73). And, perhaps, it could not be otherwise to the extent that these laws presuppose the self-recognizing power of the whole society. The notion of 'dogma' testifies the theological paradigm of the sovereignty of the American people and, therefore, as Derrida suggests, it is not used 'haphazardly'. He puts into relief Tocqueville's account of the history of that dogma from 'the night of nonrecognition' to its coming 'out into the daylight' (Ro, 164). As Tocqueville explains, the principle of the sovereignty of the people can be found 'at the bottom of almost all human institutions', though it remains 'concealed from view' or is 'not recognized', or, still, 'is abused by the wily and the despotic' (de Tocqueville 2002, 73-74). In the last case it is understood as the 'silence' or the 'submission' of a people, on which one supposes 'the right to command' to be established. This passage accounts for a divided society which cannot be totalized nor synthesized into the dogma of sovereignty, ipseity or self-

[23] De Tocqueville 2002, p.75: 'All power centres in its bosom; and scarcely an individual is to be meet with who would venture to conceive, or, still less, to express, the idea of seeking it elsewhere'.

[24] For the notion of self-return as the speculative movement *par excellence* and for the interpretation of the operation of mastery as self-return see Chapter 4 and the Supplement.

recognizing power. Only in America one can find this figure of self-recognizing at work: 'the principle of the sovereignty of the people is not either barren or concealed, as it is with some other nations; it is recognized by the customs and proclaimed by the laws; it spreads freely, and arrives without impediment at its most remote consequences' (74). As Tocqueville confesses, this sovereignty is the result of a revolution/war ('the American revolution broke out', 'battles were fought, and victories obtained for it'), or of an appropriation ('the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people ... took possession of the State', 75). The people designates itself as the ultimate and embracing principle of all laws and decisions of the United States, 'the law of laws' (76), its absolute performative.

The theological paradigm of self-recognizing (self-sufficing, self-returning, etc.) sovereignty, which has in itself its own principle (of recognition) and, thus, encompasses the cause and the end of its movement in the circle of self-return, is found by Derrida in the 'pure Actuality' or the *energeia* of Aristotle's Prime Mover.[25] His reading of this paradigm follows the development of the Aristotelian source. Firstly, he argues that pure actuality describes 'a motion of return to self' or 'a circular motion' to the extent that it moves without being moved like the primary object of desire (the first desirable) and of thought (the first thinkable), 'thought thinking thought'.[26] The circular self-return is also a movement of self-thinking and self-desiring. Secondly, Derrida outlines that pure actuality is 'a kind of life' which consists in being ever in 'the best of what we might enjoy for a brief time in our life.' Therefore, as he observes, pure actuality is also the circle of self-enjoyment. 'A taking pleasure in the self, a circular and specular autoaffection that is analogous to or in accordance with the thinking of thought' (15). Derrida seems to think of the theological paradigm of sovereignty as a circular movement of self-thinking and self-affecting which does not wait for the mediation or recognition of the other and recognizes itself as for itself, namely, ipse, the

[25] Weber gives an interesting account of the theological matrix of ipseity (/ipsocracy): 'Over what does this self rule? Over everything *other*, to be sure, not merely in the form of beings or entities, but even more in that of *time* and *space* as media of proliferation, dissemination, and alteration, and over *language* as medium of sharing and partitioning. The self rules by asserting its unity and unicity as *one-self*, as a self that stays the same over time, through space, and throughout languages – in the image of a God construed as One and the Same' (Weber 2008, 392). For a development of these remarks see the following section of my chapter.

[26] Cf. Met, 1072a-1074a.

master, the strongest, the dictator, etc. In a passage from the thirteenth session of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida focuses on the beginning of Book I of *Politics* where Aristotle elaborates the concept of sovereignty according to the theological paradigm of self-returning and self-recognizing. In the first paragraph of the chapter Aristotle defines the good of the political community in relation to the goods of other communities: 'if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest [*kuriotate*] of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest [*kuriotatou*] good' (Pol, 1.1252a). Derrida reads the term *kuriotatos* as 'sovereign' suggesting the idea of the political community as self-recognizing totality or ipseity (BS, 343).[27] Following Aristotle's text, he singles out the second paragraph of the chapter in which the Greek philosopher refuses the opinion that 'the qualifications of a statesman, king, householder, and master are the same, and that they differ, not in kind, but only in the number of their subjects' (Pol, 1.1252a 4-23). As I argued through Derrida's reading of Benveniste's text, the master, who imposes its power within a limited circle of people, is the minimal trait of sovereignty. Let me remark that Aristotle claims to distinguish mastery, which defines itself in relation to slavery, from the sovereignty of the all-embracing political community. After quoting a long passage on the historical movement from the relationships between male/female and master/slave to the constitution of the community, Derrida finds in the description of the autarchic state 'the ontological definition of sovereignty' (BS, 344). First, he draws attention to Aristotle's articulation of being self-sufficient and living well. The text of *Politics* reads:

> When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing [*autarkeia*], the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life [*eu zen*]. (Pol, 1.1252b 28-30)

A community becomes an ipseity or a sovereign totality when it is self-sufficient, when it posits itself for itself and does not reckon with any other. Now, does not

[27] Cf. Ro, 13: '[...] sovereign, that is, *kurios* or *kuros*, having power to decide, to be decisive, to prevail, to have reason over or win out over [*avoir raison de*] and to give the force of law, *kuroo*.'

autarchy, as 'independence, the fact of commanding oneself, to have its own *arché* within itself' (BS, 345), does not the theological paradigm of the sovereign community always presuppose a movement of self-positing or forced recognition, the original struggle against other autarchies, the irreducible unreliability of mastery?

I intend to conclude my examination of Derrida's reading of the Aristotelian notion of the theological autarchy, for the moment, by drawing attention to the final pages of Chapter 8 ('Recoils') of *Politics of Friendship* (1994), where Derrida discusses Aristotle's thesis that friendship is just a human experience. These pages can be read as a note on Pierre Aubenque's seminal essay 'Sur l'amitié chez Aristote' included as Appendix in his *La prudence chez Aristote* (1963). Aubenque questions whether friendship, which is a properly human experience and value, makes still sense for God and, primarily, for the wise man.[28] He refers to the passage of *Magna Moralia* where Aristotle affirms that the wise man, despite his divine self-sufficiency, cannot be assimilated to God and, thus, needs friends. It is worth remarking that, according to Aristotle, a self-sufficient God does not need friendship to the extent that he does not need the other.[29] Here, Aubenque observes, Aristotle brings into the discussion about friendship the question of the difference between God's thinking, as thought of thought (absolute or self- thinking), and the human condition of the self's knowledge of itself through the mediation of the other.[30] Derrida's remarks focus on this Aristotelian articulation brought into light by Aubenque's comments. In the passage quoted by Aubenque, Aristotle asks what the self-sufficing being does if he does not care about the other:

We are told, that he will contemplate something; for this is the noblest and the most appropriate employment. What, then, will he contemplate? For if he is to contemplate anything else, it must be something better than himself that he will contemplate. But this

[28] Cf. Aubenque 1963, 183.
[29] Cf. MMor, 1212b 34: 'Now the analogy that is generally derived from god in discussions is not right there, nor will it be useful here. For if god is self-sufficing and has need of none, it does not follow that we shall need no one.'
[30] Aubenque 1963, 181: 'On reconnait ici, introduit à propos d'une discussion sur l'amitié, le thème de la Pensée qui se pense elle-même.'

is absurd, that there should be anything better than god. Therefore he will contemplate himself. (MMor, 1212b 39)

Derrida is concerned with Aristotle's aporia according to which 'the man of friendship [...] should nevertheless resemble God' and with Aubenque's examination of this aporia (in particular, with the relation between friendship and self-thinking). For instance, drawing on the thesis that self-thinking does not allow the *detour* of the other and, therefore, of friendship, he suggests thinking of a 'tradition' *without friendship* that goes from Aristotle's thought of thought to Hegel's 'absolute knowledge' (PF, 223). Following the text of *Magna Moralia*, Aubenque explains that a wise man needs friendship to the extent that he cannot contemplate or think itself without the detour of an other.[31] In other words, I observe, the human self-sufficiency is not for itself without being for an other or without being acknowledged by an other. Furthermore, I only remark that Aristotle's other, the friend, is called upon to recognize the characters of the other's other (the self) and, perhaps, to permit the self's recognition of itself (acting, therefore, as a second self). At this point, Aubenque recalls a seminal passage where Aristotle affirms that the other's mediation is required by the human movement of auto-contemplation (in which the latter stands for the being self-sufficient or the sovereignty of the wise man).

Now we are not able to see what we are from ourselves [...] as then when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend. For the friend is, as we assert, a second self. (MM, 1213a 15-24)[32]

Therefore, Aristotle concludes, friendship mediates self-knowledge. Relaunching Derrida's suggestion of a tradition without friendship between Aristotle and

[31] MMor, 1212b 39: 'A human being surveys himself, we censure him as stupid. It will be absurd therefore, it is said, for god to contemplate himself. As to what god is to contemplate, then, we may let that pass. But the self-sufficingness about which we are conducting our inquiry is not that of god but of man, the question being whether the self-sufficing man will require friendship or not. If, then, when one looked upon a friend one could see the nature and attributes of the friend [...].'

[32] Aubenque 1963, 182: '*La condition humaine, en effet, est telle que la connaissance de soi est illusoire, et devient complaisance à soi, si elle ne se passé par la médiation de l'autre.*'

Hegel, one can find here another tradition encompassing the figures of Aristotle's human self-knowledge and the Hegelian self-consciousness and affirming the necessity of recognition or friendship. To explain the quoted passage Aubenque refers to a parallel text from the *Eudhemian Ethics* where he recognizes the 'deep meaning' of Aristotle's affirmation of the necessity of friendship for human self-knowledge. This text is quoted also by Derrida and becomes the starting point of his elaboration of the unconditioned heteronomy of the finite *cogito* and, thus, of his aim at reinscribing his own thought of the *cogito* within the Aristotelian-Hegelian tradition of the war in the ipseity (or positing) and among finite ipseities (or positings).

> For because a god is not such as to need a friend, we claim the same of the man who resembles a god. But by this reasoning the virtuous man will not even think; for the perfection of a god is not in this, but in being superior to thinking of anything beside himself. The reason is, that with us welfare involves a something beyond us, but the deity is his own well-being. (EE, 1245b 14-19)

Aristotle's text puts into relief the distinction between the absolute self-relation of God (*autos autou to eu estin*) and men's mediated self-relation (*to eu kath'eteron*). In his remarks Derrida draws the conclusion that man 'has friends' or 'desires friends' (perhaps, the recognition of his self-sufficing, of his being for-itself) because 'man thinks' *par excellence* (perhaps, *posits*), that is, man 'thinks the other'. In other words, the possibility of friendship and, thus, of recognition is inscribed in the very possibility of human thinking as the thought of the other or as the self's thinking of itself as the other('s other). While thinking itself as the other('s other) the self opens up the possibility, the desire or the demand of friendship. This being (for) an other of finite thinking has to do with friendship in a structural fashion. Translating these conclusions into the language of 'a human and finite *cogito*' Derrida announces the original war among finite totalities: 'I think, therefore I am the other; I think, therefore I need the other (in order to think)'; and, at the same time, the original opening onto the other and the other's recognition, the other to come, the event, etc.: 'I think, therefore the possibility of friendship is lodged in the movement of my thought in so far as it demands, calls for, desires the other' (PF, 224). Countersigning the Aristotelian distinction

between divine and human self-sufficiency enlightened by Aubenque's commentary, Derrida puts on the stage a certain tradition of ipseity that the theological exposition of sovereignty merely conjures away.

3.4 A Contract with Time

In this section I will focus on Derrida's exposition of sovereignty as a process of autoimmunity. My intention is to reformulate this process in light of the operation of mastery and self-recognizing.[33] Finally, by putting emphasis on the enslavement of time required by this operation, I will show that a certain articulation of the movement of idealization is at stake within the process of autoimmune sovereignty. Therefore, through Derrida's remarks on Aristotle's notion of *bebaios*, I propose returning to his early exposition of Husserl's concept of transcendental inscription. In Chapter 9 of the first part of *Rogues*, when supposing the sovereign position of a world democracy, Derrida affirms that 'pure sovereignty does not exist' to the extent that sovereignty, as self-positing or self-recognizing, is necessarily 'autoimmune'. He begins by assuming the theological paradigm according to which sovereignty 'posits itself' (by force, or 'imposes itself') 'in silence' and in 'a moment that is the very stigmatic point of an indivisible instant' (Ro, 100-101). As self-sufficing and self-returning, sovereignty must be indivisible and, thus, immune from time and language as well as from temporalization and history, which would imply necessarily the division of power, the struggle for recognition, the democratic undecidability. 'This indivisibility excludes it in principle from being from time and from language. From time, from the temporalization that it infinitely contracts, and, thus, paradoxically, from history.' The synthesis corresponding to the circular or gathering movement of sovereignty must be an infinite contraction of time in

[33] The question of the autoimmunity of sovereignty elaborated in *Rogues* has been posited first, in its general lines and in its relation to Derrida's early work, in Naas 2006. Later, autoimmunity is used by Hägglund as the key to get through the whole corpus of Derrida's work. At the beginning of his work, he defines autoimmunity in the following terms: 'His notion of autoimmunity spells out that everything is threatened from within itself, since the possibility of living is inseparable from the peril of dying' (Hägglund 2008, 9). I cannot discuss here this operation to the extent that my investigation of autoimmunity aims at detecting the relations between specific texts of Derrida's *corpus* and between them and a certain theoretical tradition.

order to interrupt temporalization and its effects. Derrida evokes the figure of a contract or a pact between sovereignty and history, according to which the sovereign posits itself *within* history in a silent and indivisible fashion, so as to escape finitude and the process of recognition. Perhaps, this contract is a trope of the Hegelian belief of the master. In other words, as the theological paradigm has always presupposed, sovereignty imposes itself over history: somehow, it enslaves it by granting itself the recognition, it pronounces its diktat to history. It is necessary to show that the unconditioned exposure to the other, the shareability of sovereignty in general, etc. are already at work within this movement. 'It is the contract contracted with a history that retracts in the instantaneous event of the deciding exception, an event that is without any temporal or historical thickness.' As I will argue below, the very operation of sovereignty is the performative of a contract, pact or engagement, in which it gives itself credit or recognition, of a forced or imposed engagement, which is the contract or pact of the master. According to the theological paradigm, Derrida notes, there is no 'thickness' of sovereignty (which would be necessarily temporal or historical) since the synthesis, its operation amounts to, should be neither temporalizing nor symbolizing. In this perspective, Derrida outlines that sovereignty cannot be inscribed into a medium of universalization (time or language) requiring its shareability or divisibility and, therefore, the sharing or division of power, the war among finite sovereignties, etc. 'As a result, sovereignty withdraws from language, which always introduces a sharing that universalizes. As soon as I speak to the other, I submit to the law of giving reason(s), I share a virtually universalizable medium, I divide my authority' (Ro 101).

At this point, the passage evokes a certain submission or enslavement of the master to a law, a certain irreducibility of the process of recognition, which corresponds also to the unconditioned questioning "why finitude?" or "why reason?".[34] Even the strongest reason, the reason imposing itself and granting itself a universal sovereignty or mastery in the medium of universalization (time or language) would necessarily be exposed to 'the law of giving reason(s)' and, therefore, caught up in the war among finite reasons, for instance, the struggle for

[34] For Derrida's examination of this question and of its philosophical tradition in 'Violece and Metaphysics' see WD, 131.

recognition. Therefore, returning to the paradigm of a nonuniversalizable sovereignty, I suggest thinking of self-positing (and its tropes: self-recognizing, etc.) as establishing a permanent (perhaps, omnitemporal) mastery (mastery as such), according to the matrix singled out in Aristotle's *Politics* or in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. 'There is no sovereignty without force, without the force of the strongest, whose reason – the reason of the strongest – is *to win out over everything* [italics mine]' (101). Yet, this strongest cannot not think itself as the other and, thus, inscribe itself into a medium of forces. A theological or self-sufficing sovereignty would presuppose a circular movement of self-return having in itself its own principle and end and, therefore, neither requiring the other nor rendering account of itself to anybody. It would think itself and, perhaps, would not even think. For this reason, as Derrida remarks by recalling, as I will explain below, a *Husserlian* question, there must be neither 'sense' nor 'meaning' for sovereignty: 'To confer sense or meaning on sovereignty, to justify it, to find a reason for it, is already to compromise its deciding exceptionality, to subject it to rules, to a code of law, to some general law, to concepts.' In other words, once again, self-positing (or self-imposing) cannot be transferred into any symbolizing or temporalizing synthesis: 'this happens as soon as one speaks of it'. Yet, as I have already remarked at the margins of Derrida's exposition of the theological paradigm of sovereignty, and, thus, despite any theological dream or wish, that transfer has always already *happened* in the performative of a (forced) pact or contract: 'but since this happens all the time [...]' (101). Enslaving or interrupting history, sovereignty is the performative of the master, the self-designating operation of a forced, unessential and unreliable recognition, still carrying with itself a demand for recognition. Finally, Derrida defines the circular movement of the sovereign self-return as a 'turn against itself', as 'autoimmunity'[35]. Self-positing, in its multiple tropes, is also 'self-refuting', that is, the very contract of mastery: the self's giving

[35] On the ambiguity of self-return see Gasché 2004: 'Needless to say, this turn by which a self returns to itself to become an *ipse*, implies the possibility of a turn against itself, that is, of a suicidal perversion of autonomy. If the self can return to itself to posit and position itself, it can in the same movement annihilate itself' (296); and: 'Rather, it [autoimmunity] is a scheme that imposed itself, when it became clear that any *autos* requires a return to itself (or auto-affection), which is also, at the same time, the possibility of a turn against itself' (297).

itself to time and language and, therefore, thinking (itself as) the other.[36] In terms of speech acts, if sovereignty posits itself through a diktat, that is, designates/recognizes or makes itself designated/recognized (as the same), and if this diktat is the very contract contracted with the enslaved history, a forced contract, then the performative of sovereignty cannot already not 'deny' or 'disavow' itself (101).[37] It necessarily demands for the other which it swears or dreams to subjugate.

In a passage of Chapter 8, where he finds in the international institutions the invention of new forms of distribution of sovereignty, Derrida describes the relation between *international* and nation-state sovereignties in terms of struggle or confrontation among sovereignties. Refusing the paradigm of the opposition between sovereignty and nonsovereignty, he suggests referring this struggle back to the notion of the original war *among* finite ipseities (and *in* the infinite) elaborated in 'Violence and Metaphysics'.

> The Declaration of Human Rights is not, however, opposed to, and so does not limit, the sovereignty of the nation-state in the way a principle of nonsovereignty would oppose a principle of sovereignty. No, it is one sovereignty set against another. (Ro, 88)

So Derrida outlines that the international or world sovereignty is, by definition, finite, autoimmune and engaged in the process of recognition. It originally wages a struggle for recognition with other finite sovereignties. Therefore, there cannot be a general, theological and self-sufficing sovereignty. At the beginning there is the division of sovereignty *in general*. Recalling a certain reading of the Hegelian

[36] For an interesting and insistent use of the notion of self-refuting see Hägglund 2008. In particular, in a passage affirming the irreducibility of time (what he calls 'the key to Derrida's argument'), Hägglund observes: 'The infinite finitude of time is not oriented toward a positive infinity that remains forever out of reach. On the contrary, the thinking of infinite finitude refutes the very Idea of positive infinity by accounting for finitude *not* as a negative limitation but as constitutive of being in general. Positive infinity is neither an immanent actuality (Hegel) nor a transcendent Idea (Kant); it is *self-refuting as such* since everything is subjected to a temporal alteration that prevents it from ever being in itself. Alterity is thus irreducible because of the negative infinity of finitude, which undermines any possible totality from the outset' (93). It is not possible to focus on the multiple and, perhaps, unjustified operations, on the theoretical and textual levels, performed in this passage, but it is worth outlining a certain concern with the self-refuting evoked by Derrida within the movement of self-positing.

[37] On the self-threatening dimension of the performative of the law see Chapter 5.

restlessness of the infinite, as it is developed in 'Violence and Metaphysics' in the wake of Hyppolite's reading of the Hegelian *unruhig*, I would conclude that there is an original restlessness of sovereignty (the very war *within* sovereignty). 'The Declaration of Human Rights declares *another* sovereignty; it thus reveals the autoimmunity of sovereignty in general' (88). The restlessness of sovereignty in general means also that sovereignty thinks and posits (itself as) *an other* (sovereignty).[38]

To conclude this section I add a final remark on the movement of the enslavement of time, which I intend to explore further by looking at the reading of Aristotle's notion of *bebaios* in *Politics of Friendship* (1994). In Chapter 10 of *Rogues* Derrida accounts for the theological autarchy of sovereignty as the operation of not giving and not taking time: 'sovereignty neither gives nor gives itself the time; it does not take time' (Ro, 109). Rearticulating this point in the perspective of the pact of forced recognition between sovereignty and history, of their relation master/slave, one could affirm that sovereignty must give itself time in order not to give it. This self-giving is the temporalizing or symbolical synthesis of time that opens up the unconditioned restlessness and heteronomy of sovereignty and, therefore, sets in motion the very operation of the sovereign enslavement of time, in the performative of forced recognition.

Now, I propose looking for the matrix of the master/slave relationship binding time and sovereignty in Derrida's reelaboration of the Aristotelian *bebaios*. In Chapter 1 of *Politics of Friendship* Derrida analyses the structure of primary friendship described by Aristotle in Book I of the *Eudemian Ethics* by bringing into focus the process of its very stabilization or becoming-stable. The Aristotelian text identifies primary friendship as the experience and value against which all the other friendships are measured. It amounts to the paradigm of a stable and, therefore, intersubjectively and omnitemporally verified friendship.

[38] Cf. BS, 70-1, where Derrida takes into account the calling into question of 'the principle and the authority of the sovereignty of the nation-state [...] in the name of man, of the right of man, of the proper of man'. He observes that 'the humanity of man or of the human person invoked by human rights or the concept of crime against humanity, by international right or the international penal agencies – all these agencies might well be invoking another sovereignty, the sovereignty of man itself, of the very being of man himself (*ipse, ipsissimus*) above and beyond and before state or nation-state sovereignty'.

For friendship seems something stable, and this alone is stable. For a formed decision is stable, and where we do not act quickly or easily, we get the decision right. There is no stable friendship without confidence, but confidence needs time. One must then make trial, as Theognis says, 'You cannot know the mind of man or woman till you have tried them as you might cattle'. Nor is a friend made except through time; they do indeed wish to be friends, and such a state easily passes muster as friendship. (EudEt, 1237b 13-17)

Firstly, Derrida remarks that 'primary friendship never presents itself outside time', since it is made in time so as to put an end to time, that is, to be verified or recognized as such (stable, reliable, etc.). His reading of this passage aims to demonstrate that Aristotle admits the presupposition of time and, simultaneously, does not reckon with the aporetic consequences of this admission. Friendship is seen as a (sovereign) decision which posits itself (by force) or makes itself recognized, although it cannot do so without opening itself onto the recognition to come. Within this insight, time is the condition for the verification or recognition of the self-verifying or self-recognizing decision of friendship: 'that which puts confidence to the test'. This decision is by definition the performative of forced recognition, which cannot prevent itself from calling upon the recognition to come, an act of confidence ('no friendship without confidence' PF, 14). As I have already observed in relation to the performative of mastery, confidence is a contract with time according to which a friendship wishes or dreams to impose itself and its recognition (*within* time itself). As Derrida notes, the performative act of confidence is originally inscribed into the medium of universalization (time or language), which allows it to posit itself and, thus, to make itself recognized, but, at the same time, exposes it to the war among finite positings. Moving 'beyond the letter of Aristotle', he conjures up the tropes of this inscription as the very condition of universalization and recognition: temporalizing synthesis or symbolicity ('by taking off from this *credence* something like a temporalizing synthesis or symbolicity can be apprehended') and giving/taking time ('engagement in friendship takes time, it gives time, for it carries beyond the present moment and keeps memory', 'it [engagement] gives and takes time, for it survives the living present', 14-15). Therefore, according to Aristotle, the decision of friendship can put an end to time and its implications (recognition, the other, the event, etc.) by violently positing itself within time as truly and omnitemporally

recognized. Here, Derrida finds 'the paradox of stability', that is, of the true and omnitemporal recognition, which, in this text, Aristotle associates to the performative act of confidence by admitting, therefore, a certain struggle for recognition among finite ipseities. In Aristotelian terms, the two poles of the antinomy can be identified with the stability of confidence (as Derrida writes, 'it must endure the test of time') and a certain call for the repetition of the decision, which presupposes an unconditioned exposure to the test of time ('it opens the experience of time'). Derrida thinks of this antinomy as the very paradoxical operation of mastery *qua* enslavement of time, 'of *dominating* [the italics are mine] time by eluding it' (15), which consists in a self-recognizing decision, that is, a decision giving itself its true and omnitemporal recognition. The decision of friendship can be taken as a process, a 'stabilization' or a 'becoming stable', which requires the time for the survival of its forced recognition or for the verification of its confidence and, therefore, even for the withdrawal from this required time. In this sense it constitutes itself as the master of time in order to exit from time itself. 'The ordeal of stabilization, the becoming-steadfast and reliable [...] withdraws time, it removes even the time necessary to dominate time and defeat duration'. Somehow, the domination of time dreams to detach from its slave or to hide the very process of enslavement. The Aristotelian *bebaios* carrying the two aporetic temporal modalities of this process of stabilization accounts for the temporal articulation of mastery and of forced recognition. 'It determines a temporal but also intemporal modality, a becoming-intemporal or omnitemporal of time.'

The aporia of time comes necessarily with another aporia inscribed in the very movement of the constitution of mastery, in its irreducibly performative character. Stabilization as enslavement of time must be a contract or an act of faith (oath, promise, etc.) giving itself credit and, therefore, wishing to remove its opening onto the recognition or the verification to come, which is the truth of its very performativity. Derrida speaks of 'the passage between two absolutely heterogeneous orders', 'from assured certainty, calculable reliability, to the reliability of the oath and the act of faith' (16). Stabilization must withdraw the very heterogeneity of this passage, the unstable recognition of the master and its unconditioned exposure to the other or the event. Concluding his reading of

Aristotle's text Derrida makes a remarkable observation which lends itself to my proposal to understand the process of stabilization as the very operation of the master and, therefore, on a more profound level, to take mastery in general as mastery or domination of time.

> One must submit, one must submit oneself to time in time. One must submit *it*, but – *and here is the history of the subject as the history of time* [italics mine] – in submitting oneself to it. To conjugate it, to enslave it, to place it under the yoke, and to do so for the spirit of man or of woman as for cattle – under the yoke *(upozugios)*. (PF, 17)

'To conjugate time' is the very movement of ipseity as always giving itself credit and entering into the struggle for recognition among finite ipseities: it is the very restlessness of ipseity in general. Here Derrida affirms the articulation between the *subject* as finite ipseity (and, thus, the deconstruction of the theological dream of sovereignty) and the aporia of idealization as the temporal or symbolical movement of exiting from time (within time). And here he finds the link between the performative trait of self-recognizing or self-designating (ipseity) and the production or institution of sense and ideality. In particular, he refers the reader back to the Husserlian interpretation of the process of idealization as to the final term of the philosophical tradition of the *eidos* and, certainly, to his early reading of that interpretation. 'We have here the whole story of *eidos* all the way up to the Husserlian interpretation of the idealization or production of ideal objects as the production of omnitemporality, of intemporality *qua* omnitemporality' (16-17).

Let me follow Derrida's suggestion and return shortly to his *Introduction* to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* (1962) to bring into focus an early articulation of the performative of forced recognition.[39] In the second part of Section VII of the *Introduction* Derrida affirms a certain unconditioned vulnerability of the graphic sign *constituting* ideal objects and, thus, a certain finitude of their perdurability. As I will attempt to show, this vulnerability or finitude is opened up by the very movement of idealization as the symbolical *constitution* of sense and, therefore, as a certain (im-)position of recognition.

[39] My short examination of the *Introduction* presupposes the excellent reading offered by Leonard Lawlor's 'The Root, that Is necessarily One of Every Dilemma: An Investigation of the *Introduction* to Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*' in Lawlor 2002, 88-142.

The graphic sign, the guarantee of Objectivity, can also in fact be destroyed. This danger is inherent in the factual worldliness of inscription itself, and nothing can definitively protect inscription from this. In such a case, because Husserl considers sense neither an in-itself nor a pure spiritual interiority but an "object" through and through, we might first think that the forgetfulness which follows upon the destruction of Objectivity's custodial sign [*signe gardien*] would not affect (as in a "Platonism" or "Bergsonism") the surface of a sense without undermining the sense itself. Such a forgetfulness would not only suppress this sense but would annihilate it in the specific being-in-the-world to which its Objectivity is entrusted. (IOG, 94)

In Section IV Derrida identifies the theme of Husserl's work with 'the genesis of the absolute (i.e. ideal) *Objectivity* of sense'. He retraces this theme back to the question of idealization, that is, of the becoming 'objective and intersubjective' of the 'subjective egological evidence of sense'.[40] Idealization implies the very process of recognition (the for-an-other) according to which the subjective certainty is raised to the order of truth by means of the acknowledgement of the other. In fact, the structural traits of objectivity are 'omnitemporal validity, universal normativity, intelligibility for "everyone", uprootedness out of all "here and now" factuality'. From the perspective of the egological subject the movement of idealization consists in the 'institution' or 'production' of sense and, thus, of recognition (63). It describes the (self-)position of recognition and the (self-)constitution of a certain domination of time. After discussing Husserl's argument according to which language is the element of objectivity, in Section VII Derrida enlightens 'the decisive step' toward the 'possibility of writing', which is assumed as the very condition of 'the absolute traditionalization' of sense, that is, of its liberation from 'any tie to an actually present subjectivity in general' and of 'its relation to a universal transcendental subjectivity'. The transcendental inscription *permits* the becoming 'virtual' and, thus recognized, of communication by emancipating sense 'from its actually present evidence for a real subject and from its present circulation within a determined community' (87). Therefore, the possibility of writing (of the incarnation in a graphic sign, of the being engraved in the world, etc.) is the very condition of the full constitution of

[40] Cf. IOG, 63: 'How can the subjective egological evidence of sense become objective and intersubjective? How can it give rise to an ideal and true object [...]'

objectivity.[41] Derrida outlines Husserl's insistence on the fact that truth cannot be 'fully' objective, ideal, absolute or recognized, 'as long as it cannot be said and written'. He formulates this thinking of the possibility of writing also in terms of life suggesting that the transcendental inscription accounts for the minimal condition of the 'perdurability' and 'survival' of sense (90). As Derrida points out in the final paragraphs of the preceding section, this movement of transcendental inscription and, thus, of the survival of sense begins within the individual consciousness. 'The possibility of language', he explains, (and, thus, of writing), is already given in the egological subject to the extent that '"the same" is recognized and communicated' in the re-activating or re-producing movement of recollection (84). The virtual and omnitemporal recognition of the same has been posited since its transcendental inscription, since its incorporation into a graphic sign, within finite memory.[42]

I propose returning to the quoted passage of Section VII and reconsidering it from the perspective of the process of recognition suggested by Derrida himself in his remarks on Aristotle. The transcendental inscription imposes or dictates the recognition of sense, its objectivity and perdurability. This (im-)position of sense (as inscription) consists in the operation of forced recognition and enslavement of time. It can be thought as the performative of an act of confidence or an oath that paradoxically opens onto the test of time and, thus, the struggle for recognition and the verification to come. For this reason, in the quoted passage, he speaks of the unposited and nonperformative exposure of inscription to the other or the event, which includes the irreducible risk of annihilation or forgetfulness.[43] The

[41] Cf. IOG, 89: 'The act of writing is the highest possibility of all "constitution."'

[42] Cf. Lawlor 2002, 115: 'The recognition and communication "of the same" (*du même*), according to Derrida, occurs first within individual consciousness across finite retentions, and afterward it is reproduced as the "same" in the act of recollection (IOG 82/85). In an egological subject, therefore, ideality is heralded before being the ideality of an identical object for other subjects. For Derrida, this internal generation across other moments of the same subject implies that "intersubjectivity is first in a certain way the nonempirical relation of Ego to Ego, of my present to other presents as such, that is, as others and as presents (as past presents), of one absolute origin with other absolute origins which are always mine despite their radical alterity" (IOG 82/86).'

[43] On the danger of 'the factual destruction of the guardian sign' see Lawlor 2002, 118-120. On a more profound level, referring to the being 'con-signed' of sense *qua* object and conjuring up, interestingly, a Hegelian vocabulary, Lawlor remarks: Since all objects must be con-signed, they can never be pure objects, can never be purely objective, purely phenomenal, purely present. The disappearance of truth – truth understood as the pure

transcendental inscription can guarantee or protect the objectivity and survival of sense only by waging the war against other finite positions and, therefore, only by relying on or swearing objectivity and survival.[44] Therefore, Derrida evokes the spectre of 'a universal conflagration, a world-wide burning of libraries, or a catastrophe of monuments or "documents" in general' (94), which always threatens the objectivity of sense and its domination of time. One must admit that sense has already instituted itself by *staking* its own life, the finite body of its inscription.

Conclusion

Here I singled out in Derrida's late works, from *Politics of Friendship* to *Rogues*, the attempt to reckon with what the modern tradition of sovereignty leaves unaccounted (the structures of the unconditionality without sovereignty, of heteronomy and autoimmunity). In my reading, Derrida pursues this task by reinscribing the notion of sovereignty within the tradition of ipseity and by unfolding a certain Hegelian movement of ipseity as self-recognizing or self-

immediacy of an object in intuition – cannot be an "accidental aberration" (IOG 108/105); it has always already disappeared, because "words and language in general are not and can never be absolute *objects.*" Without such an absolute object, there cannot be pure translatability and therefore pure community; in other words, if we adopt the Hegelian language that Derrida employs (the discussion of memory here at the end of paragraph 7 being probably the clearest *hommage* to Hyppolite in the *Introduction*), spirit can never be absolute; there is always more – *une surenchère* – indefinite mediation (IOG 106n1/104n113).'

[44] Derrida gives a later elaboration of this performative in a page of 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)' (2000), in which he isolates the arche-performative prefix of all text ("I beseech you not to annihilate this archive"). In the following passage he takes explicit account of the performative of forced recognition and mastery presupposed by all inscription. Further, he thinks of the nonperformative heteronomy of mastery (and, thus, of the war among finite ipseities it has always entered into) as the irreducible vulnerability and finitude of the body of inscription, as the unconditioned questioning "why finitude?". 'It is said often, quite rightly, – Derrida writes – that a performative utterance produces the event of which it speaks. But one should also know that wherever there is some performative, that is, in the strict and Austinian sense of the term, the mastery in the first person of an "I can", "I may" guaranteed and legitimated by conventions, well, then, all pure eventness is neutralized, muffled, suspended. And, here, for example, no performative warning, no "I beseech you", no "I appeal to you" and so forth suffices to prevent what can happen, like an unanticipatable accident, to the body of the original manuscript. The vulnerability, the finitude of a body and of a corpus is precisely the limit of all performative power, thus of all assurance. And of all bibliophilic preservation in all our libraries' (WA, 146-7).

designating mastery. From this perspective, I argued that Derrida understands this movement as the performative speech act of the self's recognizing or designating itself as such or as the same. Furthermore, as it appears from the examination of the movement of sovereignty as mastery or enslavement of time (that is, as the temporalizing synthesis that takes time in order to exit it), this performative should be taken as an oath that opens up the test of time and, at the same time, calls for its confirmation or credit. In particular, by referring to Derrida's reading of the Aristotelian notion of *bebaios* as the process of the stabilization of a sovereign decision, I put into relief this aporetic articulation of the very speech act of ipseity.

CHAPTER 4

HEGEL'S PRECIPITATION TOWARD LIFE
(The Performative of Putting Life at Stake)

Bataille, thus, can only utilize the *empty* form of the *Aufhebung*, in an analogical fashion, in order to designate, *as was never done before*, the transgressive relationship which links the world of meaning to the world of nonmeaning. This displacement is paradigmatic: within a form of writing, an intraphilosophical concept, the speculative concept par excellence, is forced to designate a movement which properly constitutes the excess of every possible philosopheme. (WD, 275)

In this chapter I will address Derrida's confrontation with a certain Hegelian tradition of the *performative* 'putting (life or sense) at stake'. My argument is that, through the engagement with Kojève, Hyppolite and Bataille's readings of the operation of mastery as it is exposed in the *Phenomenology*, Derrida proposes finding in the Hegelian concept of determinate negation or *Aufhebung* (*qua* limiting or deferring the absolute risk) the very structure of the putting at stake. As I will try to demonstrate, the absolute risk (perhaps, *chance*), that is always allowed by this performative operation, accounts for the very restlessness and heteronomy (perhaps, *comedy*) of the general concept of positing.

4.1 A Hegelian Concept

Derrida's essay on Bataille, entitled 'From restricted to general Economy. A Hegelianism without Reserve' (1967), begins by evoking and, perhaps, countersigning, Bataille's acknowledgement of the 'Hegelian self-evidence [*évidence*]' (and its being 'a heavy [*lourd*] burden') and, therefore, by establishing the stakes of the opened up confrontation, namely, the *Hegelianism* or a certain

tradition of the Hegelian text.[1] A few paragraphs later, while anticipating a *tropological* reading of a specific articulation of the Hegelian text inaugurated by Kojève and elaborated by Bataille, Derrida suggests that the confrontation will take place around the *Phenomenology*'s dialectic of the master and the slave. He recalls a note by Bataille that conjures up the necessity of engaging with 'the blinding lucidity' of the master/slave dialectic as the movement 'which determines and limits the successive possibilities of man' (WD, 252). Derrida's essay can be read itself as a response to this call and a further return to the *Phenomenology*'s text within the context of a French tradition of Hegel. Bataille's remark is taken from a footnote of the chapter devoted to Hegel in the fourth part of *Inner Experience* (1943), the 'Post-scriptum to the Torment (or the new Mystical Theology)', in which Bataille recognizes Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's inability to understand how deeply Hegel 'developed the possibilities of intelligence' (Bataille 1988, 109). It is worth observing that, in the final sentences of the footnote, Bataille refers to Kojève's commentary on the dialectic of the master and the slave, which represents the essential source of his Hegelianism and, more in general, the essential, even if implicit, term of the confrontation engaged by Derrida.[2] Finally, in these introductory pages, Derrida defends a

[1] Cf. WD, 251: '"Often Hegel seems to me self-evident, but the self-evident is a heavy burden"'. Why today – even today – are the best readers of Bataille among those for whom Hegel's self-evidence is so lightly borne?' For an updated approach to the question of the French tradition of Hegel between the two world wars I refer to Geroulanos 2010. In relation to the specific elaboration of the *Phenomenology*'s concept of desire I also take into account Butler 1987. To my knowledge there exists no rigorous, theoretical and philological study on Derrida's confrontation with that tradition. This chapter aims to be a first, tentative step toward that direction. On Bataille I refer to the excellent works of Fred Botting and Scott Wilson: in particular, see Botting & Wilson 1997, and Botting & Wilson 2001, that, however, are not primarily concerned with the investigation of a certain tradition of the Hegelian text.

[2] In a long, initial footnote of the essay, Derrida acknowledges Kojève's dominant influence on Bataille's interpretation of Hegel's text (cf. WD, 334). As I aim to demonstrate, it is plausible to suppose that the polemic target of Derrida's essay is also to demarcate a certain, decisive shift between Kojève's and Bataille's interpretations of the Hegelian text and, thus, of Hegelianism. I will refer to the following two texts by Kojève, which are published in the French edition of his seminars on Hegel, collected by Queneau with the title *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel* (1947): (a) the commentary and translation of Section I of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on 'Self-Consciousness', which is the opening chapter of the *Introduction* and is entitled 'In Place of an Introduction'; (b) the essay 'The Idea of Death in Hegel's Philosophy', which is Appendix II of the *Introduction* and has not been included in the English translation of the collection of Kojève's lectures. For an introduction to the figure of Kojève pointing out the main

certain gesture of focusing on a specific articulation of the Hegelian text as the very *trope* of Hegelianism by pointing out that Bataille was well aware of what 'taking seriously' Hegel and absolute knowledge would imply.

> And to take such a system seriously, Bataille knew, was to prohibit oneself from extracting concepts from it, or from manipulating isolated propositions, drawing effects from them by transportation into a discourse foreign to them. (WD, 253)

From this perspective, it is urgent to detect the role played by the concept of mastery in Hegelianism (or in a certain idea of Hegel's philosophy). In the next section of the essay, Derrida engages with Bataille's (and Kojève's) tropological reading of the master/slave dialectic by returning to the *Phenomenology*'s text, read in the French translation by Hyppolite (another implicit actor of a certain *struggle* around the Hegelian text), and by putting to the test Bataille's (and Kojève's) remarks on it. The section begins with a programmatic question: 'does not *sovereignty* [Bataille's *souvereineté*] translate, in the first glance, the *lordship* (*Herrschaft*) [*maitrise*] of the *Phenomenology*?' (WD, 254) What is at stake here is both taking into account Bataille's confrontation with the *Phenomenology*'s text, which prompts him to the elaboration of the 'Hegelian' – as Derrida suggests – concept of sovereignty, and, thus, responding to the call to engaging in this confrontation.

4.2 Putting Life at Stake and Negativity

First, Derrida re-opens Section I of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness ('Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage [PE, 155: '*domination et servitude*']'), to put into relief the 'operation' of the master, which Bataille identifies as 'the centre of Hegelianism'

misrepresentations of Kojève's reading of the philosophical tradition and the urgency of returning to his conception of atheism as a negative anthropology, through a reconsideration of his unpublished work, see Geroulanos 2010, 133-136. Moreover, for a detailed reference to Kojève's various commentaries on the *Phenomenology*'s struggle for recognition see again Geroulanos 2010, 358-359.

(WD, 254). Hegel explains that the movement of self-presentation of each self-consciousness, that is, of absolute abstraction, consists 'in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific *existence,* not to the individuality common to existence as such, that it is not attached to life' (PS, 113).[3] This movement is described in terms of 'action' (Ger. *Tun*; PE, 159: '*opération*'), more precisely, a 'twofold' action, in which one side, the 'seeking the death of the other', implies the other, the 'staking of its own life' (PS, 113). Therefore, the struggle for recognition, namely, for raising self-certainty to intersubjective truth and, therefore, for independence or freedom, is a struggle to death. As Hegel explains, 'the relation of the two self-consciousnesses is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle' (PS 113-4) [PE, 159: '*la lutte pour la vie et la mort*'].[4] Now, according to a movement that will be described in the following paragraphs, the winner of the struggle is the self-consciousness who *actually* risks his life. So the Hegelian text articulates the absolute abstraction of self-consciousness with the actual risk of life: 'it is only through staking one's life [PE, 159: '*par le risque de sa vie*'] that freedom is won'.[5] Furthermore, 'the individual who has not risked his life [PE, 159: '*qui n 'a* pas mis sa vie en jeu'] has not attained to the truth of this

[3] On recognition, freedom and risk see Williams 1997, 60: 'What each seeks is no recognition of the mere *facto* of his existence but the recognition of his freedom. Freedom is the possibility of abstracting from every determinacy, including life itself. Freedom can, thus, transcend more natural existence; this possibility of self-transcendence is concretely demonstrated by a willingness to risk one's life. Moreover, freedom is mere possibility until is asserted, and to assert it is to run a risk.'

[4] In the section from *Glas* on Hegel's early version of the struggle for recognition Derrida outlines the articulation of positing (the self-positing of consciousness, *sich setzen*) and risking death (*mettre en jeu*) in the following terms: 'In effect I can make an attempt on others' life – in its singularity – only in risking my own. To posit oneself (*sich setzen*) as consciousness supposes exposure to death, engagement, pawning, putting in play [*en jeu*] or at pawn [*en gage*]. "When I go for his death, I expose myself to death (*setze ich mich selbst dem Tode aus*), I put in play my own proper life (*wage Ich mein eignes Leben*)." This putting in play, at pawn, must, as every investment, amortize itself and produce a profit; it works at my recognition by/through the other, at the posit(-ion-)ing of my living consciousness, my living freedom, my living mastery. Now death being in the program, since I must actually risk it, I can always lose the profit of the operation: if I die but just as well as if I live' (Gl, 139). For the interpretation of this section let me refer to Chapter 3 of the present work.

[5] Cf. PS, 114: 'Only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-self*.'

recognition as an independent self-consciousness'. In his remarks on the Hegelian text Derrida understands mastery as the movement of absolute abstraction, as the very operation of risking life ('such an operation [...] amounts to risking, putting at stake'), which allows him to refer to Bataille's (and Kojève's) concern for the operation of '*wagen, daransetzen, mettre en jeu*'. Consequently, Derrida relates the condition of the slave to the desire to conserve life and, thus, to the renunciation of the very movement of self-presentation: 'the servant is the man who does not put his life at stake'.[6]

At this point, Derrida describes the master's operation of putting life at stake in terms that seems to presuppose Bataille's (and Kojève's) reading of the tropological character of mastery. In fact, he rearticulates his remarks on that operation supposing a certain relationship with a specific operation of the Spirit brought to light by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*'s 'Preface'. As Derrida himself points out in a footnote, this supposition can be found in Bataille's essay 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice' (1955), which is explicitly indebted to Kojève's 'The Idea of Death in Hegel's Philosophy'[7]. First, Derrida associates the movement of absolute abstraction, in other words, the proof of not being attached to life, to the operation of 'looking the negative in the face', which, according to the Hegelian text of the

[6] For Hegel's definitions of the master and the slave see PS, 115: 'One is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman.' Williams puts the servile renunciation to the claim for recognition in order to survive in these terms: 'This party fears death, and fearing death, prefers to survive, even if that means giving up his claim for recognition. He renounces his claim to and demand for recognition; better endure this determinate (partial) negation of recognition than face death, the absolute master. However, to survive, he must give up his claim to recognition and become an object for the master; that is, he becomes a slave' (Williams 1997, 61).

[7] Cf. Hegel's passage quoted by Bataille (Bataille 1990, 14) and Derrida (WD, 334-335): 'Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass onto something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being' (PS, 19).

'Preface', testifies the power of Spirit. 'By raising oneself above life, by looking at death directly, one accedes to lordship.' Then, hinging on the supposed analogy between the two Hegelian texts and the two characters of the master and the Spirit, Derrida acknowledges to the master 'the strength to endure the anguish of death and to maintain the work of death' (WD, 254), which strikingly resonates with the strength of the Spirit whose 'life endures it [death] and maintains itself in it' (PS, 19). Therefore, the master's operation of staking his life can be retraced back to the Spirit's operation of facing death. As Derrida remarks, this assumption underlying his reading of Hegel's text, this idea a certain capital role of the master, is, according to Bataille, 'the centre of Hegelianism'. The master's operation accounts for a relationship between knowledge (perhaps, *absolute* knowledge) and the unconditioned risk of life (or exposure to death), which is posited in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*. From this perspective, Bataille defines the Preface as a text 'of capital importance' ('not only for an understanding of Hegel, but in all regards' Bataille 1990, 14). There, as Derrida puts it paraphrasing Bataille, Hegel 'places knowledge at the height of death' (WD, 254).

In what follows I propose to investigate the tropological meaning of the master's operation further by addressing directly the sources of Derrida's reading of the Hegelian text and, therefore, of a certain tradition of Hegelianism. As Bataille himself suggests in one of the first footnotes of the text, his 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice' can be read as a development of Kojève's reflections on 'the idea of death' in Hegel's philosophy, where the act of looking death directly in the face is brought into focus as the core of Hegelianism. In the first part of his study, entitled 'Death', commenting on Kojève's interpretation of dialectical or anthropological philosophy as a philosophy of death (an 'atheism'), Bataille outlines the articulation between the putting life at stake (that is, the proof of not being attached to life) and the principle of action or negativity (that is, of the negation of Nature).[8] 'Man's negativity – he remarks –, given in death by virtue of

[8] Cf. Bataille 1990, 10. For Kojève's concept of negativity I refer to the excellent examination by Geroulanos, who inscribes it within the horizon of an 'ontological dualism' ('according to which the very Being of man could and must be contrasted to the

the fact that man's death is essentially voluntary (resulting from risks assumed without necessity, without biological reasons), is nevertheless the principle action.' As Bataille observes, negativity, which manifests itself in the transformation of nature, can be recognized in the Hegelian characters of the master and the worker. 'This negation of Nature is not merely given in consciousness [...] is exteriorized, and in being exteriorized, really changes the reality of Nature. Man works and fights' (Bataille 1990, 10). From this perspective, he allows a tropological reading of the master (and more *in general*, as I will point out below, of the worker) *qua* the capital articulation of Hegelianism, namely, *qua* negativity. Referring to Kojève Bataille explains that the man's operation of negating his attachment to life takes him to the constitution of 'Understanding' and, thus, of 'Man', as the very principle of action and of the movement of history: 'if he revels in what nonetheless frightens him, if he is the being who risks himself, then man is truly Man: [...] he bears within him *Negativity*, and the force, the violence of negativity cast him into the incessant movement of history' (12). The text quotes Hegel's passage from the *Phenomenology*'s 'Preface' in order to put emphasis on the unconditioned exposure to death as the irreducible condition of absolute knowledge. Therefore, the operation of staking life, *qua* negativity, is lifted up to the ultimate task of Hegelianism and of Hegel himself, that corresponds to absolute knowledge or the

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Being of the world that man is "given" [*donné*] to interact with'). As Geroulanos points out by retracing it back to a certain Heideggerian origin, 'the "given" has a sense of a situatedness of the human being that conversely also situates the world, corporeality, and consciousness' (Geroulanos 2010, 137). In this context, negation accounts for the 'interactive relationship' between the two terms of this dualism. Geroulanos observes: 'Kojeve's own later emphatic supplanting of determinate negation (in the strict Hegelian sense) with his own conception of *Man as negation* is directly responsible for his reduction of Hegel and Heidegger to the terms of philosophical anthropology and for his identification of Man with a continuous process of becoming (Kojève 1947, 431) [...] Kojeve's treatment of the given and its negation by man begins, first of all, with Mastery, Man's "historically" first self-identification as an individual, as a Negation of nature in Desire – in Desire qua Desire for the other's Desire – in the willingness to die rather than give up Desire; and second in the Slave's uncompensated work for the Master (Kojève 1947, 27)' (140). Because of the homogeneity of the interaction between man and the given, according to Geroulanos, negation cannot ever be understood as a dialectical sublation, that is, 'in terms of man relating to, interpreting, or altering this world by even momentarily "stepping out" of his existence and experience' (142-144). Therefore, Man is identified with 'a radical and ultimately nondialectical Negation' of the given (187). For my commentary on Kojève's reading of *Phenomenology* let me refer to the development of the chapter.

very condition of the 'Sage'.[9] 'There can be authentic Wisdom [...] only if the Sage raises himself to *the height of death*, at whatever *anguish* to him [the italics are mine]' (13).[10] At this point, Bataille introduces the concept of sovereignty in opposition to negativity and to the operation of the staking life/facing death. He speaks of a sovereign beauty which is irreducible to the negation of Nature or Being the staking of life amounts to. 'Beauty is unable of this, in the sense that to uphold the work of death, it would be engaged in Action'.[11]

Moreover, in the last footnote of the first part of the essay, Bataille signals a remarkable disagreement with respect to Kojève's traditional understanding of mysticism as 'fleeing the idea of death' (16). The footnote elaborates the figure of an 'atheistic', 'self-conscious' or 'conscious' mystic operating 'beyond classical mysticism', that is characterized by the exposure to the risk of life, and thus, can be compared to the description of the tropological characters of Hegelianism and of Hegel himself (as a name of the Sage). Therefore, this mystic is acknowledged as a *self-consciousness*, that is, as the consciousness (or knowledge) of his own finitude, that resides in living or experiencing the exposure to death or the risk of life. But this life or experience is supposed not to be interrupted: in other words, Bataille dissociates within the character of the mystic the operation of one's exposing oneself to death from the transformation of Being and Nature. 'The atheistic mystic [...] conscious of having to die and to disappear, as Hegel *obviously said concerning* himself, would live "in absolute dismemberment", but

[9] It is important to remember that, in Kojève's and Bataille's reading, the *Phenomenology* describes first the movement of Hegel's own consciousness. So Geroulanos outlines, 'Kojeve's Hegelian Sage (that is, Hegel and Kojève themselves)' (Geroulanos 2010, 160).

[10] For the affinity between the putting life at stake and Bataille's concept of the inner experience see Botting &Wilson 1997, 8: 'For Bataille, the 'inner experience' precisely denotes the opening out into an unbearably unfamiliar or foreign condition exterior to the comforts and defences of consciousness. The writing of 'inner experience' describes that movement beyond the attainment, in meditation or ecstasy, of a knowing summit of experience and into an abyss of un-knowing or non-knowledge. Inner experience describes an anguished tearing of individual experience and existence from within and without itself, an encounter with forces at the extreme limit of possibility.'

[11] On the relation between poetry and inner experience see Botting & Wilson 1997, 10. In particular, Botting and Wilson writes: 'Like laughter, the ecstatic quality of poetry does not simply link discrete beings in a convulsive movement and momentary loss of consciousness; the "poetry" of inner experience opens communication up to something entirely other as a communication, through death' (Botting & Wilson 1997, 10).

for him, it is only a matter of a certain period.' Moreover, Bataille explains by referring to Hegel's Preface, negativity as the Spirit's (master's, or worker's) operation of the looking death in the face implies a power 'to transpose the negative into being', a certain work of the negative, which the mystic does not lend himself to. Therefore, he does not 'come out' of the contemplation of the negative and maintains the work of death to the extent that it 'maintains itself in ambiguity' (17), that is, in that contemplation or exposure. This footnote develops a critique of Hegelianism as a certain reading of the capital operation of putting life at stake and, thus, points toward another thinking of that operation as irreducible to magical or transformative power.

But, let me return to Kojève, whose interpretation of the *Phenomenology*'s notion of mastery is the main source of the confrontation engaged by Derrida in the first section of his essay on Bataille. In the translation/commentary of the *Phenomenology*'s section on the struggle for recognition, while remarking on the passage from the animal desire for preservation to the human desire for recognition, Kojève devotes a notable page to the 'anthropogenetic' meaning of putting life into risk.[12] He explains that the essence of the human being (namely, 'man's humanity') '"comes to light"' only when human desire 'wins out over' the animal desire for preservation, that is, when man 'risks his (animal) life for the sake of his human desire'.[13] To this extent, 'the risk of life (for an essentially nonvital end)' is at the origin of self-consciousness and 'generates' it (Kojève 1969, 7). It entails that an independent consciousness aware of its own finitude

[12] Geroulanos proposes to find in this process of anthropogenesis one of the figures of Kojève's radical atheism (what he calls 'theantropy') along with the Sage and Napoleon: 'Throughout his reading of Hegel, Kojeve describes three figures as matching this interpretation of theanthropy, three figures aware of their finitude, dominance of nature, and overcoming of homogeneous existence. [...] The struggle for recognition in which the Master triumphs opens human history by initiating negativity proper. By embracing his finitude and risking death to vanquish the Desire of another, the Master rejects and indeed denies his animal being, thus becoming human (ILH 22)' (Geroulanos 2010, 160-161).

[13] For a remarkable account of Kojève's concept of desire as 'a permanent activity of negation' see Butler 1987, 69, in which it is observed that 'desire is a kind of negation that is not resolved into a more inclusive conception of being; desire indicates an ontological difference between consciousness and its world which, for Kojève, *cannot* be overcome. Kojève's formulation of desire as such permits a modern conception of desire freed from the implicit teleological claims of Hegel's view in the *Phenomenology*'.

detaches itself from nature and being of. This risk is assumed in view of being recognized (as independent) by another self-consciousness and, therefore, it is already caught at play within the fight to death for recognition.[14]

Let me interrupt the reading of this text for a while; I will return to it later, when examining Derrida's reading of the servile condition of mastery. As I have already pointed out, Bataille refers to Kojève's remarks on 'The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel' as to the source of his reading the operation of staking life as negativity and absolute knowledge and, thus, as the very movement of Hegelianism. In this text Kojève argues that the idea of death, which he defines as 'the acceptation *without reserve* [my italics] of the fact of death' and as 'human self-conscious finitude', plays a 'primordial role' in Hegel's philosophy. This idea, Kojève writes, encompasses the two poles of the struggle for recognition, which accounts for the first manifestation of man in the natural world, and of the supersession of death by means of discourse, which marks the condition of absolute knowledge.[15] For this reason, Kojève affirms that 'absolute knowledge and conscious acceptation of death [...] are the same' (Kojève 1947, 540), by calling into play the passage of the *Phenomenology*'s Preface in which Hegel identifies the power of the spirit with the contemplation of the negative (directly in the face) and, therefore, with the magical force to transpose the negative into being. Commenting on Hegel's passage, Kojève remarks the distinction between one's attitude to shrink from death and preserve oneself from destruction, which he associates with 'the aesthete, the romantic, the mystic', and the life of the spirit which endures the work of death and maintains itself in it. In particular, Kojève

[14] Kojève 1969, 7: 'Man's humanity "comes to light" only in risking his life to satisfy his human Desire-that is, his Desire directed toward another Desire. Now, to desire a Desire is to want to substitute oneself for the value desired by this Desire. For without this substitution, one would desire the value, the desired object, and not the Desire itself. Therefore, to desire the Desire of another is in the final analysis to desire that the value that I am or that I "represent" be the value desired by the other: I want him to "recognize" my value as his value, I want him to "recognize" me as an autonomous value. I In other words, all human, anthropogenetic Desire – the Desire that generates Self-Consciousness, the human reality – is, finally, a function of the desire for "recognition". And the risk of life by which the human reality "comes to light" is a risk for the sake of such a Desire. Therefore, to speak of the "origin" of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for "recognition."'

[15] On Kojève's notion of discourse see the next sections of the chapter.

suggests to think the sage's attitude as that of a self-conscious finitude: 'the life of Spirit is the existence of philosophy or of the Sage, conscious of the world and of itself'(548). Now, the life of the spirit begins with 'the dismemberment of Real' or the opposition of man and nature ('standing before the Negative'), and, therefore, with the man's negation of nature through the life-and-death struggle for recognition or through labour. This movement describes the magical power to endure the work of death and to convert it into being, that is, history.[16] Kojève suggests an explicit articulation between this magical power and the operations of the master and the worker. In fact, in the passage from the *Phenomenology*'s Preface he finds an anticipation of the anthropogenetic process of the fight to death for recognition.

> Since it is in the struggle, when the power of the Negative manifests itself through the voluntary assumption of the risk of life (Master) or the anguish caused by the conscious apparition of death (Slave) that man creates its being human by magically converting the Nothing that he is and that manifests itself to and through him as death into the negating existence of the fighter or the worker who create History. (Kojève 1947, 549)

I limit myself to outline the shift between Kojève's interpretation of the operation of putting life at stake and Bataille's suggestion of an exposure to death from which it is impossible to come out and which, therefore, does not lead to a certain production of Being/History. In the pages below, following the development of Derrida's reading of the *Phenomenology*'s exposition of the struggle for recognition, I will attempt to single out another reading of the Hegelian *wagen* which aims to account for Bataille's concept of sovereignty.

[16] See Kojève 1947, 548-549: '*D'ailleurs, l'Esprit "n'obtient sa vérité qu'en se trouvant soi-même dans le déchirement absolu". Car, encore une fois, l'Esprit est le Réel révélé par le Discours. Or le Discours nait dans l'Homme qui s'oppose à la Nature, ou qui nie : dans la Lutte [...] et par le Travail [...] C'est de ce "déchirement" du Réel en Homme et Nature que naissent l'Entendement et son Discours, qui révèlent le Réel et le transforment ainsi en Esprit. Cette opposition, ce conflit entre l'Homme et le Réel donné, se manifeste d'abord par le caractère erroné du discours révélateur humain, et ce n'est qu'à la fin de temps, au terme de l'Histoire, que le discours du Sage rejoint la Réalité.*'

4.3 Limiting or Deferring the absolute Exposure

In the second stage of his reading of the *Phenomenology*'s text Derrida focuses on the two irreducible presuppositions of the truth of mastery: (a) 'that the master stay alive in order to enjoy what he has won by risking his life' and (b) 'that the "truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the consciousness of the bondsman"' (WD, 254-255). As Derrida remarks, they can only be thought together according to the development of the master/slave dialectic. At this stage, Derrida is concerned with what he determines as the 'servile condition of mastery' by referring not simply to a condition of possibility, but also, on a more profound level, to the very structure of mastery and, thus, by engaging with Bataille's concept of servitude.[17] Firstly, let me focus on the key-moments of Hegel's text, which are presupposed by Derrida's remarks on the characters of the master and the slave and by a certain tradition (again, Kojève, Hyppolite and Bataille) against which these remarks should be measured. Secondly, I will follow Derrida's account of the structural condition of servitude.

After describing the life-and-death struggle, Hegel points out that it cannot go to the death since 'death is the *natural* negation of consciousness, negation without independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition'. In this case, there would be no recognition either for those who die, even if it proves their staking of life and, thus, their absolute abstraction, or for those who survived the struggle, that seek for the other's acknowledgement of their independence.[18] Here Hegel outlines the difference between the abstract negation of death, which cannot be the end point of the struggle for recognition, and, as Williams puts it, a 'negation which is more appropriate to the kind of being that consciousness is, namely, a determinate or limited negation' (Williams

[17] For Bataille's reading of a negativity detached from servitude see Botting & Wilson 1997, 4: 'Its negativity is unemployed, in the service of nothing and no one, inoperative in respect of specified and useful goals.'

[18] PS, 114: 'Death certainly shows that each staked his life and held it of no account, both in himself and in the other; but that is not for those who survived this struggle.' For Derrida's reading of the fight to death see his commentary in *Glas* on the version of the struggle for recognition proposed by Hegel in the *Jena Philosophy of Spirit 1803-4*, and my remarks on this commentary in Chapter 3.

1997, 61). This negation consists in a movement of supersession (*Aufhebung*) which 'preserves and maintains what is superseded' (PS, 114) and, for this reason, explains the solution of the life-and-death struggle into the relationship between the master and the slave.[19] Therefore, the master's operation of staking life (*qua* determinate negation) can be read as a trope of the magical power of the spirit to convert the negative in being (*qua Aufhebung*).[20] As I will attempt to demonstrate below, Derrida finds in the *Phenomenology*'s distinction between abstract and determinate negation the point of departure between Hegel's and Bataille's understanding of the putting life at stake and, therefore, between the concepts of mastery and sovereignty. Returning to the *Phenomenology*'s text, the determinate negation requires that, in order to survive, one of the two self-consciousnesses gives up its claim for recognition and accepts to be an object for the other self-consciousness. 'There is posited a pure self-consciousness, and a consciousness which is not purely for itself but for another, i.e. is a merely *immediate* consciousness, or consciousness in the form of *thinghood*'.[21] The master, or the independent consciousness, relates to himself through the mediation of another consciousness 'whose nature is to be bound up with an existence that is independent, or thinghood in general' (115), namely, the slave. As Hyppolite paraphrases in a note of his French edition of the *Phenomenology*, the master relates to a thing as such, which is the object of his desire, through the slave, who works on it and offers it to his enjoyment, and to the slave through the thing, which stands independent before the slave and represents the natural being from which the slave could not detach himself in the struggle.[22] Hegel suggests that the relationship between the master and the slave amounts to the sublimation of desire

[19] On this distinction see Williams 1997, 61: 'The point is not to end life but to secure recognition and intersubjective legitimation of one's own certainty. This requires that abstract negation of murder and death be displaced in favour of a negation appropriate to the kind of being that consciousness is, namely, a determinate or limited negation. This is what happens in the constitution of master and slave.'

[20] For Hyppolite's translation of the passage see PE, 160: '*Leur opération est la négation abstraite, non la négation de la conscience qui supprime de telle façon qu'elle conserve et retient ce qui est supprimé; par là même e l le survit au fait de devenir-supprimée*'; and the related footnote: '*La négation qui supprime en conservant est l'*Aufheben'.

[21] On this point see Williams 1997, 61.

[22] Cf. PS, 115-116 and PE, 161: '*Le maître se rapporte médiatement 11 la chose, car l 'esclave travaille la chose dont il jouit, et médiatement à l 'esclave, car ce qui fait l 'esclave, c'est sa dépendance à l 'égard de la chose, de l'être-là naturel dont il n'a pas pu s'abstraire dans le combat.*'

to the extent that 'what desire failed to achieve, he [the master] succeeds in doing, viz. to have done with the thing altogether, and to achieve satisfaction in the enjoyment of it'. By interposing the slave between the thing and himself, and therefore, through the mediation of the slave's work, the master leaves 'the aspect of independence' of the thing to the slave and 'takes to himself only the dependent aspect' (116). Therefore, the struggle for recognition solves into the achievement of mastery and recognition through an unessential or dependent consciousness. Only the latter grants the intersubjective truth of the independent consciousness: 'the *truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman'.[23]

At this point, Hegel turns to the character of the slave claiming to account for 'what it is in itself and for itself' not simply in relation to the master but from another perspective, that is, 'as a self-consciousness'. He explains that, even if not yet aware of it, servitude has the truth of the independent consciousness in itself. In fact, it has experienced this truth, 'the truth of pure negativity and being-for-itself', while experiencing 'the fear of Death, the absolute Lord'[24]. Again, Hegel articulates the unconditioned exposure to death with a certain experience of pure negativity or independent self-consciousness. 'This pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable', 'this moment of pure being-for-itself', Hegel explains, remains merely 'implicit' in servitude. And, yet, it is also 'explicit' as the object of the master's desire and, thus, of its service. 'His consciousness is not this dissolution of everything stable merely in principle; in his service he *actually* brings this about. Through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence' (PS, 117).[25] Service consists in the slave's movement of self-presentation as being for itself, that is, in the operation through which the slave puts its life at stake and, therefore, proves to be independent.

[23] On the instability of the recognition attained by the master see Williams 1997, 63-65 and my elaboration in Chapter 3.

[24] PS, 117: 'In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations.'

[25] On the self-presentation of the servile consciousness see Williams 1997, 65: 'In an important move Hegel locates the inversion of the servile consciousness in labour. The possibility of liberation of the slave from his thraldom lies in the transformation of the world by his labour.'

Perhaps, it can be read according to the structure of the master's operation of putting life at stake and of determinate negation. Moreover, Hegel elaborates a distinction between the movement of pure negation of desire, whose satisfaction is 'a fleeting one' and 'lacks the side of objectivity and permanence', and labour as 'desire held in check, fleetingness staved off'. Work institutes a negative relation to the independent object which consists in shaping and forming it and, therefore, in 'something permanent'. Therefore, through this formative activity the implicit truth of pure negativity and independent consciousness 'acquires an element of permanence'.[26] Now, as Hegel points out in the last paragraph of the section, the formative activity has also a negative significance with respect to the moment of fear, to the extent that the slave finds there his pure being for himself or its truth. In fashioning the thing through work, or, in destroying the existing shape which confronts him and, thus, the alien negative moment of fear, the slave 'posits *himself* as a negative in the permanent order of things, and thereby becomes *for himself,* someone existing on his own account' (118). Ultimately, the two moments of work and fear, Hegel outlines, cannot be detached since only through work it is possible to come to the truth of pure negativity which lies implicit in the experience of absolute fear.[27]

At this point, I propose returning to Derrida's remarks on the characters of the master and the slave in order to take account of what he understands as the general structure of servitude. Through a close reading of the *Phenomenology*'s text, Derrida focuses on the difference between the negative relation to the independent

[26] Williams observes: 'The slave's labour is desire held in check, a delayed gratification. Through this delayed gratification, the slave negates his thraldom, transforms himself, and overcomes his servility. Although the slave lacks direct enjoyment of the products of his labour, he nevertheless comes to see that the shaping and producing of objects is the key to objective permanence and independence. [...] He becomes *for himself* being-for-self. And when this occurs, the slave has overcome his self-alienation' (Williams 1997, 65-66).

[27] Cf. PS, 119: 'For this reflection, the two moments of fear and service as such, as also that of formative activity, are necessary, both being at the same time in a universal mode. Without the discipline of service and obedience, fear remains at the formal stage, and does not extend to the known real world of existence. Without the formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness does not become explicitly *for itself.* If consciousness fashions the thing without that initial absolute fear, it is only an empty self-centred attitude; for its form or negativity is not negativity *per se,* and therefore its formative activity cannot give it a consciousness of itself as essential being.'

object, corresponding to work, and the pure negation of desire. While desire as pure negation brings about the immediate disappearance of the thing, work, he observes, 'consists in inhibiting desire and delaying the disappearance of the thing'. Therefore, he isolates in the concept of work the very structure of the master's operation (of staking life) and of determinate negation as a certain limiting the unconditioned risk of life or a certain deferring death. In other words, along the line of the tropological reading of the master/slave dialectic, work comes to account for the general structure of *Aufhebung* or the magical power of spirit to transpose the negative into being.

> To stay alive, to maintain oneself in life, to work, to defer pleasure, to limit the stakes, to have *respect* for the death while one looks directly at it [*tenir la mort* en respect *au moment même où on la regarde* en face] – such is the servile condition of mastery and of the entire history it makes possible. (WD, 255)

Here Derrida announces the servile structure of mastery and spirit. In other terms, mastery implies a certain servile work of deferring risk. Derrida understands labour, *qua* the elaboration of the independent thing, as what mastery presupposes in order to control death and to achieve the ultimate enjoyment of the thing. Finally, the general structure of servitude allows us to think together the two conditions of mastery (conservation of life and unessential recognition).[28]

[28] For a critical position with respect to Derrida's reading of the Hegelian concept of determinate negation see Houlgate 1996. Houlgate explains that, according to Derrida and Bataille – 'whom Derrida follows closely here' – 'Hegelian consciousness is after all not ready to risk *death*, to risk losing itself altogether, but is in fact hoping for a return on its risk, namely, recognition or a new-found freedom in *life*' (Houlgate 1996, 80). Let me outline here the positional or performative character of 'hoping'. Furthermore, as Houlgate notes, 'Hegelian consciousness only risks death because it already knows and anticipates what it hopes to *gain* and *earn* from this risk' (81). Finally, he remarks that 'the problem with this interpretation of Hegel is that it assumes that death, loss and negativity are given meaning and value by a Spirit or consciousness which essentially already is what it is *prior* to the loss' (82). Here I dare to remark that: (a) my reading of Derrida's text aims to bring into focus a *specific* confrontation around the tradition of a *specific* Hegelian text; (b) my argument is that Derrida reads the operation of putting life at stake as a trope of the absolutely other, that is, as the very war in the infinite and among finite positings.

The *premises* of Derrida's announcement of the general structure of servitude, I would suggest, can be found in Kojève's commented translation of the *Phenomenology*'s text. First, Kojève seems to understand the concept of determinate negation as a general structure of dialectical overcoming that is shared by both characters of the master and the slave and, thus, accounts, in Derrida's terms, for the servile condition of mastery. While commenting on the distinction between 'abstract negation' and 'negation by consciousness', he speaks of the latter as a 'dialectical overcoming' which entails sublimation through preservation and vice versa. '"To overcome dialectically" means to overcome while preserving what is overcome; it is sublimated in and by that overcoming which preserves or that preservation which overcomes' (Kojève 1969, 14).[29] A certain servitude is already at play to the extent that, as Kojève himself points out below, the master can 'dialectically overcome' the unconditioned exposure to death only through the work of the slave. Kojève identifies the dialectical overcoming of the master with the act of 'enslaving' the other (15). This operation, that anticipates the irreducible presupposition of servitude, is the very enslavement of the master. A few pages later, Kojève remarks that the slave mediates the master's consumption of the independent object 'in a negative or negating way', that is, by dialectically overcoming it. In fact, since the thing is independent, the slave 'cannot, by his act-of-negating, finish it off to the point of the [complete] annihilation [...] he merely transforms it by work' (17). Therefore, the slave does not consume the thing but prepares it for the consumption of the master. The master can 'finish off' the object of his desire only 'thanks' to the interposition of the slave, to his elaboration of the autonomous thing. Therefore, the truth of mastery is the work of the slave, 'in' and 'through' which the desire of the master operates (18).[30]

[29] Insisting on Kojève's intention to demarcate his own notion of negation from Hegel's dialectical sublation, Geroulanos notes that 'in his 1939 commentary on "Lordship and Bondage", Kojeve renders "determinate negation" as *suppression dialectique* [dialectical suppression], evading *négation* [Kojève 1947, 21]' (Geroulanos 2010, 139).

[30] Cf. Kojève 1969, 20: 'The Master's "truth" is the Slave and the Slave's Work. Actually, others recognize the Master as Master only because he has a Slave; and the Master's life consists in consuming the products of slavish Work, and in living on and by this Work.'

Finally, Kojève singles out a third movement of dialectical overcoming which amounts to the slave's negation of its slavery: 'a slave [...] who has "dialectically overcome" his slavery' (20). The slave is compared to the master to the extent that he overcomes his slavery and puts into effect the freedom of the spirit; in other words, he solves the impasse of mastery (hence, the servile condition of mastery) through work or the dialectical overcoming of the thing and, finally, he liberates himself or overcomes his own state of servitude.[31] Here one can grasp the difference between Kojève's and Derrida's interpretations of the Hegelian text, since the latter finds in the servile condition of work the very structure of a certain operation of limiting or deferring the absolute risk and, therefore, of a certain Hegelianism. The consideration of the slave from the point of view of the slave himself, according to Kojève, would prompt Hegel to affirm the 'incarnation' of the spirit in the working slave.[32] Kojève explains that the slave sublimates ('transcends', 'overcomes') himself through the work imposed by the master. In fact, he becomes the master of nature, to which he was attached when he renounced to recognition in order to preserve life. This moment accounts for the slave's self-overcoming and for the elevation of work, as the progressive transformation of nature (and, thus, as the act of deferring death), to the structure of the magical power of the spirit.

> In becoming master of Nature by work, then, the Slave frees himself from his own nature, from his own instinct [of preservation] ... by freeing the Slave from Nature, work frees him from himself as well, from his Slave's ... In the technical world transformed by his work, he rules – or, at least, will one day rule as absolute Master. (Kojève 1969, 22)

Recalling the Hegelian distinction between the merely negating desire and work, Kojève points out that the latter, as transformation-education, and, thus, as dialectical (self-)overcoming, requires the 'repression' of a certain drive for

[31] Cf. Kojève 1969, 20: 'The complete, absolutely free man, definitively and completely satisfied by what he is, the man who is perfected and completed in and by this satisfaction will be the Slave who has "overcome" his Slavery. If idle Mastery is an impasse, laborious Slavery, in contrast, is the source of all human, social, historical progress. History is the history of the working Slavery.'

[32] Cf. Kojève 1969, 25: 'Therefore, it is only by work that man is a supernatural being that is conscious of its reality; by working, he is "incarnated" Spirit, he is historical "World", he is "objectified" History.'

consumption and, perhaps, of a certain death drive (which I will attempt to address elsewhere): 'the man who wants to work [...] must repress the instinct that drives him "to consume immediately"' (24). Work consists in the sublimation of the instinct of pure negativity and, perhaps, in the sublimation of a certain staking of life. Through work, Kojève observes, the slave sublimates nature and, at the same time, itself (as consciousness of his being for himself) by sublimating desire as pure negativity. Perhaps, it is in this sublimation that Derrida finds the minimal structure of mastery (and *Aufhebung*), what he calls its servile condition.

4.4 The Concept of essential Life

My commentary on the second section of 'From restricted to general Economy' will focus on Derrida's rearticulation of the servile condition in terms of 'economy'. He returns to the *Phenomenology*'s passage in which Hegel affirms 'the necessity of the master's retaining the life which he exposes to risk' by identifying the condition of survival and preservation as a certain 'economy of life'. Therefore, the recourse to 'economy' accounts for the movement according to which a self-consciousness limits or defers the risk of life and, thus, the pure negation of the thing, by enslaving another self-consciousness and, thus, by presupposing its elaboration of the thing itself. As Derrida recalls, Hegel's text argues that the fight to death prevents any process of recognition and, thus, that an economy of life that limits the operation of putting life at stake is necessarily required. 'To rush headlong into death pure and simple is thus to risk the absolute loss of meaning, in the extent to which meaning necessarily traverses the truth of the master and of the self-consciousness' (WD, 255). The unconditioned exposure to death implies a certain absolute heteronomy, or the always open possibility of the worst.[33] The economy of life wishes or dreams to *master* this (unmasterable) exposure: it is the very concept or the truth of mastery to the extent that it amounts to this dream or wish. Drawing on the Hegelian text, Derrida understands

[33] On Derrida's late articulation of the unconditional without sovereignty with the infinite possibility of the worst see, for instance, Ro, 153: 'as soon as reason does not close itself off to the event that comes, the event of what or who comes, assuming it is not irrational to think that the worst can always happen [...].'

economy as the determinate negation of consciousness, which, as the reference to the German original in the text seems to suggest, plays as the trope of the *Aufhebung* (of the magical power of spirit).[34] Perhaps, one can say that the economy of life rests on the sublimation of a certain death drive, which is always inscribed in the characters of the master and the spirit. In fact, what is at stake in Derrida's reading, along with the preservation of self-consciousness, is also the power to convert the negative into being, the very analogy between the spirit and the man who fights or works. At this point, Derrida suggests that there is a 'ruse' grounding the economy of life and this 'ruse' comes from 'life' as 'reason' (which, perhaps, stand for the dream or wish to master the unconditioned exposure to death, the very dream or wish of mastery). This ruse corresponds to the operation of limiting the risk of life (or the exposure to death) and, therefore, to the servile structure of mastery in general. 'Through a ruse of life, that is, of reason, life has thus stayed alive' (WD, 255). Reinterpreting Bataille's text, which I will examine below, Derrida proposes understanding this ruse as a 'surreptitious' putting a concept of life in place of another and, thus, as a deferring the absolute risk of life, which, yet, necessarily 'exceeds' life itself and, thus, reason.[35] Therefore, the text introduces the distinction between the concept of 'natural' and 'biological' life, which, one might suppose, is unconditionally exposed to death, and that of 'essential' life, which might also be conceived of as an *elaboration on* the biological and natural one and, thus, *on* its unconditioned exposure. This distinction is marked by work itself as the ruse that defers the risk of life. 'The life is not natural life, the biological existence put at stake in lordship, but an essential life, that is welded to the first one, holding it back, making it work for the constitution of self-consciousness, truth and meaning' (WD, 255). Insisting on the Hegelian comparative reading of desire and work, which Derrida's terminology seems to conjure up, one could say that the essential life sublimates desire as pure negativity, works on it as work itself. Therefore, *the truth of life* – let me countersign again Derrida's recourse to the *Phenomenology*'s language – is its servile condition or structure, which always coincides with a ruse of life-reason, a

[34] See Derrida's quotation of the German text in WD, 255.

[35] WD, 255: 'Another concept of life has been surreptitiously put in its place, to remain there, never to be exceeded, any more than reason is ever exceeded.'

surreptitious substitution of concepts, the *elaboration* of the natural and biological life, the hope to master a certain unconditioned heteronomy of the latter. By implicitly referring to the above commented definition of the negation coming from consciousness, Derrida calls this ruse *Aufhebung* and describes it in terms of service or as the elaboration of the object of desire.

> Through the recourse to *Aufhebung*, which conserves the stakes, remains in control of the play, limiting it, and elaborating it by giving it form and meaning [*sens*] (*Die Arbeit ... bildet*), this economy of life restricts itself to conservation, to the circulation and self-reproduction as the reproduction of meaning. (WD, 255)

The economy of life is *restricted* to the extent that it surreptitiously masters the absolute risk of life by holding it back and elaborating it with work. In other terms, this economy hopes to *restrict* itself. It presupposes the servile structure of the *Aufhebung*.[36]

It is worth reconsidering these remarks on the economy of life by developing Derrida's references to Bataille's reading of the concept of sacrifice in the second part of his 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice'. The sacrifice represents the experience of putting life at stake and of the direct contemplation of death, as it is described in the capital text of the Preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which Bataille takes into examination in the first part of his essay. Hinging on Kojève's elaboration of man as a self-conscious finitude or negativity and of Hegel's philosophy as a philosophy of death, Bataille observes that 'it is precisely in sacrifice that "death lives a *human* life"' (Bataille 1990, 18). Therefore, he retraces the sacrifice back to the spirit's experience of dwelling in dismemberment, of looking at the work of death directly in the face.[37] Firstly, in his passage on the restricted economy of life, Derrida conjures up Bataille's laughter: 'burst of laughter from Bataille'

[36] See Houlgate 1996, 81: 'He [Derrida] insists that the Hegelian "economy" ultimately restricts itself to the conservation of life and meaning, and that the role of death within that economy is *controlled* by the structure of *Aufhebung* which he defines (in *Glas*) as the "absolute reappropriation of absolute loss".'

[37] At this point Bataille quotes an excerpt of the already quoted text of the *Phenomenology*'s Preface (Bataille 1990, 18).

(WD, 255).[38] A certain comedy would be provoked by the economy of life to the extent that it works through a surreptitious substitution of concepts, it conserves life as essential life or life-reason, which simply defers the absolute exposure to death.[39] Bataille introduces the notion of 'comedy' when he sheds light on the 'subterfuge' which makes the self-consciousness of death possible. 'In order for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living – watching himself ceasing to be'.[40] This self-revelation can only take place 'by means of a subterfuge', that is, exactly, in sacrifice, where the sacrificer can see himself die by identifying himself with the sacrificed animal.[41] 'But this is a comedy' (Bataille 1990, 19), Bataille proclaims.

Remarkably, in the two final sections of the essay (entitled 'Discourse gives useful Ends to Sacrifice "Afterwards"' and 'Impotence of the Sage to attain Sovereignty on the Basis of Discourse'), Bataille elaborates the relation between the concepts of sovereignty and of meaningful discourse. As Derrida remarks, in the above commented passage on the Hegelian distinction between abstract and determinate negation, the operation of putting life at stake can also be thought as applied to sense ('to risk the absolute loss of meaning' WD, 255). Economy is conservation of life as well as of sense; or, in other words, it hopes to defer the unconditioned risk of life as well as of the loss of sense. Firstly, Bataille marks out a 'profound difference' between Hegel and the 'man of sacrifice' amounting to the fact that, in Hegel, the representation of death (and, thus, self-revelation) presupposes a certain consciousness to the extent that it takes place through a discourse. 'Hegel was *conscious* of his representation of the Negative: he situated

[38] Cf. BR, 19: 'In the burst of laughter, the body convulses and sense evaporates, the loss akin to that of sacrifice: "we laugh at ourselves as other and at the other as ourselves, in this suspended instant in which we are at once ourselves and the other. In short: in which we are, period, laughing, and laughing at being"'. On an interesting, *Bataillean* elaboration of the concept of laughter see Wilson 2008.

[39] For the notion of 'essential life' see Bataille's remarks on the conservation of life in sacrifice: 'The man of sacrifice, on the other hand, maintains life essentially. He maintains it not only in the sense that life is necessary for the representation of death but also in the sense that he seeks to enrich it' (Bataille 1990, 21).

[40] Cf. Bataille 1990, 20 : 'Man must live at the moment that he really dies, or he must live with the impression of really dying'.

[41] On the necessity of spectacles that grants the self-revelation of man as self-conscious finitude see Bataille 1990, 20.

it, lucidly, in a definite point of the "coherent discourse" which revealed him to himself.'[42] For the man of sacrifice the experience of death is irreducible to meaning ('an unintelligible emotion') and, perhaps, takes him beyond the spirit's dwelling in the dismemberment, toward 'the sacred horror', where 'all limited meaning' is 'destroyed' (Bataille 1990, 21).[43] In the first section devoted to the concept of discourse, Bataille supposes that 'sovereignty' occurs in the sacrifice, as the tropological operation of putting life at stake, and, yet, must be dissociated from 'meaningful discourse' and, thus, from sense. Therefore, sovereignty, *qua* putting life and sense at stake, exceeds a restricted economy of life and sense and can be reduced neither to mastery nor to its servile structure. 'To the extent that discourse informs it, what is sovereign is given in terms of servitude. Indeed, by definition, what is sovereign does not serve' (25-26). Once reappropriated by discourse, sovereignty would be submitted or subordinated to the primacy of sense and, therefore, to a certain servitude.[44] Here Bataille outlines a complicity of discourse (which is always meaningful) and sense, that can be referred back to Kojève's elaboration of the play of discourse in Hegel's philosophy. There is a discursive condition of the economy of life and sense and, thus, of the notion of mastery (and servitude). Kojève identifies 'discourse' with the means by which 'man' describes or reveals 'the totality of what *is* and exists' (Kojève 1969, 530). From this perspective, the revelation of Being is essentially dialectical or discursive.[45] Finally, returning to Bataille, by definition sovereignty cannot

[42] On Bataille's distinction between writing and discourse see Botting & Wilson 1997, 2-3.

[43] A few pages later, taking up the difference between the 'naive attitude' and that 'of the Wisdom of Hegel', Bataille explains that 'it was essential for Hegel to gain consciousness of negativity as such, to capture its horror – here the horror of death – by upholding and by looking the work of death right in the face' (Bataille 1990, 21).

[44] Cf. Bataille 1990, 26: 'The pure revelation of Man to himself passes from sovereignty to the primacy of servile ends.'

[45] Cf. Kojève 1947, 550-1: '*Cette révélation de l'Etre par l'être humain temporal et temporaire est une révélation discursive ou «dialectique» qui se déroule dans le temps ou elle est née et ou elle disparaitra un jour.*' For another reading of the irreducible articulation of discourse and sense in Hegel's philosophy see also the first two chapters of Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence* (1953), 'The Ineffable' and 'Sense and Sensible'. For instance, see Hyppolite 1997, 21: '[...] dialectical discourse is a progressive conquest of sense. That does not mean that sense would be in principle prior to the discourse which discovers it and creates it (and that we are obligated to use these two verbs simultaneously indicates the difficulty of the problem) rather sense develops itself in discourse itself.'

'serve' and, therefore, cannot be reduced to the discursive structure of servitude as the very operation of the limiting the risk of life and sense. Now, this concept of sovereignty applies, in particular, to a certain interpretation of the movement of Hegel's sage (of Hegel himself as the sage), whose revelation has always entered into a discourse.[46] In this case, sovereignty serves the end of the absolute knowledge (perhaps, the essential life or sense). It serves *tout court*, within a discursive or restricted economy of sense: 'the Sage cannot fail to subordinate it [sovereignty] to the goal of Wisdom.' As Bataille notes, Hegel thinks of absolute dismemberment, of the unconditioned risk of life and sense, namely, of sovereignty, as the very 'rupture of discourse'. And, yet, he takes this rupture as 'full of meaning [*sens*]' (Bataille 1990, 26): he has already reappropriated it within the circulation of sense by means of a discourse, of a certain service or labour. Therefore, I would observe that, in Bataille, servitude in general is structurally presupposed by sense as a meaningful discourse: it accounts for the very (dialectical or discursive) structure of the economy of sense, for the comic ruse of the restricted economy, for the notion of deferring the unconditioned exposure to death and to the loss of sense.

4.5 The Performative of Hegelianism

In the following pages of his chapter on sovereignty and mastery, Derrida develops the notion of the servile condition of mastery in relation to the economy of sense. The figure of laughter returns before a certain service for sense or, perhaps, before service *tout court*: 'what is laughable is the submission to the self-evidence of meaning, to the force of this imperative' (WD, 256). Sense is an imperative *positing* itself (by force and, thus, imposing itself), a diktat, namely, mastery, to the extent that it is the very operation of conserving sense and deferring the absolute risk, and, ultimately, in Hegelian terms, the very desire of sense. A certain service or servitude is required by this desire as its structural

[46] Bataille 1990, 27: 'Sovereignty in Hegel's attitude proceeds from a movement which *discourse* reveals and which, in the Sage's spirit, is never separated from its inspiration. It can never therefore be fully sovereign.'

condition. Derrida unfolds the imperative or desire of sense through four propositions, that need to be carefully examined:

> [...] that there must be meaning, that nothing must be definitely lost in death, or further that death should receive the signification of "abstract negativity", that a work must always be possible which, because it defers enjoyment, confers meaning, seriousness and truth upon the "putting at stake". (WD 256-257)

First, sense posits itself in being or makes itself recognized: it has always waged (and won) a struggle for recognition. Second, it must conserve itself and, therefore, it cannot fight to the death: rather, it presupposes another desire giving up the aim of recognition and accepting to be slave. Third, death is reappropriated within the order of negativity (what can be worked or elaborated on) and, thus, can be merely substituted with the determinate negation coming from consciousness. Fourth, servitude and its work are the structural conditions of mastery as limiting the exposure to death (or a certain death drive). Work consists in the discursive or dialectical reappropriation of sovereignty (*qua* putting life at stake) within the restricted economy of life and sense. It mediates the mere desire of sense (and, perhaps, a certain drive for its irremediable loss) and grants its final satisfaction or enjoyment. As I have attempted to demonstrate, Derrida's formulation of the imperative of sense can be read as a rewriting of his interpretation of the master/slave dialectic and of the servile condition of mastery. Implicitly *responding* to Bataille's call for the confrontation with the Hegelian text, he remarks that the submission to sense and, thus, servitude in general, as required by the very desire of sense, is the 'essence and element' of Hegel's philosophy and, perhaps, of philosophy in general as a restricted economy of sense. If *Aufhebung* is understood as the very concept of this economy, perhaps, it coincides with the very target of Bataille's laughter: 'the very notion of *Aufhebung* [...] is laughable.' As Derrida remarks, this concept (the concept *par excellence* of Hegel's philosophy) accounts for a meaningful discourse, for the subordination to sense (that is, to the desire of sense). It amounts to 'reappropriating all negativity', 'working the "putting at stake" into an investment', 'amortizing absolute expenditure', 'giving meaning to death' (WD,

257). Finally, it sets in motion the comedy of sense as conserving itself (through discourse) and, thus, as presupposing a servile (or discursive) condition, the comedy at play in the (im-)position of sense, in its forced recognition. As Derrida remarks in the final paragraph of the chapter, the entire history of philosophy as a meaningful discourse and, therefore, as the desire of sense, can be rewritten in light of Bataille's concept of servitude. If servitude is the truth of the desire (of sense) and if work, or *techne*, permits the very satisfaction of this desire, then, the history of philosophy unfolds itself as the history of servitude and, ultimately, as a comedy. 'Servility is therefore only the desire for meaning: a proposition with which the history of philosophy is confused; a proposition that determines work as the meaning of meaning, and *techne* as the unfolding of truth' (WD, 262).

Finally, I intend to focus on Derrida's elaboration of the notion of sovereignty as the 'blind spot of Hegelianism' (WD, 259) and on his proposal to think of it as an affirmation (a nonpositional affirmation)[47]. A certain Hegelianism cannot account for sovereignty as, by definition, it amounts to what the discursive or dialectical conservation of life and sense wishes or dreams to limit or defer and, thus, cannot encompass. This blind spot is 'the point at which destruction, suppression, death and sacrifice, constitute so irreversible an expenditure, so radical negativity [...] *without reserve* [...] that they can no longer be determined as negativity in a process or a system'. Derrida calls into play the terms 'process' and 'system', which are *mediated* by discourse itself and, thus, by the discursive or dialectical movement of sense. Sovereignty is the absolute or unconditioned risk of the loss of life or sense, which always opens up and, at the same time, exceeds discourse as the operation of limiting or deferring that risk. Therefore, sovereignty cannot be thought as a negativity, as what can be worked or elaborated on by the very

[47] It is not possible to follow here the path of Derrida's elaboration of affirmation (as distinct from position) across his *oeuvre*. However, it is worth recalling the following passage from a footnote of 'The University without Condition' (2002), in which Derrida clarifies his concern with the concept of affirmation: 'I am provisionally associating affirmation with performativity. The "yes" of the *affirmation* is not reducible to the positivity of a position. But it does in fact resembles a performative speech act. [...] Later, at the end of our trajectory, I will try to situate the point at which performativity is itself exceeded by the experience of the event, by the unconditional exposure to what or who is coming' (WA, 301). For an important reading of the absolute performative of the "yes" in relation to the minimal structure of life let me refer to Francesco Vitale's contribution to the forthcoming collective volume Senatore (in press).

movement of discourse or dialectics mediating the master's desire of life and sense. Discourse is, somehow, positive or positional (perhaps, performative), to the extent that it grants the conservation (or the desire) of sense. By definition, it elaborates on negativity in view of sense and, thus, it stands for its servile condition. For this reason, Derrida explains, 'negativity cannot be spoken of, nor has it ever been except in this fabric of meaning' (WD, 259). Sovereignty as *radical* negativity is already other than negativity, absolute or unconditioned exposure, what the economy of sense hopes to limit or delay. Derrida recurs to Foucault's essay 'Preface to Transgression' (1963) to suggest how far one can think of sovereignty and of the excess of discourse and sense in general, and how far one can speak of something 'which exceeds the logic of philosophy'. In a footnote, he countersigns Foucault's proposal to speak of a 'non-positive' (I would add, a non-positional or non-performative) affirmation, an unconditional or sovereign 'yes', a 'yes' without reserve.[48] First, Foucault invites to understand 'transgression' as the operation of the carrying every limit 'to the limits of its being', that is, to a certain structural or irreducible condition of excess. 'Transgression forces the limit [...] to find itself in what it excludes' (Foucault 1977, 34). Then, a few paragraphs later, he develops this definition by attempting to think of transgression in terms of a neither positive nor negative affirmation. As the general operation of carrying the limit to *its* structural limit (the non-limit, or the absolutely/indefinitely other of the limit), it cannot be simply taken as negating a limit: it consists in affirming the truth or the being limited of the limit, its unconditioned exposure to a certain excess. '[...] transgression affirms limited being – affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone of existence' (35). Certainly, transgression does not posit anything, to the extent that it is the condition of excess allowed by every limit: 'no content can bind it, since, by definition, can possibly restrict it'. For this reason, Foucault supposes to call it a nonpositive affirmation and to find in it an essential articulation of contemporary philosophy. He refers it back to Blanchot's principle of the contestation of death by understanding 'contestation' as the very operation of the carrying every limit 'to the Limit', that is, to a certain unconditioned exposure, a certain unconditioned 'yes' (to the excess, the limitless, etc., 36).

[48] Cf. WD, 335.

Developing Bataille's remarks on a certain limit of Hegelianism, Derrida points out that it is exactly in the question of negativity that one can find the *failure* of Hegelianism. As I have attempted to remark through the reading of the Hegelian text and of a certain tradition of it, Hegelianism is understood as a philosophy of negativity and, therefore, as the very operation of putting life at stake *qua* the principle of action and absolute knowledge. (According to Bataille and Derrida, this entails that Hegelianism wishes to reappropriate sovereignty or the absolute putting at stake by means of discourse, or to limit and defer it through *Aufhebung* or within the restricted economy of life and sense.) Now, Derrida observes, 'the immense revolution [of Kant and Hegel] consisted – it is almost tempting to say consisted *simply* – in taking the negative seriously. In giving meaning to its labour'. Hegelianism gives sense to what opens up and, at the same time, exceeds sense: by means of *Aufhebung* (or discourse) it wishes to submit or subordinate a certain unconditioned exposure to death or to the loss of sense in the very moment when it posits there a capital experience. It fails to recognize the unconditioned opening (onto the excess) of all mastery and its implications. 'In naming the without-reserve of absolute expenditure as "abstract negativity", Hegel, through *precipitation*, blinded himself to that which he had laid bare under the rubric of negativity' (WD, 259). This *precipitation* leans toward the conservation of life and sense; perhaps, it accounts for the structural precipitation of discourse (or *Aufhebung*) as the means of that conservation. Perhaps, this precipitation presupposes the *general* or *empty* precipitation toward the absolute risk of death and of the loss of sense, that constitutes the very possibility of natural or biological life and sense.[49] Therefore, according to Bataille's text, which Derrida comments on here, the 'uncertain point' of Hegelianism is not a certain unawareness of the moment of negativity: 'this "moment" is included, implicated in the whole movement of the *Phenomenology* – where it is the Negativity of death ... which makes man of the human animal' (HDS, 21). Rather, as Bataille suggests, Hegel misunderstands sacrifice by comprehending its moment of sovereignty within a discourse and, therefore, by subordinating it (the absolute risk of nonsense) to an essential concept of sense. To this extent, as Derrida's

[49] See the exergue of this Chapter.

commentary on Bataille's text outlines, Hegel is *wrong* since he *accounts for* the experience of negativity, dismemberment, etc. 'And [he] was wrong for being right, for having triumphed over the negative.' Derrida develops Bataille's remarks on the ambiguity of Hegelianism drawing attention to the ambiguity of the operation of *accounting for* negativity, of *taking* it *seriously*. The dialectical or discursive movement, which describes the restricted economy of sense, has begun, as Derrida seems to assume, since 'the constitution and the interiorizing memory of sense, *Erinnerung*' (WD, 259).[50] Since then, therefore, the act of limiting the absolute risk, namely, the work and elaboration of the negative, has already set itself in motion: it has already *precipitated* toward life and sense (perhaps, *precipitating* towards death and the loss of sense).

From this perspective, Hegelianism can be read as a performative, as the very performative of discourse and, thus, of the work of negativity (*Aufhebung*). Here Derrida finds the operation of 'betting for discourse, history, meaning' and 'against play, against chance': in other terms, the operation of betting against (of limiting, of putting off wishing, of mastering, etc.) the very condition or 'possibility' of betting, play or chance, which, indeed, accounts for the capital operation of the absolute putting at stake. Therefore, the blind spot of Hegelianism would be, in terms of performativity, the excessive or nonperformative opening of the performative itself, its unconditioned finitude. As Derrida recalls,

> Hegel has blinded himself to the possibility of his own bet, to the fact that the conscious suspension of play (for example, the passage through the certitude of oneself and through the lordship as the independence of self-consciousness) was itself a phase of play; and to the fact that play *includes* the work of meaning or the meaning of work, and includes them not in terms of *knowledge*, but in terms of *inscription*; meaning is a *function* of play, is inscribed in a certain place in the configuration of a meaningless play. (WD, 260)

[50] On the understanding of the interiorizing memory (*Erinnerung*) as the very beginning of the economy of sense see Hyppolite's reading of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* in LE 28-34. For an excellent examination of this question I refer to Chapter V of Lawlor 2002, 87-142.

I limit my remarks to the reference between brackets to lordship: interestingly, Derrida proposes reading the position of the master as the act of betting against chance, as the performative putting off the unconditioned risk of death and non-sense. Moreover, 'inscription' can be taken to account for the relationship between this performative operation and its excessive or nonperformative opening, for the very finitude of this operation.[51] Maintaining the focus on mastery, one could argue, in the wake of words, that sovereignty 'provides' mastery itself 'with its element, its milieu, its unlimiting boundaries of non-sense' (WD, 260-261). It accounts for the putting at stake that the master has already comprehended, that is, deferred or sent off, within a restricted economy of life and sense. Taking up the very structure of this economy as dialectical or discursive, Derrida thinks of sovereignty as an 'irruption', rather than a 'rupture' or a 'caesura', as an absolute or excessive exposure, as the unlimiting margins of non-discourse: 'an irruption suddenly uncovering the limit of discourse' (261), the original, unconditioned incomprehensibility of discourse itself.[52] In 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice', as I have already pointed out, Bataille sketches a demarcation between discursive and poetic languages in his elaboration of the concept of sovereignty. Discourse is always meaningful and is referred to the operation of servitude and work, which is the very condition of the restricted economy of life and sense, whereas the poetic word is related to the *manifestation* of sovereignty: 'only sacred, poetic words, limited to the level of impotent beauty, have retained the power to manifest full sovereignty' (Bataille 1990, 25). This passage prompts Derrida to further elaborate the hypothesis of an affirmation of sovereignty in relation to a certain concept of the poetic. Ultimately, there must be a word of sovereignty, which is not merely another discourse, but the very finitude of every discourse, its exposure to non-discourse or to other discourses, the *medium* of discourse, the very (im-)possibility of a discourse folding upon itself and

[51] For the concept of inscription see the last section of Chapter 3.

[52] As Derrida himself points out, 'irruption' describes a certain experience of radical passivity and, thus, the very heteronomy of the sovereign as self-positing. See, for instance, WA, 234: 'If there is any, if there is such a thing [as an event], the pure singular eventness of *what* arrives or *who* arrives and arrives *to me* (which is what I call the *arrivant*), it would suppose an *irruption* that punctures the horizon, *interrupting* any performative organization, any convention, or any context that can be dominated by a conventionality.'

comprehending itself. Derrida conjures up Hegelianism as the thought of totality or absolute knowledge and carries it to its limit. He acknowledges that 'there is only one discourse, it is significative, and here one cannot get around Hegel'. Therefore, the word of sovereignty is the unlimiting margin of the unique discourse of Hegelianism and, consequently, of discourse in general: what I have tentatively defined as the war in the infinite and among finite totalities. 'The poetic is that *in every discourse* which can open itself up to the absolute loss of sense' (WD, 261), as Derrida remarks by evoking a thought of the poetic which acknowledges its sovereignty and, at the same time, prevents it from the subordination or submission to any goal, from servitude or submission *tout court*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to bring to light the close confrontation that Derrida engages in "From restricted to general Economy" with the French tradition of the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave. As my reading suggests, he re-opens Chapter IV of *Phenomenology* to put to test a certain interpretation of the operation of mastery as the very trope of Hegelianism. I aimed to prove that Derrida elaborates this notion as the performative of deferring the actual staking of life (or sense). To this extent, first I drew attention to Derrida's attempt to put into relief the servile condition of this operation, which consists in the inhibition of desire through work (the elaboration of the independent object) and in the delay of death through determinate negation (*Aufhebung* or restricted economy of life). This attempt was measured against Kojève's reading of mastery as a trope of negativity and Bataille's distinction between sovereignty and Hegelian Sage. Second, I focused on Derrida's thinking of a certain 'blind spot of Hegelianism' as exposure to death, chance, nonpositional affirmation, etc. In so doing, I pointed out that Derrida understands Hegelianism as the performative of a certain precipitation towards life and sense, which consists in deferring the risk of death and non-sense.

SUPPLEMENT

(The *Différance* of a Text)

... like a letter, a post card, a contract, or a will that one sends oneself [*s'envoie*] before leaving on a long, a more or less long, voyage, with the always open risk of dying en route, on the way [*en voie*], and also with the hope that it will arrive, and that the message will become archival, or even the indestructible monument of the interrupted *en-voie*. The document is ciphered, it will remain secret if "his own" die before the "author" returns. But will be "his own" all those who will know how to decipher, and first constitute themselves in their history by means of the will of this code. Who will know how, or *will believe* they know how. (PC, 342)

This supplement to Chapter 4 focuses on Derrida's elaboration of the notion of the text that replaces and supplements the master in the very process of forced recognition. I will take into account the first chapter of 'To Speculate – On "Freud"' (1974-1975)[53], entitled 'Notices (Warnings)', where he develops further his interpretation of the master/slave dialectic as the movement according to which the master writes or sends itself the very text of his auto-recognition. My aim is to put into relief Derrida's reading of the performative structure of that text.

Towards the end of 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', in Chapter VII, entitled 'Postscript', Derrida suggests that his work can be read as a two handed writing since it ties together the reading of Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' and that of Hegel's speculative idealism. 'Now, since we are reading Freud with one hand, and with other, via an analogous vocabulary, the Hegel of the dialectic of the master and the slave ...' (PC, 394). Perhaps, this passage gives a *first* key to read the title itself of Derrida's essay. As I will tentatively suggest in this supplement, the 'analogous vocabulary' of the two readings refers to a certain

[53] The essay, published in *La carte postale. De Socrate à Freud et au de là* (1980), is originally the third part of Derrida's unpublished seminar *La vie la mort* (1974-1975), as Derrida himself recalls in the first section of the first chapter (cf. PC, 259).

deconstruction of the notion of mastery and to its effects.[54] In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', the character of the master comes to the stage since the first reference to the pleasure principle, which Freud deduces from Fechner's principle of constancy.

> The facts which have caused us to believe in the dominance of the pleasure principle in mental life also find expression in the hypothesis that the mental apparatus endeavours to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant. This latter hypothesis is only another way of stating the pleasure principle; for if the work of the mental apparatus is directed towards keeping the quantity of excitation low, then anything that is calculated to increase that quantity is bound to be felt as adverse to the functioning of the apparatus, that is as unpleasurable. (BPP, 3)

As Derrida carefully points out, when speaking of 'the dominance' [*Herrschaft*] of the pleasure principle Freud conjures up the Hegelian notion of lordship or mastery.[55] Furthermore, he acknowledges that 'the pleasure principle [...], from the point of view of the self-preservation of the organism among the difficulties of the external world, is inefficient and even highly dangerous'. Therefore, the lordship of the pleasure principle unfolds as the movement that replaces and supplements the principle itself. Here the dialectic of the master and the slave makes a start. 'Under the influence of the ego's instinct of self-conservation – Freud points out – the pleasure principle is replaced by the principle of reality.' The substitution does not bring about another lordship beyond the pleasure principle, to the extent that the reality principle 'does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure'. Somehow, it *serves* the pleasure principle as *its* master. Freud explains that the reality principle 'demands and carries into effect

[54] Let me recall Samuel Weber's excellent study *The Legend of Freud* that was first published in German in 1979, before the inclusion of the unpublished 'To speculate – On "Freud"' in *Postcard*. In this text Derrida refers to Weber's study in the following terms: 'On all these questions it seems to me that *The Freud Legend* will become uncircumventable' (PC, 375). It would be worth developing a comparative reading of Derrida's elaboration of Freud's notion of mastery and of Weber's elaboration of Lacan's notion of the narcissistic ego. On this point see, for instance, Weber, Samuel 2000, 134-5. Moreover, for a commentary to Derrida's reading of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle, see also Trunbull 2012.

[55] See PC, 281: 'Here, then, the pleasure principle is confirmed in its authority, in its sovereign domination (*Herrschaft*, Freud already says, and we will take this into account).'

the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure' (4). In this movement of replacing and supplementing it is possible to recognize the relationship between the master and the slave exposed by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness. Hegel suggests that the notion of mastery can be understood as a sublimation of desire.[56] 'What desire failed to achieve – he observes – he [the master] succeeds in doing, viz. to have done with the thing altogether, and to achieve satisfaction in the enjoyment of it.' By interposing the slave between the thing and himself, and therefore, through the mediation of the slave's work, the master leaves 'the aspect of independence' of the thing to the slave and 'takes to himself only the dependent aspect' (PS, 116).[57] I would remark that what is at stake in Freud's text is a certain sublimation of the pleasure principle (of a certain death drive inscribed in the principle itself) through the interposition or mediation of the reality principle and, therefore, that a certain master/slave relationship binds one principle to another. From this perspective, it is worth recalling that, when considering the case of sexual drives, which operate only according to the pleasure principle and, therefore, if succeeding, 'overcome the reality principle, to the detriment of the organism as a whole' (BPP, 4), Freud observes that they are 'hard to "educate"'.

Derrida's remarks on this passage explicitly evoke the Hegelian structure of Freud's exposition of the relation between the two principles. Firstly, he identifies the movement that supplements one principle with another with the interposition or mediation of a slave: 'the "ego's instincts of self-preservation" force the principle into retreat, not into disappearing by *simply* yielding its place, but into *leaving* the reality principle in its place as a delegate, its courier, its lieutenant, or its slave, its domestic.' Secondly, Derrida recalls the Hegelian question of the sublimation of desire by drawing attention to Freud's observation on the

[56] For the interpretation of the teleological development from desire to recognition as a 'sublimation of desire' see Williams 1992, 50.

[57] In Chapter 4 I develop a close reading of Derrida's interpretation of the servile condition of mastery and of the slave's work as the operation of limiting or deferring the exposure to the risk of death and non-sense and, thus, of holding in check the master's death drive.

resistance of sexual drives to education. He seems to rewrite the relation of substitution between the two principles in terms of education, that is, as an inverted, master/disciple relationship, where 'the disciplined disciple, [...] *as always* [the italics are mine], finds himself in a situation to inform, to teach, to instruct a master who is sometimes hard to educate'.[58] Finally, Derrida conjures up and articulates the notions of detour and *différance* to account for the spatio-temporal movement consisting in 'the postponement of satisfaction' and 'the long indirect road to pleasure'. 'Detour – he remarks – in order to defer enjoyment, the way station of a *différance*' (PC, 282).[59] To recall an expression occurring elsewhere in Derrida's text, here *différance* is retained in 'a reassuring medium' (290), to the extent that it is considered as limited and subordinated to the lordship of the pleasure principle. *Différance* is encompassed within the master/slave dialectic (the sublimation of desire, or the limitation of a certain death drive) as the very interposition of the slave's work. In other words, the master/principle submits itself to *its own* slave/supplement, to an allegedly limited and submitted *différance*. Therefore, Derrida suggests reading the master/slave relationship in terms of an 'engagement' or a 'contract' which the master merely takes or signs with his own representative ('with the assistant master [*sous-maitre*] or foreman [*contre-maitre*] who nevertheless does nothing but represent him'). Finally, mastery is a 'fake contract' or a 'simulacrum of engagement' to the extent that it binds the master to someone who has already given up his desire for recognition and recognized the master as such. Namely, it binds the master to himself or to a

[58] The determination of the pleasure principle as 'hard to educate' [*difficilement educable*] derives from Freud's definition of sexual drives. See PC, 282: '[...] to instruct a master who is sometimes hard to educate. "Hard to educate", for example, are the sexual drives which conform only to the pleasure principle.'

[59] For Derrida's reading of Freud's reality principle in relation to différance see the essay '*Différance*' (1968): 'Here we are touching upon the point of greatest obscurity, on the very enigma of différance, on precisely that which divides its very concept by means of a strange cleavage. We must not hasten to decide. How are we to think simultaneously, on the one hand, différance as the economic detour which, in the element of the same, always aims at coming back to the pleasure or the presence that have been deferred by (conscious or unconscious) calculation, and, on the other hand, différance as the relation to an impossible presence, as expenditure without reserve, as the irreparable loss of presence, the irreversible usage of energy, that is, as the death instinct, and as the entirely other relationship that apparently interrupts every economy?' (MP, 19)

reassuring other ('himself modified').[60] One could also say that the master *gives himself* or *posits* (by force) his own mastery and representative, he *makes himself recognized* as such. From this perspective, the master/slave dialectic accounts for the movement of self-positing or self-recognizing as the self-return and the self-reappropriation of the master through the position of his representative.[61] Developing the paradigm of the contract, the slave (representative, supplement, mediation, modification, différance, etc.) can be thought as the very text or the corpus of the engagement that the master takes with himself. This text must be already caught up in the self-return of the self-engaging mastery. 'The master addresses to himself the text or the corpus of this simulated engagement via the detour of an institutional telecommunication.' Therefore, the notion of différance accounts for the institutional, postal or tele- communication that the master entertains with himself. I suggest finding in Derrida's passage 'he [the master] writes himself, he sends himself' the ultimate structure of mastery. Self-positing and self-recognizing are ultimately a self-*writing* or a self-*posting*. The *différance* of a text, a *corpus*, a representative, etc., a certain tele-, are the essential conditions of mastery. As Derrida points out, it always implies the unconditioned exposure to the other and, thus, a call for credit and repetition. It opens up the irreducible possibility of non-return: it is the constitutive opening of self-return onto the other (as other), its original impossibility of bending back on itself.[62] Furthermore, *différance* always exceeds any attempt to master it within a reassuring medium, namely, as a limited and subordinated representative. 'But if

[60] As Freud points out at the end of the first chapter of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', the reality pleasure is anything but a modification of the pleasure principle or the pleasure principle itself as 'modified' (cf. BPP, 5).

[61] As Derrida explains in Po, 98, 'position' or 'thesis' (*Setzung*), *qua* 'position-of-the-other', describes the movement of the self-alienation of the Idea or the Infinite into a finite determination and, therefore, presupposes the self-re-appropriation or self-return of the Idea itself. Cf. also PC, 259-261, where Derrida announces his search for a 'non-positional' or 'a-thetic' logic 'overflowing' the logic of position.

[62] Derrida speaks of the speculative possibility of the absolutely other, that is, of writing, as '(for example)' the very structural division of the letter and its always being-not-arrived-yet. See PC, 324: '[...] the letter makes its return after having instituted its postal relay, which is the very thing that makes it possible for a letter *not to* arrive at its destination, and that makes this possibility-of-never-arriving divide the structure of the letter from the outset. Because (for example) there would be neither postal relay nor analytic movement if the place of the letter were not divisible and if a letter always arrived at its destination.'

the length of the detour can no longer be mastered, and rather than its length its structure, then the return to (one)self is never certain' (282).

The master/slave dialectic describes the very self-relation of the same and the structural presupposition of *différance*.[63] It carries with itself the wish or dream to retain the *différance* of the representative within the reassuring medium of a self-engagement or a self-address. 'It is the same *differant*, in différance with itself' (283). And yet, in his self-return or self-relation, the same *includes* what, by definition, cannot be mastered nor comprehended, the other (as other). It is worth remarking that Derrida considers the dialectic of the master and the slave as a 'speculative transaction', which refers back to the initial definition of the contract between the master and the slave (that is, of the self-engagement of the master) as a pure speculation.[64] The notion of the speculative may refer to the calculation of the master binding himself to his own slave, representative or mere modification. But, on a more profound level, it retrieves a certain understanding of speculative idealism as 'hetero-tautology' (322), to the extent that the dialectic of the master and the slave is taken to account for the speculative movement of self-return and, thus, for the very logic of position. At the beginning of the following chapter, Derrida identifies 'the possibility of the totally-other' admitted by the 'speculative' self-return of the master and, more in-depth, by self-writing or self-posting, with a certain notion of writing. He seems to suggest that there must be an inscription within the letter or the text of the self-engagement, which consists in the non-encompassable condition of the self-engagement itself. 'The speculative possibility of the totally-other is in advance inscribed within it, in the letter of engagement that it believes it sends to itself circularly, specularly.' By definition, this possibility is already not inscribed within the letter as in a reassuring medium and, thus, is already not comprehended by the speculative or

[63] Cf. PC, 283: 'As soon as an authoritarian agency submits itself to the work of a secondary or dependent agency (master/slave, master/disciple) which finds itself in contact with "reality" – the latter being defined by means of the very possibility of this speculative transaction – there is no longer any *opposition*, opposition, as is sometimes believed, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle.'

[64] Cf. PC, 302-303: 'A false contract, a pure speculation, the simulacrum of an engagement which binds the lord only to himself, to his own modification, to himself modified.'

circular self-return. Rather – here I attempt my own translation of the passage into English – '*it opens the letter onto an inscription of the other since the principle* [*l'ouvre d'une scription de l'autre à meme le principe*]'; therefore, it amounts to the original exposure of the letter to the other and, thus, to the original conjuration to the other to preserve and repeat it (perhaps, it amounts to the being-yet-to-come of the letter itself).[65] Derrida thinks of writing (or différance) *qua* the very opening of self-writing onto the other's writing, *qua* the original heteronomy and iterability of self-writing. There is no opening, origin, principle, beginning, etc., that does not unfold itself as self-writing and, therefore, does not admit writing, iterability, call for credit, being-yet-to-come, etc.

(Before accounting for the lordship of the pleasure principle, Derrida has already put into relief the articulation of self-writing and self-posting in the very opening line of BPP. He develops a certain understanding of the performative to account for the text of the contract that the master/principle writes or posts to itself in the circle of the speculative self-return. There is an implicit articulation, Derrida suggests, in the first line of Freud's text: 'in the theory of psycho-analysis we have no hesitation in assuming that ...' (BPP, 1). The statement does not fulfil *strictu sensu* the traditional requirements of the performative speech act to the extent that, although it makes things happen ('things are happening in it'), it wishes to be a constative utterance, a declaration or attestation of facts (Freud 'is allegedly declaring and attesting' PC, 273). The subject of the statement (the 'speaker'), namely, Freud, describes as a matter a fact what he wishes to be as such, the existence of psychoanalysis, that is, of a certain theoretical history of which he is father, founder, master, etc. ('producing agent and first subject'). In other words, he makes himself and his authority (as the master of psychoanalysis) recognized. Therefore, his statement is the very text or corpus of the (simulacrum of) engagement the master signs with himself. He writes or addresses it to himself. '*He would have written himself.* To himself, as if someone were sending himself a message informing himself by certified letter [...] of the attested existence of a theoretical history to which he himself gave the send-off.' The subject of the statement, Freud, is taken in a movement of forced recognition,

[65] For a development of these remarks see Chapter 5.

according to which he *will have had* ('he will have been') the authority that he has given or recognized himself. The temporal structure of the statement, the future anterior, describes the very articulation of the performative statement of forced recognition or self-recognizing.[66] The movement of self-recognizing (and, thus, of self-writing or self-posting) implies the mediation of the other who has already given up his/her desire for recognition (slaves, delegates, representatives, etc.): it necessarily rests on a dialectic of the master and the slave. Therefore, Derrida convokes 'those whom he has associated, or who have associated themselves with the movement of this production have all accepted, in principle and consciously, the contract which institutes him as producer.' Yet, perhaps, this is another performative statement implicit in the first performative, in the text of forced recognition. The master wishes to retain the other within the detour/*différance* of self-engaging and self-writing, which consists in the very performative of the text or the letter that he addresses to himself. And, yet, this performative always conjures the other to credit and preservation. It is worth observing that the authority Freud's statement wishes to attest is the authority of the statement itself, Freud's authority to speak about psychoanalysis and its history as father, founder, etc. Therefore, Freud is recognizing himself the very authority of this auto-recognition. To this extent, as Derrida suggests, the statement 'returns' (*revienne*) to Freud himself as the very authority of psychoanalysis, as the master guarantor and responsible for what concerns psychoanalysis: 'he is attesting to an act whose contract implies that the act come back to him, and that he answer for it'(274). Finally, the speculative self-return articulates as the self's recognizing itself as the ultimate ground or justification, as the very master of its auto-recognition.)

[66] On the temporal articulation of the performative of forced recognition see my reading of 'Force of Law' in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

PERFORMATIVE FORCE

(Derrida and Deleuze on Nietzsche)

At least provisionally, we are placing our trust, in fact, in this form of critical analysis we have inherited from Marxism: in a given situation, provided that it is determinable and determined as being that of a socio-political antagonism, a hegemonic force always seems to be represented by a dominant rhetoric and ideology, whatever may be the conflicts between forces, the principal contradiction or the secondary contradictions, the over-determinations and the relays that may later complicate this schema – and therefore lead us to be suspicious of the simple opposition of dominant and dominated, or even of the final determination of the forces in conflict, or even, more radically, of the idea that force is always stronger than weakness (Nietzsche and Benjamin have encouraged us to have doubts on this score, each in his own way …). (SM, 68)

In this chapter I follow the traces of a thought of force across Derrida's oeuvre. In my reading, this thought unfolds itself as a rewriting of a certain Nietzschean tradition of understanding the repeatability of force.[1] I aim to demonstrate that this rewriting wages a close and more or less implicit confrontation with Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's thought of force, as developed in the formidable second chapter of his *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), entitled 'Active and Reactive'. The ultimate stake of this confrontation, I suggest, is the interpretation of the concept of force (*qua* self-recognizing and, thus, auto-performative) in light of the Hegelian concept of mastery.

[1] For an approach to the continental tradition of the notion of force (from the *Phenomenology*'s section 'Force and Understanding' on) I refer to Benjamin & Caygill 2009. For a comparative investigation of the work of Derrida and Deleuze see: Protevi 2001, Patton & Protevi 2003, Lawlor 2000 and Kuiken 2005. It is worth remarking that, to my knowledge, there exists no published attempt, in Derrida scholarship, to account for a thought of force unfolding across Derrida's *oeuvre* in relation with Nietzsche's (and Deleuze's) text. Regarding the various commentaries on the specific articulations of Derrida's thought of force, I will refer to them as this chapter develops.

5.1 Qualitative Difference and Passage

As Derrida remarks in the interview 'Negotiations' (1987), the term 'Nietzschean' should be essentially retraced back to a certain diaphoristics, a certain commitment toward 'qualitative difference':

> The emphasis of what I am saying is rather *Nietzschean*, that is, in a certain way, I am for hierarchy, I am for a certain type of hierarchization, for differentiation, for *qualitative difference* [my italics]. If I am opposed to certain forms of political hierarchy, to certain forms of power, it is precisely insofar as they tend to neutralize differences. (Ne, 21)

The vocabulary of this passage evokes a Nietzschean tradition of the notion of force as it is first elaborated by Derrida in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' (1966) and 'Différance' (1968).[2] On a terminological and theoretical level this early elaboration refers explicitly to Deleuze's exposition of Nietzsche's thought of force in the second chapter of his book on Nietzsche.[3] I propose beginning by reading Derrida's presentation of a specific Nietzschean articulation in 'Différance' and, then, by taking account of the more or less explicit references to Deleuze's text. Firstly, Derrida suggests understanding Nietzsche's and Freud's putting into question the self-certainty of 'consciousness' as the gesture of positing 'presence – and specifically consciousness, the being beside itself of consciousness – no longer as the absolutely central form of Being but as a "determination" and as an "effect" [...] of différance' (MP, 16). In Nietzsche's case, Derrida recalls, consciousness is determined as the effect of a relationship of

[2] For a general examination of Derrida's reading of Nietzsche see Haar 1992. On a conjuration of the term "Nietzschean" in relation to Austin's notion of the performative see MP, 322: 'Austin had to free the analysis of the performative from the authority of the value of truth, from the opposition true/false, at least in its classical form, occasionally substituting for it the value of force, of difference of force (illocutionary or perlocutionary force). (It is this, in a thought which is nothing less than Nietzschean, which seems to me to beckon toward Nietzsche; who often recognized in himself a certain affinity with a vein of English thought).'

[3] For an introduction to Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche see: Hardt 1993 (in particular, Chapter II) and May 2005 (in particular, Chapters II and IV).

force which consciousness itself cannot comprehend ('of forces whose essence, byways, and modalities are not proper to it', 17).[4] Here he rests on the first paragraph of Deleuze's chapter, in which 'the phase of the modesty of consciousness' announced by Nietzsche is explained by notably conjuring up the Hegelian figure of the master/slave relationship. As I will argue in the development of my investigation, by calling into play Derrida's and Deleuze's readings of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the tradition of force at stake here unfolds as a certain confrontation around the Hegelian tradition of recognition.[5] Firstly, Deleuze focuses on the urgency of taking consciousness for what it is: 'a *symptom*, nothing but the symptom of a deeper transformation and of the activities of entirely non-spiritual forces [my italics]'. Secondly, he develops this notion of symptom by drawing attention to a certain relation of slavery between consciousness and a superior whole 'of which it could be a function'. Consciousness in Nietzsche, he argues, is not 'the master's consciousness but the slave's consciousness in relation to a master who is not himself conscious. [...] This is the servility of consciousness; it merely testifies to the "formation of a superior body"' (Deleuze 1983, 39). Nietzsche understands force as *essentially* entering into a relationship of dominance or obedience with another force, and, therefore, the above mentioned superior body as *structurally* constituted by a master/slave relationship of force. 'What defines a body – Deleuze explains – is this relation between dominant and dominated forces' (40). Dominant and dominated forces are respectively recognized the predicates "active" and "reactive", that account for their 'difference in quantity as such' and, therefore, for their respective 'quality'. As Deleuze points out, the difference between dominant or active and dominated or reactive forces, which constitutes their own essence or quality, consists in the notion of 'hierarchy'. In 'Différance' Derrida repositions Deleuze's analysis within the context of his account of the general system of the effects of *différance*. Therefore, he puts emphasis on the differential essence of the concept of force (*qua* presence), that is, of its inscription within that system or play: 'force itself is never present; it is only a play of differences and quantities'.

[4] On this point see Gasché 1986, 80-2, where Gasché presents Dilthey's and Nietzsche's philosophy as post-Hegelian critiques of reflection bringing into focus the constitutive heterogeneity of self-reflection and self-consciousness.

[5] See the last section of this chapter.

According to Derrida, this understanding of force would legitimate the interpretation of Nietzsche's thought (*qua* the thought of the eternal return, as I will come to) as a certain *diaphoristics* or an engagement in the name of *différance*.[6] 'Is not all of Nietzsche's thought a critique of philosophy as an active indifference to difference, as the system of adiaphoristic reduction or repression?' (MP, 18).[7] At this point, one can read once again Derrida's late elaboration of the Nietzschean perspective as a certain concern for 'hierarchy' and/or 'qualitative difference'.

But let me refer Derrida's proposal of a diaphoristics back to the development of Deleuze's analysis. In the third paragraph of his text, Deleuze accounts for the essence of Nietzsche's concept of quantity as differential (or, perhaps, *qualitative*) and presupposing a force relationship. Consequently, quantity – in terms of difference of quantity, or in terms of quality – cannot be reduced to a pure quantitative determination. 'Difference in quantity is, in one sense, the irreducible element *of* quantity and in another sense the element which is irreducible *to* quantity itself' (Deleuze 1983, 44).[8] For this reason, Nietzsche's critique of

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[6] On the 'nearly total affinity' between Deleuze's concept of 'difference in itself' and Derrida's *différance* I refer to Lawlor's excellent study 'The Beginnings of Thought: The Fundamental Experience in Derrida and Deleuze' in Patton & Protevi 2003, 68-83. Lawlor begins with a comparative reading of Deleuze and Derrida's anti-Platonism, which brings to light their different elaborations of the concept of difference. 'For Deleuze – Lawlor remarks – the Platonic decision is one that subordinates difference in itself to the same. This "in itself" means that difference is conceived without any mediation' (69). Therefore, 'reversing Platonism for Deleuze in fact means to make the simulacra [that is, singularities] rise to the surface.' As Lawlor explains, Derrida understands the Platonic decision as 'being "intolerant in relation to [the] passage between the two contrary senses of the same word"', or, in other words, 'as the subordination of contamination to pure heterogeneity' (70). Therefore, deconstructing Platonism consists in displacing "simulacra" 'into the "wholly other field" in which being and the beyond being mutually contaminate one another' (71). I believe that one can put these preliminary remarks to the test in Derrida's rewriting of Deleuze's Nietzsche in '*Différance*'.

[7] Cf. MP, 18: 'It is historically significant that this diaphoristics, which, as an energetics or economics of forces, commits itself to putting into question the primacy of presence as consciousness, is also the major motif of Freud's thought: another diaphoristics, which in its entirety is both a theory of the figure (or of the trace) and an energetics. The putting into question of the authority of consciousness is first and always differential.'

[8] Cf. Deleuze 1983, 43: '*Quantity itself is therefore inseparable from difference in quantity.* Difference in quantity is the essence of force and the relation of force to force. To dream of two equal forces, even if I they are said to be of opposite senses is a coarse and approximate dream, a statistical dream in which the living is submerged but which

science cannot simply be solved into a conventional affirmation of the rights of quality against quantity. As Deleuze notes, 'he invokes the rights of difference against equality, of inequalities against equalization of quantities', or, in other terms, 'against the undifferentiated' (45). It is worth remarking that, here, as well as in Derrida's passage, Nietzsche's critique of science in the name of 'difference' or 'inequalities' depends on his theory of force.[9] Deleuze explains that Nietzsche considers the scientific tendency 'to deny differences', to let 'the universe sink into the undifferentiated' and, finally, to the '*adiaphoria*' as an articulation of the nihilism of modern thought. From this perspective, he suggests reading the thought of the eternal return *qua* 'the reproduction of diversity as such, of the repetition of difference', as 'the opposite of *adiaphoria*' (46), a certain diaphoristics, in Derrida's terms. Deleuze understands the thought of the eternal return as an answer to the problem of the 'passage' of the present or of the 'passing moment', which describes the articulation of pure becoming. Now, if 'returning is the being of becoming' and of 'that which passes', then the eternal return must be thought not as 'the return of the same' but, exactly, as what is related to diversity and multiplicity.

> It is not some one thing which returns but rather returning itself is the one thing which is affirmed of diversity or multiplicity. In other terms, identity in the eternal return does not describe the nature of that which returns but, on the contrary, the fact of returning for that which differs. (Deleuze 1983, 48)

Derrida himself develops his reflections on Nietzsche's diaphoristics toward a certain interpretation of the thought of the eternal return, that is understood as a

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chemistry dispels. Each time that Nietzsche criticises the concept of quantity we must take it to mean that quantity as an abstract concept always and essentially tends towards an identification, an equalization of the unity that forms it and an annulment of difference in this unity. Nietzsche's reproach to every purely quantitative determination of forces is that it annuls, equalises or compensates for differences in quantity. On the other hand, each time he criticises quality we should take it to mean that qualities are nothing but the corresponding difference in quantity between two forces whose relationship is presupposed. In short, Nietzsche is never interested in the irreducibility of quantity to quality; or rather he is only interested in it secondarily and as a symptom. What interests him primarily, from the standpoint of quantity itself, is the fact that differences in quantity cannot be reduced to equality.'

[9] Cf. Deleuze 1983, 45: 'According to Nietzsche science will inevitably fall short of and endanger the true theory of force.'

synthesis of différance and repetition. It is worth remarking that, by applying sameness or returning to différance, he posits it in terms of 'passage' between different or opposite terms. 'The same, precisely, is *différance* (with an *a*) as the displaced and equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition.' Here the notion of passage accounts for a certain equivocity and displacement to the extent that the sameness of the term of each opposition, what Derrida calls 'the economy of the same' (MP, 18), presupposes the sameness or returning of *différance*, namely, the general system or play of differences.[10]

Finally, I suggest returning to Deleuze's definition of force as *essentially* in relation to another force and, therefore, as *structurally* presupposing a master/slave relationship. Again, in his chapter on Nietzsche's thought of force, he refers to the Hegelian tradition of recognition and mastery. 'The relation of force to force, understood conceptually, is one of domination: when two forces are related, one is dominant and the other is dominated.' Each relationship of force presupposes a struggle for recognition. According to Deleuze, an internal will, the 'will to power', determines the forces at play and, thus, their relation of domination. It operates on the double level of 'the reciprocal genesis of their difference in quantity' and of 'the absolute genesis of their respective qualities' (Deleuze 1983, 51). Let me interrupt the reading of Deleuze's chapter momentarily. However, I anticipate that Derrida will return to this elaboration of Nietzsche's notion of force as a relation of domination by engaging in a close and implicit confrontation with the conclusions of Deleuze's chapter and by pointing toward an *hyperbolic* reading of Nietzsche's elaboration of the master/slave dialectics in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In the last part of this chapter I will reckon with the terms and the stakes of this confrontation.

[10] Cf. MP, 18: 'And on the basis of this unfolding of the same as *différance*, we see announced the sameness of *différance* and repetition in the eternal return.'

5.2 Holding in Reserve

In this section I propose to return to an earlier elaboration of the Nietzschean tradition of force, where Derrida retrieves the very scene of the relationship of force by putting it on the stage of writing. In 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' (1966), Derrida reckons with Freud's attempts to set forth a satisfying explanation of the psychic process of memory, from the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) to *A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad* (1925). The relationship of force plays an essential role in Freud's tentative explanations and, as Derrida will point out, retraces them back to Nietzsche's thought of force brought to light in Deleuze's chapter. In the *Project* Freud has already laid down the structural traits which every explanation of memory must take into account: 'the permanence of the trace' and 'the virginity of the receiving substance' (WD: 200-201). To this extent, he supposes the distinction between the permeable or perceptual neurons, 'which offer no resistance and thus retain no trace of impression', and the neurons 'which would oppose contact-barriers to the quantity of excitation, and would thus retain the printed trace'. This distinction allows Freud to 'stage' memory through the operation of 'breaching', of 'opening up a conducting path' (Ger. *Bahnung*, Fr. *Frayage*).[11] Derrida understands this operation as unleashing a relationship of force. As allowed by Freud's definition of neurons, the notion of *Bahnung* involves a force of resistance or breaching. Therefore, it can only be thought in terms of quality as differences in quantity. Derrida remarks that the concept of *Bahnung* does not tolerate the simple distinction between quality and quantity and that only this intolerance can explain the opening of a singular path. In other words, this concept conjures up a certain critique of science in the name of differences and inequalities (a certain diaphoristics). 'An equality of resistance to breaching, or an equivalence of breaching forces, would eliminate any *preference* in the choice of itinerary. Memory would be paralyzed.' Therefore, as Freud concludes, 'memory is represented by differences in the facilitations'. Derrida

[11] For an important reading of *Bauhnung* in relation to Leroi-Gourhan's notion of *via rupta* I refer to the forthcoming Vitale (in press). Tracing out Derrida's elaboration of *via rupta*, Vitale proposes to find in the operation of holding in check, *qua* the very structure (and, perhaps, the first concrete manifestation) of writing, the ultimate and minimal articulation of life.

rewrites this conclusion by identifying the differences as 'the true origin of memory, and thus of psyche' and, therefore, by applying the term 'origin' to a relationship of force. Moreover, he claims a certain Nietzschean tradition of thinking force in terms of relationship of force which Freud's elaboration would countersign ('As Nietzsche has already said', 201).[12]

Ultimately, Derrida pushes Freud's conclusions further by finding in the notion of *Bahnung* the very articulation of life *qua* protecting itself through an operation of detour or *différance* that he entitles 'the constitution of a reserve' and associates with the master/slave relationship between pleasure and reality principles. 'This movement [of producing a trace] can be described as the effort of life to protect itself by *deferring* a dangerous cathexis, that is, by constituting a reserve (*Vorrat*).'[13] Therefore, it accounts for a restricted economy of life (*qua* limiting the unconditioned risk of death and holding in check a death drive) that allows a certain non-encompassable iterability or heteronomy. It is in this perspective that I propose to read Derrida's rhetorical formulation: 'is it not already death at the origin of a life which can defend itself against death only through an economy of death [namely, a detour, repetition or reserve]?'[14] It is necessary to relate the determination of force, as essentially caught up in a force relationship, to the process of opening a path, producing a trace or constituting a reserve.[15] The relationship of force represents a restricted economy of life or an economy of death: 'in the first time of the contact between two forces, repetition has already begun.' As Derrida suggests, a relationship of force can ultimately be thought as

[12] It is worth remarking that here Derrida invites to a systematic confrontation between Nietzsche's and Freud's thoughts of difference, quality and quantity, by recalling the fragment from *The Will to Power* where Nietzsche defines quality *qua* difference-in-quantity, on which Deleuze grounds his chapter on force. Cf. WD, 329 and Deleuze 1983, 40.

[13] Cf. WD: 202: 'Is this not already the detour which institutes the relation of pleasure to reality?'

[14] For a notable reading of Derrida's notion of life that takes into account the unpublished seminar *La vie la mort* (1975), which I will refer to below, see Garrido (in press). On this point it is worth remarking that it is in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' and, therefore, much earlier than in *La vie la mort* (of which 'To speculate – On "Freud"', published separately, is the third part) that Derrida takes writing (and, perhaps, the Hegelian operation of mastery) to the order of life and of the minimal structure of the living.

[15] On the elaboration of Derrida's concept of reserve as the medium of all possible differentiations see Gasché 1986, 151-153.

the movement according to which life conserves itself through the production of a trace or the constitution of a reserve, and. therefore, as the very operation of mastery life itself amounts to. In this sense, life can 'contain' (or, I propose, master) the effraction of breaching 'only by repeating it' (202). A few pages later, Derrida reformulates this understanding of force in relation to a certain concept of power. If there is a power associated with force, that is, the power of producing or instituting meaning or life, then this power is also a certain *impuissance* (non-power) to the extent that it implies reserve, repetition and, thus, heteronomy.[16] 'Force produces meaning trough the power of "repetition" alone, [...] this power, that is, this lack of power.' This irreducible trait of power/*impuissance* could suggest the idea of force and, thus, of life *qua* drive or desire (for appropriation, power, etc.), as Derrida himself implies when he calls into play the trope of an 'absolute' and 'pure' idiom. In fact, force can only produce or institute what we call 'language', where a pure idiom is a limit 'always already transgressed' through repetition (213). Derrida will develop further this affinity between the notions of force and drive (or desire) in relation to that of idiom in the later examination of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 'To speculate – On "Freud"'.[17] Now, in the 'Note' of 1925, Freud comes to describe memory and, thus, the psychic in general as the writing machine of the mystic Pad. As Derrida remarks commenting on this text, it 'represents the apparatus [the mnestic system in the psychic apparatus] in its entirety'.[18] Certainly, this description also accounts for the force relationship that is presupposed by the constitution of trace, reserve or language. Ultimately, it explains the true essence of life as limiting or deferring the exposure to death or to the absolutely other. Freud supposes that the writing device is a slab of wax protected by a removable transparent sheet, which consists of an upper layer, a piece of celluloid, and a lower layer, a thin translucent waxed paper adhering to the upper surface of the wax slab. Derrida draws attention to 'the protective nature of the celluloid sheet' to offer a more sophisticated elaboration of the restricted economy of life. 'Without it, the fine waxed paper

[16] This is, perhaps, a servile power (see my elaboration of the servile condition of mastery in Chapter 4).
[17] On Derrida's reading of the drivenness of the drive as the relation to the proper see PC, 403-405.
[18] For a description of the apparatus or machine see WD, 223.

would be scratched or ripped.' This condition allows Derrida to find in writing itself (namely, self-writing) the economy of life and, therefore, to think of it as the movement of the self's protecting itself against itself. To this extent, the 'subject' of writing is taken to account for the structural exposure (subjection, perhaps) of self-writing to the threat of death. 'There is no writing which does not devise some means of protection, *to protect against itself*, against the writing by which the "subject" is himself threatened as he lets himself be written: as he exposes himself' (224). I would suggest that this movement of life as self-writing can be read as an exposition of the notion of the relationship of force and, thus, of mastery in general.

5.3 The Enforceability of the Law

More than twenty years later, Derrida takes up a certain notion of force once again in a paper given at the colloquium *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (1989), entitled 'Force of Law: the "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', the second part of which is a commentary on Walter Benjamin's *On the Critique of Violence* [*Gewalt*] (1921).[19] I propose reading this text as the elaboration of a certain notion of the structural enforceability of the law and, thus, reconsidering Derrida's confrontation with Benjamin in light of this elaboration.[20] Force is a key-notion in this text as is testified by the initial appeal to a certain vigilance regarding the use of the term, which can also be taken as a list of the most decisive questions addressed by Derrida's thought of force.[21] Derrida calls into play the term 'force' at the beginning of the essay when tying it to the predicate

[19] The original text is included with the title 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' in the collective volume *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, (1992). The second text, from which I am quoting here, is the translation of the French revision of the original contribution to the conference (1994) and is included in AR, 230-298.

[20] This section is mainly indebted to the following, formidable texts, which I will refer to across my reading of Derrida's text: (a) Werner Hamacher's 'Affortative, Strike', in which the notion of the affortative is elaborated in order to account for the deposing of positing violence in Benjamin's text; (b) Fritsch 2005, in particular, Chapter III, in which Fritsch gives a comparative reading of the articulation between the finitude of power and the messianic interruption in Benjamin and Derrida.

[21] Cf. AR, 234-5. In the next section I engage in a commentary of this decisive passage.

'symbolical' and supposing a certain affinity with the 'law' by which he must speak English, or 'the language of the majority' ('because one has made this for me a sort of obligation or condition by a sort of symbolic force or law'). Moreover, Derrida observes that, among the various conditions required to bend to this law, there is the fact that 'he must be capable to understand the contract' (AR, 232). Hence let me anticipate that the 'symbolical force' (or 'law') is a contract, the text of an engagement which structurally lends itself to repetition and calls for an act of faith. My reading aims to account for these structural traits of law and for their irreducible coimplication.

But let me start again by following the development of Derrida's enquiry into the relation between force and law. He begins by isolating an idiomatic expression within the language of majority, "to enforce the law", or "the enforceability of the law or contract", which alludes to a force 'that comes from within to remind us that law is always an authorized force, a force that justifies itself or is justified in applying itself'. Derrida's explanation of the English expression implies that law (*qua* authorized force) is essentially related to force to the extent that only a force can give itself or posit its own authority, that is, can make itself recognized. In other words, law stands for the very process of self-positing (by force) or self-recognizing. It is the supplement of the operation of mastery, the contract, or the text of the engagement that a force takes with itself by writing or posting it to itself.[22] In fact, this engagement must have been repeatable since the beginning and demands to be countersigned or respected. Therefore, enforceability evokes the essential condition by which the law, as the text of a certain engagement, can always be repeated. From this perspective, I propose reading Derrida's conclusion that there is 'no law that does not imply in itself, a priori, in the analytic structure of its concept, the possibility of being "enforced", applied by force' (AR, 233). Perhaps, I would suggest, the articulation of force and law describes the very process of self-writing and self-posting into which Derrida deconstructs the

[22] For a reading of the operation of mastery (self-positing) as self-writing and self-posting see my remarks on 'To speculate – On "Freud"' in the Supplement of Chapter 4. Here it is worth remarking that, as Derrida and other commentators point out, Benjamin himself understands the law as a necessary supplement of the original positing (on this point see, in particular, the end of this section).

speculative process. Following this, Derrida conjures up another idiom (referring to the German term *Gewalt*) in order to reckon with the undecidability between 'violence' and 'legitimate power' or 'justified authority' (234). A few pages later, he develops these first remarks on the essential repeatability of the law, as the supplement of self-positing or self-recognizing, by taking into account a certain French tradition inaugurated by the texts of Pascal and Montaigne. Firstly, I will address Derrida's reading of Pascal's fragment 298 in order to put into relief some key-articulations of a certain thought of the relation between force and law. Let me outline a noteworthy gesture in Derrida's commentary on the first part of the fragment (*'Justice, force – Il est juste que ce qui est juste soit suivi, il est nécessaire que ce qui est le plus fort soit suivi'*).[23] He remarks that the very possibility of being 'followed' (*suivi*) – that is, as he suggests, 'enforced' – is already inscribed in the concept of justice as law ('it is right that ...'). As I have already argued, this possibility represents the essential condition of the *text* of the law. Furthermore, Derrida draws attention to the concept of 'the strongest', which stands for a determination of force and implies the same possibility of being followed/enforced (again, 'it is necessary ...', 238). Perhaps, Derrida already anticipates the conclusions of his reading of the fragment, namely, the structural enforceability of the law as the contract that the strongest sends to itself.[24] Commenting on the other part of the fragment, he outlines that justice is 'powerless' when 'it doesn't have the force to be "enforced"' and, therefore, that it is 'necessary', in the sense of the analytic implication within the very concept of justice, that the law can always be enforced (certainly, by the strongest). This commentary on Pascal's fragment has already detached the text 'from its most

[23] For the whole fragment see AR, 238-239: 'Justice, Force – It is right that what is just should be followed; it is necessary that what is strongest should be followed. Justice without force is powerless, force without justice is tyrannical. Justice without force is gainsaid, because there are always offenders; force without justice is condemned. It is necessary then to combine justice and force; and for this end make what is just strong, or what is strong just. And thus being unable to make what is just strong, we have made what is strong just.'

[24] Derrida will return to this notion of the strongest as master or ipseity in his later texts that deal explicitly on sovereignty such as *Rogues* and the seminars on *The Beast and the Sovereign*. It is worth noting that, a few pages later, he demarcates Pascal's thought of justice from the 'the cynical moral of La Fontaine's 'The Wolf and the Sheep', according to which '*la raison du plus fort est la meilleure*' ['"The reason of the strongest is always the best – i.e., might makes right"]' (AR, 241), which, indeed, is retrieved in his later works as a key-moment of the tradition of sovereignty.

conventional and most conventionalist reading' by proposing an analysis of the internal structure of the concept of the law or contract (and, on a more profound level, by implicitly mobilizing a certain understanding of the operation of self-positing *qua* self-posting).

Derrida recalls that in a related fragment Pascal takes up the following, notable expression from Montaigne: 'the mystical foundation of authority' (which is also the subtitle of Derrida's essay). The expression appears originally in a text in which Montaigne relates the authority of laws to an act of faith. 'Laws are now maintained in credit, not because they are just, but because they are laws. It is the mystical foundation of their authority' (239-240). Derrida places emphasis on the notion of 'credit', as that which only 'justifies the allusion to the mystical character of authority' and implies a certain believing. 'The authority of laws rests only on the credit that is granted them. One believes in it; that is their only foundation' (240). From the perspective elaborated above, the understanding of authority as credit and the essential implication of an act of faith in the authority leads back to a thinking of the enforceability of the law and, thus, of the law as representing or supplementing the process of self-authorizing or self-recognizing. Since the beginning of its operation, a self-positing and self-recognizing authority demands to be believed and, thus, repeated, which testifies for its unconditioned heteronomy or finitude. The law, as the contract or the text of self-recognizing, originally carries this call. Therefore, it cannot be overlooked, in my opinion, that Derrida recalls the development of Montaigne's text referring to 'certain lawful fictions, on which it grounds the truth of justice'. This definition of law suggests the idea of a repeatable text whose authority depends on the credit granted by others. Furthermore, Derrida recalls another text by Montaigne, in which he proposes 'an analogy between this supplement of a legitimate fiction [...] and the supplement of artifice called for by a deficiency in nature'. The observation added to the presentation of this text structurally articulates the notion of supplement with the founding or the positing of the law (and, thus, with the process of self-recognizing). It is, Derrida suggests, 'as if the absence of natural law called for the supplement of historical or positive' (240). The legitimate fiction or the text of the

contract, as structurally repeatable and liable to credit, is the necessary supplement of an unconditionally heteronomous and finite authority or mastery.

The reconsideration of Pascal and Montaigne's texts prompts Derrida to single out a certain 'performative' or 'interpretative' force and 'a call to faith' as the structural traits of laws and contracts. Force is performative (or interpretative) to the extent that it is always caught up in the process of self-positing or of the auto-performative. Therefore, the very authority of the law (*qua* enforceable) is based upon on the credit of others and does not admit any verification. Derrida reformulates the moment of the foundation or institution of the law as the process of an absolute foundation or institution.

> The operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law, to making law, would consist of a *coup de force*, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice and no earlier and previously founding law, no pre-existing foundation, could, by definition, guarantee or contradict or invalidate. (AR, 241)

If the law is a discourse or a text, its authority consists in 'the performativity of its institutive language' or in the operation of self-recognizing described by this performativity ('its *dominant* interpretation [italics added]'). Here, in the very 'performative power' of discourse, in the absolute foundation of its authority, Derrida finds the 'limit' of discourse itself, non-discourse, or the mystical. It is worth remarking that Derrida also names the founding or grounding of the law 'positing', which accounts for the very operation of authority or mastery and, thus, is necessarily absolute, that is, self-positing (by force) or self-imposing. In this perspective, the performative of this positing is the auto-performative. Derrida outlines the difference between Austin's notion of the performative speech act and the performative in question pointing out that the latter accounts for the very (self-)positing or the mystical foundation of the ultimate conventions and rules presupposed by the felicitous execution of Austin's performative. For this reason, he explains, 'even if the success of performatives that found a law [...] presupposes earlier conditions and conventions [...] the same "mystical" limit will

re-emerge at the supposed origin of said conditions, rules or conventions' (243). Finally, the thought of the structural enforceability of the law brings to light the very being 'deconstructible' of the law, what Derrida names the 'being unfounded' of its ultimate foundation and, thus, the mystical foundation of its very authority, its essential dependence on the credit of others.

At this point, I take into examination the second part of Derrida's essay, where, as I aim to demonstrate, he finds in Benjamin's *On the Critique of Violence* the premises of his thought of the enforceability and deconstructability of the law. Let me focus on Derrida's reading of Benjamin's 'distinction between two kinds of violence of law, in relation to law': 'the founding violence, the one that institutes and posits law' (*die rechtsetzende Gewalt*)', or law-positing/making violence, and 'the violence that preserves, the one that maintains, confirms, insures the permanence and enforceability of law (*die rechtserhaltende Gewalt*)', or law-preserving violence (264). In what for Derrida's reading is a decisive moment of the text, Benjamin admits 'as a general maxim of present-day European legislation', the fact 'that all the natural ends of individuals must collide with legal ends if pursued with a greater or lesser degree of violence'. Hence he deduces the immediate consequence that 'law sees violence in the hands of individuals as a danger undermining the legal system' (CV, 280). Therefore, Benjamin remarks, European legislation is characterized by a certain 'interest in a monopoly of violence' that can be explained 'not by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather, by that of preserving the law itself' (281).[25] In his commentary on this

[25] Benjamin speaks of a 'dialectic' and of a 'law of oscillation': 'A gaze directed only at what is close at hand can at most perceive a dialectical rising and falling in the lawmaking and law-preserving formations of violence. The law governing their oscillation rests on the circumstance that all law-preserving violence, in its duration, indirectly weakens the lawmaking violence represented by it, through the suppression of hostile counterviolence.' (CV, 300). On this point see Hamacher 1991, 134-136 and Fritsch 2005, 111-114. Hamacher understands Benjamin's dialectic as the process of the self-obstruction and corruption, according to which 'law-imposing violence turns against its original positing character, and, in this collision with itself, must disintegrate' (Hamacher 1991, 1134). From this perspective, he seems not to be primarily concerned with the relation between the necessary supplement and the deposing of the original positing. In another context, Fritsch explicitly relates Benjamin's dialectic to the 'law of iterability'. He explains that, becoming law-preserving violence, the original positing must oppose and, therefore, expose to other, potentially hostile forces; in other words, 'it opens itself up to historical change and internal transformations' (Fritsch 2005, 114).

passage, Derrida remarkably accounts for individual violence as a 'threat' to 'the juridical order' and draws attention to a certain 'interest' of the order itself as inscribed in its very essence. 'It is in the nature of his interest', he observes 'to exclude any individual violence threatening its order' (266). In these remarks Derrida seems to propose that the law, that is enforceable and, thus, finite, essentially seeks for recognition and credit (namely, for preservation). Furthermore, he explicitly applies to Benjamin's passage the notion of the performative that had been elaborated in the first part of the essay. The 'tautological' affirmation of the interest in the monopoly of violence and in the preservation of the juridical order betrays the very structure of the positing of the law. Of course, this structure is performative to the extent that it presupposes a self-positing and, therefore, appeals to an act of faith. 'Is not tautology the phenomenal structure of a certain violence of the law that lays itself down, by decreeing to be violent anything that does not *recognize* it [my italics]?' (267). It is worth remarking that Derrida associates the notion of the 'performative tautology' with that of '*a priori* synthesis' suggesting a temporal articulation of the positing of the law that he will later take into account.[26]

In the development of the text, Benjamin addresses the case of the strike where the application of violence 'threatening' the law and 'feared' by it is, in principle, permitted. 'Organized labor – he observes – is apart from the state, probably today the only legal subject entitled to exercise violence' (CV, 281). However, this is not the case 'in the face of a revolutionary general strike', when the state considers the labour's appeal to its right to strike as an 'abuse' (or 'illegal') 'since the right to strike was not "so intended"'. This extreme case of strike brings forth 'the objective contradiction in the legal situation', whereby a specific conduct 'may be called violent if it exercises a right in order to overthrow the legal system that has conferred it'. In fact, Benjamin concludes, what 'the state fears' in a strike

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From this perspective, Fritsch proposes to read Benjamin's notion of the deposing of the law and of the interruption of the circulation of law-positing and law preserving violence (see CV, 300) as 'the finitude of positing in demanding of any imposition to reaffirm itself, to return to itself in order to maintain itself' and 'the withdrawal of an identity given once and for all to a legal order or a political formation' (126). For Hamacher's reading of deposing as pure violence and afformation see Hamacher 1991, 1138-1139.

[26] Cf. AR, 269.

is the violence which grants 'the only secure foundation' of all decision, included a *critique* of violence (282), that is, law-positing violence. Let me outline a few remarkable steps in Derrida's commentary on Benjamin's examination of the case of the right to strike. First, stressing Benjamin's understanding of the omission of actions or the non-action of the strike as still violent, Derrida remarks: 'and so there is violence against violence'.[27] Therefore, in Derrida's reading, this condition of struggle prefigures the 'revolutionary' case of the general strike and uncovers the heteronomy of the legal order *qua* essentially enforceable. Commenting on Benjamin's examination of the general strike, Derrida describes the 'revolutionary situation' as the moment when 'violence is not exterior to the order of law' but 'threatens law from within law'. In other words, this situation is structurally allowed by the very essence of the law *qua* enforceable. Finally, Derrida draws attention to the notion of the 'fear' of the State, which is structurally related to that of the threat: 'the state is afraid of founding violence'. Furthermore, in Derrida's reading, the violence of the strike testifies that in the legal order the law 'remains to be transformed or modified' (AR, 268), as if the positing of law were by essence restless and, thus, always at war with other positings.[28] From this perspective, the notions of threat and fear can be rearticulated within the very movement of the positing of the law and, more generally, of self-positing and of the auto-performative. The law (*qua* enforceable) threatens itself or makes itself afraid.[29] This announcement can be read as another formulation of the war in the infinite and as an anticipation of the autoimmunity of the sovereign. As Derrida outlines, 'that which threatens law already belongs to it, to the right to law, to the origin of law'. The performative structure of the legal tautology (that is, the implicit conjuration of a certain act of

[27] Cf. CV, 281-282. Hamacher and Fritsch read the nonviolent mass proletarian strike as an example of the interruption and deposing of the law of oscillation between positing and preserving violence. For their elaborations on the traits of this strike see Hamacher 1991, 1145-1146 and Fritsch 2005, 128-135. On Derrida's misreading of Benjamin's understanding of the proletarian general strike see Sinnebrink 2002 (in particular, 84-86).

[28] CV, 283: 'The strike shows, however, that it can be so, that it is able to found and modify legal conditions, however offended the sense of justice may find itself thereby.'

[29] Cf. AR, 275: 'The notion of threat appears here indispensable. But it also remains difficult to delimit for the threat does not come from outside. The law [*le droit*] is both threatening and threatened by itself.' On the self-threatening structure of the performative I refer to Derrida's formidable exposition of the performative of the conjuration of specters in SM, 47-48.

faith inscribed in that structure) implies a fear for its own dependence on the other. The 'revolutionary situation' accounts for the positing of the law as the movement of self-recognizing and self-authorizing, which is also the self's threatening (or making) itself (afraid). This movement develops into the temporal structure of the future anterior to the extent that 'the law to come will in return legitimate, retrospectively, the violence that may offend the sense of justice, its future anterior already justifies it'. Somehow, the law is always not yet there (it is still to come) to the extent that it is structurally enforceable. The very affirmation of the present hides the performative tautology of the future anterior and its irreducible heteronomy: the present is always not yet there or still to come. This affirmation describes as a matter of fact what it posits, that is, what it seeks for (perhaps, its own authority), and, ultimately, it makes itself afraid. Therefore, Derrida points out that 'the grammatical category of the future anterior all too well resembles a modification of the present to describe the violence in progress' (269).

Finally, Derrida returns to the initial distinction between the positing and the preserving of the law, which had been put into question since the beginning of his text by the announcement of the enforceability of the law. I will focus on his remarks on this distinction since they develop further a certain thought of the autoimmunity of positing. 'It belongs to the structure of fundamental violence – Derrida writes – in that it calls for the repetition of itself and founds what ought to be preserved, preservable, promised to heritage and to tradition, to partaking.'[30] This structural liability of positing to the tradition refers back to a more general understanding of the war in positing itself, which includes the Montaigne/Pascal tradition of the mystical foundation of the authority and of its dependence on the credit of others. To this extent, Derrida advances that a positing is also a 'promise', which by definition calls for an act of faith. 'Every positing (*Setzung*) permits and promises [*permet et pro-met*], posits ahead; it posits by setting [*mettant*] and by promising [*promettant*]. [...] Positing is already iterability, a call

[30] Cf. AR, 272: 'Thus there can be no rigorous opposition between positing and preserving, only what I will call (and Benjamin does not name it) a differential contamination between the two, with all the paradoxes that this may lead to.'

for self-preserving repetition' (272). This promissory trait stands for the temporal articulation of positing in general, for the always-still-to-come of the present.[31] Through the reading of Benjamin, Derrida shows how the enforceability of the law announced at the beginning of the text already implies a certain appeal to the other to enforcing. Towards the end of the essay, Derrida develops the articulation of positing and iterability by commenting on Benjamin's exposition of the irreducible decay of institutions. Benjamin explains that, because of the essential relation between violence and law, the former is, if not directly present, at least 'represented' in the latter. In fact, he warns that 'when the consciousness of the latent presence of violence in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay (CV, 288). Derrida grasps this 'furtive and elliptical allusion' as 'decisive' by deflecting it toward a certain *Hegelian* or *speculative* description of the structure of positing. The contract is a representative or a supplement (perhaps, a slave) of the original violence, the text of the engagement that the self takes with itself and that the absolute positing of the law amounts to. 'Without being immediately present, it [instituting violence] is replaced (*vertreten*), represented by the supplement of a substitute.' This contract ensures the enforceability and iterability of the law, its unconditioned finitude: somehow, it ensures the very death of the consciousness of the original violence. This death plays as the structural condition of positing itself. Along this line of thinking, Derrida remarks that 'the loss of conscience or of consciousness does not happen by accident, nor does the amnesia that follows'. It accounts for 'the very passage from presence to representation', that is, for the master/slave dialectic describing the positing of the law. 'Such a passage – Derrida continues – forms the trajectory of decline, of institutional degeneration', the structural finitude of institutions, perhaps. Remarkably, he understands the structural death of consciousness (and, therefore, the structural appeal to belief) as amnesia, as a neither ontological nor psychological 'forgetting' that 'produces itself, lodges and extends itself in this

[31] On the promissory structure of the performative and a certain tradition of deconstruction bringing this structure into focus see the Introduction of the present work.

différance, in the movement that replaces presence [...], in this *differantial* representativity' (AR, 282).[32]

5.4 The *Genealogy* and the Law of Inversion

In the first pages of 'Force of Law', when he exposes the traits of a certain deconstruction of force, Derrida draws particular attention to a structure of inversion and exchange allowed by the notions of force and weakness. 'But also and above all, [it is a matter] of all the paradoxical situations in which the greatest force and the greatest weakness strangely exchange places [*s'echangent etrangement*]' (AR, 234-235).[33] To which Derrida adds: 'and that is the whole story, the whole of history', suggesting an essential implication of this 'strange exchange' within a certain notion of history. As I will argue, this structure evokes the reading of the repeatability of a force (the strongest) as self-recognizing or self-authorizing, and, thus, of its very unconditioned exposure to other forces. To this extent, the quoted passage anticipates, in 'Force of Law', the elaboration of the thought of the enforceability of the law. I intend to investigate this structure of

[32] On the notion of forgetting as the structural supplement of the absolute performative (or *yes*) and, therefore, as *différance*, see Derrida's 'A Number of Yes' (1987) in Ps, II 231-240. See, for instance, Ps, II 240: 'Since the second *yes* inhabits the first, the repetition augments and divides, splits in advance the archi-originary *yes*.This repetition, which figures the condition of an opening of the *yes*, threatens it as well: mechanical repetition, mimicry, thus *forgetting* [the italics are mine], simulacrum, fiction, fable. Between the two repetitions, the "good" and the "bad", there is both cut and contamination.' Let me recall the excellent study de Vries 1992, in which de Vries retraces the notion of the mystical foundation of the authority back to the question of the foundation of the mystical language.

[33] At the beginning of his chapter on Derrida's reading of Benjamin, Fritsch recalls the following passage from SM, 95, identifying a certain line of thought claiming for the 'complication' of 'the simple opposition of the dominated and the dominator' and, perhaps, more generally, of the master/slave dialectic: 'Nietzsche and Benjamin have encouraged us to have doubts on this score, each in his own way, and especially the latter when he associated "historical materialism" with the inheritance, precisely, of some 'weak messianic force [*faible force messianique*]'. At the margins of this text, Fritsch proposes addressing the question of the messianic that interrupts or deposes the law of oscillation between positing and preserving violence ('the connection of a weak force with a strength that compromises the simple opposition of oppressors and the oppressed' Fritsch 2005, 105). The reading of the notion of the inversion that I develop in this section can be understood as aiming to account for the *Nietzschean* version of a certain thought of the messianic (the affortmative, deposing, etc.)

inversion by taking into account its development in relation to a specific articulation of Nietzsche's *On Genealogy of Morals* in Derrida's almost contemporary interviews 'Negotiations' (1987) and 'Nietzsche and the Machine' (1994). My argument is that Derrida's thought of the force/weakness exchange can be understood as a reading of Nietzsche's confrontation with the Hegelian concept of mastery in the *Genealogy* (and a confrontation with Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's confrontation).[34] In 'Negotiations' Derrida defines the structure of inversion in relation to the notion of force as trace or iterable mark. He recalls that 'what is "proper" to any mark is the power to erase itself', to the extent that every force-mark is repeatable and, thus, calls for an act of faith. Since this power of self-effacement is a structural trait of the force-mark ('if a mark has a structure such that *it succeeds* only by erasing itself'), then, it accounts for an *essential* weakness of force. The essence of force necessarily admits a certain structural inversion. Therefore, propositions like 'there is more force in weakness' or 'weakness is revealed to be stronger than force' touch upon the very essence of force, upon what Derrida names its 'non-reliability' (Ne, 35), which, in fact, conjures up the question of the mystical foundation of authority and of the credit of others. This essential weakness or *unreliability* is described as 'a ruse of structure' (an inversion) in the very field where all forces are inscribed. It is worth remarking that Derrida takes up the political dimension in order to give an account of this ruse. If the inversion concerns the essence of every force as repeatable and, therefore, its life (its opening onto other forces or, in general, the to come), then affirming the strength of the weakest consists in affirming life and what/who comes, a certain messianic trait, in the political field. 'Always to put oneself on the side of the weakest and the most oppressed is also a kind of confidence in the future' (35-36). From this perspective, taking the side of 'those who protest against an oppressive or repressive authority' or, more generally, against 'hierarchy', must be thought again in light of a certain investigation of the structural inversion and, more in general, of the iterability of force.

[34] To my knowledge there is no remarkable literature on the Derrida-Deleuze confrontation around the *Genealogy*'s elaboration of the Hegelian concept of mastery.

Derrida retraces this preliminary elaboration of the notion of the inversion back to the reading of Nietzsche's genealogical investigation of morals. He focuses on a specific presupposition of the Nietzschean idea of genealogy ('that sees the weak as those who prevail in the end'), namely, 'the idea of force being a weakness', to elaborate the premises of his thought of the inversion. The pages of the interview 'Nietzsche and the Machine' devoted to the interpretation of the *Genealogy* begin by remarking a certain 'attention to a possible reversal in the logic engaged with', which Derrida identifies with the force relationship or the master/slave dialectic, and therefore, in this perspective, to a certain deconstruction of that logic or dialectics. He explains that 'Nietzsche is fascinated (intrigued and alarmed) by the way in which reactivity causes the weakest to become the strongest, by the fact that the greatest weakness becomes stronger than the greatest strength'. It is worth observing that this 'sense' of fascination is deeply elaborated by Deleuze in his chapter on Nietzsche's thought of force, which I will take into account below.[35] Here Derrida seems to find in Nietzsche's text the 'inversion' of the Hegelian notion of mastery, which Nietzsche himself describes as the logic of force. Derrida names this fact a 'principle' or a 'law', to the extent that it represents an unmasterable presupposition of the logic of force and of the operation of mastery. 'Nietzsche himself cannot prevent ...', Derrida observes. The vocabulary of these remarks suggests that the inversion consists in an irreducible or systematic 'virtuality' or 'possibility' admitted by the repeatability of self-recognizing force. But this implies, in Derrida's perspective, that Nietzsche's articulation of the reversal must be taken as the announcement of the structural weakness of the strongest and of the equally structural strength of the weakest, and, thus, of a certain 'essential weakness' of self-recognizing force in general (its very repeatability). Nietzsche's taking a position for the strongest as the weakest entails a certain affirmation of that 'essential weakness' as the condition of possibility of force relationships. 'When Nietzsche says that the strong have been made slaves by the weak, this means that the strong are weak. By coming to the aid of strength, Nietzsche is coming to the aid of weakness, of an essential weakness.' Furthermore, Derrida notes that 'it is in this essential weakness that one can locate the place of an "arche-ethics"', of the very 'law' of inversion. This reading is

[35] See NP, 66.

hyperbolic ('the oscillating play is difficult to stop') insofar as the notions of the strongest and the weakest ceaselessly revert the one into the other betraying the very origin (or condition of possibility) of their authority, an essential repeatability.[36] Here Derrida elaborates the notion of the future, of the being-pregnant-with-the-future in relation to the principle of reversal. The inversion grants the very possibility of the future as repeatability and unconditioned exposure to the risk of death. Perhaps, this thought of the pregnancy with the future, of a certain messianic dimension, is the structural virtuality admitted by the logic of force. 'One must defend the weakest who are pregnant with the future, because it is they who are the strongest' (226). The thought of the inversion is also the thought of this notion of the future. Let me single out in Nietzsche's text that which, according to Derrida, can be read as the logic of force. At the beginning of his work, in the second chapter of the first dissertation, he claims that 'the real breeding ground for the concept "good"' must be sought in a certain '*pathos* of nobility and distance'.[37] Nietzsche refers back to this *pathos* a certain operation of self-recognizing force and self-constituting authority. 'It has been "the good" themselves – he explains – meaning the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded, who saw and judged themselves and their actions as good' (GM, 11). At the origin of authority and values there is an absolute positing which has always already entailed a performative force or violence. The strongest give themselves their own authority and, thus, the right to give names.[38] Therefore, Nietzsche identifies the genealogy of values, which he names as the very operation of mastery ('seigneurial'), with the genealogy of language: 'the seigneurial privilege of giving names even allows us to conceive of the origin of language itself as a manifestation of the power of the rulers' (12). As he points out later in the text, the logic of force and mastery is the dominance of the strongest and the subordination of the weakest. 'It is just as absurd to ask strength *not* to

[36] A few paragraphs later, Derrida supposes that this law of inversion restarts 'a machine of hyperbolization' which 'is constantly at work' (Ne, 227).

[37] Cf. GM, 12: 'The pathos of nobility and distance, as I said, the continuing and predominant feeling of complete and fundamental superiority of a higher ruling kind in relation to a lower kind, to those 'below' – *that* is the origin of the antithesis "good" and "bad"'.

[38] Cf. GM: 11: 'It was from this *pathos of distance* that they first claimed the right to create values and give these values names: usefulness was none of their concern!'

express itself as strength, *not* to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master, [...] as it is to ask weakness to express itself as strength' (26). According to the above mentioned observations by Derrida, it seems that 'the absurd' happens systematically and that it is necessary to reckon with it. Indeed, it seems that the reversal of strength into weakness and vice versa has always been presupposed by the logic of force and mastery. Here I am referring to the specific articulation of Nietzsche's text that Derrida singles out to elaborate a certain thought of the being-pregnant-with-the-future of weakness. In a remark within parentheses, in the fifth section of the first dissertation, Nietzsche acknowledges the inversion of the logic of force and the defeat of the 'master race' in contemporary Europe: 'the subject race has ended up by regaining the upper hand in skin colour, shortness of forehead and perhaps even in intellectual and social instincts' (15). He identifies this state of things as the triumphal result of '*the slaves' revolt in morality*' begun with the Jews two thousand years before. Within Derrida's perspective, the stake of this revolt would be the virtuality of the becoming master of the weakest. As Nietzsche announces a few pages later, the 'masters' are 'deposed' by the 'slaves' (19).[39]

In his formidable chapter on Nietzsche's thought of force, Deleuze focuses on the question of the inversion of values proposing a different interpretation that rejects Derrida's thought of the hyperbolic machine of reversal.[40] His argument is that Nietzsche accounts for the triumph of the reactive forces in the human world as

[39] In the introduction to the *Genealogy*, entitled 'On Nietzsche's critique of Morality', Keith Ansell-Pearson writes: 'One of the most important events in Western history occurs when the *slaves* revolt against the masters' form of valuation. The slaves are, after all, not only physically weak and oppressed, they are also by virtue of their very weakness debarred from spontaneously seeing themselves and their lives in an affirmative way. They develop a reactive and negative sentiment against the oppressive masters which Nietzsche calls '*ressentiment*', and this *ressentiment* eventually turns creative, allowing the slaves to take revenge in the imagination on the masters whom they are too weak to harm physically' (GM, XXI).

[40] There is a large debate on Deleuze's reading of Hegel's master/slave relationship through Nietzsche, inaugurated by Jean Wahl's article 'Nietzsche et la philosophie' in 1963. See, for instance, Butler 1987, 205-217; Houlgate 1986; Hardt 1993, 26-47. For a recent, sophisticated investigation of Deleuze's confrontation with Hegel see Somers-Hall 2010. However, this debate does not touch directly upon Deleuze's remarks on Nietzsche's reelaboration of the master/slave dialectic that I will take into account below. I propose understanding Derrida's thought of inversion as an engagement with these specific remarks on Nietzsche's Hegel.

the becoming-reactive of active forces and not as the becoming-active of the reactive forces. He formulates the question very clearly in the following passage:

The question is; how do reactive forces triumph? That is to say: when they get the better of active forces do reactive forces themselves also become dominant, aggressive and subjugating? Do they, by getting together, form a greater force that would then be active? Nietzsche's answer is that even by getting together reactive forces do not form a greater force, one that would be active. They proceed in an entirely different way - they decompose; they separate active force from what it can do; they take away a part or almost all of its power. In this way reactive forces do not become active but, on the contrary, they make active forces join them and become reactive in a new sense. We can see that, from its beginning and in developing itself, the concept of reaction changes in signification: an active force becomes reactive (in a new sense) when reactive forces (in the first sense) separate it from what it can do. Nietzsche will analyse how such a separation is possible in detail. But it is important to notice that, even at this stage, he is careful never to present the triumph of reactive forces as the putting together of a force superior to active force but, rather, as a subtraction or division. Nietzsche devotes a whole book to the analysis of the figures of reactive triumph in the human world ressentiment, bad conscience and the ascetic ideal. In each case he shows that reactive forces do not triumph by forming a superior force but by "separating" active force. (Deleuze 1983, 57)

Let me recall here the thirteenth chapter of the first dissertation where Nietzsche accounts for the separation of strength from its subject as a voluntary deed and, thus, for the origin of a certain freedom of choice and of responsibility. He explains that, 'just as the common people separates lightning from its flash and takes the latter to be a *deed*, something performed by a subject', so 'popular morality separates strength from its manifestations' and supposes 'a substratum behind the strong person which had the *freedom* to manifest strength or not'. This separation leads to the very contestation of the logic of force and mastery by which the strong cannot not express itself as such. It supports the belief that '*the strong are free* to be weak, and the birds of prey are free to be lambs', that they become somehow '*responsible* for being birds of prey' (GM, 26). Deleuze suggests transcribing numerically the triumph of reactive forces as a process of separation and, thus, of the becoming-reactive of active forces (and not viceversa)

in terms of 'subtraction'.[41] In this perspective, he can conclude that the slaves, or the weakest, do not stop being slaves (that is, weakest), when they replace masters, or the strongest. In other words, their triumph cannot be read as the triumph of the strongest and, therefore, as presupposing the play of the ceaseless reversal of the strongest into the weakest and viceversa. There is no conversion of slaves into new masters. Developing these conclusions in relation to Darwin and evolutionism, Deleuze argues that, according to Nietzsche, 'we cannot use the result of the struggle between forces, in order to decide which are active and which are reactive'. Here Nietzsche is reckoning with 'the defeat of the stronger', which is the 'reverse' of the outcome 'desired by the school of Darwin' (NP, 58).[42] Therefore, Deleuze points out, the term 'weak' does not account for the absolute quantity of force or for the result of struggle but for the reactive force, that is, for what is separated from what it can do. He reads the triumph of the reactive forces as the very movement of becoming, as 'becoming' in general. The triumph and the becoming (-reactive) are the same movement. 'Active forces become reactive. And the word 'becoming' must be taken in the strongest sense: the becoming of forces appears as a becoming-reactive.' At this point, Deleuze observes that 'perhaps' there is another 'way of becoming' than becoming-reactive, but it requires 'another sensibility' (64). In order to conclude this comparative reading of Deleuze and Derrida's readings of Nietzsche's notion of the 'inversion of values', I propose to add some remarks in the wake of Derrida's interpretation. The latter can be aligned to the positions of Socrates and of free thinkers Deleuze accounts for in his chapter. It cannot simply be liquidated as Socrates's position is not: 'Callicles does not complain of not having been understood, he begins again' (58). If the logic of force and mastery is the very articulation of force relationship and of experience in general (as forces are finite positings or totalities or ipseities), then, the triumph of the slaves and of the

[41] Cf. Deleuze 1983, 57: 'Thus if we want to give a numerical transcription of the victory of reactive forces we must not appeal to an addition by which reactive forces would, by getting together, become stronger than active force, but rather to a subtraction which separates active force from what it can do and denies its difference in order to make it a reactive force'.

[42] In the same section, Deleuze observes that this problem reopens the famous debate between Callicles and Socrates on the relationship of force, which is active and goes to its limit, with law, which is reactive and separates force from what it can do (see Plato's *Gorgia* 481-527).

weakest *must* be read according to this logic and, therefore, *necessarily* allows its very deconstruction, the hyperbolization of forces and their being-pregnant-with-the-future. Further, paraphrasing Deleuze's sentence on Callicles, I would dare to say that Derrida himself (namely, Socrates), on the other side, begins once again, without complaining of not having been understood.

(In the third session of the seminar 'La vie la mort' (1975) Derrida follows the traces of a certain Nietzschean reading of the relationship of force in terms of 'Darwinism'. In particular, he brings into focus the development of this reading from the *Philosophenbuch* (1872) to the fragments in the *Will to Power* entitled 'Anti-Darwinism' (1888).[43] According to Derrida, in 1872, Nietzsche seems to read the relationship of force and, thus, the operation of mastery through the tradition of Darwinism ('*le darwinisme a raison*').[44] As Derrida remarks, he supposes a state of war ('*état de guerre*') where the natural selection takes place by obeying the law of the strongest ('*obéissante à la raison du plus fort*'). Now, this reading of Darwinism as an exposition of the law of the strongest becomes more sophisticated later, when Nietzsche is concerned with the question of the inversion raised in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. What Nietzsche, under the name of Anti-Darwin, accuses Darwin of – Derrida explains – is disregarding the virtuality of inversion, which constitutes the natural selection as such, and, therefore, the dominance of the weakest ('*sans tenir compte de l'énigmatique possibilité d'inversion qui la constitue, à savoir la domination régulière non pas de plus forts mais des plus faibles*'). Here, perhaps, it is suggested that Nietzsche finds in the inversion, in the reversibility of the strong and the weak, a structural condition of force relationship and of mastery in general. Darwinism, therefore, as a simplistic theory of the law of the strongest, seems unable to account for this very condition. Derrida understands it as the self-contradicting of the law of the strongest ('*la loi du plus fort qui se contredit elle-même*') and, perhaps, of the law in general, as its very deconstructability. Furthermore, he seems to refer to an automatic process of inversion ('*et [la loi] s'inverse immédiatement*'), a sort of

[43] On the development of Nietzsche's interpretation of Darwinism I refer to Johnson 2010.

[44] The texts quoted in this conclusive paragraph are from Derrida's unublished seminar *La vie la mort* (1974-1975).

hyperbolic machine. Finally, retracing the confrontation of forces back to life, he proposes to read the process of inversion as a certain force of death already at work in life itself ('*une force de mort soit à l'œuvre*'). Here he remarks the absurdity and strangeness of this process once it is looked at from the perspective of life. In fact, it describes the transgression by life of its own law (the law of the strongest or the natural selection). In this sense, he speaks of the strange logic of the will to power ('*étrange logique de la volonté de puissance*') according to which there *can* be a dominance of the weak and of the slave. The first fragment of Nietzsche's 'Anti-Darwinism' recalled by Derrida would be an attestation of what Nietzsche himself believes to see when he looks at the history of human beings, that is, the strange articulation of the dominance of the weak and of the transgression of the law of the strongest. Nietzsche remarks that Darwin is blind ('*aveugle*') to this state of things, which admits the opposite ('*le contraire*') of the way his school sees the fight for existence and life in general. This examination of Nietzsche's (anti-)Darwinism is notable not only because it uncovers Derrida's early concern for the specific process of inversion in relation to the notion of mastery and self-recognizing force, but also because it demarcates his elaboration of inversion from mere Darwinism (by which I mean the Darwinism evoked by Deleuze in his chapter on Nietzsche's thought of force). In the wake of Nietzsche, Derrida thinks of an irreducible self-contradicting of mastery and self-recognizing force.)

Conclusion

This chapter unfolds as a tentative exploration of Derrida's thought of the structural non-reliability of force. The exploration is developed into the following three stages: (1) the elaboration of a certain *Nietzschean* commitment to diaphoristics and qualitative difference (with particular attention to 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' and 'Différance'); (2) the reading of the articulation of positing and iterability (call for credit and repetition) and of the movement of différance in Benjamin's critique of violence; (3) the interpretation of a specific articulation of Nietzsche's *On Genealogy of Morals* (the inversion of strength and weakness) as

a hyperbolic law of structure. Through these stages of investigation, I brought into light a decisive and close confrontation with Deleuze's account of Nietzsche's thought of force (in particular, with his interpretation of the deposition of the masters by the slaves as the becoming reactive of active forces). My conclusion is that the notion of non-reliability accounts for the performative or positional structure of force, which originally allows a certain *differantial* representativity.

CONCLUSION

My working hypothesis was that the performative is not only reinscribed by Derrida into an investigation into the very structure of ipseity, but it is taken up in order to account for that structure itself. To this extent, I proposed speaking of a certain arche-performative of ipseity. I attempted to develop and verify my hypothesis by describing a theoretical trajectory which goes from the notion of the autoperformative (as the minimal structure of the self-referring and self-constituting of the performative in general) to that of self-recognizing (as the very self-positing of mastery and ipseity, carrying with itself a call for credit and repetition). This trajectory was articulated through the following movements:

(1) I situated Derrida's thought of the arche-performative within a certain contemporary tradition of reading the notion of the performative speech act, which is inaugurated by Benveniste. This tradition was identified with the gesture of taking into account the performativity of the performative or the minimal performative conditions of the performative speech act, that is, with the absolute performative or the auto-performative as the performative movement of self-referring or self-constituting. The roots of the contemporary notion of the performative speech act were found in Fichte's solution of the principle of identity as absolute and unconditioned positing (*setzen*). Within this context, I aimed to prove that Derrida refers his understanding of the arche-performative (as I argued, for instance, in my reading of the structure of the 'yes') back to the notion of positing elaborated by Hegel in Chapter IV of *Phenomenology*, in which, according to the reading given by Hyppolite, the Fichtean principle of identity is rewritten along the trajectory that goes from desire to recognition and mastery. In so doing, I demarcated the thought of the arche-performative from Gasché and Hamacher's readings of Fichtean positing in the wake of Henrich's seminal essay on Fichte's original insight into the philosophical problem of self-consciousness.

(2) I found the theoretical premises of the arche-performative in Derrida's early reading of the Hegelian positing as it is elaborated in 'Violence and Metaphysics' (when I say 'Hegelian', it has become explicit that I refer to a close confrontation

with the French tradition of Hegel around the Hegelian text). In my view, here Derrida thinks of positing as the self-positing of a finite totality (ipseity) which grants the access to the other as other and, at the same time, exposes itself to the positing of the other (this is the primordial war among finite ipseities, the very structure of heteronomy and iterability). My overall argument was that Derrida's arche-performative is this self-positing. As the study developed, I pointed out that it is understood by Derrida as the positing of the master (positing by force, self-imposing, etc) which necessarily carries with itself a certain (speech) act of self-recognizing (self-designating, diktat, etc.).

(3) I drew attention to Derrida's late elaboration of the positing of ipseity (from *Politics of Friendship* to *Rogues*) as a certain Hegelian operation of mastery *qua* self-recognizing or self-designating. I aimed to point out that this elaboration rearticulates the early thought of positing developed in the reading of Lévinas's anti-Hegelianism and brings to light an Aristotelian tradition of ipseity. My reading put forward the argument that Derrida understands the operation of mastery/ipseity as the performative of the self's recognizing or designating itself as such or as the same. Moreover, as it appeared from the examination of the operation of ipseity as mastery or enslavement of time (that is, as the temporalizing synthesis that takes time in order to exit it, or as the very movement of idealization), this performative was understood as the oath that opens up the test of time and, at the same time, demands for confirmation or credit. In particular, by referring to Derrida's reading of the Aristotelian notion of *bebaios* as the process of the stabilization of sovereign decision, I put into relief the aporetic articulation of the performative ipseity consists in.

(4) I attempted to bring to light the careful confrontation that Derrida engages in 'From restricted to general Economy' with the French tradition of the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave. Through my reading, I suggested that, once again, he re-opens Chapter IV of *Phenomenology* to put to the test a certain interpretation of the operation of mastery as the very trope of Hegelianism. I aimed to prove that Derrida elaborates this notion as the performative of deferring the actual staking of life (or sense). To this extent, first I drew attention to Derrida's attempt to put into relief the servile condition of this operation, which

consists in the sublimation of desire through labour (the elaboration of the independent object) and in the delay of death through determinate negation (*Aufhebung* or restricted economy of life). This attempt was measured against Kojève's reading of mastery as a trope of negativity and Bataille's distinction between sovereignty and the Hegelian Sage. Second, I focused on Derrida's thinking of a certain 'blind spot of Hegelianism' as exposure to death, chance, nonpositional affirmation, etc. In so doing, I pointed out that Derrida understands Hegelianism as the performative of a certain precipitation towards life and sense, which consists in limiting the absolute risk of death and non-sense.

(5) I followed the traces of a thought of force in Derrida's *oeuvre*. Breaching a path across Derrida's oeuvre, I argued that this thought unfolds itself as a rewriting of a certain *Nietzschean* tradition of the iterability of force and wages a close confrontation with the interpretation of Nietzsche's thought of force developed by Deleuze in the formidable second chapter of his *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), entitled 'Active and Reactive'. The ultimate stake of this confrontation, I suggested, is the interpretation of the concept of force (*qua* self-recognizing and, thus, auto-performative) in light of the Hegelian concept of mastery. This analysis aimed to account for a configuration that, to my knowledge, is totally overlooked by Derrida scholarship. My exploration was developed into the following three stages: (a) the elaboration of a certain *Nietzschean* commitment to diaphoristics and qualitative difference (with particular attention to 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' and 'Différance'); (b) the reading of the articulation of positing and iterability (call for credit and repetition) and of the movement of différance in Benjamin's critique of violence; (c) the interpretation of a specific articulation of Nietzsche's *On Genealogy of Morals* (the inversion of strength and weakness) as a hyperbolic law of system. Through these stages of investigation, I proposed reading Derrida's notion of non-reliability as the performative or positional structure of force (the original allowance of différance or of a certain movement of *differantial* representativity).

Along this trajectory, which goes from the reading of the autoperformative in light of a certain understanding of the Hegelian positing to the rewriting of this positing

in terms of master/slave dialectics and economic sublimation, I aimed to demonstrate that the structure of the arche-performative (or the positing of ipseity) originally admits *différance* (or iterability), that is, the movement of economic sublimation (or substitution) of positing itself through a temporalizing synthesis, a supplement, a text, a slave, an injunction to repeat or believe, etc. (what in the supplement to Chapter 4 I called 'self-writing' or 'self-posting'). Ultimately, this original allowance, I argued, accounts for the minimal structure of ipseity.

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