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The *Différance* of an Almost Absolute Proximity:

Hegel and Derrida

By

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For my parents, David and Polly Lambert

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

The present thesis considers the relation between Jacques Derrida and G.W.F. Hegel. In his *Positions* Derrida noted that difference is 'at a point of almost absolute proximity to Hegel,' and that he had 'attempted to distinguish [difference] from Hegelian difference at the point at which Hegel, in the greater *Logic*, determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it.' Nevertheless, scholarship on the relation between the two thinkers has largely neglected the detailed consideration of the relation of Derrida's thinking to Hegel's logic of essence, where the categories of difference and contradiction are located. This has often led to a simplification, from both Hegelian and Derridean perspectives, of the relation between Hegel and Derrida. Through a reading of Hegel's logic of essence and of Derrida's early texts in particular, the thesis first aims to determine the nature and degree of the proximity indicated by Derrida and then considers the manner in which the two thinkers depart from one another.

The proximity between Hegel and Derrida is drawn out through an analysis of Hegel's notion of reflection and his logic of identity and difference. This logic is compared with the 'graphics' of identity and difference elaborated by Derrida in his *Limited Inc.* I claim that Derrida departs from Hegel in thinking difference as the displacement of opposition. Nevertheless, I claim that in relating Hegel and Derrida to one another, it cannot be a question of simply comparing two logics or two philosophies, for Derrida does not and cannot have a *general* logic or 'philosophy' of 'difference.' Derrida thus departs from Hegel also insofar as he puts into question the possibility of, and the desire for, a general onto-logic.

List of Abbreviations

References to Derrida and Hegel first give the page number in the relevant English translation, followed by the corresponding page number in the French or German text.

Works by Derrida

- D *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981) / *La dissémination* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972)
- GT *Given Time*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1993) / *Donner le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1991)
- GI *Glas*, trans. by John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) / *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974)
- LI *Limited Inc.*, trans. by Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988) / *Limited Inc.* (Paris: Galilée, 1990)
- M *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982) / *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972)
- G *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) / *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967)
- P *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Athlone, 1987) / *Positions: Entretiens avec Henri Ronse et al.* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972)
- S *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York ; London: Routledge, 1994) / *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993)

WD *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001) / *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967)

Works by Hegel

Enc *The Encyclopaedia Logic, with the Zusätze (1830): Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. by Théodore F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991) / *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830). Erster Teil. Die Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, Werke in zwanzig Bänden, vol. 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986). References to Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* indicate the section number in both the English and German editions, not the page number.

LL *Lectures on Logic: Berlin, 1831*, trans. by Clark Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008) / *Vorlesungen über die Logik: Berlin 1831*, ed. by U. Rameil (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001)

Ph *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) / *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, Werke in zwanzig Bänden, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970)

SL *The Science of Logic*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989)

LS *Wissenschaft der Logik. Die Lehre vom Sein (1832)*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Meiner, 2008)

LW *Wissenschaft der Logik. Die Lehre vom Wesen (1813)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999)

LB: *Wissenschaft der Logik. Die Lehre vom Begriff (1816)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner,

2003)

Introduction / Conclusion

1. Beginnings and Returns

The starting point of the present study will have been a remark that came to Derrida during the course of an interview:

I have attempted to distinguish *différance* [...] from Hegelian difference, and have done so precisely at the point at which Hegel, in the greater *Logic*, determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it, to interiorize it, to lift it up [...] into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis. *Différance* (at a point of almost absolute proximity to Hegel [...]: everything, what is most decisive, is played out, here, in what Husserl called “subtle nuances,” or Marx “micrology”) must sign the point at which one breaks with the system of the *Aufhebung* and with speculative dialectics (P 44/59-60).

Hegel’s analysis of difference is given in the second book of his *Science of Logic*, The Doctrine of Essence. Derrida indicates here that the nature of his relation to Hegel—and by extension the nature of his own thinking—might be significantly illuminated through an exploration of his proximity to and ‘departure’ from Hegel’s logic of essence. Indeed, he adds that the ‘conflictuality of *différance* [...] can be called contradiction only if one demarcates it by means of a long work on Hegel’s concept of contradiction.’ Yet Derrida himself did not undertake either this long study or a broader exploration of the relation between his thinking and Hegel’s *Logic*—at least not directly.

Likewise, in the scholarship on the relation between Hegel and Derrida, the relation of Derridean 'différance' to Hegel's *Logic*, and to the logic of essence in particular, has not been treated in detail.¹ This has perhaps contributed to a frequent simplification of the relation between the two thinkers from both 'Derridean' and 'Hegelian' perspectives. While, from the one perspective, Hegel is often painted as the *Identitätsphilosoph* par excellence, for whom difference is only ever a moment of an absolute identity that is tacitly present from the outset, Derrida, from the other, is presented as the thinker of *pure* difference who would have failed to pay attention to Hegel's elementary lesson that pure difference = pure identity; he would thus turn out to be a profoundly 'metaphysical' and reactionary thinker. It is in this way that a simple and misleading *conflict* is staged between Hegel and Derrida.

Yet Derrida's remark indicates that his departure from Hegel—if such it is—can only take place through a slight displacement of the Hegelian logic. As Joseph Cohen notes, it would then be too simplistic to regard Derrida simply as opposing—i.e.

¹ Some of the works that have touched on this relation include: Karin de Boer, 'Différance as Negativity: The Hegelian Remains of Derrida's Philosophy', in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Chichester, West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Manfred Frank, *What Is Neostructuralism?*, trans. by Sabine Wilke and Richard Gray (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Catherine Kellogg, *Law's Trace : From Hegel to Derrida* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); Wendell Kisner, 'Erinnerung, Retrait, Absolute Reflection: Hegel and Derrida', *The Owl of Minerva*, 26 (1995), 171–86; Leonard Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); John Llewelyn, 'A Point of Almost Absolute Proximity to Hegel', in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. by John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); J. Protevi, 'Derrida and Hegel: Différance and Unterschied', in *Jacques Derrida, Vol. 1*, ed. by Christopher Norris and David Roden (London: Sage, 2003), pp. 331–46; Kevin Thompson, 'Hegelian Dialectic and the Quasi-Transcendental in Glas', in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. by Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998).

‘positioning’ himself against—or attempting to leap out of Hegelianism.² In the present study it will rather be a question of attending to the manner in which Derrida could be said to inhabit Hegel *otherwise*, to dwell on that which Hegel’s thinking both gestures toward and presupposes, but at the same time shrinks back from and represses. Of course, we cannot assume at the outset that this slight *détournement* of the Hegelian logic might not have significant repercussions.

In pursuing Derrida’s remark in *Positions*, the present study is then rather belated. But its belatedness perhaps also gives it the possibility of returning otherwise to the Hegel-Derrida relation, of conceiving this relation in a manner that might not have been possible in the heat of the moment. This is of course not to claim that this reconceptualisation should be in any way ‘definitive.’

2. The Gift of Hegel

Rather than outlining the terms of an opposition, the present study might be read as tracing the inheritance of a debt or the reception of a gift. When viewed through the lens of the *Science of Logic*, what might we suggest, then, that Hegel gives to Derrida?

First of all, in the first book of the *Logic*—the Doctrine of Being—Hegel gives an immanent critique of immediacy—of what Derrida will term ‘presence.’ What is critiqued under the heading of immediacy is the notion that things are what they are simply by themselves, without relation to other things. By the end of the logic of being, such simple

² Joseph Cohen, ‘The Event of a Reading: Hegel “with” Derrida’, in *Hegel’s Thought in Europe: Currents, Crosscurrents and Undercurrents*, ed. by Lisa Herzog and George Pattison (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 251. Cf. also Derrida’s remarks on the inadequacy and self-satisfaction of such position-taking in P 96/131-2.

immediacy has been seen to 'sublate' itself, which means that, in truth, things are what they are *only* through their relations to other things, and so *are* nothing prior to these relations. For Hegel, this means that their identity does not precede their difference. And this itself means that the critique of immediacy is also a critique of the notion of an 'origin' that would not already have displaced itself by 'showing itself' within this process of mediation.

Hegel thus conceives essence as this 'originary' process of mediation or *reflection*. Now in truth, nothing precedes this process, and yet, the process still *seems* to have to presuppose that there was initially something there to be mediated—an 'origin'—in order for it to get going at all. Essence thus appears to be troubled by a 'past' that it has not succeeded in shaking off. This 'past,' however, is not simply a leftover of the immediacy of being that has not fully disappeared, for in truth it does not precede the process of reflection 'on' it. Indeed, as we see in chapter 1, it is this reflection itself which, as it were, generates the 'illusion' that something preceded it. What seems to be referred back to is thus a 'past that has never been present,' a *revenant* which returns for the first time. Though it is not named as such in Hegel's text, the notion of such a *remainder* will have been the second aspect of Hegel's gift to Derrida.

Now it is precisely because the 'illusion' of this origin arises through the movement of reflection itself that reflection can never definitively 'catch up with' and overcome it. As soon as it has done so—as soon as it has explained the remainder away as in truth 'only' an illusion, the remainder returns again. It thus acquires the strange status of a 'necessary illusion.' Since the basic structure of reflection runs through Hegel's entire logic of essence, the latter is then continually haunted by the very spectre that it conjures up. The sphere of essence is therefore marked by an unsettling *Nachträglichkeit*. This takes the form of a disruption of the unity or the closure of reflection: though the

remainder does not lie outside reflection, it also cannot be made fully transparent to any given reflection, and thus leaves itself open to being subsumed under, but never definitively captured by, many different reflections. We might then describe it as the 'outside inside,' or the 'quasi-transcendental,' which gives rise to a contaminating form of difference: a difference that is neither the simply 'external' difference between immediately given terms, nor the wholly 'internal' difference between the moments of a totality.

3. Forking Paths

3.1. Hegel's Sublation of the Remainder

How, then, does Hegel's *Logic* respond to this remainder, to this spectre that it has conjured up? It does so not by living with it, but by repeatedly conjuring it away. This takes place through what in chapters 2 and 4 I call the all-or-nothing character of the dialectical movement in the sphere of essence, which leaves no space or time for the remainder to persist in. Almost as soon as the remainder appears, it comes to be determined as that which falls outside of reflection and so gives rise to wholly external difference (diversity), only for this external difference to collapse into wholly internal difference (opposition and contradiction). This all-or-nothing movement serves to guard against the contaminating effect of the remainder, and in the moment of contradiction it 'overcomes' the remainder by re-establishing the unity of reflection or the identity of identity and difference.

The remainder will return again and again throughout the sphere of essence in the form of the difference of identity and difference, and this movement from diversity to

opposition and contradiction will be repeated. Yet with each new passage through contradiction the remainder is 'reduced' ever further until it vanishes entirely. At this point, the logic of essence gives way to the logic of the concept—to the complete identity of identity and difference. The concept thus reconstitutes the simple presence critiqued in the logic of being, not *as* this simple presence, but as *self*-presence—as the complete transparency of the self to itself. This eternal self-presence is no longer troubled by a 'past' that it cannot catch up with; as we see in chapter 5, it has overcome the diachrony of essence to such an extent that it can even be said to give itself its own 'history.'

3.2. Derrida's 'Ingratitude'

How, then, does Derrida respond to the gift of Hegel? He does so not by faithfully taking up what Hegel believed himself to be bequeathing, but by attending to what in this gift is not *given*—to what is not 'obvious' or 'self-evident.' Derrida responds, then, by dwelling on the remainder to which the *Logic* fails to give time and which it rushes past in its desire for reconciliation. He attends to that which Hegel's *Logic* gestures towards, but which only appears between its lines—to what Hegel 'saw without seeing' or simply could not see: 'Thus he must be followed to the end, without reserve, to the point of agreeing with himself against himself and of wresting his discovery from the too *conscientious* interpretation he gave of it' (WD 328/381).

Derrida's interminable response to Hegel thus consists in thinking through this blind spot and pausing to consider where the remainder might lead us if it is not passed over. This thinking through of the remainder leads to a form of negativity that is neither abstract nor absolute—a 'negativity *without reserve*'—and a difference that resists and displaces its determination as either simply 'external' or wholly 'internal.' In chapter 3 I

therefore suggest that Derrida departs from Hegel in coming to think a form of 'diversity' that is not the symmetrical 'own other' of opposition, and so does not simply collapse into opposition but continually exceeds it.

Nevertheless, it would be too simple to regard Derrida as simply working out *another* logic from the remains of or the scraps left behind by Hegel's *Logic*. To think that this could be the case would be to fail to take the measure of Derrida's 'ingratitude.' For what is gestured toward but repressed within Hegel's *Logic* is a form of difference that, in being essentially multiple, cannot be 'faithfully' presented within any pure onto-logic, insofar as the latter must treat and *name* difference *as such*. What the thinking of the remainder ultimately calls into question, then, is the very possibility of such a logic, which is why in chapter 3 I also claim that Derrida does not and cannot elaborate a *general* 'philosophy,' one whose principle would be 'differance.'

This also means that the question of the difference between Hegel and Derrida is not ultimately a theoretical question, one that could be treated in a 'neutral' manner. It is rather a question of desire and repression. If an onto-logic can constitute itself only by passing over and repressing the remainder, then the question becomes that of the desire for such a systematic project, and the desire for a 'way out' of it. Through a reading of *Glas* in chapter 6 I therefore show that the question of Derrida's reception of the gift of Hegel opens on to the question of Derrida's and Hegel's respective responses to the unreason of that which 'gives to thinking'—to that which both gives rise to thinking and continues to animate and potentially haunt thinking. There I consider how, for Derrida, the Hegelian response to this gift is to take it 'as given,' in a manner that conceals a desire to make the gift fully transparent—to make it one's *own* and ultimately give it to oneself. I contrast this with a Derridean response to the gift which attempts to avoid such an

appropriation, which rather affirms that that which gives rise to thinking does not let thinking 'rest,' and so leaves what the gift will have been still to come.

Chapter 1: The Opening of Essence: Reflection

Part 1. From Being to Essence

1.1. The Doctrine of Essence in the Context of Hegel's *Science of Logic*

In the following, I shall give a reading of the first chapter of Hegel's Doctrine of Essence, which is the middle book of his *Science of Logic*. This book is preceded by the Doctrine of Being and followed by the Doctrine of the Concept. Through this reading I shall attempt to bring into relief certain key aspects of Hegel's conception of essence, while also indicating their proximity to certain elements of Derrida's thought. This proximity itself will be more fully explored in chapter 3.

Before discussing the opening chapter of the Doctrine of Essence in detail, however, certain preliminary remarks are in order concerning the manner in which I shall treat Hegel's *Logic* as a whole and the place of the Doctrine of Essence within it. In the following I shall consider the *Logic* as an ontology which unfolds the fundamental categories of being. These are at the same time the fundamental categories of thought, insofar as, for Hegel, the *Logic* begins from the standpoint of *Wissenschaft*, or the identity of thought and being—a standpoint that may be attained either by following the course of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or through the 'resolve' to think presuppositionlessly (SL 68-70/LS 56-59). The *Logic* presents these categories in a strict order: it begins with the most abstract category—that of pure being—and progresses to ever more concrete and

comprehensive categories of being.¹ Each new category is generated by, as Stephen Houlgate notes, rendering explicit what is implicit within the foregoing category.²

While the *Logic* in this way only comes to its ultimate truth by moving forward, as Hegel famously notes, this is at the same time a movement back ‘into the ground’ (SL 71/LS 59-60).³ Each new category constitutes the *truth* or, loosely speaking, the ‘ground’ of the categories that have preceded it, insofar as it comprehends them as ‘moments’ of a more complex structure. It cannot simply prescind from these prior categories, but must account for their prior *seeming* truth on its own terms. Likewise, each new ‘sphere’ of the *Logic*, such as the Doctrine of Essence, must account for the general form of being which characterised the previous sphere.

Yet in addition to being an ontology, the *Logic* is also a critical work. This is so, firstly, with respect to the individual categories of being within all three spheres of the *Logic*. For Hegel, all of these categories are necessary to a complete account of what being proves to be. Nevertheless, the unfolding of all that is implicit in these categories allows Hegel to criticise those modes of thought, and those historical philosophies, which cling only to certain aspects of each category, and which therefore remain ‘one-sided.’

¹ It should be noted here that all of the books or ‘spheres’ of the *Logic* are concerned with being, though only the first is named the Doctrine of Being. The different books are distinguished by the fundamental *form* of being that each deals with, as will become clear in the following.

² Stephen Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, in *A Companion To Hegel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), pp. 139–58 (p. 139).

³ ‘It must be admitted that it is an important consideration—one which will be found in more detail in the logic itself—that the advance is a *retreat into the ground*, to what is *primary* and *true*, on which depends and, in fact, from which originates, that with which the beginning is made’ (SL 71/LS 59-60). This paradoxical movement will be treated in the second part of chapter 5, with a view to the *Logic* as a whole.

Such modes of thought are associated in general with what Hegel terms the 'understanding' [*Verstand*] as opposed to 'reason' [*Vernunft*]. In the logic of being, for example, the understanding abstracts the finite from the infinite; in the doctrine of essence, it unquestioningly adheres to the principle of identity, $A = A$; and in the logic of the concept it conceives the universal as abstract rather than concrete. As we shall see, the key deficiency of the understanding is its failure to think the dynamic unity of any given category with its contrary.

Secondly, while the understanding is criticised within all of the three spheres of the *Logic*, its mode of thinking is more suited to grasping the categories of being as they appear in the logic of being and, to a lesser extent, the logic of essence, than it is to grasping the categories of the logic of the concept. The categories of being and essence are not in themselves 'false'; they are necessary moments of the unfolding of being. Nevertheless, the form of being that is common to all of the categories in the sphere of being or the sphere of essence does not represent the ultimate or entire truth of being; the latter is only reached with the transition to the logic of the concept. At the level of its different spheres, then, the *Logic* provides an immanent critique of those forms of thinking that cling to a *seinslogisch* or a *wesenslogisch* conception of being. It does so by bringing to light the contradictions inherent in the categories of these spheres, and ultimately, the contradictions inherent to these spheres as a whole. In the logic of being, this constitutes an immanent critique of a conception of being as immediacy; in the logic of essence, of being as reflection. To this extent, then, I would agree with Michael Theunissen that the first two books of the *Logic* (the 'objective logic') unfold partly as a critique of 'metaphysics' as 'objectifying thinking.'⁴ It is only in the logic of the concept

⁴ Michael Theunissen, *Sein und Schein: Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik*, 2nd edition (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 24–27.

(the 'subjective logic') that the ultimate truth of being comes to be presented on its own terms, or in and for itself.

On this basis, we can gain an understanding of how the *Wesenslogik* both expounds 'the truth of' essence while at the same time bringing to light its contradictory character, and thereby highlighting the 'one-sidedness' of the historical conceptions of essence that have attempted to repress this contradiction. On the one hand, essence designates that which is *not* the immediate determinations of something and which is indifferent to the changes in these determinations that are brought about through something's interactions with other things. We might call this the Platonic-Aristotelian conception of essence as that which is what it is *kath' hauto*, or in virtue of itself.⁵ On the other hand, essence also designates that which *cannot* remain indifferent to these determinations, since then it would not be the essence of something in all its particularity—it would not *fully* account for that thing. In this respect, essence does not prescind from the immediate determinations of something, but is only the process of their differentiation and mediation. Rather than minimising this contradiction by repressing the latter aspect of essence, Hegel emphasises it, and develops his conception of essence by confronting this tension directly. On the one hand, the essence of something is indeed *not* its immediate determinations; on the other hand, as we shall see, Hegel shows that genuinely *not* being the immediate determinations of something means not being *immediately different* from these determinations.

In the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel writes that the Doctrine of Essence is the most difficult part of his philosophical system (Enc § 114). This, as we shall see, is partly due to the paradoxes to which the contradictory nature of essence gives rise. But we should

⁵ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 2, p. 1626 (Metaphysics, 1029b14).

note here that it is also due to the manner in which essence has to be thought as the truth, and thus the reconceptualisation, of the sphere of being. This forces Hegel, in giving his account of essence, to use terms like ‘immediacy’ in such a way that it is not always clear whether they are being used in their *seins-* or *wesenslogisch* senses. Let us now explore this transition and reconceptualisation in detail.

1.2 The Becoming of Essence: Immediacy and Mediation

Essence does not come to supplant being but is rather that which being, in Houlgate’s words, ‘proves to be.’⁶ In this sense, essence is ‘the truth of being’ (SL 389/LW 3). Nevertheless, essence constitutes a ‘new’ logical sphere insofar as it arises only when being loses its hitherto most basic determination: that of *immediacy*. Immediacy is both a ‘positive’ and a ‘negative’ concept. On the one hand, if something is immediate it is what it is by itself (in the following I shall call this *positive immediacy*). On the other hand, as Houlgate notes, immediacy also has a negative connotation. That something is what it is ‘by itself’ also means that it is what it is because it is *not* mediated by something else (it is *im-*mediate). But this implies that it is also constituted by its negative relation to what it is not, and in this respect its immediacy has what Hegel calls a *determinate* aspect (I shall therefore call this *determinate immediacy*).⁷

⁶ Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, p. 140.

⁷ Cf. Stephen Houlgate, ‘Hegel’s Critique of Foundationalism in the Doctrine of Essence’, in *German Philosophy Since Kant*, ed. by A. O’Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 21. It should be noted that, ‘positive’ and ‘determinate’ immediacy are never simply distinct from one another. Distinguishing the two forms of immediacy in this way, however, will help to clarify the nature of the different moments of essence in Hegel’s account.

Immediacy, as one might infer from this description, is a contradictory concept. If something is what it is only if it is not what it is not then its very being is already *mediated* by what it is not. Indeed, this contradiction surfaces throughout Hegel's logic of being in the relation between categories such as something and other or the finite and the infinite, and its resolution at any given moment constitutes the transition to a new category which contains the previous two contrary terms within itself. Nevertheless, we might say that the sphere of being as a whole suffers from a bad memory, for this mediation is not internalised (*er-innert*) within the new category that forms the beginning of each dialectical movement, so an immediate difference again resurfaces between this new category and its other. Mediation thus remains merely implicit throughout the logic of being until we reach the end of its third section, entitled 'Measure.' At this point, the two general categories which have formed the basis of all the other categories in this sphere, namely 'quality' and 'quantity' are seen to be mediated by one another.

Quality designates the immediate unity of being and non-being which, following the restless movement of becoming at the opening of the *Logic*, first allows the immediacy of pure being to take on a determinate *way* of being—that is, to be what it is partly through a negative relation to what it is not. The logic of quality becomes a logic of quantity when, at the end of the analysis of 'being-for-self,' the difference between logical determinations becomes no longer one of kind, but of magnitude. This does not mean that quality disappears, but rather that any change can henceforth only take place with reference to a presupposed stable quality, which would be logically prior to, and the 'basis' of, the quantitative differences between terms.

In the logic of measure, however, this logical precedence of quality over quantity is overturned when it becomes clear that a change in quantity can produce a change in quality, such as when water is heated to 100° Celsius or the population of a state

becomes so large as to require a different form of government. Thus, if quality always has a certain quantity, and if quantity *can* affect quality, then quality never was simply independent of quantity: quality, as the quality it is, must always have been determined or *mediated* by quantity from the outset. This does not amount to a *reversal* of logical priority, however, for there is equally no quantity that is not already relative to a certain quality; it rather implies the mutual mediation of quality and quantity.

Each is then only what it is through the other. If this is so, however, it is no longer possible to say that each is clearly distinct from the other. Indeed, although there must remain a certain distinction between the two in order to speak of one mediating the other at all, each must be said to only find itself in the other. As Hegel puts this in the *Encyclopaedia*: 'quality is indeed *in-itself* [*an sich*] quantity, and conversely, quantity is *in-itself* quality, too. Hence, in that the two determinations pass over into one another in the process of measure, each of them only becomes what it already is *in-itself*' (Enc § 111). Because quality and quantity are the two most general categories of the logic of being—the two of which all the others are specific forms—their mutual mediation signals the collapse of the immediacy of being *tout court*. The conclusion of the logic of being and the starting point of the logic of essence is thus, as Houlgate notes, that being has proved to be *non-immediacy*.⁸

In particular, what has collapsed here is immediacy in its *determinate* sense, for quality and quantity have proved to be incapable of maintaining their *distinction* from one another—of remaining *not* the other. In this case, the collapse of immediacy must be conceived as the negation of negation. This does not amount to the simple doubling of negation, but to the *self-relation* of negation, insofar as quality and quantity both negate their *own* negative relation to each other. In the following we shall see that the paradoxes

⁸ Houlgate, 'Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's Science of Logic', p. 140.

and contradictions of essence all have their root in the ontological ambiguity of a negation that negates itself, i.e. a negation that must be both negation and not negation. We now need to follow Hegel in exploring the different senses in which such negation can be understood.

1.3 The Activity of Being

Before doing so, we might step back to consider what the collapse of the distinction between quality and quantity already indicates about the nature of Hegelian essence. The transition, Hegel notes, is a form of inwardisation or recollection [*Er-innerung*] from out of the immediacy of being (SL 389/LW 3). Essence is thus the ‘memory,’ lacked by being, that can hold two contrary terms together in order to think their mutual mediation. As we shall soon see, the non-immediacy of being therefore comes to be conceived as a process of *reflection* which posits and contains within itself the terms that in the sphere of being seemed to be immediate. In the literature on Hegel’s account of essence, the nature of this reflection is disputed. On a reasonably influential reading, reflection is conceived as a process of *thinking* which mediates and thereby unifies the seemingly immediate determinations. As Béatrice Longuenesse writes:

the transition from “Being” to “Essence” is the transition from determinations which seem to exist by themselves and to be immediately presented in “things,” to the revelation that the apparently most “immediate” determinations are always constituted and organized in the context of a unified process of thinking.⁹

⁹ Béatrice Longuenesse, *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 7. Cf. also Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Such a reading, however goes against certain unambiguous remarks of Hegel's concerning reflection. In so doing, it risks construing Hegel as a 'subjective' rather than an 'absolute' idealist. Furthermore, it misses what is *really* interesting about the transition to essence. In his introductory remarks on essence, Hegel states that the movement of mediation is 'the movement of being itself' (SL 389/LW 3). Commenting on the transition to essence he states that 'this reflection of the differences into their unity is not the product of the *external* reflection of a subjective consciousness, but [it is] the very nature of the differences of this unity to sublimate themselves, with the result that their unity proves to be absolute negativity' (SL 384/LS 430, trans. modified¹⁰).

Commentators such as Stephen Houlgate, Jean Hyppolite and Dieter Henrich are more attentive to the fact that the *Doctrine of Essence* is not the point at which a subject comes to reflect on being, but at which being comes to reflect on (or simply to reflect) itself.¹¹ Indeed, Henrich connects the transition to essence to Hegel's discussion of the concepts of substance and subject in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel there writes of his philosophical system, that, 'everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*' (Ph 10/22-23). For the true to be subject is, Hegel remarks, for it to be 'the movement of positing itself, or [...] the mediation of its self-othering with itself' (Ph 18/23). Essence, as Henrich notes, is thus the point in Hegel's logical thought where we see being begin to determine itself as

¹⁰ Miller has, 'not merely the product of the external reflection of the subjective thinker,' whereas Hegel's German is 'nicht die *äußere* Reflexion des *denkenden* Bewußtseins.'

¹¹ Cf. Houlgate, 'Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's Science of Logic'; Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, trans. by Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Dieter Henrich, 'Hegel's Logik der Reflexion. Neue Fassung', in *Die Wissenschaft der Logik und die Logik der Reflexion*, Hegel Studien, Beiheft 18 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978).

subject: it is no longer inert and simply self-identical, but rather that which actively relates itself to itself through the determinations that it gives itself.¹² We can now see, then, that the significance of the transition to essence is in fact the reverse of that presented by Longuenesse, as is succinctly captured by George di Giovanni:

At this point of the *Logic* [...] the object has begun to exhibit a *reflective* structure, in virtue of which it can perform vis à vis its own manifestations the synthesizing function for which thought was solely responsible in the dialectic of being.¹³

Part 2. Essence and *Schein*

2.1 One Step Forward...The Essential and the Unessential

Rather than beginning with a conception of non-immediacy as reflection, or even mediation, however, Hegel's account of essence first seems to step back into the sphere of being. Essence as non-immediacy is first of all taken up as the immediate *negation* of being. As such, it takes the form of the *essential* over against the *unessential*. As Hegel writes, 'Essence that issues from being seems to confront it as an opposite; this immediate being is, in the first instance, the *unessential*' (SL 394/LW 7).

Why such a step backward should be made is not made clear by Hegel. Nevertheless, in a manner that recalls his analysis of the finite and the infinite in the Doctrine of Being, Houlgate indicates that the initial simple negation of being by essence

¹² Henrich, p. 208. This and all subsequent translations of this paper are my own.

¹³ George Di Giovanni, 'Reflection and Contradiction. A Commentary on Some Passages of Hegel's Science of Logic.', *Hegel Studien*, 8 (1973), 131–61 (p. 133).

can be seen as part of the unfolding of *all* that is implicit in the notion of non-immediacy.¹⁴ As we shall see, this moment of simple negation never entirely vanishes from essence, but it will come to be seen as a moment of a wider reflection in which the sense of such negation is transformed.

Though such simple negation may be a necessary moment of essence, however, Hegel's isolation of it here also allows him to criticise those conceptions of essence that do not move beyond it. Such conceptions, governed by the understanding, would take essence to be the simple cancellation of all the immediate determinations of things. Hegel writes that such abstractions determine essence as 'a being in which everything determinate and finite is negated. It is thus the *indeterminate*, simple unity from which what is determinate has been eliminated in an *external manner*' (SL 389/LW 3).

Hegel finds fault with this conception of essence as the essential in contrast to the unessential not because it falls short of a pre-given notion of reflection, but because it contradicts itself. In being simply *not* immediacy it is itself immediate; it stands over against being, Hegel writes, 'only as [an] *other*' (SL 390/LW 8). Rather than negating immediacy, then, it has only reconstituted it. As there would be no *formal* ontological difference between essence conceived in this way and immediate being, Hegel contends that there could be no necessary (i.e. immanent) reason for calling the one essential and the other inessential.

If essence is the truth of being, then the problem with conceiving essence as the essential is that this fails to grasp the absolute *lack* of immediacy that being has proved to be. Being is only conceived as negative, as Hegel notes, '*in relation to* essence, not in and

¹⁴ Houlgate, 'Hegel's Critique of Foundationalism in the Doctrine of Essence', p. 23; Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2006), p. 403.

for itself' (SL 394/LW 8). In truth, however, as Hegel reminds us a little further on, 'Essence is the absolute negativity of being; it is being itself, but not only determined as an other, but being that has sublated itself both as immediate being and also as immediate negation, as negation that is burdened with otherness' (SL 395/LW 9, trans. modified).¹⁵ It is from an acknowledgement of being as not merely unessential, but rather as an *Unwesen* or *Schein* that the next, more adequate conception of essence will have to set out.

2.2 Der Schein and das Scheinen¹⁶

Being is now taken up as that which has sublated itself, and which *is* only in its sublatedness.¹⁷ In other words, it is taken up as that which cannot be genuine immediacy but only *seeming* immediacy (*der Schein*). Nevertheless, Hegel notes that even in this sublated form, being still *seems* to be distinct from essence (SL 395/LW 9). We can see

¹⁵ In Miller's translation, the omission of 'only' in 'not only determined as an other' distorts the complexity of Hegel's analysis here, for, as we noted above, negation will never entirely lose its immediate aspect, even within the sphere of essence.

¹⁶ Miller's translation of *Schein* as 'illusory being' too strongly suggests that what is in question here is a *bloßer Schein*—a mere illusion. Di Giovanni's translation of *Schein* as 'shine,' retains an important connotation of the German term (one which allows Hegel to connect it so easily to the concept of reflection), but takes too much emphasis away from the sense of *Schein* as 'seeming.' While 'seeming' may in some cases function as a translation of *Schein*, however, it blurs the distinction between *der Schein* and *das Scheinen*, where the former is a moment within the latter. Accordingly, I shall generally leave *Schein* untranslated, and will translate *Scheinen* by 'seeming.'

¹⁷ Throughout the present study, I follow Miller's translation of *Aufhebung* as 'sublation.' As Hegel famously remarks, *Aufheben* means both 'to nullify and 'to preserve.' Yet at this point in Hegel's derivation of essence, it is the nullification of the sphere of being that is in question.

why this should be if we consider the structure of *Schein* more closely. That *Schein* is only as sublated means that it is 'only by means of its negation' (SL 396/LW 9). It does not precede its being negated, yet at the very moment that it is negated, it flashes up as *that which* is negated. This is what gives it its seeming immediacy over against essence, though in truth this immediacy is always already sublated.¹⁸

Since being has thus been shown to be a 'nullity' or a negative which 'sublates itself and withdraws into essence,' the question is no longer how *being* can seem to be distinct from essence. As Houlgate notes, Hegel's attention now turns to the question of how, even though it is the truth of being, *essence* itself can seem to be distinct from being, i.e. how it can seem to be immediately self-sufficient. Indeed, Hegel states that 'all that has to be shown is that the determinations which distinguish [*Schein*] from essence are determinations of essence itself, and further, that this *determinateness of essence* which *Schein* is, is sublated in essence itself (SL 397/LW 11).

As Henrich observes, section two of the chapter, '*Schein*' thus involves identifying the *nothingness* [*Nichtigkeit*] of *Schein* with what Hegel terms the *negativity* of essence.¹⁹ The latter concept is rather abruptly introduced at this point in Hegel's derivation of essence, so in order to see how Hegel arrives at it, we will need to reconsider the nullity or nothingness that being has proved to be. For if essence is nothing *other* than the truth

¹⁸ With a view to Derrida, we might then describe *Schein* as a 'trace' which only appears in its disappearance and disappears in its very appearance. *Schein* seems to represent a falling away from immediacy or the diminution of an initial 'presence,' yet in truth this is an immediacy that never was, but is only projected backward, after the fact. This is not the place to pursue this thought, however; for it is not until a little later in the course of the logic of essence that Hegel shows that, in truth, essence does not 'emerge' from being, but rather *itself* projects the illusion that being preceded it.

¹⁹ Henrich, p. 245.

of being, then its negativity must be another *aspect* of the structure that can also be described as a nullity.

2.2.1 Accounting for the Schein of Immediacy

Schein, as we have seen, is the determinate immediacy or the 'negative' that *is* only in being negated. But this means that it can no longer be conceived as being negated from the 'outside': its negation has become internal to it, such that it is negated *in itself*. It must therefore be conceived as self-relating negation. Yet the latter can be regarded from two 'angles.' On the one hand, it is self-relating *negation* or a *negative* relation to self. Seen from this angle, it is the nullity of *Schein*. On the other hand, it is *self-relating* negation, or 'a *relation* of negation only to itself' (SL 398/LW 12). Seen from this angle, the self-relating negation is the 'negativity' of essence which constantly remains with or, as Hegel puts it, 'goes together with' itself. Because it relates only to *itself* it seems to be simply immediate and thus to be distinct from the nullity of being, that is, from *Schein*.

But it is important to note that essence as negativity is not the simple *coincidence* of the negation with itself and thus its collapse into positive immediacy. If this were so, it would only constitute a return to the simple immediacy of being and would again become an immediate, determinate essence over against being. At this point, the self-relating negation that essence has proved to be must rather be thought as a *process* of self-relation. Essence, then, is not more 'profound' than being, but more *dynamic*; it is nothing but the continual and circular process in which negation relates to itself first by dividing itself and becoming determinate, and then coinciding with itself. Furthermore, as the *process* of self-relating negation—a process which encompasses both of these moments and in which essence remains with itself even in its division—essence takes on

what Hegel calls a 'reflected immediacy.' It is this new form of immediacy, which is gained only through the movement of reflection, that accounts for, but is not itself reducible to, what *seemed* to be essence's simple immediacy over against being.

In this process that essence has proved to be, *Schein* now figures as a moment, such that, as Houlgate remarks, essence can be thought as 'projecting' *Schein*.²⁰ *Schein* is the moment within the self-relation of negation when negation is divided from and opposed to itself. As Hegel writes, 'The immediacy of the determinateness in *Schein* over against essence is consequently nothing other than essence's own immediacy; but the immediacy is not simply affirmative [*seiend*], but is the purely mediated or reflected immediacy' (SL 397/LW 11).

In interpreting *Schein* as the *determinate* or distinctly *negative* moment of this process, the reading I have given goes against that of Henrich. For Henrich, *Schein* amounts to the reconstruction within essence of the *positive* immediacy of being. It is conceived as the positive moment that is produced when negation cancels itself out, even if this moment is destined to immediately vanish.²¹ Nevertheless, though the *Logic* is not always unambiguous on this point, in numerous passages Hegel clearly emphasises the determinate nature of *Schein*. To take just one of these, he writes, for instance, that '*Schein* is essence itself in the determinateness of being. Essence seems [*hat einen Schein*] because it is *determinate* within itself and thereby distinguished from its absolute unity' (SL 398/LW 12).²²

²⁰ Houlgate, 'Hegel's Critique of Foundationalism in the Doctrine of Essence', p. 28.

²¹ Henrich, p. 264.

²² A little earlier Hegel states that *Schein* is 'the determinacy of being against mediation: being as moment' (SL 397/LW 11).

2.2.2 Dialectical Reversal

Schein, we have seen, is thus no longer negated by essence, but is in truth only a 'phenomenon' generated by essence itself. As Hegel states, *Schein* in essence is not the *Schein* of an other, but '*Schein* as such [*an sich*], the *Schein* of essence itself' (SL 398/LW 12, trans. modified). Nevertheless, as Houlgate makes clear, this does not mean that essence can be thought as something that is distinct from, but generative of, *Schein*;²³ rather, it is 'nothing but *the very process of seeming*' itself. Houlgate elaborates on this in the following way:

All there is, is the process of seeming itself—the process whereby sheer negativity first seems to be immediacy, then seems to be distinct from its own seeming immediacy, and finally dissolves this distinction and reveals itself to be nothing but seeming as such.²⁴

At a certain level, this does not mean that essence is the same as *Schein*. Essence is rather the *process* of seeming [*das Scheinen*] whereas *Schein* is one moment of this process. Nevertheless, at a more subtle level, even this distinction breaks down, for it is ultimately impossible to isolate one moment of this process without it immediately becoming the other—and so without it showing itself to be the whole of the process. This is what allows Hegel to indicate, in the final paragraphs of his account of *Schein*, a dialectical reversal between the 'moments' represented by *Schein* and essence. Of the former, he writes that it is

²³ Houlgate, 'Hegel's Critique of Foundationalism in the Doctrine of Essence', p. 28.

²⁴ Houlgate, 'Hegel's Critique of Foundationalism in the Doctrine of Essence', pp. 28–9.

a non-self-subsistent being which is in its own self sublated and null. As such, it is the negative turning back to itself (*das in sich zurückgehende Negative*), the non-self-subsistent. This *self-relation* of the negative or of non-self-subsistent being is its *immediacy*; it is an other than the negative itself...[it] is purely *self-related* negativity, the absolute sublating of the determinateness itself (SL 398/LW 12).

Essence, on the other hand, 'the self-subsistent, as self-related *immediacy*, is equally sheer determinateness and moment and *is* only as self-related negativity' (SL 398/LW 12). This reversal amounts to the notion that that which is least self-subsistent, that which can least lay claim to its own being, proves to be most self-subsistent and that that which seemed most self-subsistent is in fact least stable in its being.

At the end of Hegel's account of 'seeming,' it becomes evident that there is then only one process of the self-relating negation, or negativity—a circle in which certain moments can be momentarily glimpsed, but which immediately vanish at the very moment they are distinguished. To this extent we might then see these moments as different *ways* in which self-relating negation might be conceived—as either *self-relating* negativity or *negative* self-relation, to borrow John Burbidge's terms.²⁵

2.2.3 Seeming and the Trace

We can now look back and consider how far Hegel's conception of essence has already departed from a notion of essence as that which underlies and possesses a certain mastery over the immediate determinations of things. Hegelian essence, as Houlgate

²⁵ John W. Burbidge, *On Hegel's Logic: Fragments of a Commentary* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 65.

remarks, both generates and undermines the illusion that there is a foundation to being.²⁶ It generates the illusion because the self-sublation of *Schein* seems to 'point back'²⁷ to that which is simply-self equal; in other words, the negation of the negation indicates an underlying positive term. But it undermines it insofar as this seeming positive self-equality immediately sublates *itself* and becomes determinate, or 'seems' within itself, and in truth only is positively immediate insofar as it remains with itself throughout this whole process of self-division and self-coincidence.²⁸ Essence, as Houlgate writes, is thus only the 'movement from one seeming to another, from seeming to seeming.'²⁹

This movement 'from seeming to seeming,' moreover, clearly bears distinct similarities to the movement of the Derridean trace. Like *Schein*, the trace 'points back to' an immediacy which seems to underlie it, but what seems to underlie it is only another trace, another *Schein*. Hegelian seeming might then seem to be equivalent to the movement of Derridean differance as a chain of displacement which ceaselessly moves from one trace to another, without coming to rest at a final term which would be what it is by itself. Nevertheless, despite the strength of the resemblance, it can only be pushed so far. For even though the process of seeming contains a moment of division, this

²⁶ Houlgate, 'Hegel's Critique of Foundationalism in the Doctrine of Essence', p. 20. In this way, Hegel's 'method' here might be thought to foreshadow Derrida's deconstructive practice, insofar as it takes one historically dominant interpretation of a concept and shows it to be a moment of a wider process that that moment does not govern.

²⁷ Stephen Houlgate, 'Why Hegel's Concept Is Not the Essence of Things', in *Hegel's Theory of the Subject*, ed. by D. G. Carlson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 21.

²⁸ Essence could therefore be said to exhibit two forms of positive immediacy: the positive immediacy that seems to underlie its seeming, and the positive immediacy of the movement as a whole insofar as that movement remains a process of *self*-relation throughout.

²⁹ Houlgate, 'Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's Science of Logic', p. 141.

division is still a *self*-division in a process which remains a *self*-relation at all times. As di Giovanni puts this, the movement '*remains with itself* no matter which limited term one may want to abstract from it.'³⁰ This is why this movement is circular and why Hegel will come to conceive it as reflection. As we shall see in chapter 3, the movement of Derridean differance cannot be conceived as such a self-relation, but rather as the dissolution of self-identity.

Part 3. Reflection

Essence has now proved to be a form of self-relation which continually moves from self-coincidence to self-division, and which as soon as it arrives at either of these poles, doubles back on itself. Accordingly, essence is now conceived as reflection. The movement of reflection is self-contained insofar as there can no longer be anything that lies outside it. This is because immediacy has proved to be in truth only reflected immediacy, 'only this very equality of the negation with itself, the negated negation, absolute negativity [...] immediacy is only this movement itself' (SL 399/LW 14, trans. modified).

Whereas the first part of the first chapter of the Doctrine of Essence was concerned with how essence emerges from being, the second part doubles back on itself and shows how the seeming immediacy of the sphere of being is an 'effect' generated by the movement of essence as a *process* of self-determination. As we shall see, however, essence fails to be absolutely self-determining. For reflection finds that that which it posits through its movement, it also has to presuppose as prior to, and the origin of, this

³⁰ George Di Giovanni, 'Reflection and Contradiction. A Commentary on Some Passages of Hegel's Science of Logic.', *Hegel Studien*, 8 (1973), 131-61 (p. 140).

movement. Nevertheless, this presupposition *itself* proves not to have preceded the reflection that has posited it. The presupposition itself has a presupposition, and so requires what we might call the 'origin of the origin.'

Reflection in its positing thus comes up against what we might call a remainder (a *reste* or *restance*) of the sphere of being which prevents it from being a purely active process of self-determination. But because this presupposition itself turns out not to precede the reflection that seems to reflect 'on' it, it is a remainder in a highly complex sense. Indeed, taking up Houlgate's hint,³¹ we might say that the remainder here is a *revenant* in the precise sense of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*: it is the 'return' of that which does not precede its returning, and which therefore 'returns' for the 'first time' (S 10/31). In other words, it is 'a past that has never been present.'

As Markus Gabriel notes, then, there is an essential belatedness or *Nachträglichkeit* to Hegelian essence.³² It is just because reflection's presupposition does not precede reflection that reflection cannot definitively catch up with or 'get behind' the remainder, and so remains 'haunted'³³ by the spectre that it conjures up, by this *nie aufgehende Rest*. This *Nachträglichkeit* itself rests on the logical diachrony of essence, in which the 'present' of its self-determination is immediately thrown back on to its 'past,' and this past is immediately thrown forward toward the present. Essence is not a smooth passage but rather a jolting or jerking movement between these two moments. At certain points along the path of essence, the diachrony between these two moments is brought together into the simultaneity of positing and presupposing, but due to the resistance of

³¹ Houlgate, 'Why Hegel's Concept Is Not the Essence of Things', p. 22.

³² Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology : Essays in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 133.

³³ Cf. Houlgate, 'Why Hegel's Concept Is Not the Essence of Things', p. 22.

the remainder, this simultaneity immediately comes apart again. The remainder might therefore be considered essence's quasi-transcendental condition, or its condition of possibility and impossibility.

Nevertheless, through the course of the logic of essence, the remainder is progressively reduced; and it is when it vanishes entirely that essence becomes the concept. One might then be tempted to interpret the reduction of the remainder as the reduction of reflection's presupposition to its own position. Yet this would be too simple. The concept, as we shall see, is indeed self-determining. But it is not simply self-determining in the manner that essence, as it were, 'wishes to be,' but fails to be. Indeed, Hegel's immanent critique of essence should rather be seen as a critique of such a simple sense of self-determination. In the sphere of the concept, it is rather the case that, to use Jean Hyppolite's terms, 'creation' is simultaneous with '*comprehension*.'³⁴ As we shall see, this does not mean that the concept does not still privilege *self*-determination, nor that a certain repression is not necessary in order for the concept to be reached. In chapters 2 and 4 we shall consider how this conjuration of the remainder takes place through an 'all-or-nothing' dialectical movement which does not let the remainder persist as the 'outside inside'; for now, however, let us turn to the logic of reflection in more detail.

3.1. Positing or 'Absolute' Reflection

3.1.1 Positing

Since it has no starting point outside itself and only *is* what it is in what we might call its 'self-assertion,' Hegel terms the first form of reflection he considers, 'positing [*setzende*]

³⁴ Hyppolite, p. 182.

reflection.’ In introducing this form of reflection, Hegel underscores its contradictory nature: the immediacy that the process of positing acquires through its self-relation, as the ‘going together’ (*zusammengehen*) with itself of negation (or the negative), is also a *negative* relation to self.

This movement of self-negation is described by Hegel as a *returning* movement.³⁵ As he writes, ‘The self-relation of the negative is, therefore, its return into itself; it is immediacy as the sublating of the negative, but immediacy simply and solely *as* this relation or as the return from a negative’ (SL 401/LW 15). Now Hegel’s use of the term ‘return’ [*Rückkehr*] may appear strange here, insofar as the premise of positing reflection is precisely that nothing precedes this movement. As I read him, however, Hegel is attempting to draw attention to the paradoxical character of reflection. Because the movement of self-relating negation acquires a certain immediacy in virtue of being a *self*-relation, it appears as a movement of return to the immediacy that ‘previously seemed to be the starting point of the reflective movement’ (SL 401/LW 15). In truth, however, we know from Hegel’s analysis of *Schein* that no such immediacy can precede the reflective movement: we know that the negation is always already in itself negated. Thus Hegel notes that, in truth, it is only *in* returning that reflection is ‘that which begins or returns’ (SL 401/LW 16, trans. modified).

The immediacy that is thus ‘posited’ in this movement, and which ‘previously seemed to be’ the origin of the movement, is called by Hegel *positedness* or *posited being* [*Gesetztsein*]. Posited being is that which *Schein* has become now that it has proved to be

³⁵ Houlgate criticises Miller’s translation of Hegel’s *Rückkehr* as ‘return,’ since it is only in the ‘return’ itself that that which would be ‘returned to’ would be created. Houlgate thus prefers ‘turning back’ (Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, p. 143). I retain ‘return’ here, however, in order to emphasise the paradoxical character of this movement.

only the *Schein* of essence itself. Like *Schein*, posited being is then a form of *determinate* immediacy. This is made clear by Hegel when he writes that it is ‘immediacy purely as determinacy’ (SL 401/LW 15, trans. modified), and ‘determinacy as negation in general [*überhaupt*]’ (SL 406/LW 22, trans. modified). Posited being is ‘negation,’ or the ‘negative,’ however, only insofar as the negative *is* only in already being negated. To this extent, its immediacy is ‘reflected,’ since posited being *is* only as a moment generated within the movement of reflection.

3.1.2. Presupposing

As we have seen, reflection has no starting point outside itself. At the same time, however, its movement is a ‘reflection-into-self’ only as the negation of the negative. In this movement, Hegel notes, reflection only comes to coincide with itself through its negation ‘of the negative as negative’ (SL 401/LW 16). But this suggests that it is not pure positing after all, and in fact has a presupposition. It has to *presuppose* this negative *as* (immediately) *negative* in order for the movement to begin at all. Thus, contrary to how things initially seemed, reflection does indeed seem to have to presuppose ‘that from which it is the return’ in order to return (SL 401/LW 16).

In taking this presupposition of positing reflection, along with Houlgate,³⁶ to be the very negative that is negated in positing reflection, my reading here again goes against Henrich’s. In line with his interpretation of seeming as positive immediacy, Henrich takes the presupposition of positing reflection to be a reconstruction, within essence, of the positive, not the determinate, immediacy of being. Henrich’s reasoning is the following: reflection, for Hegel, is the sublation of the negative. This negative is the

³⁶ Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, p. 144.

other of reflection and so stands in an immediately negative relation to reflection. But in subsuming this negative *as* negative, reflection also sublates the negative's *negative* relation to reflection,³⁷ and leaves it as what we might call a 'pure positive' that is indifferent to reflection. The presupposition is then posited *as not posited* because the relation cancels itself as a relation *in* the relation itself. Though the presupposition is generated by reflection, it thus seems to fall outside the circle of reflection.³⁸

Henrich's reading, then, is based on a particular reading of Hegel's statement that reflection is the negation of the negative as negative. For Henrich, the statement means here that reflection precisely negates the *negative* character of the negative, making it positive. Now Henrich's reading is not 'wrong'; the problem with it is rather that he is one step ahead of Hegel's development. As Houlgate notes, *this* dimension of reflection only comes to the fore in Hegel's discussion of the next form of reflection: external reflection.³⁹ In positing reflection, another dimension of this structure is emphasised, namely, that reflection is the negation of the negative as that which must first of all be taken as immediately *negative*.

3.1.3 The Presupposition of the Presupposition, or the Origin of the Origin

In the final paragraphs of Hegel's analysis of reflection, this seemingly immediate negative that positing reflection seems to have to presuppose is itself shown to have to presuppose positing reflection. This is because the very immediacy that the negative seems to possess has already been shown in the transition to essence to be self-subsuming.

³⁷ Henrich, p. 278.

³⁸ Henrich, p. 274.

³⁹ Houlgate, 'Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's Science of Logic', p. 144.

As Houlgate puts this: ‘we know that the reflexive negative never is simply negative but is self-negating *from the start*.’⁴⁰ Like *Schein*, the presupposition is only what it is—negative—in *being negated* or as a nullity. Like *Schein* too, it therefore does not precede its being negated, yet at the very moment that it is negated, it *seems* to be immediate because it flashes up momentarily as *that which* is negated. The presupposition, then, only *seems* to fall outside the circle of reflection, since it only falls outside the circle *from within* it.

We then return to the opening of positing reflection, since it has become clear that ‘what is thus found [*Dieses Vorgefundene*] only *comes to be* through being *left behind*; its immediacy is sublated immediacy’ (SL 402/LW 16). To this extent we might then say, following Houlgate, that that which is presupposed is in truth pre-*posited* (*Voraus-gesetzt*).⁴¹ Indeed, Hegel states that reflection ‘*setzt sich voraus*.’ Ultimately, of course, this amounts to saying that the presupposition is in truth only posited being: ‘Reflection, as absolute reflection is essence that seems within itself and presupposes for itself only seeming, positedness’ (SL 402-3/LW 17).

This does not mean, however, that the presupposition simply vanishes and that reflection closes on itself. Rather, the presupposition itself has been found to presuppose positing. Yet positing will again come to presuppose *it*, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Reflection is therefore described by Hegel as an ‘*absolute recoil* [absoluter Gegenstoß]’ within itself insofar as it ceaselessly moves from positing to presupposing (SL 402/LW 17).

Furthermore, this ceaseless movement takes place because, due to the contradictory nature of essence as the *self*-relation of *negation*, each of the moments *is* immediately the other in being itself, for each ‘is only itself, in that it is the negative of

⁴⁰ Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, pp. 144–5.

⁴¹ Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, p. 145.

itself' (SL 402/LW 17). Hegel thus writes of reflection that its 'arrival at itself is the sublation of itself and self-repelling, presupposing reflection, and its self-repelling is its arrival at itself' (SL 402/LW 17, trans. modified). It is this contradiction which gives rise to the *Nachträglichkeit* proper to essence that comes to the fore here. For the presupposition, as we have seen, does not precede positing, it only 'will have been' prior to positing through the movement of positing itself. As Houlgate writes, 'The reflexive negative, one might say, thus *comes to have been* simply negative in the very movement in which it *turns into* affirmative immediacy.'⁴² Likewise, positing will have been prior to the presupposition.

3.2 External Reflection

3.2.1 A New Presupposition

From the absolute recoil or, as Henrich puts it, 'endless circling' of positing reflection, a new form of reflection develops, which Hegel calls 'external reflection.' Like positing or absolute reflection, it too has a presupposition, but unlike positing reflection, its presupposition is not the negative that forms a moment within reflection, but a form of simply positive immediacy that seems wholly indifferent to reflection. This difference between the two forms of reflection is clearly marked by Hegel when he writes: 'Reflection, as absolute reflection is essence that seems within itself and presupposes for itself only seeming, only positedness. But external or real reflection presupposes itself as sublated, as the negative of itself' (SL 402-3/LW 17, trans. modified).

⁴² Houlgate, 'Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's Science of Logic', p. 145.

The presupposition of external reflection is therefore that which reflection finds before itself—that on which it reflects, but which itself is indifferent to reflection. For this reason Hegel associates external reflection with Kant’s concept of ‘reflective judgement.’ In a manner that will become important for the subsequent course of the logic of essence, the externality of the ‘object’ to reflection also means, as Hegel notes, that the object is indifferent to the determinations that reflection posits in it (SL /18/253).

We now need to consider in more detail how this presupposition differs from that of positing reflection, and how a complete indifference to reflection can emerge from the narrow circle of positing reflection. Henrich explains this in the following way. In the sphere of positing reflection, what is posited is pure *Schein*,⁴³ which cannot persist over against reflection. Since it is what it is only in being sublated by reflection, it is immediately reabsorbed back into the movement of reflection. In other words, it is a moment of reflection, but is not itself reflexive.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Henrich states that even within his account of positing reflection, Hegel often ‘arrived at the thesis that that which is posited in reflection can itself be regarded as reflection.’⁴⁵ This is for the same reason that *Schein*, in the ‘dialectical reversal’ in 2.2.2, above, proved to be reflexive: because it is only as negated, its negation is already internal to it, so it is already itself self-relating negation. For Henrich, it is when this reflexivity of posited being becomes *explicit* that the transition to external reflection occurs. Since posited being is thus reflexive, it becomes ‘self-sufficient’ and so indifferent to the reflection that posited it. In this sense, it has to be presupposed by reflection, even if it does not *precede* this reflection. Thus, Henrich

⁴³ Henrich, p. 278.

⁴⁴ Henrich, p. 281.

⁴⁵ Henrich, p. 289.

writes that external reflection sets out from 'posited being which is itself reflection and therefore has a stability.'⁴⁶

The problem with Henrich's reading here, however, is that he is again one step ahead of Hegel. In a sense, it has been clear since Hegel's discussion of *Schein* that that which is generated by reflection is itself implicitly reflexive. Nevertheless, it is only at the *end* of Hegel's account of external reflection that this becomes explicit [*gesetzt*] or 'for us' (SL 404/LW 18-19); and this is precisely the point at which the presupposition is *sublated*—at which the transition to a new form of 'determining' reflection takes place.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Henrich's account also fails to address Hegel's statement that the presupposition of external reflection is the negative or 'Nichtsein' of reflection (SL 400/LW 17-18). Hegel's statement indicates that what is in question here is not the negative of *this particular* reflection, and so another *form* or instance of reflection, but

⁴⁶ Henrich, p. 298.

⁴⁷ Di Giovanni gives a similar explanation to Henrich of how the presupposition of external reflection emerges and why it seems to be indifferent to reflection. He argues that, at the end of positing reflection, positing and presupposing are so thoroughly mediated by each other that each is in itself the entirety of the reflective movement. As he puts it: 'The same reason that makes it impossible for positing reflection to retain (except as a disappearing element) the distinction between its two moments equally accounts for their appearance as indifferent elements – for if each moment is already the other, each is the *whole*, and thus an object complete in itself' (di Giovanni, p. 153). As di Giovanni notes, such an explanation would accord with that given by Hegel to account for the later transition from the category of absolute difference to that of diversity (*Verschiedenheit*), which latter is described by Hegel as analogous to external reflection (di Giovanni, p.154). Yet in the transition to diversity, the reflexivity of that which is posited by reflection has already been established, whereas in the present case it is precisely a matter of establishing this reflexivity.

the negative of reflection *as such*.⁴⁸ Henrich is then right to say that external reflection's presupposition is distinguished from that of positing reflection by its independence from reflection; yet he is wrong about the reasons for this: it is not because the presupposition is itself reflection, but because it is that *simple immediacy* that is wholly indifferent to reflection.

Now if Henrich is one step ahead of Hegel, then, as Houlgate does, we can draw on his account of positing reflection in order to show how the presupposition of external reflection emerges.⁴⁹ I shall do so in a slightly different way to Houlgate. We can read the emergence of external reflection from positing reflection as the unfolding of all that is implicit in reflection as the negation of the negative as negative. This description of reflection returns in Hegel's account of external reflection, when he states that it, 'relates to its presupposition such that the latter is the negative of reflection, but so that this negative *as negative* is sublated. Reflection in its positing immediately sublates its positing and thus has an *immediate presupposition* (SL 403/LW 18 trans. modified).⁵⁰ We can then say, as Henrich did of positing reflection, that the sublation of the negative cancels the negative character of the latter and thereby also its negative relation to reflection. It thus leaves a 'purely positive' simple immediacy that is seemingly indifferent to reflection.

⁴⁸ Moreover, at a more incidental level, it is difficult to see how Henrich's account could incorporate Hegel's association of external reflection with Kantian reflective judgement.

⁴⁹ Houlgate, 'Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's Science of Logic', p. 145.

⁵⁰ Significantly, the 'as' in 'sublation of the negative *as negative*' is emphasised here, whereas it was not in Hegel's account of the presupposition of positing reflection.

3.2.2 The Presupposition of the Presupposition

We can again note the *Nachträglichkeit* of this presupposition. It is not in itself simply immediate, but only seems to be simply immediate within the reflection that reflects 'on' it. As soon as reflection relates to the presupposition, it has always already cancelled the presupposition *as negative*, such that the latter appears as that which confronts reflection as simply and positively immediate. This, however, is also the reason why the presupposition of external reflection itself presupposes that reflection. Like the presupposition of positing reflection, it is precisely posited as not posited, or 'pre-positing' (*voraus-gesetzt*), and thus only seems to fall outside of reflection from within reflection. Like *Schein*, it is generated by reflection. As Hegel puts this, reflection:

presupposes the immediate; in negating, it is the negating of this its negating. But it is thereby equally positing, the sublation of the immediate negatively related to it [des ihr negativen Unmittelbaren], and this immediate from which it seemed to start as from something alien, is only in this its beginning (SL 403-4/LW 18).

Unlike the presupposition of positing reflection, however, the presupposition here is not immediately taken back into the movement of reflection as one of the moments of reflection. For unlike the presupposition of positing reflection, the presupposition of external reflection previously seemed to be wholly *indifferent* to reflection. It can only have seemed so if it was in truth not one moment of reflection, but the whole of reflection. Contra Henrich, it is then only *here* that it becomes explicit that that which seemed to be the immediate presupposition of external reflection is itself reflexive. But this does not mean that immediacy has been *reduced* to reflection. It rather indicates the

vanishing of the residual difference between reflection and immediacy, which are now in complete unity.⁵¹ As Hegel puts this:

the externality of reflection over against the immediate is sublated; its positing in which it negates itself is the coinciding [*Zusammengehen*] of itself with its negative, with the immediate, and this coinciding is the immediacy of essence itself [*die wesentliche Unmittelbarkeit selbst*] (SL 404/LW 19).

It is at this point that essence proves to be ‘the truth of being,’ not merely insofar as it is that which being has become, but insofar as it has reconstituted, in the form of reflected immediacy, the immediacy that previously *seemed* to pertain to being. Indeed, it has now become clear that immediacy, in truth, can only be reflected immediacy. As Houlgate writes, ‘Being reflexively posited or constituted does not [...] prevent such immediacy from being genuinely immediate, but is precisely what establishes it *as* genuine, free-standing immediacy.’⁵²

3.3. Determining Reflection

The unity of reflection and immediacy, Hegel notes, is at the same time the unity of positing and external reflection. This is because that which is posited *by* reflection has proved to be itself reflexive, or ‘essence in and for itself’ (SL 404/LW 19). We might think of positing and external reflection, then, as two moments of or stages within a wider and more comprehensive circle of reflection. This wider circle is called by Hegel ‘determining

⁵¹ Cf. Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, p. 147.

⁵² Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, p. 147.

reflection,' and is analysed with regard to the 'determinations' [*Reflexionsbestimmungen*] that it posits, which we shall treat in the next chapter.

Insofar as determining reflection is positing reflection, it first of all produces a moment of posited being which is *negative*. As Hegel states, 'as positedness it is negation as such, a non-being over against an other' (SL 408/LW 23). In that this determination is wholly negative, it is sublated in itself, such that, as Hegel remarks, the equality of reflection with itself is not disturbed by it. What is posited here is thus only a moment of, and so immediately reincorporated by, the reflection that posits it. In the next chapter we shall see that this is true of the first form of 'absolute difference' that is posited by identity.

On the other hand, insofar as determining reflection is *also* external reflection, its determination proves to be not mere posited being, but also to be 'reflected into itself.' As Hegel writes: '*Firstly*, the determination is positedness, negation as such; *secondly*, it is reflection into self. As positedness, it is negation as negation; this accordingly is already its unity with itself' (SL 407/LW 23). Every moment of determinacy is thus always already a moment of self-equality, because its negation is internal to it and is thus *self-relating* negation. It is in this way that the determination that has been posited by reflection can detach itself from that reflection and persist in a certain independence from it. It can do so because it itself is a different *form* of reflection. In the following chapter we shall this process occur at the end of Hegel's account of absolute difference.

As we shall see in the next chapter, essence henceforth 'loses itself' in its determinations, or its 'essential seeming': '*determining reflection* is reflection that has come forth from itself; the equality of essence with itself loses itself in negation, which is the dominant factor' (SL 407/LW 23).

Conclusion

In following Hegel's account of essence, we first saw essence emerge from the self-sublation of the immediacy of being. Essence is thus what being proves to be, or 'the truth of being'; yet because the truth of being is *non*-immediacy, essence initially seemed to be distinct from, and the simple negation of, being. Though this distinction was sublated, a more subtle distinction nonetheless still seemed to remain between essence on the one hand and being as *Schein* on the other. This distinction, in turn, was shown to be *merely* apparent insofar as *Schein* and essence are in truth the very same process of self-relating negation, or negativity: a circular process which consists in the continual alternation of self-division and self-coincidence.

The second part of the opening chapter of the Doctrine of Essence, dealing with reflection, is the mirror image of the first. Here the movement of the *Logic* doubled back on itself, such that it was no longer a question of showing how essence emerged from being, but of how being is, 'in truth,' an effect of essence as reflection.

Nevertheless, as we saw, essence is not an unadulterated process of self-determination. For in its positing it turned out to be presupposing. By the stage of determining reflection, this presupposition seems to have been 'overcome,' for all immediacy has proved to be only reflected immediacy. The emergence of the unity between immediacy and reflection is thus one of those moments in the logic of essence when positing comes to be simultaneous with presupposing. Yet this does not mean that reflection will henceforth be a pure process of self-determination which encounters no presupposition. As we shall see in the following chapter, the presupposition of reflection will return, yet what will be presupposed here will not be the negative of reflection as such, but another *form* of reflection. Here reflection will be doubled, such that one form

of reflection (difference) will gain an independence from the movement of reflection through which it is posited (identity). At this point, the remainder will manifest itself not as that which disturbs the closure of one process of reflection, but as that which prevents these *different* forms of reflection from forming one whole—i.e. as the difference of identity and difference. This difference will then be ‘overcome’ by the logic of opposition which drives the sphere of essence forward.

Chapter 2: Hegel's Logic of Identity and Difference

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we considered the transition from the sphere of being to that of essence. We saw that, on the one hand, essence is *not* the immediacy of being, but, on the other hand, is also not *other* than this immediacy. Indeed, as reflection, essence proved to be the *truth* of the seeming immediacy of being. In this way, Hegel's conception of essence was seen to be a continuation of the broadly Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of essence as that which is self-sufficient or 'in virtue of itself.' Yet it was also seen that for something to be truly self-sufficient is not for it to be detached from its relations to other things, but rather for these relations to be taken account of and included within itself, such that they are intrinsic aspects of what that thing is. Essence as reflection is therefore described by Hegel as '*the relation to its otherness within itself*' (SL 408/LW 23); but since this is a relation to its otherness within *itself*, it is a relation to its otherness *as to itself*. As purely *self*-relating, essence continually 'goes together with itself' and is therefore reflexively immediate.

It is thus not difficult to see why the first 'determination of reflection' that results from this unity of reflection and immediacy should be 'identity.' Reflection has proved to be a process of self-determination which gives itself its own 'posited being.' Nevertheless, reflection as the relation to its otherness within *itself* is also the relation to its *otherness* within itself. The movement of positing will therefore again come up against a presupposition, which in the present context means that identity will prove to be always already shot through with difference.

In the following, I will be particularly concerned to consider the status of *difference* within Hegel's analysis of the determinations of reflection. I shall first show that identity, for Hegel, does not prescind from difference, but is only a form of indifference *in difference*. As soon as it unfolds itself, identity always already contains difference within itself. Nevertheless, since difference 'emerges,' as it were, in and through the movement of identity, it might be thought that it remains subordinate to identity, as merely identity's 'posited' moment—i.e. the product of identity's *self*-division which is then simply reabsorbed back into identity. In the following I shall argue that, in Hegel's dialectic of identity and difference, identity is not privileged in this simple manner. In doing so, I shall claim that this dialectic does not correspond to Karin de Boer's recent reading of the general dialectical movement of the *Logic*.

In de Boer's view, Hegel's methodology undergoes a significant change between his early and his mature works. In the early *Essay on Natural Law*, for example, de Boer claims that Hegel conceives the contrary moments of ethical life as finite moments which possess a relative independence, but which are also initially *entangled* with each other. In the *Essay*, Hegel first saw a need to disentangle these determinations before arriving at their synthetic unity. By the time of the *Logic*, however, this initial entanglement is bypassed; it is rather the case that, in truth, one of the contrary terms already contains the other, such that its ultimate reconciliation with it is never in any real doubt.

For de Boer, this reconciliation is guaranteed because the *Logic* presupposes that the conflicts between the fundamental concepts in the history of philosophy have been resolved. Hegel's concept represents the culmination of this history, and its abstraction from itself to its barest form constitutes the beginning of the *Logic* with pure being. Yet the concept remains, as it were, in the background, as the 'ground' into which the *Logic* progresses. As de Boer writes,

As soon as the *Logic* begins, it is not the entanglement of contrary conceptual determinations, but rather the abstract identity of a concept that constitutes the beginning of its attempt at self-actualization. Since, moreover, this abstract identity from the outset contains its contrary determinations, it is in fact their synthetic unity – albeit merely such as it is ‘in itself’ – that replaces the initial entanglement of contrary conceptual determinations. Hegel, in other words, could not have developed the *Logic* without presupposing that the concept as such has once and for all resolved the initial entanglement of its contrary determinations so as to establish itself as the absolute principle of thought.¹

It is on the basis of this general presupposition that the two contrary determinations within any given stage of the *Logic* will, on de Boer’s reading, always be *asymmetrically* related. One determination will ‘actualise’ itself by opposing itself to and reducing its other to a moment of itself. It will be able to do so because, in truth, that other is always already contained within it as a moment posited *by* it.² It is the asymmetrical reduction of one moment to the self-actualisation of the other that de Boer calls ‘absolute negativity.’³ A key example of such absolute negativity, for de Boer, is the dialectic of the finite and the infinite in the Doctrine of Being. On de Boer’s reading, the infinite ‘reduces itself’ to a finite term in the moment of its opposition to the finite, but is itself the whole which contains this opposition as a moment—and in a way in which the finite cannot. As she writes,

¹ Karin de Boer, *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative* (Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 87–8.

² de Boer, pp. 99–100.

³ de Boer, p. 179. We shall consider de Boer’s reading of absolute negativity in the following chapter.

Whereas the infinite reduces the finite to a subordinate moment by means of which it can actualise itself, the finite reduces itself to precisely this subordinate moment. Only the infinite, in other words, contains its contrary *in such a way* that it can both posit the latter over against itself and reduce it to a subordinate moment of itself.⁴

For de Boer, absolute negativity reflects the mature Hegel's excessive optimism and inability to think persistent conflicts.⁵ To this negativity she opposes the entanglement of relatively independent determinations found in his early works, which she calls 'tragic negativity.' This form of negativity expresses the *symmetrical* relation of finite terms. As they are always entangled, however, the attempt of one term to actualise itself will always be threatened, as it were, 'from the inside,' by the contrary attempt of the other.⁶ It is by returning to the earlier Hegel, then, that de Boer attempts to depart from the mature Hegel; more importantly, as we shall see in the next chapter, she also interprets Derridean difference along the lines of 'tragic negativity.'

Now de Boer's reading of absolute negativity, I would suggest, misrepresents the methodology of the *Logic* as a whole. But my concern here is only to show that it does not correspond to the dialectic of identity and difference. It is true that the first form of difference that emerges in this dialectic, which Hegel calls 'absolute difference,' is to a great extent only a 'moment' of the self-unfolding of identity. It resembles the presupposition of positing reflection, which does not truly disturb the unity of reflection with itself. If the dialectic of identity and difference did not proceed beyond this point, it would indeed correspond to de Boer's reading of absolute negativity. Nevertheless, just

⁴ de Boer, p. 92.

⁵ de Boer, p. 2-9.

⁶ de Boer, p. 178.

as a more radical presupposition emerged from that of positing reflection, here too, a more radical form of difference is seen to emerge from 'absolute difference.' This is a form of difference which, in being 'reflected into itself,' does not immediately collapse back into identity, but is able to persist *as difference* while containing a 'moment' of identity within itself. At this point, difference proves to be not merely a moment of the whole, but to be, like identity, both a moment *and* the whole. It detaches itself from and thereby proves not to have been posterior to, the movement of identity that 'posited' it. Hegel draws attention to the importance of this form of difference in the following passage from the *Encyclopaedia*:

essence is being-within-self, it is *essential* only insofar as it has the negative of itself, [i.e.,] the relation-to-another, or mediation, within itself. It has the inessential, therefore, as its own seeming [*Schein*] within itself. But there is a distinguishing [*Unterscheiden*] contained in the seeming or mediation, and what is distinct itself acquires the form of identity, in its distinction from the identity from which it emerges, and in which it is not or is [only] seeming. Hence, what is distinct is itself in the mode of self-relating immediacy or of being (Enc § 114).

I shall claim, therefore, that from this point in the *Logic* on, identity and difference are, as William Maker puts it, 'equiprimordial.'⁷ They are also symmetrical, so that while one can say that difference is still only the 'mirror image' of identity, what is mirrored (identity) does not precede its 'image.' As we shall see in chapter 3, Hegel's dialectic of identity and difference is then extremely close to, and indeed, ultimately also incorporates, the tragic

⁷ William Maker, 'Identity, Difference, and the Logic of Otherness', in *Identity and Difference: Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit, and Politics*, ed. by Philip T. Grier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 21.

negativity that de Boer would oppose to it. The equiprimordiality and symmetry of identity and difference is maintained, I shall claim, in all of the forms of difference that follow from absolute difference: diversity, opposition, and contradiction.

Difference is thus not subordinated to identity in any straightforward sense. That is to say, difference is not subordinated to identity as to its *contrary determination*: it is neither simply posited by identity nor, as we shall see, does it become a 'subordinate moment' of identity. The majority of the following chapter will be devoted to showing this. Nevertheless, at the end of the chapter, I shall claim that identity is privileged over difference at a 'meta-level': that of the identity of identity and difference. This claim constitutes the beginning of an interpretation of Derrida's remark on Hegel in *Positions*, which will be addressed in more detail in chapter 3:

I have attempted to distinguish *différance* [...] from Hegelian difference, and have done so precisely at the point at which Hegel, in the greater *Logic*, determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it, to interiorize it, to lift it up [...] into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis (P 44/59-60).

Identity comes to be privileged as the identity of identity and difference not despite, but precisely *because* of the equality and symmetry of identity and difference. As John Protevi notes, it is on this basis that the two determinations come into absolute contradiction; they thereby pass into each other initially without leaving a remainder and form a ground which encompasses both within a *single* reflection.⁸ It is crucial to note, however, that

⁸ John Protevi, 'Derrida and Hegel: Différance and Unterschied', in *Jacques Derrida, Vol. 1*, ed. by Christopher Norris and David Roden (London: Sage, 2003), 331–46 (p. 335/7).

ground itself is not simply the identity of identity and difference. It is also, as Hegel notes in the *Encyclopaedia*, the difference of identity and difference (Enc § 121, Add.). Because the latter difference remains, ground amounts to the more thorough interpenetration of identity and difference, but not their absolute unity. Yet each time a new contradiction arises in the logic of essence, this interpenetration becomes ever more thorough, until, in the transition to the concept, the remainder of the difference between identity and difference vanishes. Contradiction, then, ultimately leads to the *oneness* of identity and difference. Furthermore, in the following I shall also indicate the 'all-or-nothing' character of the dialectical movement in this stage of the logic of essence, which provides the basis for its subsequent stages. As we shall see, the dialectic moves from the simple coincidence of identity and difference to their complete separation, and from there directly to their opposition and subsequent sublation into a new unity. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4, this all-or-nothing movement preserves the symmetry of identity and difference by preventing a certain contamination of 'internal difference' by 'external' difference, a contamination which would ultimately lead to the excess of difference over identity.

Part 1. Identity⁹

As we saw in the previous chapter, the transition to determining reflection marks the sublation of the difference between immediacy and reflection. Immediacy has proved to be in truth only the 'going together with itself' of negation, or negativity. In short, this means that there can no longer 'be' anything outside the movement of reflection, such that reflection now has its outside within itself, as an internal limit. As Hegel writes at the end of his discussion of determining reflection: 'In so far, therefore, as it is the positedness that is at the same time reflection-into-self, the determinateness of reflection is *the relation to its otherness within itself [an ihr selbst]*' (SL 408/LW 23). As we noted above, because reflection is only a relation to its otherness within *itself*, it is first of all a relation to this otherness *as to itself*. As such, it is called by Hegel, 'identity.'

Now it may initially seem that Hegel treats identity as he treats the categories which begin each new dialectical stage in the Doctrine of Being. There, the new category is first taken up in its positive (*seiende*) immediacy, without reference to its other. In Hegel's introductory comments on the determinations of reflection, for example, he writes that identity, as simple relation to itself, is 'the *lack* of any determination

⁹ In the following, the determinations of reflection shall be considered almost exclusively as they are treated in Hegel's *Greater Logic*. As was noted in the previous chapter, Hegel's analysis of all logical categories, at least until the *Doctrine of the Concept*, is partly a *critical* analysis. Nevertheless, this critical dimension is far more prominent in the *Encyclopaedia's* treatment of the determinations of reflection, as the latter also acts as the transitional stage between being and essence which in the *Greater Logic* is fulfilled by a separate discussion of reflection. In order, then, to understand what Hegel takes to be the truth of the categories of identity and difference, it is necessary to attend to the latter work.

[*Bestimmungslosigkeit*]’ (SL 409/LW 24, trans. modified, my emphasis). This impression might be reinforced when, a little later, Hegel states that ‘Essence is simple immediacy as sublated immediacy. Its negativity is its being; it is self-equal [*sich selbst gleich*] in its absolute negativity, through which otherness and relation-to-other has vanished in its own self into pure equality-with-self. Essence is therefore simple identity-with-self.’ (SL 411/LW 27). This might suggest that identity is conceived as the collapse of reflection into the simple immediacy of and indifference of the sphere of being.

Yet not only does the phrase ‘its negativity is its being’ indicate that Hegel’s conception of identity will be far more complex than this; but in the sphere of essence no category, even in its most immediate form, *can* any be longer be one-sided in the manner of the categories of being. Essence is the sphere of mediation, wherein each category is always already permeated by its ‘other.’ Indeed, in the remark following the introductory statements on identity, Hegel is highly critical of those conceptions of identity that either *begin* with identity and difference as already self-subsistent terms and then weave these together,¹⁰ or that abstract identity and difference from their entanglement with one

¹⁰ Hegel appears to be making an indirect reference here to the notion of the *symploke*—the weaving together of ‘nouns’ and ‘verbs’—in Plato’s *Sophist*. In a manner that sheds an important light on the difference between Hegel and Derrida, the latter seems to indicate his own displacement of this notion when he reflects on how he might discuss ‘différance’: ‘I would like to attempt, to a certain extent, and even though in principle and in the last analysis this is impossible, and impossible for essential reasons, to reassemble in a *sheaf* the different directions in which I have been able to utilize what I would call provisionally the word or concept of *différance*, or rather to let it impose itself upon me in its neographism, although as we shall see, *différance* is literally neither a word nor a concept.’ This figure is invoked partly because, ‘the word *sheaf* seems to mark more appropriately that the assemblage to be proposed has the complex structure of a weaving, an interlacing which permits the different threads

another. It is in the context of this remark that Hegel makes the following statement, which foreshadows the dialectic to come:

A consideration of everything that is shows that *in its own self* everything is in its self-sameness [*Gleichheit*] different from itself [*sich ungleich*] and self-contradictory; and in its difference [*Verschiedenheit*], in its contradiction, is identical with itself, and is in itself this movement of transition of one of these determinations into the other, because each is in itself the opposite of itself. (SL 412/LW 28, trans. modified).¹¹

Identity, then, is not the *result* of reflection or the collapse into simple immediacy, but is, as Hegel states, ‘reflection in its entirety, not a distinct [*unterschiedenes*] moment of it’ (SL 412/LW 27, trans. modified). Yet while identity is the whole of reflection, it is still reflection that is *accented* in a certain manner.

We saw in the previous chapter that reflection has two fundamental ‘moments’: one in which negation is *separated* from itself; the other in which negation *coincides* with

and different lines of meaning—or of force—to go off again in different directions, just as it is always ready to tie itself up with others’ (M 3/3).

¹¹ In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel is even more forthright: ‘It is of great importance to reach an adequate understanding of the true significance of identity, and this means above all that it must not be interpreted merely as abstract identity, i.e. as identity that excludes distinction [*Unterschied*]. This is the point that distinguishes all bad philosophy from what alone deserves the name of philosophy (§ 115). Later he adds, ‘although recent philosophy has frequently been nicknamed ‘Philosophy of Identity’, it is precisely philosophy, and above all speculative logic, which exhibits the nullity of the mere identity that belongs to understanding, the identity that abstracts from distinction. This philosophy then also insists, to be sure, that we should not rest content with mere diversity but become cognizant of the inner unity of everything there is.’ (§118 Add.).

itself. As Miguel de Beistegui notes,¹² identity is that form of reflection which emphasises the latter moment of coincidence. It is the movement of seeming or shining within itself in such a way that this seeming is already reflected into itself as its *own* seeming: the self-division that, because it is only *self*-division, is immediately a self-coincidence. As Hegel puts this: 'As absolute negation it is the negation that immediately negates itself, a non-being [*Nichtsein*] and difference [*Unterschied*] that vanishes in its arising, or a differentiating by which nothing is differentiated, but which immediately collapses within itself' (SL 413/LW 29). This is why identity initially seemed to be the lack of any determination, for it posits its determinations as already sublated.

As we can see, identity is then a form of positing reflection or an active process of self-determination. For insofar as its otherness is already internal to it, in negating that otherness it only negates itself and so immediately coincides with itself. Hegel states that identity is thus, 'the equality-with-self as the bringing of itself to unity [*sich zur Einheit herstellende*], not a restoration of itself from an other, but this pure production [*Herstellen*] from and within itself' (SL 411/LW 27, trans. modified). This movement can perhaps best be illustrated if we think of the identity of a particular being. Identity would be the manner in which the determinations of that being which arise through its relations to other beings are taken account of and determined as *having been always already included within itself*, in the 'timeless past' of essence. For insofar as these determinations are integral to what that being is, they represent relations not to an other, but only to itself. Here, again, we can note the *Nachträglichkeit* of identity, for it is not simply prior to difference, but only 'will have been' prior.

¹² Miguel de Beistegui, *Truth and Genesis: Philosophy as Differential Ontology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 89.

Identity is, then, as John Burbidge puts it, ‘an equivalence to itself that is maintained through a process of change,’ because, ‘as a difference begins to appear, it disappears. In the concept of *identity* the moment of change is introduced only to be dismissed as creating no *essential* difference.’¹³ It is important to be clear however, that a change makes no difference to identity because it is precisely determined as not a change: it is determined as always already having been posited *by* identity itself.¹⁴ Nevertheless, to the extent that identity is not simply ‘there’ from the outset, but only comes to be posited *as having been* there from the outset through this movement, Hegel’s conception of identity can be expressed as *indifference in difference*.

Part 2. Difference

2.1 Absolute Difference (*Absoluter Unterschied*)

Identity, however, now proves to be difference. Difference therefore does not emerge, as both Burbidge and Protevi contend,¹⁵ through its *exclusion* by identity. Identity, as Houlgate notes, is not yet ‘in relation’ to difference, but is purely self-relating.¹⁶ At this point, identity has no immediacy that could be placed over against difference, for it consists only in the relation of negation to *itself*, and at this point identity is all that

¹³ John W. Burbidge, *On Hegel’s Logic: Fragments of a Commentary* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 73.

¹⁴ This is precisely why the concept of ‘change’ does not apply in the logic of essence as it did in the logic of being.

¹⁵ Burbidge, p. 74; Protevi, pp. 333–4.

¹⁶ Stephen Houlgate, ‘Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic’, in *A Companion To Hegel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), pp. 139–58 (p. 148).

essence has proved to be. Yet *within* this process of *self*-relation a separation of negation from itself is necessary in order for negation not simply to collapse into simple immediacy in its self-coincidence. Difference thus initially ‘emerges’ because it is found to be constitutive of identity *as* identity. As Houlgate writes, identity ‘is nothing but difference because *within itself* it is nothing but reflexion and self-negating negation.’¹⁷

Difference, then, is always already internal to the unfolding of identity. This is made clear in Hegel’s remark on the principle of identity: $A = A$. Throughout this chapter of the *Logic* Hegel is highly critical of the basic (onto)logical principles on which he remarks, but here this criticism only extends to the particular way in which he takes the principle of identity usually to be understood. Indeed, in the *Encyclopaedia* he calls this principle ‘true enough’ (Enc § 115), but objects to its usual interpretation which, in taking it to express simple, abstract identity with self, ignores its very structure. He contrasts this interpretation with the speculative understanding of the principle:

In the *form of the proposition*, therefore, in which identity is expressed, there lies *more* than simple, abstract identity; in it, there lies this pure movement of reflection in which the other appears only as seeming, as an immediate vanishing; *A is*, is a beginning that hints at something different [*Verschiedenes*] to which an advance is to be made; but this different something is not reached; *A is – A*; the difference is only a vanishing; the movement returns into itself’ (SL 415-6/LW 32).

As the *self-relation* of negation, identity requires negation to differ from itself—to continually delay its coincidence with itself even, one might say, in the very process of *coinciding*. In this respect, then, identity turns out to be nothing other than difference. Its self-coincidence is equally a self-differing.

¹⁷ Houlgate, p. 148.

Here it is important to stress that the difference that identity has proved to be is pure *self*-difference. Although in the process of reflection a relation to an other appears to arise, this is a *mere* appearance because negation differs only from itself. Indeed, it is from the notion of identity as a ‘differentiating by which nothing is differentiated,’ that Hegel directly arrives at absolute difference: ‘Here [...] distinguishing is present as self-related negativity, as a non-being which is the non-being of itself, a non-being which has its non-being not in another but in its own self. What is present, therefore, is self-related, reflected difference, or pure *absolute difference*’ (SL 413/LW 28).

2.1.1 Absolute Difference = Absolute Identity

Hegel now claims that absolute difference, in turn, proves to be nothing other than identity. For Protevi, this movement of the dialectic responds to the exigency of rational thought. As he puts it, ‘To think difference as difference some identity must be implicated in difference, so that difference stands still long enough to be thought as difference.’¹⁸ On Protevi’s reading, this is a crucial dimension of the difference between Hegel and Derrida: ‘This giving of a meaningful identity to difference, this rendering difference meaningful via the implication of an identity is the first stage in which, in Derrida’s words, Hegel “determines difference as contradiction.”’¹⁹ Protevi’s claim, however, is problematic if it is to be taken as a reading of this particular section of the *Logic*. Even if one rejects the premise of the *Logic* that we noted in the previous chapter—namely the identity of thought and being—here would not be the point at which to show that a form of difference has emerged which might escape rational thought. Absolute difference in truth

¹⁸ Protevi, p. 334.

¹⁹ Protevi, p. 334.

proves to be identity for a simple reason—one with which, as we shall see, Derrida largely concurs.

Absolute difference proves to be identity because it is only *self*-related difference. While it is self-relating *negation*, it is nonetheless the negation that relates *only* to itself, and so continually ‘goes together with itself.’ Like identity, then, it is a movement in which a difference appears, but since the latter is only a self-difference, it *makes* no difference and so is immediately annulled.

Difference, in its initial ‘absolute’ form, can then be seen as a rather ‘minimal’ form of difference. It is immediately ‘reabsorbed’ back into the movement of identity, because in truth it never really left this movement. In this way, it resembles the presupposition of positing reflection which does not trouble the self-determining capacity of reflection, for it is a ‘presupposition’ that immediately sublates itself and proves to have been ‘pre-posed.’ To this extent, we might say, with Miguel de Beistegui, that absolute difference is ‘nothing more than the unfolding of itself of the negativity within identity.’²⁰

It is important to note that this does not mean that there is now, in truth, *only* identity. Difference remains necessary to the unfolding of identity, but the crucial point is that it does not *disturb* this process of self-determination. Difference is a moment in a process of *self*-relation, as the difference between A as subject and A as predicate—a difference which vanishes in its very appearing. As Hegel writes, ‘Difference is the negativity which reflection has in it, the nothing which is said in enunciating identity, the essential moment of identity itself which, as the negativity of itself, determines itself and is distinguished from difference’ (SL 417/LW 33).

²⁰ Beistegui, p. 91.

At this point, Hegel is only unfolding what difference initially proves to be, and thereby showing that when difference takes the form of ‘absolute difference,’ it immediately collapses back into identity. This is a point to which Derrida acknowledges an ambiguous debt in an important footnote to his ‘Violence and Metaphysics,’ which I shall come back to in the following chapter: ‘Pure difference is not absolutely different (from nondifference). Hegel’s critique of the concept of pure difference is for us here, the most uncircumventable theme. Hegel thought absolute difference, and showed that it can be pure only by being impure’ (WD 411, n. 91/227, n.1).²¹

Now if Hegel’s dialectic of identity and difference were to stop here, then it would indeed correspond to the manner in which de Boer reads the relationship between contrary categories within the *Logic* as a whole. As we shall see, however, difference now comes to take on a more radical form. This is noted by de Beistegui, who states that, in the next category to be examined—diversity—‘essence provide[s] itself with a determination that remain[s] indifferent to the process that generated it’²² Nevertheless, although de Beistegui gives a nuanced reading of this chapter of the *Logic*,²³ he conceives

²¹ I am indebted to Johannes-Georg Schüle in for drawing attention to this footnote in his paper at the 2012 Hegel-Kongress in Istanbul. The paper, ‘Hegel und die Stimme der Metaphysik. Zu Derridas Hegel-Lektüre in *Der Schacht und die Pyramide*’ is forthcoming in the Hegel Jahrbuch, *Hegel gegen Hegel*, ed. By A. Arndt, M. Gerhard, and J.Zovko (Akademie-Verlag: Berlin).

²² Beistegui, p. 93.

²³ More than many post-Derridean commentators on Hegel, de Beistegui acknowledges and emphasises that, for Hegel, difference lies at the heart of identity. Indeed, he sees the fundamental shift that takes place with German Idealism, and that is exemplified by Hegel, to be the freeing of difference from its determination as contrariety in Aristotelian metaphysics. As he writes, the *Logic* ‘enacts a transgression in relation to the classical concept of difference [...] to the extent that, refusing to subordinate difference to the prior identity of a substance or of a genus, it takes it into the hitherto forbidden

its subsequent development in terms that are sometimes reminiscent of de Boer's. For he also states that difference

comprises various strata, various dialectically generated phases, which all stem from the self-repelling of identity. The various determinations of this process of differentiation are diversity (*die Verschiedenheit*), opposition (*der Gegensatz*), and contradiction (*der Widerspruch*). From the outset, then, not only opposition [...] but also contradiction itself is included within the process of differentiation, and so [is] internal—and indeed *essential*—to the constitution of identity.²⁴

In the following, however, I shall claim that difference as it now emerges, and in the forms it subsequently takes, cannot be thought as simply internal to the constitution of identity; it is rather that which disrupts, and cannot be contained by, identity as a process of self-determination.

2.1.2 From Absolute Difference to Diversity

This new form of difference emerges in a similar way to the presupposition of external reflection that we considered in the previous chapter. It too is reached through the unfolding of all that is implicit in the concept of difference as self-relating negativity. This unfolding goes as follows. On the one hand, as we have seen, difference is the self-

territory of contradiction' (Beistegui, p. 80). For de Beistegui, the logic of identity and difference is pivotal in that it expresses in undeveloped form the truth of the concept, which 'is self-identical only to the extent that it opens itself to that which is wholly other than it. Its capacity to *be* is only a function of its capacity to be *other*, its capacity to open itself to contradiction' (Beistegui, p. 89).

²⁴ Beistegui, p. 90.

relation of the *negative*. Yet because this relation is *only* a *self*-relation, the negative continually 'goes together with itself' and collapses back into identity. It thereby proves to be a 'moment' that is in truth contained within identity; identity is thereby the whole of the reflective movement in which both identity and difference are moments. On the other hand, however, the very fact that the negative only goes together with itself *also* gives it a certain self-sufficiency *as* the negative or *as different* that precisely allows it to resist its collapse into identity. It is, as Hegel puts it, 'reflected into itself' *as difference* by containing within *itself* a moment of identity. From this perspective, then, difference is also the whole of the reflective movement in which both difference and identity are moments.

At this point, we can see that identity has come up against a presupposition that is not simply its own position and that it does not simply precede. For identity now proves to be as much a posited moment of difference as difference is a posited moment of identity. In truth, then, neither identity nor difference is logically prior to the other, but each only *will have been* prior to the other, after the fact. To this extent, the two determinations can be described as 'equiprimordial.'

The transition to diversity can now be understood on the basis of this equality or equiprimordiality of identity and difference. Each, as a different 'side' of reflection or with a different emphasis, is determinately different to the other. Yet because each contains the other, each is also the *whole* of reflection. As Hegel writes, difference, 'possesses both moments, identity and difference; both are thus a *positedness*, a determinacy. But in this positedness each is *relation to itself*. One of the two, identity, is itself immediately the moment of reflection-into-self; but equally, the other, difference, is difference in itself, reflected difference' (SL 418/LW 35). Each then contains within itself both its 'other' and its difference from that other, or, as Houlgate writes, difference 'includes

identity *as that which it is not,*' as does identity difference.²⁵ This, as we shall see a little later, will ultimately drive difference to take the form of contradiction, but it initially has a very different result.

2.2 Diversity (*Die Verschiedenheit*)

2.2.1 The Diverse

Since both identity and difference now contain both their other and their difference from their other within themselves, they both take on a seeming self-sufficiency. Though each is one side of reflection, each is also the whole of reflection, and for this reason they now fall apart from, and become indifferent to, one another. As Hegel writes, 'Identity *falls apart* within itself into diversity because as absolute difference it posits itself as its own negative within itself, and these its moments, namely itself and its negative, are reflections in themselves [*Reflexionen in sich*], are self-identical' (SL 418/LW 35). As cut off from and indifferent to one another, identity and difference now come to appear as two distinct beings; as such, they are called by Hegel 'the diverse.'

Furthermore, the diverse are not indifferent to one another simply because they are what we might call two separate 'spheres' of reflection, but rather because these two spheres have themselves undergone an internal collapse. Let us consider why this should be. Each determination contains its difference from the other within itself. Yet because this difference is wholly internal, it has always already been cancelled as a difference—once again, we could say that it 'makes no difference.' As Lakebrink observes, it is then

²⁵ Houlgate, p. 149.

because the diverse are indifferent to their own 'interior difference'²⁶ that they are wholly indifferent to each other. Since the diverse are thus no longer differentiated within themselves, they collapse, as Houlgate emphasises, into the *simple* immediacy encountered in the logic of being,²⁷ such that their difference falls outside them (SL 418-9/LW 36).

Now here of course we might question quite why the diverse should collapse into such *wholly* simple self-identity. We might question, in other words, why the fact that the difference of each term from the other is *internal* to each should mean that this internal difference now makes *no* difference. Why should it not persist as a 'contaminating' difference? It is not clear, then, that the transition from a state in which identity and difference only coincide with each other to one in which they fall wholly outside each other can be justified on a purely immanent basis. Yet it is this either-or movement that, in Hegel's analysis of identity and difference, serves to prevent any prolonged contamination between 'internal' and 'external' difference.

The diverse, then, are simply self-identical and indifferent to their difference. We might then say that the foundation of diversity is identity in a dual sense: firstly, diversity rests on the simply immediate identity of the diverse terms themselves. As Hegel puts this, 'They are diverse when they are reflected into themselves, that is, when they *relate to themselves*; as such, they are *in the determination of identity*' (SL 418/LW 35), trans. modified). Secondly, the simple self-identity of the diverse is itself a *result* of the interpenetration, or the identity, of identity and difference. Only because both

²⁶ Bernhard Lakebrink, *Kommentar zu Hegels Logik in seiner Enzyklopädie von 1830, Bd. 1, Sein und Wesen* (Freiburg: Alber, 1979), pp. 224–5; cf. also J. Biard et al., *Introduction à la lecture de la 'Science de la logique' de Hegel, vol. 2, La doctrine de l'essence* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1983), p. 70.

²⁷ As Houlgate writes, 'reflexion produces simple, non-reflexive immediacy by becoming wholly external to itself' (Houlgate, p. 149).

determinations contain their other within themselves do they both collapse, as we saw, into simple immediacy. This point, it is worth noting, is clearly acknowledged by Derrida in *Glas*:

Diversity is a moment of difference, an indifferent difference, an external difference, without opposition. As long as the two moments of difference (identity and difference since identity differs, as identity) are in relationship to themselves and not to the other, as long as identity does not oppose itself to difference or difference to identity, there is diversity. So diversity is a moment both of difference and identity, it being understood, very expressly, that difference is the *whole* and its own proper moment. (Gl 168/189).

Nevertheless, though the basis of diversity is identity, this does not mean that diversity constitutes a reduction of difference. Within the sphere of diversity, difference remains equal to identity, but is now, as we shall see, wholly external to 'the diverse' or to the self-identical terms.

2.2.2 Likeness and Unlikeness: External Difference

The falling apart of identity and difference into the diverse itself implies the falling apart of reflection and immediacy. Though the diverse terms are implicitly reflexive, they are now wholly indifferent to their mutual mediation. This does not mean that reflection disappears, but it does mean that reflection can only relate the diverse beings to one another in an *external* manner, or from the perspective of a 'third' (SL 420/LW 37).

In its external form, reflection too is divided into distinct moments. The latter are no longer identity and difference; since these have become external to themselves, they

are replaced by 'likeness' [*Gleichheit*] and 'unlikeness' [*Ungleichheit*]. Furthermore, in the comparison of external reflection, likeness is posited without reference to unlikeness and vice versa; though external reflection continually switches from the one to the other, they are never brought together in the same moment of reflection. The diverse are, as Hegel writes, 'in one respect [*Seite*] like one another [*einander gleich*], but in another respect are unlike, and in so far as they are like, they are also unlike. Likeness relates only to itself, and likewise unlikeness is only unlikeness' (SL 420/LW 37).

In the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel notes that comparison based on isolated respects of likeness and unlikeness can yield valuable results in the experimental sciences, but that it is not sufficient for truly scientific [*wissenschaftlich*]*—*that is, philosophical*—*comprehension (Enc § 117). The problem with such comparison is that it sets out from the assumption that things in themselves are simply immediate and indifferent to one another; it thereby fails to see that the seeming immediacy of these things is constituted through their relations to other things, and, above all, through their relations to their *polar opposites*. For example, it determines red as not yellow, not green, not blue, etc., but does not identify red in and through its opposition to green. As we shall see at the end of this chapter, it thereby fails to *ground* its comparative activity, and so fails to bring the various 'respects' and 'points of view' into one unified totality. In chapter 4, we shall see how a more developed form of the structure of diversity gives rise to the problem of relativity, such that things are intrinsically susceptible to being determined in different ways.

2.2.3 From Diversity to Opposition

Although Hegel takes the complete separation of likeness and unlikeness to emerge through the *Logic's* immanent development, he writes that it can also be thought as the motivated attempt of the understanding to avoid contradiction, an attempt that is doomed to failure: 'The very thing that was supposed to hold off contradiction and dissolution from them, namely, that something is *like* something else *in one respect, but is unlike it in another*—this holding apart of likeness and unlikeness is their destruction [*Zerstörung*]' (SL 420/LW 38). We can now turn to the manner in which Hegel shows that likeness and unlikeness, as well as the diverse themselves, presuppose one other.

We already know of course that likeness and unlikeness and the two diverse terms are abstractions from, and moments within, a wider process of reflection. Yet Hegel does not draw on their genesis in order to show that, in truth, they are mediated by one another. With respect to unlikeness, he first states that, insofar as it is distinct from likeness, it is 'like itself [*sich selbst gleich*]' and 'a reflection for itself' (SL 420/LW 38, trans. modified). But this means it is not simply unlikeness but rather contains likeness within itself. Furthermore, both likeness and unlikeness are the likeness and unlikeness of a 'third,' namely, of the diverse. This first of all means that likeness is the likeness of what is other than likeness itself, and so is not 'the likeness of itself,' or is not simply 'self-referred.' Unlikeness, on the other hand, as the unlikeness of what is unlike unlikeness is thereby not unlike itself, or, as we might put it, '*itself* unlike,' but rather like itself and only unlike something else (SL 421/LW 38).

Now on Houlgate's reading, these arguments also serve to show why likeness and unlikeness are determinations of the diverse themselves, and so why the diverse are not in truth indifferent to one another, but rather within themselves like and unlike one another. As Houlgate writes, 'the diverse, *as diverse*, are both unlike and like likeness and unlikeness.'²⁸ In my view, however, this cannot serve as an explanation here since, whereas likeness and unlikeness are themselves essentially referred to the diverse, the diverse themselves are simply *indifferent* to likeness and unlikeness. Hegel, as I understand him, thus takes the following approach to explaining why the diverse must be in themselves like and unlike (one another): As reflected into themselves, the diverse are characterised simply by self-likeness. But this self-likeness, since it results from the annulment of their internal difference, is the abstract identity of simple immediacy. From the transition to essence, we know, however, that this immediacy is not truly self-sufficient, but immediately sublates itself. In Hegel's words, 'the *implicit [an sich seiende]* reflection is self-relation without negation, abstract identity with itself, and so is positedness itself' (SL 421/LW 39). The consequence of this is that in order to be and to maintain themselves as themselves, the diverse, just like likeness and unlikeness, must include within themselves their relation to each other.

2.3 Opposition (*Der Gegensatz*)

Now that likeness and unlikeness explicitly include their relation to each other within themselves, they are determined as the positive and the negative. The positive is the 'self-*likeness* reflected into itself that contains within itself the relation to unlikeness'; the negative is the 'unlikeness that contains within itself the reference to its non-being, to

²⁸ Houlgate, p. 152.

likeness' (SL 424/LW 43). In that each determination contains its relation to its other within itself, the transition to the positive and the negative signals the return of a form of reflection that is no longer external. This is why there is no longer a distinction between reflection and the terms that are related. Nevertheless, the positive and negative are not united within a single process of reflection, for insofar as each contains the other, each is again the whole of which it is also a part. We are thus once again confronted with two forms of reflection which both seem to be self-sufficient:

The positive and the negative are thus the sides of the opposition that have become self-sufficient [*selbständig*]. They are self-sufficient in that they are the reflection of the *whole* in themselves, and they belong to opposition, insofar as it is the *determinateness* which, as the whole, is reflected into itself' (SL 425/LW 43, trans. modified).

The structure that has now emerged does not constitute simply a return to identity and difference as we encountered them just prior to the collapse into diversity. This might appear to be the case when Hegel writes that 'each is itself and its other' (SL 425/LW 43). Yet here the structure is different because each includes its other in a particular way. The two moments are only just returning from the illusory self-sufficiency that they seemed to possess in the state of diversity, so although each has to include its other in itself in order to be what it is, each includes the other *as excluded*. For this reason, Biard et al. describe opposition in a formula similar to that with which Hegel describes essence as such, namely as the 'simple, or non-mediated, unity of immediacy and mediation.'²⁹ Here again we can witness the all-or-nothing character of the dialectical movement. It is

²⁹ Biard et al., p. 77.

because likeness and likeness first became completely indifferent to each other that, on rebounding out of this indifference, they set themselves up in a polemical relation to each other wherein each, in itself, explicitly and actively excludes the other. It is because this direct opposition ensues that, as we shall see, each term ultimately proves to be as much the other as it is itself, which means that they form a single whole.

The process of exclusion takes place differently in the positive and the negative. Where the positive is concerned, while the moment of exclusion is necessary to its self-identity, it does not constitute the major part of it—or as the *Encyclopaedia* succinctly puts it: ‘the positive is the identical relation to self in such a way that it is *not* the negative.’ The negative, on the other hand, has a certain positive being of its own, but is constituted almost entirely by its *not* being the positive: ‘the negative is what is distinct on its own account in such a way that it is *not* the positive’ (Enc § 119). Let us now consider the defining characteristics of the opposition that has developed between these two determinations.

The opposition that has arisen is a genuine or absolute opposition because it is based on the equality of identity and difference, in three crucial and related respects. Firstly, it is *reciprocal*: while one term constitutes itself through its exclusion of the other, this other also constitutes itself via the exclusion of the first. Secondly, as we have seen, the terms of the opposition are *equiprimordial*. André Doz, I would suggest, is therefore mistaken in claiming that the positive must logically precede the negative in order that the latter can exist *as negative*,³⁰ for the positive is in itself already related to the negative and, furthermore, is itself contained within the negative. One could therefore say of opposition that which de Beistegui writes of the contradiction that it will become, that it

³⁰ André Doz, *La Logique de Hegel et les problèmes traditionnels de l'ontologie* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1987), p.

'disavows any problematic of the origin, as well as any attempt to elevate a given moment to a position of absolute superiority.'³¹ Thirdly, the relation between the positive and the negative is *symmetrical*: each is the mirror image of the other. Opposition as a whole is thus, like diversity, based on the equality of identity and difference in these three senses; what distinguishes it from diversity, however, is that in opposition identity and difference are more thoroughly intertwined.

Hegel calls opposition the *Vollendung* of difference and it is clearly one of the most radical forms of difference we have seen in the *Logic*. De Beistegui characterises it in the following way: 'In opposition [...] the positive and the negative find themselves united from the start within a relation which, far from cancelling out their difference, allows them to be thought on the basis of difference alone.'³² This does not capture the whole truth of this relation, however, for it is based not just on the determinations' negative relation to each other, but also on their reflection into self, or their identity. Yet this identity, in each case, is of course disrupted by a difference that it cannot contain, for the other that each contains is 'the non-being of that in which it is supposed to be contained as only a moment' (SL 425/LW 43). We might then say that each is both the condition of possibility and impossibility of the other, which would seem to indicate a point of great proximity to Derridean deconstruction. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, this resemblance only extends so far, since this Hegelian enabling-undermining relationship is based upon the relation of symmetrically determined, 'own others,' which undermine and enable each other *equally*.

³¹ Beistegui, p. 100.

³² Beistegui, p. 94.

2.3.1 The Relation to an Own Other

The transition from diversity to opposition is particularly significant for Hegel because it demonstrates that beings are not essentially diverse—i.e. simply external to one another—but are what they are not only through their relations to other things, but more specifically, through processes of *reciprocal* exclusion. Opposition in a general sense is thus the state in which the difference of something from other things has become *internal* to it. But since opposition is not solely based on the *negative* relation to other things, it also has the consequence that something comes to be opposed not just to all other things, but above all, to its polar opposite. It is due to the equality of the positive and the negative in opposition that, for example, red is not simply *not* a whole range of other colours, but that it has its *own* other in green. Red, in being positively red, specifically excludes green more than it excludes other colours. And vice versa for green. It is then through the equality of the positive and the negative that beings come to have their ‘own,’ necessary others. As Hegel writes in the following, crucial passage of the *Encyclopaedia*:

Ordinary consciousness treats the distinct terms as indifferent to one another. Thus we say, “I am a human being, and I am surrounded by air, water, animals, and everything else.” In this ordinary consciousness everything falls outside everything else. The purpose of philosophy is, in contrast, to banish indifference and to become cognizant of the necessity of things, so that the other is seen to confront *its* other. And so, for instance, inorganic nature must be considered not merely as something other than organic nature, but as its necessary other. The two are in essential relation to one another, and each of them is [what it is], only insofar as it excludes the other from itself, and is related to it precisely by that exclusion [...] In any case, it

is an important step in thinking, when we cease to say, “Well, something else is possible, too.” When we say that, we are burdened with the contingent, whereas, as we remarked earlier, true thinking is the thinking of necessity (Enc § 119, Add. 1).³³

We can already see then, that the importance of opposition is not limited to its status as one category among others in Hegel’s *Logic*. Indeed, its central importance within Hegel’s ontology was emphasised by Jean Hyppolite in his *Logic and Existence*.³⁴ As we shall see in chapter 4, opposition—at a ‘methodological,’ rather than a ‘categorical’ level—might be considered the motor of the logic of essence, since it is because the contrary logical categories at any given stage come into opposition with one another that they come to be sublated into the unity of the same ‘ground.’ It is therefore through opposition that we pass from one dialectical stage to the next. Throughout the logic of essence, opposition usually enters at the end of the second moment of any dialectical stage. In the first moment, the two contrary terms are given their initial minimal definitions. But because these are so minimal, the terms pass into each other quite trivially (in the manner of identity and absolute difference). Because each contrary thus already contains the other in itself, in the second moment they take on a seeming self-sufficiency, falling into

³³ Hegel also states that ‘the distinction of essence is *opposition* through which what is distinct does not have an *other in general*, but *its own* other facing it; that is to say, each has its own determination only in its relation to the other: it is only inwardly reflected insofar as it is reflected into the other, and the other likewise; thus each is the other’s *own* other’ (§ 119).

³⁴ Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, trans. by Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 115–22. Nevertheless, insofar as Hyppolite emphasises the priority of the *negative* in the transition from diversity to opposition, rather than the equality of the positive and the negative, it remains unclear, on his account, exactly how a given being comes to be opposed to its *own* other rather than to be equally opposed to all other others.

absolute indifference to each other (as in the case of diversity). This leaves the terms open to being determined in different ways. Opposition ensues when the indifference of diversity is seen to be only an abstraction from the essential mediation of the terms by each other, at which point the indifference swings to the other extreme and becomes the exclusion in which each 'recognises' the other as its own other. This exclusion, as we shall see, leads to contradiction, and to the sublation of the distinction between the contrary terms. In the following chapter I shall consider Derrida's departure from this Hegelian logic of opposition and contradiction. His response to the above statement from the *Encyclopaedia* will of course be: "Doch! 'Something else' always remains possible, and the 'contingent' need not be a 'burden.'"

2.4. Contradiction

The positive and the negative now prove to be not just opposed but, as such, to be contradictory. The contradiction is not that there are two equally valid determinations of being which mutually exclude one another. It is rather, as Biard et al. note,³⁵ *internal* to both the positive and the negative. It has been seen that each term must include its other within itself in order to be what it is. This other, however, is included *as excluded*. But insofar as the other is partly constitutive of each term's very being, in excluding it each excludes *itself* from itself. One could also approach this contradiction from the other direction, as does Houlgate, and state that each term is contradictory because, in order to be what it is, it must include in itself that which it is *not*, and which it must therefore exclude.³⁶ Hegel himself describes the general structure of contradiction as follows:

³⁵ Biard et al., p. 87.

³⁶ Houlgate, p. 152.

In that the self-sufficient determination of reflection excludes the other in the same respect [*Rücksicht*] in which it includes it and is thereby self-sufficient, it excludes its own self-sufficiency in its self-sufficiency; for this consists in containing within itself its other determination—through which alone it is not a relation to something external—but no less immediately in being itself and excluding its negative determination from itself (SL 431/LW 50-1, trans. modified).

This is the basic structure of contradiction as it holds for both the positive and the negative. Hegel's analysis of these determinations individually, however, shows how each proves not only to undermine itself, but also to *be* the other, *in its exclusion of that other*. On the one hand, the positive is, as Hegel writes, '*positedness* [where positedness here means a *negative* relation to the other] as reflected *into likeness to itself*, positedness that is not a relation to an other, a subsistence [*Bestehen*], therefore, that is insofar as positedness is *sublated* and *excluded*' (SL 432/LW 51). The inclusion of the negative moment of positedness in the positive allows the latter to reflect back into itself. But in that the positive must also *exclude* this moment of negation, it proves to be the very negative that it excludes.

The negative is similar in structure, although not the same; indeed, in contrast to the positive, Hegel calls it *posited*—which in this case means *explicit*—contradiction. In its opposition to the positive, it is '*positedness as reflected into unlikeness to itself*, the negative as negative' (SL 432/LW 51). Yet as has been clear since the transition to the sphere of essence, the negative cannot be simply negative, for otherwise it could not maintain its opposition to the positive; it is rather self-relating negation, which secures it a positive being and so a stability *as negative*. In its very capacity to consistently exclude the positive, then, it must itself be positive. The negative is therefore *explicit*

contradiction because it is in itself determined as the 'non-identical', or the 'exclusion of identity,' which in this exclusion has its identity.

Part 3. The Transition to Ground: The Status of Difference

In considering the result of this contradiction, we can now turn back to the overall question of this chapter: the status of difference in the dialectic of the determinations of reflection. What remains of difference, then, now that it has passed through contradiction?

Since the self-sufficiency of both the positive and the negative has been radically undermined, each determination now passes into the other in what Hegel terms a 'restless vanishing.' The first result of the self-sublation of the two terms is an indeterminacy expressed by Hegel as the 'null.' At its most extreme, this is the collapse of all distinction and difference into the simple immediacy of being, or a wholly abstract identity. The two determinations *gehen zugrunde*, which at this point means that they destroy themselves or perish.

Yet this 'null' is not the only result of the sublation of contradiction. In another respect, all that has been sublated is the relation of *otherness* between the positive and negative, or as Hegel puts it, their 'posited' difference. Because each term is now *in itself* the other, the sharp distinction between them vanishes. In this sense, it is then only their self-sufficiency *over against* one another that 'perishes' in the sublation of the contradiction. As Hegel puts it, 'their self-negation sublates the *positedness* of self-sufficiency' (SL 433/LW 53). Through this perishing, what had previously been two self-reflecting 'spheres' now come to be united in a *single* reflection, which Hegel terms 'ground.'

Now in regard to the question of difference, we can first of all note that this sublation of the 'posited' difference between the positive and the negative does not constitute a reduction of difference per se. Nor does it mean that difference has ultimately proved to be only a moment of the identity from which it initially emerged. For what has been lost here in terms of immediate difference has *also* been lost in terms of immediate identity. The passage through contradiction has resulted then in a more thorough interpenetration of identity and difference, such that there no longer is any immediate identity in which difference could be 'internalised.' It would thus be misleading to say, as do Biard et al., that in ground, 'all alterity is absorbed [*résorbée*].'³⁷

Just as difference has not been absorbed back into identity, it is also the case that identity and difference have not collapsed into a simple 'oneness.' For this reason, contradiction can be said to persist in ground, even if, as we shall see, it initially goes underground. The contradiction consists precisely in that both the positive and the negative, as moments of ground, are in *themselves* the other and are in themselves the *other*. To this extent, then, far from disappearing, the contradiction has become all the more pervasive—and so Hegel states that it is 'as much negated as preserved' (SL 435/LW 55). In the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel therefore observes that ground is not only the unity of identity and difference, but also the difference of identity and difference (Enc § 121, Add.).

Nevertheless, Hegel's exposition first takes up ground only as the *identity* of identity and difference, and furthermore, as a rather simple form of *self*-determination, and it is only later that the other side of ground will come to manifest itself. Since the difference between the positive and the negative—i.e. the difference between identity and difference—is now a moment internal to ground, it is a difference that is immediately

³⁷ Biard et al., p. 92.

sublated as such, or a difference which once again makes no difference. The movement that is ground therefore remains, as it were, 'present to itself' throughout its course, or continually goes together with itself. In this respect, then, as the sublating of the difference between identity and difference, ground 'is not again a positedness as the negative of an other, but a uniting [*Zusammengehen*] with itself, positive unity with itself' (SL 434/LW 54). The movement of grounding thus becomes a movement of self-determination which is seemingly self-sufficient. It constitutes the return of the positing reflection which seems to know no presupposition other than that which it itself has posited. As Hegel writes, 'Self-sufficiency is thus through *its own* negation a unity returning into itself, since it returns [*zurückkehrt*] into itself through the negation of *its* posited being' (SL 434/LW 54, trans. modified, Hegel's emphasis).

On the basis of Hegel's opening statements on ground, one might then question whether contradiction really is preserved within it, or whether contradiction here is a mere *Schein*. This is the view taken by de Boer. As she writes,

Qua finite concept, the concept of contradiction meets its fate by being reduced to a determination of the concept of ground. The latter is distinguished from the concept of contradiction in that it no longer lets the opposition of its contrary moments prevail. The ontological perspective opened up by the concept of ground regards the contrary moments of the concept no longer as positing one another, but as being posited by their common ground.³⁸

Nevertheless, to interpret the transition to ground in this way would be, as we noted in the introduction, to distort the methodology of the *Logic*. For throughout this work, Hegel always begins with the 'positive' result of a prior sublation, and then proceeds to unfold

³⁸ de Boer, p. 96.

the negative result. Likewise, here Hegel first takes up only one aspect of ground, namely, that in which each of ground's moments is *in itself* the other. Later in the analysis of ground, however, we will see what follows from the fact that each of these moments is also in itself the *other*. In other words, we will witness the return of the remainder, such that ground will prove to be, in truth, not simply self-determining or pure positing reflection, but will come up against a genuine presupposition. As Hegel himself writes in the *Lectures on Logic*, 'this ground is no dry essence, nor is it essence as identity. Rather, the essence of matters is a self-identity that at once includes something still different from this very self-identity' (LL 140). What de Boer's remark does serve to highlight, however, is that the transition to the next stage of the logic of essence—that of ground—only takes place when the loss of the immediate or 'posited' difference between the positive and negative is first taken up as their identity, that is, as the *single* process of reflection in which they are only moments.

We have seen, then, that the determination of difference as contradiction does not serve to 'reduce' difference or privilege identity in any simple sense. That is, difference is not *absorbed* into identity. Nevertheless, contradiction as *methodological* contradiction rather than the particular category of contradiction does contribute to the privileging of identity at a 'meta-level': that of the identity of identity and difference. We noted above that because this latter identity is not absolute in ground, the difference of identity and difference—or the 'remainder'—will return. Ground, in its positing, is not *at the same time* presupposing, so within the grounding relation the diachrony and *Nachträglichkeit* of essence persists. Yet over the subsequent course of the logic of essence, each new state of contradiction that is reached will serve to increase the interpenetration of identity and difference. The difference between identity and difference, or the

remainder, will therefore be gradually reduced, until in the transition to the concept it vanishes entirely.

The concept, as we shall see, is then the absolute identity of identity and difference. This does not mean that the concept is not internally differentiated. But it does mean that the division of the concept is *simultaneous* with its unity; thus, every 'finite' moment of the concept is *at once* the whole of the concept, since it is immediately one with all of the other moments. As such a *totality*, the concept is completely transparent to itself and even in its division immediately goes together with itself or 'continues' itself within itself. Since the remainder vanishes in the concept, so too does the *Nachträglichkeit* that characterises essence. As there is no longer any 'recoil' between positing and presupposing, the continuation of the concept through its moments constitutes the eternal logical present which fully comprehends both past and future.

The logic of opposition and contradiction that recurs throughout the logic of essence thus ultimately comes to privilege identity, not in the form of identity *over* difference, but as the identity of identity and difference. In chapter 6 we shall consider the structure of the concept in general, as well as the movement through which the 'absolute method' reached at the end of the *Logic* attempts to overcome the *Nachträglichkeit* of the *Logic* as a whole through the complete comprehension of its beginning.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we first saw that identity, for Hegel, is not static, but rather a dynamic process in which reflection relates to its otherness within *itself*. Identity was thus seen to be a form of positing reflection or self-determination. Difference emerged as the reverse

side of this movement, in the form of reflection that relates to the *otherness* within itself. Yet since this otherness is only *within itself*, difference proved to be pure *self*-difference or 'absolute difference' that only goes together with itself and so immediately collapses back into identity.

In another respect, however, we saw that it is just because difference is self-relating that it acquires the self-sufficiency that allows it to persist *as* difference. In this form, it is still the 'mirror image' of identity, and yet it is the mirror image of that which does not precede its being mirrored. At this point, difference is seen to be equiprimordial with identity, in that while difference is contained as a moment within identity, identity is also contained as a moment within difference.

This equiprimordiality and symmetry of identity and difference was seen to lead to their seeming self-sufficiency and indifference toward each other in the state of diversity. This self-sufficiency proved to be unsustainable, yet since the two determinations had become so divided from each other, they then rebounded out of this separation with such force that their relation became a 'polemical' opposition. Their mutual mediation took the form of each term's inclusion of the other *as excluded*. Since in excluding the other, each determination not only excluded itself, but thereby *became* the other, opposition passed over into explicit contradiction. Contradiction was then seen to resolve itself into, but also to persist within, the category of ground.

We can now begin to outline an interpretation of Derrida's statement in *Positions* that Hegel, 'determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it, to interiorize it, to lift it up [...] into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis' (P 44/59-60). This interpretation, and Derrida's departure from Hegelian contradiction, will be taken up in detail in chapters 3 and 6. In these chapters I shall suggest that

Derrida's concern with the role of contradiction is, in part, that which I have outlined above. The concern is therefore not that one term of an opposition simply comes to incorporate the other, but that contradiction ultimately leads to a state in which identity and difference are in complete harmony with one another and only go together with each other. This is why he speaks of difference being *aufgehoben* and interiorised not into a form of 'presence' but into 'self-presence'—for difference here cannot be thought as being interiorised into that which would precede the very *process* of interiorisation itself.

But does this mean that, for Derrida, the Hegelian dialectic of identity and difference only becomes problematic when difference is *explicitly* determined as opposition or contradiction? Should we then look for the point of almost absolute proximity between Hegel and Derrida within Hegelian diversity, and see Derrida as 'opposing' Hegelian diversity to Hegelian opposition, or claiming that the former exceeds the latter? Things are of course not quite this simple. For diversity, like opposition, is still based on the equality of identity and difference; as we saw above, it is distinguished from opposition only by the fact that identity and difference are external to one another. Diversity is therefore itself the symmetrical 'own other' of opposition: it is absolutely external difference as opposed to intrinsic difference. This is what allows Derrida to observe in *Glas* that 'The opposition between difference and qualitative diversity is a hinge of the greater *Logic*' (Gl 168/189).

As I shall show in the next chapter, for Derrida it cannot then be a matter of emphasising Hegelian diversity *over* contradiction or—as I shall show in chapter 6—of contingency over necessity, for this would already be to accept the very basis of the Hegelian distinction. For Derrida, it will rather be a question of deconstructing these distinctions, which means: firstly, showing 'diversity' to be not simply the symmetrical other of opposition, and secondly, showing opposition to be a restriction of the wider

field that is constituted by 'diversity.' In short, Derrida will suggest that the 'own other' of opposition is reached through the exclusion of 'other others,' and that the harmony ultimately achieved in the concept is thus predicated on a form of 'repression.'

With some caution, we might then say that for Derrida it will be a question of indicating a certain contamination between 'external' and 'internal' difference, which means that, in Hegelian terms, Derridean 'differance' would be located at a point between diversity and opposition. It would be a form of difference that, while not being simply 'external,' would still be permeated by a remainder which would prevent opposition from becoming absolute. As we shall see in the following chapter, this would mean that no term could have a *necessary*, 'own other.' The attempt to posit the latter for any term would constitute a more or less violent restriction of a wider field of potential 'other others.'

Nevertheless, we do indeed need to proceed with some caution here. For as I shall claim in the following chapter, it would be misleading to claim that Derrida has a 'theory' or 'philosophy' of 'differance,' one which would either constitute a displacement of the Hegelian logic of opposition or an alternative theory which might directly 'compete' with the latter. For to have such an account would already be to presuppose that 'differance' could present itself *as such*—that it could 'come on the scene' in full illumination, rather than being that which precisely resists and escapes the 'as such.' Part of Derrida's 'objection' to Hegel is then that the very attempt to grasp difference in pure onto-logical terms is already to determine it from the outset on the basis of identity at the meta-level of the 'as such.'³⁹

³⁹ Note that this is not de Boer's point: it is neither the claim that difference is determined merely on the basis of its contrary *category*, nor that the concept is already present, and seeking to 'actualise' itself, from the outset of the *Logic*. It is the much more minimal claim that, insofar as this logic is the

As I shall discuss in the following chapter, two consequences follow from this point. Firstly, if it cannot be a question, for Derrida, of presenting 'difference' on its 'own' terms, it will rather be necessary to indicate the displacement of oppositional structures—by that which we cannot name once-and-for-all 'difference'—in *numerous* contexts. To this extent, Derrida's response to Hegel is interminable. Secondly, in Derrida's analyses of such oppositional structures, it will not be a question of arguing that a displacement of these oppositions *must* occur, or that this could be decided on a 'neutral' basis, but rather of showing the *possibility* of this displacement and above all, that the opposition has first of all been constituted as a *repression* of this possibility. In other words, it will not be a question of considering *whether* opposition is necessary or not, but of highlighting the forces which serve to institute supposedly necessary oppositions.

Now some of these contexts are of course the texts of Hegel. In chapter 6 I shall outline Derrida's contention that the standpoint from which the *Logic* is written is itself only reached by means of a restriction of 'external' difference. In chapter 4, however, I shall also suggest that such an exclusion of the possibility of a diversity that is not simply Hegelian diversity also takes place within the text of the *Logic* itself. In the respective dialectics of ground and the modal categories, I shall claim that the 'all-or-nothing' character of the dialectical movement noted above serves to prevent a contamination of 'internal' difference by 'external' difference. I shall suggest that this all-or-nothing movement is made seemingly plausible through an appeal to 'common sense.'

science of the basic categories or 'ways' of being *as such*, all of these categories are already determined within the *element* of identity. One of the two contrary categories is not privileged explicitly *within* the dialectic, then, but the dialectic itself is already skewed towards one of those terms. This also does not mean that identity is not genuinely disturbed by its other, but only that identity will ultimately be able to take account of this disturbance.

Chapter 3: A Point of Almost Absolute Proximity

Part 1. Methodological Reflections

In the previous chapter we considered Hegel's logic of identity and difference in the Doctrine of Essence. The aim of the present chapter is to consider Derrida's relation to this Hegelian logic and to pursue Derrida's statement in *Positions* that difference is 'at a point of almost absolute proximity to Hegel' and that Derrida had 'attempted to distinguish [difference] [...] from Hegelian difference [...] precisely at the point at which Hegel, in the greater *Logic*, determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it, to interiorize it, to lift it up [...] into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis' (P 44/59-60).

In the scholarship on the relation between Hegel and Derrida, the relation of difference to this point of Hegel's *Wesenslogik* has not been treated in detail. This has prevented an adequate dialogue from being established between those who have charged Hegel with suppressing difference and those who have defended Hegel from such critiques. While the former have often contended that difference is for Hegel only ever a moment of a self-identity that is privileged from the outset, the latter have often felt it sufficient to recall the equality of identity and difference in Hegel and to suggest that postmodern philosophies of difference serve to fetishise difference and elevate it to the level of a 'metaphysical' principle.¹ Each 'side' thereby sets up a 'straw man' version

¹ William Maker, 'Identity, Difference, and the Logic of Otherness', in *Identity and Difference: Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit, and Politics*, ed. by Philip T. Grier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 29, n. 14.

of the other and fails to grasp why Hegel is so important for Derrida—why he is, as Derrida puts it in *Grammatology*, ‘the last philosopher of the book and the first thinker of writing’ (G 26/41).

In the following, I shall suggest that we can gain a more subtle idea of the difference between Derrida and Hegel if we set out from the proximity noted by Derrida. In doing so, I shall not at this point concentrate on Derrida’s texts *on* Hegel, but on certain rather ‘programmatic’ early writings, including the first part of *Grammatology*, the lecture ‘Difference,’ *Positions*, and above all, *Limited Inc*. I shall suggest that in the latter we can initially observe a point of proximity to Hegel insofar as both thinkers offer a critique of ‘immediacy’ or ‘presence.’ Yet I shall also claim that Derrida takes this critique further in that he departs from the Hegelian logic of opposition through which Hegel ultimately comes to reconstitute presence as the *self*-presence of the concept.

I shall contrast my reading with that of Karin de Boer, not just in regard to the ‘structural’ relation of Derridean difference to Hegelian difference, but also in regard to the nature of the Derridean project.² Indeed, before we consider the structural proximity and difference between Derrida and Hegel, we need to ask about the basis of this proximity and thus the possibility of a direct comparison between the two figures. The question arises here of whether Derrida’s ‘project’ could be said to operate at a similar level of generality to Hegel’s *Logic*, which treats the fundamental forms of being.

² Karin de Boer, ‘Différance as Negativity: The Hegelian Remains of Derrida’s Philosophy’, in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

1.1 Language and Ontology

I shall address this question principally through certain passages of *Grammatology*. The first part of this text allows us to see how Derrida conceives his early engagements with language and linguistics not to be restricted to these domains, narrowly conceived, but also to intervene on the 'ontological' plane, or at least its historical determination as the 'metaphysics of presence.' Indeed, as de Boer writes, 'Derrida uses the context of Saussure's linguistics—then at its height—for a purpose by no means limited to the element of language alone.'³ In the following I shall outline why I take de Boer's claim to be partially true.

The significance of Derrida's engagements with language and linguistics can only be appreciated in the context of his questioning of the division between the ontological and the ontic. In *Grammatology*, Derrida indicates that the 'historical' context from which he is writing is one in which language and writing can no longer be considered merely 'examples' or instances of a metaphysical superstructure. This is a period in which the question of language has come to dominate the philosophical and broader theoretical field. As Derrida writes, the 'inflation of the sign' is both a crisis and a symptom: 'It indicates, as though in spite of itself, that a historico-metaphysical epoch *must* finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon' (G 6/15). Furthermore, this historical determination also has a retroactive effect: it opens the space of a 'reflection' through which it can be seen that the problem of language always *will have been* 'central' to philosophy. Indeed, the first chapter of *Grammatology* opens with the words:

³ de Boer, p. 596.

'However the topic is considered, the *problem of language* has never been simply one problem among others' (G 6/15).⁴

Two principal sources of this elevation of language are indicated in *Grammatology*: Heidegger's philosophy and structural linguistics. Heidegger's determination of being as sense, and sense as indissociable from language, has given language a privileged status in the enquiry into being. The sense of being is henceforth, in Derrida's words, 'tied, if not to a particular word or to a particular system of language (*concesso non dato*), at least to the possibility of the word in general' (G 21/34). This means that language can no longer be conceived merely as a means of access to being, or an ontic representation of that which would 'exist' outside it. From this, Derrida draws the further conclusion that linguistics can no longer be considered a merely 'ontic science or regional ontology' (G 21/35).

Nevertheless, Derrida observes that Heidegger's thinking and modern linguistics are not in a simply mutually complementary relationship. On the one hand, the Heideggerian development lends philosophical weight to the rise of structural linguistics and underlines its wider significance. On the other hand, however, it is in traversing the field of structural linguistics with an attentiveness to Heidegger's questioning of being that Derrida takes a difference to emerge that is more 'originary' than the Heideggerian ontico-ontological difference, and from which the latter is said to be 'derivative'

⁴ Here Derrida seems to follow Jean Hyppolite, who in a paper entitled 'Language and Being; Language and Thought,' writes: 'Language has become the centre of all philosophical problems today.

Undoubtedly it was always thus, but it is only today that we can become truly aware of it' (Jean Hyppolite, 'Language and Being; Language and Thought', trans. by Emilio Comay del Junco, *Pli, The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 24 (2013), 10–17).

(G23/38)⁵ This is made possible through modern linguistics' shifting of the focus of attention from the primacy of the spoken word to the relationships between signs at the level of syntagmatic and paradigmatic chains.⁶

Modern linguistics does not simply shift the focus of attention from the isolated word to the relationships between signs; in doing so, it also serves to shift the focus from speech to writing. In Derrida's words, 'By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing' (G 6/16). It is then partially on this historical basis that Derrida conceives his questioning of the relation between speech and writing (which we shall consider a little later) to be at the same time a deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence.⁷

⁵ As Derrida is careful to note here, and as we shall see in the following, this 'originary' quality is not to be confused with a more profound 'ground' or 'origin' (G 23/38).

⁶ It should be noted that Derrida's discussion of what we might call Heidegger's linguistics and its relation to modern linguistics is extremely subtle and cannot be addressed adequately here. On the one hand, Derrida notes that the early Heidegger's privileging of the word that is 'spoken' in the 'ideal' communion of the self with itself (experienced as the call of the conscience) serves to 'efface' the signifier. It also serves to make the word 'being, an *Urwort*,' or 'the transcendental word assuring the possibility of being-word to all other words' (G 20/33-4). On the other hand, the later Heidegger's emphasis on the 'necessary, irreducible, and originary dissimulation of the meaning of being' as and only as the history of the logos means that, in the final event, 'nothing escapes the movement of the signifier' (G 22/36). Nevertheless, it is of course not a question, for Derrida, of *separating* an 'early' Heidegger from a 'later Heidegger,' but rather of attending to the emphasis given to these different accents that are never simply 'absent' from Heidegger's thinking at any given period.

⁷ As Derrida writes of Saussure in *Grammatology*: 'this and some other indices (in a general way the treatment of the concept of writing) already give us the assured means of broaching the de-

But does this mean, then, that Derrida, by a sleight of hand, is in fact operating at the same level of generality as Hegel in his *Logic*? If linguistics no longer has merely regional or ontic significance, then is not Derrida's appropriation of linguistics just ontology by any other name? This conclusion, however, would be too rash. It would ignore the fact that Derrida is not attempting to indicate a *reversal* of the relation between the ontic and the ontological here, but its *complication*. Linguistics has not simply *supplanted* ontology. On the one hand it does not possess merely regional significance; yet on the other hand, it remains a 'particular' domain because though it may constitute a royal road to the deconstruction of metaphysics, it is still one domain among others. What may appear a casual remark in *Grammatology* makes this crucial point. Derrida writes of linguistics that:

Not only is its field no longer simply ontic, but the limits of ontology that correspond to it no longer have anything regional about them. And can what I say here of linguistics, or at least of a certain work that may be undertaken within it and thanks to it, not be said of all research *in as much as and to the strict extent that* it would finally deconstitute the founding concept-words of ontology, of being in its privilege? (G 21/35).⁸

construction of *the greatest totality*—the concept of the *episteme* and logocentric metaphysics—within which are produced, without ever posing the radical question of writing, all the Western methods of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation' (G 46/68).

⁸ This complication of the ontic and the ontological or the particular and the general, is not the only reason why Derrida cannot be conceived to be providing an 'ontology.' Ontology for Derrida is also characterised by the thinking of presence as that which serves to give a fundamental 'order' to the ontic field. Derridean 'différance,' as we shall see, cannot be thought in such terms.

While some domains may be more (historically) significant than others, there is no *absolutely* privileged domain of the deconstruction of metaphysics. Derrida himself undertakes this deconstruction in numerous domains, including the political, the anthropological, the poetic, the artistic, the psychoanalytic, and the theological. Derrida's engagement with linguistics should then be seen as part of a wider (and interminable) project of questioning whether supposedly 'ontic' domains function according to a supposedly self-present ontological truth that 'underlies' them—whether they correspond, for example, to the structure of Hegel's concept. The more they are shown not to, the more such an onto-logic of self-presence is put into question.⁹ Yet such an onto-logic cannot be *definitively* 'refuted.' Derrida's remark on the attempt to reconceive the notion of the trace in a manner that departs from the 'classical discourse' might equally be applied here: 'the effort will be laborious and we know a priori that its effectiveness will never be pure and absolute' (G 46/68).

1.2. A Derridean 'Philosophy'?

Since no one domain is absolutely privileged, the work of deconstruction is never 'finished.' Deconstruction cannot then simply take a shortcut through linguistics, but must necessarily intervene in a plurality of domains. Now one might of course argue that what Derrida 'does' in these various domains is 'essentially' the same thing, and that their plurality only disassembles an underlying set of principles according to which deconstruction operates. In short, one can attribute to Derrida a 'philosophy.' This is

⁹ In that it is rooted in this wider project, in this respect the 'general' significance of Derrida's engagement with language and linguistics does not presuppose the Heideggerian determination of being as sense and thus as language.

always *possible*, and on some occasions more than others Derrida seems to license such a reading, particularly in his earlier texts.¹⁰ It is on the basis of such an assumption that de Boer writes that Derrida ‘uses’ the Saussurean context. The principle of Derrida’s philosophy, she states, is ‘différance’:

It might be objected that *différance* cannot possibly be called a principle, since philosophical principles have traditionally been used to develop comprehensive systems. I hold, however, that any philosophy presupposes a basic guiding thread that functions as a principle, if only to expose the purported one-sidedness of the principles that had been put forward until then. In what follows I will conceive of *différance* as such a critical principle, and treat it on a par with the Hegelian principle of absolute negativity.¹¹

The problem with de Boer’s reading here is not, however, the one that she indicates—namely that it risks suggesting that Derrida’s philosophy is *systematic*—but rather that it implies that Derrida has a ‘philosophy’ at all. The approach taken by de Boer presupposes both that a Derridean ‘philosophy’ could be abstracted from the contexts in which it is elaborated, and concomitantly, that there could be a ‘master word’ or concept which captures the essence of that philosophy. Accordingly, de Boer writes that the ‘*concept* of *différance* can be elucidated against the backdrop of the *Doctrine of Essence*.’¹² This

¹⁰ This might seem to be the case, for instance, in the ‘Differance’ lecture, in the first part of *Grammatology*, and in parts of *Limited Inc*. It is important to note, however, that all of these texts are based around engagements with other texts.

¹¹ de Boer, p. 595.

¹² de Boer, p. 595 (my emphasis). Here de Boer does not address Derrida’s statement in the ‘Differance’ lecture that ‘*différance* is literally [*à la lettre*] neither a word nor a concept’ (M 3/3).

implies that any other terms used in a similar way to 'differance' in other contexts—terms such as 'pharmakon,' 'spacing,' 'dissemination,' 'writing,' 'tracing,' 'iterability,' 'chora,' 'hymen,' 'supplement,' etc.—are merely other names for differance. The problem with this approach is ultimately that it would be in contradiction (and contradiction in a 'classical,' uninteresting sense) with any philosophy one might draw out of Derrida's multiple textual interventions. For any such philosophy would have to contend that the context in which a 'concept' is elaborated transforms its sense. This approach would therefore leave Derrida open to—and supposes that he did not consider—the charge classically levelled against the 'relativist,' namely, that of basing the affirmation of 'relativity' on one universal, unchanging principle. By contrast, Derrida himself states that the term 'differance' *must* let itself be substituted for by other terms: 'I wish to underline that the efficacy of the thematic of *différance* may very well, indeed must, one day be superseded, lending itself if not to its own replacement, at least to enmeshing itself in a chain that in truth it never will have governed.' This is 'the chain in which *différance* lends itself to a certain number of nonsynonymous substitutions, according to the necessity of the context' (M 12/13).

For Derrida, then, 're-naming' is not simply re-naming, and, as we shall see in chapter 6, if something is *essentially* many-named, then it is not 'one,' since its various names will serve to transform its sense. As Derrida writes in *Grammatology*: 'If words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms, only within a topic [an orientation in space] and an historical strategy. The justification can therefore never be absolute and definitive' (G 70/102)?¹³ Now this does not mean that Derrida's interventions in various contexts have

¹³ And as Derrida notes in the 'Differance' lecture: 'there is nowhere to *begin* to trace the sheaf or the graphics of *différance*. For what is put into question is precisely the quest for a rightful beginning

to be very different from one another, but it does mean that their description cannot simply import terms from elsewhere and must remain sensitive to the specificity of the context. Derrida's interventions are, indeed, often formally very similar, and there is a sense in which we might say they are 'systematic'; but they are so insofar as they *respond* to what Derrida takes to be a systematic gesture of repression in the Western tradition of philosophy.¹⁴

Differance cannot then be considered the general principle of a Derridean 'philosophy.' Nevertheless, we still need to consider a more subtle manner in which Derrida might be said to make claims of a very general 'ontological' nature. It may be that Derrida does not approach the various contexts with which he engages with a pre-given 'philosophy,' but that in traversing these contexts he arrives at conclusions whose generality exceeds their apparent particularity. As we shall see below, in 'Signature Event Context' (hereafter SEC), this might seem to be the case when Derrida begins to speak of the general conditions of the functioning of any 'mark' whatsoever. The generality of the term 'mark' brings it into proximity with the Hegelian term 'determinacy' and might be thought to operate at the same basic ontological level. Nevertheless, the same point can be made here as we made above: 'mark' may be the most 'appropriate' term in one context but will need to be replaced by other terms in other contexts. In comparing the 'logic'—or rather the 'graphics'—of identity and difference outlined in SEC to Hegel's logic of identity and difference, I will therefore suggest not that it directly 'competes' with Hegel's logic, but that it is at first formally *analogous* to it, and on this basis can indicate a [*commencement du droit*], an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility. The problematic of writing is opened by putting into question the value *arkhe'* (M 6/6).

¹⁴ Although there is not space to do so here, this systematicity would therefore have to be distinguished from the systematicity that Rodolphe Gasché attributes to deconstruction itself (Cf. in particular chapter 9 of *The Tain of the Mirror*, 'A System Beyond Being,' pp. 177-255).

displacement of it within a context whose significance is not *merely* ontic, in the manner discussed above. Before doing so, however, I shall consider de Boer's reading of Derrida's relation to Hegel.

Part 2. Tragedy and Displacement

De Boer locates the proximity between Derrida and Hegel in the 'unmistakeable resemblance' between two forms of Hegelian negativity and two forms of Derridean differance.¹⁵ The first form of Hegelian negativity is *abstract* negativity, which produces differences that are 'arbitrary,' 'external,' or 'inessential' because they do not serve to oppose a term to its 'own other.' As de Boer notes, they thus do not provide a basis for the eventual identification of one term with its contrary.¹⁶ The second form is absolute negativity, which de Boer describes here as she did in *On Hegel*, i.e. as 'the movement wherein something opposes its contrary so as to actualize itself through the latter.'¹⁷ For de Boer, absolute negativity is a one-sided form of negativity insofar as it reduces its contrary to a moment of itself, and can do so because this contrary always was in truth only its own moment: 'In each case the moment that constitutes a determination of pure thought, to use a Hegelian term, is defined as the principle of both itself *and* its contrary. Such oppositions thus affirm the power of pure thought to actualize *itself* by means of its contrary.'¹⁸ This is true both of those terms governed by absolute negativity, but also of absolute negativity itself in its relation to abstract negativity: the exteriority of the latter

¹⁵ de Boer, p. 599.

¹⁶ de Boer, p. 601.

¹⁷ de Boer, pp. 599–600.

¹⁸ de Boer, p. 599. As we shall see, this conception of absolute negativity significantly determines the manner in which de Boer conceives Derrida's departure from Hegel.

is reduced in that it is determined as the contrary of absolute negativity, in which it has its truth and essence.¹⁹ Abstract negativity is therefore determined as ‘a subordinate moment’ of absolute negativity.²⁰

Where the ‘two forms’ of *differance* are concerned, de Boer distinguishes these not only according to their effects, but also according to the domains in which they operate. The first form operates, de Boer writes, ‘within the element of linguistic exteriority’ and there produces differences similar to those of Hegelian abstract negativity.²¹ These are differences between terms which ‘cannot be traced back to a positive, self-identical element,’ and which Derrida explicates by drawing on Saussurian linguistics. De Boer refers to such differences as ‘arbitrary,’ though we should note that in *Grammatology*, Derrida explicitly criticises Saussure’s use of this term for reasons we shall consider in chapter 6 (G 44/65). On de Boer’s reading, though Hegel acknowledged this form of differance under the heading of abstract negativity, in Derrida’s view he ‘failed to take [it] seriously’ by denying it a place within ontological thought.

Furthermore, Hegel ‘ignored altogether’ another form of negativity or differance which, ‘within the element of pure thought,’ generates ‘irresolvable differences’ between ‘seemingly opposed determinations such as essence and appearance, inside and outside...’²² This second form of differance resembles Hegel’s absolute negativity in that it provides an account of how seemingly fixed conceptual oppositions arise, but departs

¹⁹ de Boer, p. 599/604.

²⁰ de Boer, p. 600.

²¹ de Boer, p. 599.

²² de Boer, p. 599.

from Hegel in that it does not 'resolve' these oppositions through the subjugation of one term by the other.²³

De Boer states that it is not clear how Derrida understands the relation between these two forms of differance. She seems to suggest that the second form of differance represents a symptom of the contamination of the purity of ontological thought by the first form of differance, or the contamination of absolute negativity by abstract negativity.²⁴ Nevertheless, within the 'element of pure thought,' this contamination does not manifest itself *as* abstract negativity but as 'irresolvable difference,' which closely resembles the 'tragic negativity' of de Boer's *On Hegel*.

Now de Boer's reading is helpful insofar as it broaches the question of how, for Derrida, a form of 'external difference' might come to contaminate and problematise seemingly fixed oppositions. But her reading is problematic insofar as it ends up *separating* differance as 'external difference' from differance as 'irreducible difference.' Insofar as it maintains a distinction (though one that is to a certain extent problematised) between 'linguistic exteriority' and 'the element of pure thought,' it also preserves a distinction between the particular and the general which, as I argued above, Derrida would not accept. In her subsequent elaboration of differance, de Boer focusses almost exclusively on the second form of 'irreducible difference' between contrary terms within

²³ Interestingly, de Boer does not mention a passage of the 'Differance' lecture where Derrida indicates an even greater proximity to Hegel: '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 has 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?' (M 19/20).

²⁴ de Boer, p. 601.

the 'element of pure thought.' She elaborates this form of difference, and thereby pinpoints Derrida's break with Hegel, in the following way:

Derrida turns against Hegel [...] by arguing that the difference between contrary determinations is such that it does not necessarily develop into their opposition, nor, consequently, into their resolvable contradiction. Whereas Hegel holds, in sum, that ontological oppositions result from the negation of their implicit *unity*, Derrida contends that apparent oppositions result from the negation of their *irresolvable difference*.²⁵

De Boer illustrates her thesis with reference to Derrida's discussion of nature and spirit in *Grammatology*. She claims that while Hegel determines nature in terms of spirit, Derrida suggests that 'nature and spirit can come into their own only by means of a detour (*un passage détourné*) that leads from one to the other.'²⁶ Because Derrida sees 'neither moment as more primordial than the other' or 'the ultimate principle of its contrary,' neither one is absorbed by the other: there results a 'primordial, nondialectical struggle between contrary conceptual determinations,' in which each tries to 'actualise' itself through the other.²⁷ On this account, Derrida's departure from Hegel would then consist in acknowledging a certain symmetry between the two terms, or in attributing to each an equal *power of self-actualisation*.

Now one might easily find evidence for such a reading in Derrida's texts. Here I shall focus on two such instances, but shall also indicate why I take them to be of limited relevance. Firstly, de Boer herself draws attention to a passage in the 'Difference' lecture

²⁵ de Boer, p. 602.

²⁶ de Boer, p. 598.

²⁷ de Boer, p. 598.

where Derrida, in the context of a discussion of Nietzsche, describes difference by way of the Heideggerian concept of 'the same.' This passage might seem to support de Boer's reading of difference as the active, conflictual difference between contrary terms. Derrida writes that difference as the same is

the displaced and equivocal passage of one different thing to the other. Thus one could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed [...] not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same [...] Thus, *différance* is the name we might give to the "active," moving discord of different forces.

Furthermore, we might note that in the lecture Derrida also refers to a polemical form of difference in which the differentiated terms have an 'allergic' relation to one another (M 8/8). Nevertheless, Derrida's lecture needs to be treated with some caution. Firstly, the passage quoted by de Boer is one of a number of passages in which Derrida does not present difference 'in and for itself,' but indicates how difference can be seen to be at work within the texts of various thinkers. Derrida therefore 'borrows' the terminology of these thinkers but cannot be assumed to adopt it unreservedly (which is why he puts scare quotes around the term 'active'). Secondly, as Robert Bernasconi stresses,²⁸ the 'Difference' lecture is an early text of Derrida's, and one which betrays the strong influence of Heidegger even while Derrida tries to distinguish difference from Heideggerian ontological difference at the end of the lecture. Derrida's reference to a

²⁸ *Derrida & Difference*, ed. by David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Coventry: Parousia Press, 1985). In a footnote to his translation of Derrida's lecture, Alan Bass also notes that the polemical difference of which Derrida speaks cannot correctly be described as 'active' (M 8, n.9).

polemical form of difference might be seen as a reference to the Heideggerian concept of strife, such as occurs between world and earth in Heidegger's essay on 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' Yet Derrida is absolutely clear that difference, even in this 'polemical' form, should not be described as an *active* principle, but rather in the middle voice (M 9/9). Finally, difference as such 'active' discord is not the only form of difference that Derrida refers to in the lecture, and, as I shall suggest, is not the form that plays the most significant role in his actual deconstructive 'practice.' In this connection we might note that, at an earlier point in the lecture, Derrida notes that difference 'resists' the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible because it 'transports' (*porte*) this opposition (M 5/5), which indicates that it not only prevents its resolution but also both 'underlies' or 'generates' it and *displaces* it or carries it off. This indicates—and this is the thesis I shall come to develop—that the difference between such terms is 'irreducible' because their relationship can always come to be determined *otherwise*.

Another passage that might seem to support de Boer's reading of difference—this time in regard to the symmetry of contrary terms—appears in *Positions*. There Derrida explicitly states that 'in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand' (P 41/56-7, cf. also LI 21/50). In other words, in such 'oppositions' we are not dealing with an opposition at all, but an asymmetrical subordination of one term by the other. It might then seem sensible to think of Derrida as attempting to rectify such an asymmetry by conceiving difference in terms of the symmetrical relation between contrary terms. Nevertheless, (and leaving to one side for the moment Derrida's general suspicion of

symmetry),²⁹ this would only support de Boer's reading of difference via Derrida's departure from *Hegel* if we were to suppose that in the latter we are also dealing with 'classical' oppositions, i.e. relatively simple hierarchies. In the previous chapter I attempted to show that this is not the case—that we are rather dealing with a 'real' opposition between 'equals.' At least in his subtlest criticism of Hegel, I believe this is also Derrida's view. Moreover, it is only on this basis that we can comprehend why Hegel is so important a figure for Derrida and why he is 'also the thinker of irreducible difference' (G 26/41).

Derrida's critique of the Hegelian logic of identity and difference is aimed, as I indicated in the previous chapter and as I shall discuss in chapter 6, at the very 'equality' and symmetry of the related terms, and not the simple subordination of one to the other. It is precisely because identity and difference are 'on the same level,' in Protevi's words, that they can come into direct contradiction and thereby pass into each other initially *without remainder*, forming a unity which fully encompasses them both.³⁰ Derrida's 'objection' to this logic is that this unity serves to privilege identity in a more subtle manner than in 'classical' philosophical oppositions, i.e. not identity in its initial opposition to difference, but the peaceful and harmonious identity of identity and difference, or 'self-presence.' As Protevi notes, 'it is precisely in the reciprocal implication of identity into difference that we find the point of Derrida's difference from Hegel.'³¹ Derrida's essential point is then, as I shall also discuss in chapter 6, that neutrality is not

²⁹ Cf., in the 'Difference' lecture, M 7/7, 10/10. Cf. also Derrida's remark in *Writing and Difference* that 'In doubling lordship, sovereignty does not escape dialectics' (WD 329/382).

³⁰ J. Protevi, 'Derrida and Hegel: Différance and Unterschied', in *Jacques Derrida, Vol. 1*, ed. by Christopher Norris and David Roden (London: Sage, 2003), 331–46 (pp. 335–7).

³¹ Protevi, p. 333.

neutral,³² and furthermore, that it is constituted through a repression of a more radical difference.

As we saw in the previous chapter, in the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel notes that the identity of identity and difference as ground can also be called the difference of identity and difference (Enc § 121, Add.); and, as we shall see, a certain remainder returns to haunt every new unity that is formed throughout the logic of essence. Nevertheless, the recurrence of methodological opposition and contradiction throughout the logic of essence serves gradually to reduce this remainder, such that in the transition to the concept it ultimately disappears. The concept then is no longer disturbed by even a remainder of exteriority; the difference within it is its *self*-differentiation. And because nothing has been lost or left behind on the path to the concept—because it thus fully accounts for its own ‘history’—the latter too can retrospectively be posited as *having been in truth* only the concept’s self-difference. But this is not to say that the concept *was* there, as de Boer supposes, driving the dialectical progression from the outset. It rather will have been there, once it has been reached, according to the ‘soothing’ (*apaisant*) logic of the Hegelian future perfect that Derrida refers to in *Dissemination* and that I shall discuss in chapter 5 (D 21/30). Derrida does not then assume, as does de Boer, that

³² On the question of neutrality, cf. also Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, pp. 136-142). Derrida’s reading of Hegel’s concept is in this respect close to de Beistegui’s, when the latter writes: ‘it is precisely in integrating contradiction itself within the unity of substance that Hegel is eventually in a position to posit the real or being as the One substance, and no longer to set the identity, or the being *kath auto*, of the substance against any residual difference. Contradiction, as *absolute* contradiction, is only a symptom of a speculative shortsightedness. Identity alone is absolute, and absolute only to the extent that nothing remains outside of it, as something absolutely other. Yes, Hegel pushes difference all the way (in)to contradiction. As a result, however, the ultimate form of absolute alterity, what Aristotle recognized as pure heterogeneity, becomes a pure illusion’ (Beistegui, p. 106).

'Hegel comprehends the concept of difference as a particular form of the concept as such, that is, as an as yet abstract form of the absolute negativity that impels concepts to establish the unity of their contrary determinations.'³³

If we now return to de Boer's reading of difference, we can see that, far from departing from the Hegelian logic of opposition, it in fact reinstates it, precisely because it sets out from a misidentification of Hegelian opposition with 'classical' 'opposition.' As the *struggle* between *contrary* terms, difference interpreted as tragic negativity would not be the absence of opposition but rather an unresolved and supposedly irresolvable, genuine opposition. And yet, it is difficult to see why this opposition should be irresolvable, since it is characterised by the same three features which in the previous chapter we saw as defining Hegelian opposition: the terms are equiprimordial, they reciprocally exclude each other, and they do so symmetrically—insofar as each is accorded an *equal* power of self-actualisation (or insofar as each is equally positive and negative). As they are *formally* identical there is then no essential barrier to their eventual unity.

This is not to say that tragic negativity might not be elaborated in such a way that it does not collapse into Hegelian opposition; but it is to say both that de Boer does not provide this elaboration and, more importantly, that however it might be elaborated it would not be Derrida's way out of Hegel's logic. This is because such negativity is predicated on the concept of contrary terms—terms which are *essentially* each other's *own other*. For Derrida, this would already bring tragic negativity into the vicinity of Hegelian opposition: as he writes in *Glas*, 'The "its other" is the very syntagm of the Hegelian proper; it constitutes negativity in the service of the proper, literal sense' (Gl 83/96). To accept such essential contrariety from the outset would leave little room for

³³ de Boer, p. 601.

challenging the manner in which the contrary terms, in any given case, have traditionally been conceived (cf. P 41/57).

Derrida, I would like to suggest, is not a tragic thinker, but a thinker of displacement. While he begins with opposed terms, classical or otherwise, he does not remain there. As he remarks in SEC, deconstruction operates according to a 'double gesture' (LI 21/50). The first gesture is that of reversal, where the privileged term in an opposition is shown to be in fact 'derivative' from or supplementary to the underprivileged term which had been considered to supplement it. The second is one of displacement, which moves beyond a simple inversion of the power imbalance between the two terms. This second gesture shows not that the previously 'weaker' term now comes to dominate, but that the seemingly 'stronger' term in fact resulted from a more or less violent attempt to restrict and exclude from itself the wider field constituted by the 'weaker' term. It therefore shows that the sense of the latter must be both *generalised* and therefore reconceived. As Derrida notes in *Grammatology* with regard to the opposition of speech and writing: 'It is not a matter of rehabilitating writing in the narrow sense, nor of reversing the order of dependence when it is evident' (G 56/82). The second gesture thus allows a 'new "concept"' to emerge, 'a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime' (P42/57).

If this is the case, then we can only locate Derrida's proximity to and departure from Hegel if we expand our perspective beyond the opposition of contrary terms, and consider how such opposition constitutes a restriction of a wider field of 'external' difference. It will then be a question of showing that, for Derrida, opposition is a moment of a structure that produces effects similar to those encountered in the state of Hegelian diversity. The latter category, as we indicated in the previous chapter and as we shall see in the following chapter, gives rise to 'external comparison' between terms, such that

these terms can be said to have a variety of others rather than their *own* others. But as we noted in the conclusion of the previous chapter, it cannot be a question, for Derrida, simply of affirming *Hegelian* diversity over Hegelian opposition, and particularly not of affirming *pure* diversity over pure opposition, for pure diversity collapses into opposition. For this reason I would have to disagree with Kevin Thompson's identification of differance with Hegelian diversity. He writes:

Diversity—marked within the logic of *Aufhebung* between abstract and determinate negation—uncovers the enigma of simultaneity, the quasi-transcendental remains, at the closure of the history of metaphysics. An infinitesimal and radical displacement of Hegelian speculation indeed appears to be carried out in this disclosure and it would seem possible then to isolate the precise point of rupture between the Derridean chain of infrastructures and Hegelian speculative logic. It is the category of diversity.³⁴

As is evident here, Thompson takes the category of diversity to be the point of contamination between merely external difference and internal difference, yet as we have seen in the previous chapter, for Hegel it is the paradigmatic structure of external difference. Thompson's affirmation is thus too simple for two principal reasons. Firstly, Hegelian diversity, at least in its pure form, is, as we saw, predicated on the equality of identity and difference, whereas, as I shall suggest in the following, 'differance' implies the *excess* of difference over identity. Secondly, and at a more basic level, diversity has its foundation in the indifferent self-identity of the diverse terms (whose difference lies wholly outside them). Thompson himself acknowledges that diversity is a structure based

³⁴ Kevin Thompson, 'Hegelian Dialectic and the Quasi-Transcendental in Glas', in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. by Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 258.

on 'a manifold of self-contained and solely self-related objects, monads, that are wholly indifferent to one another.'³⁵ But it would surely be to turn things on their head to claim that Derrida attempts to depart from Hegel by affirming that things are simply self-identical. As I will claim in the following section, for Derrida as much as for Hegel, things are what they are *only* through processes of mutual mediation or 'seeming' in one another. Derrida departs from Hegel, however, by affirming the *excess* of this mediation—affirming that a certain 'remainder' that is not identity prevents the various processes of mediation between terms from being brought into one whole or totality.

In the next section, I shall first show how Derrida's deconstruction of the speech/writing opposition in SEC initially exhibits a proximity to Hegel's logic of identity and difference, insofar as Derrida, like Hegel, gives a critique of 'immediacy' or 'presence.' I shall then show how this deconstruction comes to displace this Hegelian logic by indicating the excess of difference over identity, rather than their equality. Here it will not be a question of showing a radical break with Hegel, but a small displacement of the Hegelian logic which may have significant consequences. As Derrida himself noted in this regard, 'everything, what is most decisive, is played out, here, in what Husserl called "subtle nuances," or Marx "micrology"' (P 44/60).

Part 3. Almost Absolute Proximity, and a Remaining Difference

3.1 Proximities

In the first part of SEC, Derrida gives an immanent critique of Etienne Bonnot de Condillac's conception of writing. Condillac here constitutes one 'example' of such a

³⁵ Thompson, p. 253.

conception, yet at the same time Derrida indicates Condillac's exemplarity when he states: 'I do not believe that a single counterexample could be found in the entire history of philosophy as such' (LI 3/21). Derrida's critique focusses on the notion that writing, as one species of communication among others, serves to *represent* 'thoughts' or 'ideas.' Functioning as it does by means of signs, writing is thus marked by a form of absence proper to all communication: that of the 'thing itself' that is communicated. Indeed, as Derrida puts it, for Condillac the sign 'comes into being at the same time as imagination and memory, the moment it is necessitated by the absence of the object from present perception' (LI 6/25). The absence in question here is therefore the absence of an original presence; the sign, as a form of representation, transports an original presence that in itself has no need of such mediation in order to be what it is.³⁶

As a particular form of communication, writing is further distinguished by its own form of absence: it can be used to communicate between those who either are not or cannot be physically present to one another. It serves both to 'perpetuate' thoughts over time and thereby to 'mak[e] them *known* to persons who are *absent*.'³⁷ This absence makes writing differ in degree but not in kind from other forms of communication: though the receiver may be absent, the written message still transports the thought intended by the sender, but over greater spatio-temporal distances than would be possible by means of oral communication. Writing constitutes a 'continuous modification and progressive extenuation of presence' across a 'homogeneous field,' without altering the 'ideal content' of this presence (LI 5/24). As Derrida states, 'writing will never have

³⁶ In *Grammatology*, Derrida writes that the 'very idea of the sign [...] implies a distinction between a signifier on the one hand, and a signified on the other that is able to "'take place" in its intelligibility, before its "fall," before any expulsion into the exteriority of the sensible here below' (G 13/25).

³⁷ Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, quoted by Derrida in LI 4/22.

the slightest effect on either the structure or the contents of the meaning (the ideas) that it is supposed to transmit [*véhiculer*]' (LI 4/22). It is thus conceived as a merely 'technical' supplement to speech. In this way, Derrida shows that for Condillac there is a continuous path from 'simple sensation and present perception to the complex edifice of representation' (LI 6/25).

Derrida undermines Condillac's account solely by putting pressure on its internal assumptions. He thus considers the ramifications of the absence 'proper' to writing, namely, that the written mark can continue to function beyond the presence of the 'sender' to the mark and the presence of the sender and receiver to one another. What has traditionally made it possible to distinguish written from oral communication, he notes, is that a written sign is 'a mark that subsists, one which does not exhaust itself in the moment of its inscription and which can give rise to an iteration in the absence and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it' (LI 9/30). Derrida thus notes that the written mark must then still be capable of 'functioning' when this absence is pushed to an 'absolute' degree, that is, in the case of the disappearance or demise of both the sender and 'any receiver, determined in general' (LI 7/27).

If this is the case, however, then writing can no longer be conceived as a simple extension of the bounds of (oral) communication or as 'an (ontological) modification of presence' (LI 7/27). For it shows that the written 'message' is not essentially and wholly governed by the sender's intention (*vouloir-dire*) and the hermeneutic context which links him or her to the receiver. Writing can therefore no longer be thought as simply one form of the transportation or 'communication of consciousnesses or of presences' (LI 8/29). Furthermore, the possibility of the sign's being repeated in contexts other than those in which the sender intended it to function opens it to an essential 'drift' [*dérive*] in

meaning, such that its alteration would not be a mere accident but a necessary possibility.

Now Derrida explains the iterability of the written mark through a 'graphics,' of identity and difference which closely resembles Hegel's logic of identity and difference. On the one hand, the continued functioning of the mark beyond the sender's or (any particular) receiver's intentions implies that it is constituted according to a certain 'code' (LI 7/28) or, as Derrida slightly later puts it, must have 'a certain self-identity' (LI 10/31). This allows the mark to break from a given context and maintain itself in another. On the other hand, this identity does not precede difference. Firstly any sign or mark only emerges as a distinct element—only acquires what we might call a 'minimal determinacy'—through the difference or spacing [*espacement*] which separates it from other marks in the syntagmatic chain (LI 10/31). Its capacity to break from any context is co-dependent on this spacing. Secondly, this identity or 'unity,' Derrida writes, 'only constitutes itself by virtue of its iterability' (LI 10/32). We might then say that this identity, like Hegelian identity, *is* nothing other than the mark's capacity to include within itself or to 'take account of' its differences from other marks across various contexts. But this means that this identity is from the outset permeated by difference, since the sense of the mark, not simply preceding other marks, will depend on which marks it comes to be distinguished from in these different contexts. It will depend, in other words, on which others it includes as excluded. As we shall see, this opens up the possibility of a potentially radical drift in its meaning and a potential rupture of its identity.

Now the significance of Derrida's analysis would be limited if it were only valid for writing in the narrow sense—that is, if it did not indicate that the difference by which writing is permeated is *generalisable*. If Derrida's conclusions were only applicable to writing, then

writing might be unsuited to 'representing' the presence or immediacy that it transports, or would be an imperfect means of 'accessing' it, but the possibility of such an immediacy would itself remain unchallenged. Derrida claims, however, that the traits by which writing are characterised 'are valid not only for all orders of "signs" and for all languages in general but moreover, beyond semio-linguistic communication, for the entire field of what philosophy would call experience, even the experience of being: the above-mentioned "presence"' (LI 9/29-30).

In order to demonstrate this in the case of oral communication, Derrida does not present a new 'argument,' but rather sets out the 'essential predicates in a minimal determination of the classical concept of writing' (LI 9/30) and (rhetorically) asks: why should these not also be applicable to oral communication? Insofar as any 'element' of spoken language both possesses a 'certain self-identity' that permits it to break from any given context and to be recognised in others,³⁸ and is distinguished from other elements through spacing, it too will be iterable and thus susceptible to the same drift as written communication.³⁹ As Derrida states, 'This structural possibility of being weaned from the referent or from the signified [...] seems to me to make every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general; which is to say [...] the nonpresent *remainder* [restance] of a differential mark cut off from its putative "production" or origin' (LI 10/32). The mark cannot then be conceived as the 'representation' of this 'origin,' but at most, as its

³⁸ Indeed, it is at this point that Derrida substitutes the notion of 'identity' for that of 'code' (LI 10/31).

³⁹ This does not mean that it is thereby *equally* susceptible to such drift. Here Derrida is only concerned to show that the structural conditions of speech do not differ *in kind* from those of writing (though they do differ in kind from the conditions of speech as it has historically been opposed to writing). Here Derrida's later remark that the 'relative purity' of performatives does not 'emerge *in opposition to* citationality or iterability, but in opposition to other kinds of iteration within a general iterability' could equally be applied to the 'purity' of speech (LI 18/45).

trace—a trace which differs from itself as soon as it appears insofar as it is already projected toward new contexts. As Derrida remarks in the ‘Differance’ lecture: ‘Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself’ (M 23/24).

Furthermore, Derrida proposes extending this ‘law’ to ‘all “experience” in general if it is conceded [*s’il est acquis*] that there is no experience consisting of *pure* presence but only of chains of differential marks’ (LI 10/32). This is clearly an extension of Derrida’s central point in SEC and might be parsed as follows: insofar as any experience ‘of’ something must first of all isolate that ‘object’ of experience from the other elements in the context in which it appears, this object too will be constituted in its ‘identity’ through spacing and will therefore also be iterable. The mark is therefore not, in truth, a trace of an original presence, but rather the trace of that which is *itself* a trace.

It is at this point that Derrida’s analysis arrives at its point of greatest proximity with Hegel’s conception of essence as reflection. As we have seen, Derrida, like Hegel, calls into question the notion of simple immediacy or ‘presence.’ For Derrida, as for Hegel, the ‘essence’ that the mark ‘represents’ and seems to refer back to is itself always already a process of seeming, insofar as it too does not precede its mediation by the other terms from it is differentiated. To this extent it therefore does not precede its ‘representation.’ For Derrida, as for Hegel, this implies the *Nachträglichkeit* of that which the mark or the trace seems to refer back to, in that the latter is, to borrow a phrase from Derrida’s discussion of Freud and Levinas in the ‘Differance’ lecture, a ‘past that has never been present.’ (M 21/22). The trace is therefore a ‘remainder’ of this ‘past,’ but like the remainder of Hegelian essence, it is the remainder of that which never was simply present. In the following section we shall explore this proximity between Derrida and Hegel further with regard to the concepts of identity and difference. Nevertheless, we

shall also see that what we might call ‘Derridean seeming’ is not a seeming of ‘essence’ *within* itself, but rather a seeming that prevents the closure of reflection on itself.

3.2 Differences

One might then think that Derrida is elaborating a logic that is identical to that of Hegel’s dialectic of identity and difference. Like Hegel, Derrida offers a critique of immediacy which leads to a seeming ‘equiprimordiality’ of identity and difference. As in Hegel’s account, neither identity nor difference precedes the other, yet each, paradoxically, will have preceded the other. The mark does not precede the spacing that makes it possible, and the spacing does not precede the marks which it divides. Likewise, the mark possesses a capacity to break with a given context, but this capacity does not precede the spacing which permits such a break.

Is Derrida not then at a point of *absolute* proximity to Hegel? That his use of the term ‘identity’ in SEC is not accidental is confirmed by its repetition in his response to John Searle’s misreading of that paper: ‘Iterability supposes a minimal remainder (as well as a minimum of idealization) in order that the identity of the *selfsame* be repeatable and identifiable *in, through,* and even *in view of* its alteration. For the structure of iteration—and this is another of its decisive traits—implies *both* identity *and* difference’ (LI 53/105) Yet how, on the other hand, would we reconcile this statement with Derrida’s approving quotation, in the ‘Differance’ lecture, of Saussure’s claim that ‘in language there are only differences *without positive terms*’? (M 10-11/11). In order to see how these statements might be reconciled, we will need to consider more closely the role that ‘identity’ plays here.

We can initially note that, as we saw in the previous chapter, Derrida accepts Hegel's demonstration that 'pure difference' without any element of 'identity' would, paradoxical though it may seem, not be 'pure,' or would not be pure *différance*. This is the root of Derrida's objection, in 'Violence and Metaphysics,' to Levinas' attempt to 'leap' out of the Hegelian logic of identity and difference through a relation to an other who is wholly other. This was the context of the remark of Derrida's that we quoted in the previous chapter: 'Pure difference is not absolutely different (from nondifference). Hegel's critique of the concept of pure difference is for us here, the most uncircumventable theme. Hegel thought absolute difference, and showed that it can be pure only by being impure' (WD 411, n. 91/227, n.1)⁴⁰ As I read this footnote and Derrida's accompanying quotation from Hegel's *Logic*, Derrida is both acknowledging a debt to Hegel while also signalling a potential departure from him—he is noting that 'pure' difference must contain an element of identity, yet without wishing to follow Hegel in taking this element to be *equal* to that of difference.

For Derrida, difference is then not to be thought without an element of identity. Nevertheless, Derrida's use of the term 'identity' in *Limited. Inc.* might be thought to be misleading, insofar as it has little in common with what has traditionally been designated by 'identity.' If we look again at Derrida's response to Searle, we can see that the 'identity' in question is first designated as a 'minimal remainder [*restance*].' We can shed some light on the nature of this remainder if we now turn to the manner in which SEC comes to displace the Hegelian logic of opposition.

⁴⁰ Cf. note 21 to chapter 2. This crucial remark is also noted by Leonard Lawlor, in his discussion of Jean Hyppolite's influence on Derrida. After quoting it, Lawlor writes that 'The very root of Derrida's law of contamination can be found here, in Hyppolite's Hegel. It is the source of the concept of *différance*' (Leonard Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 103.

In SEC Derrida writes that the 'identity' of the mark is 'paradoxically the division or dissociation of itself' (LI 10/31-32). This is because the mark's very capacity to enter other contexts opens the possibility of the 'drift' in its sense, or of its radical transformation. This may mean, first of all, that the mark comes to take on 'conflicting' meanings which undermine its unity, and even meanings which 'contradict' one another in various ways. Furthermore, the necessary possibility of the mark's extraction from any given context means that no definitive set of 'relevant contexts' for the mark can in principle be circumscribed. No such delimitation of 'relevant' contexts is possible, since in each one, the spacing that separates the mark from other marks will always leave it open to being displaced into yet further contexts—to being infinitely re-marked.⁴¹ It is this which prevents a *balance* or equality from being established between identity and difference. Derrida indicates rather that identity is exceeded *in advance and throughout* by a difference that is inscribed within it but which it cannot contain—by what we might provisionally call the 'virtual' possibility of its endless transformation and internal division and disintegration. In other words, it is already carried away from itself as soon as it 'enters the game' (Cf. G 7/16).

It is this excess of difference which reduces identity to the status of a remainder—to that which, at the limit, no longer has the power to *positively* assert itself as a self-consistent unity, but only to negatively assert itself as *not* being reducible to any particular determination while nevertheless still being susceptible to further determination. The remainder is then the 'identity' that manifests itself only as difference and deferral. Thus in *Limited Inc.* Derrida writes that 'the remainder, although indispensable, is never that of a full or fulfilling presence: it is a differential structure

⁴¹ Cf. Rodolphe Gasché, 'Nontotalization without Spuriousness: Hegel and Derrida on the Infinite', *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 17 (1986), 289–307 (p. 300).

escaping the logic of presence and absence [...] This is why the mark qua “non-present remainder” is not the contrary of the mark as effacement (LI 53/105). The Derridean remainder, I would like to suggest, is in this sense at a point of extreme proximity to the remainder that runs through Hegel’s logic of essence, and which, as we saw, manifests itself as the difference of identity and difference which prevents reflection from becoming unified into one whole. Yet Derrida, unlike Hegel, does not see this remainder as being gradually reduced, but rather focusses on the manner in which it provides both the condition of possibility of a form of ‘diversity’ that is not the diversity of Hegel’s *Logic* and the condition of impossibility of the *necessary* opposition between ‘own others.’

3.3. ‘Accounting for’ Opposition

We can now see, on the basis of the ‘impure’ form of ‘diversity’ that we have reached, how opposition should constitute a restriction of this field. In order to do so, let us return to the movement of the mark through this field. In certain of the contexts into which it might enter, the mark will be opposed to another mark and will include this other mark within itself *as excluded*; in other contexts, it will be opposed to different marks. Alternatively, across a range of contexts, the mark may develop within *itself* opposed meanings (such as the term *Aufhebung*). But since the range of contexts into which it might enter is structurally limitless, the mark has no *necessary* or *essential* other. There is no ‘own’ other, but only a series of, as it were, ‘provisional’ others, or a multiplicity of provisional ‘contradictions,’ and there will always be ‘other others’ that have not yet been ‘taken into account.’ As Protevi writes, ‘Derrida here shows that marks *can* be opposed to one another, but only on the basis of their inscription in the forceful and meaningful field

he names the “general text.”⁴² In order to illustrate this notion of the general text, Protevi refers to the following section of ‘Plato’s Pharmacy,’ where Derrida writes,

[The *pharmakon*] is the *différance* of difference. It holds in reserve, in its undecided shadow and vigil the opposites and the differends that the process of discrimination will come to carve out. Contradictions and pairs of opposites are lifted from the bottom of this diacritical, differing, deferring, reserve. Already inhabited by *différance*, this reserve, even though it “precedes” the opposition between different effects, even though it preexists differences as effects, does not have the simplicity of *coincidentia oppositorum*. It is from this field that dialectics draws its philosophemes (D 127/158).

It is therefore only when this wider field of the ‘general text’ is *restricted* that terms *seem* to have their own essential others.⁴³ We can now see why Derrida is far from affirming the persistent conflict between supposedly ‘contrary’ terms, but rather affirms the displacement of such conflict. As Derrida writes in an important footnote in *Dissemination*:

Differance—which is thus by no means dialectical contradiction in this Hegelian sense—marks the critical limit of the idealizing powers of relief [*la relève*] wherever they are able, directly or indirectly, to operate. *Differance inscribes* contradiction, or

⁴² Protevi, p. 341.

⁴³ As Derrida’s scare quotes indicate, the ‘general text’ neither logically nor temporally precedes its repression. As we shall see in chapter 6, such repression has, for Derrida, always already occurred, and the wider field is only glimpsed through an analysis of repression and a displacement of its effects. This is another reason why ‘differance’ is not more ‘originary’ than difference as opposition and why it is not a ‘determining principle.’

rather, since it remains irreducibly differentiating and disseminating, contradictions. In marking the “productive” (in the sense of general economy and in accordance with the loss of presence) and differentiating movement, the *economic* “concept” of difference does not reduce all contradictions to the homogeneity of a single model. It is the opposite that is likely to happen when Hegel makes difference into a moment within general contradiction. (Belated residual note for a postface) (D 6, n.8/12-13, n.5).

The ‘general text’ to which Protevi refers, or the ‘wider field’ of writing, is a fractured space in which marks can take on irreconcilable senses that cannot be brought together into the harmonious unity of a single ‘ground.’ Moreover, this is essentially so insofar as, for structural reasons, this field remains open to further determination, such that what each mark will have been remains still to come.⁴⁴ The fractured nature and structural openness of the field thus prevents the difference within it from being thought, as is the case with Hegel’s concept, as *self*-difference. This is why, insofar as he might have Derrida in mind, William Maker would be very far from the ‘mark’ when he claims that the postmodernist fetishising of difference turns it into a ‘metaphysical, authoritarian determining ground in its own right.’⁴⁵ Derridean ‘difference’ or ‘spacing,’ as we saw above, neither underlies nor governs the displacements that take place in this field.

⁴⁴ In the following chapter, we shall consider the ramifications of Derrida’s insight for Hegel’s logic of ‘ground.’

⁴⁵ Maker, p. 29, n. 14.

Part 4. Concluding Methodological Reflections

Whether or not one is convinced by Derrida's claims in SEC, one might still wonder how much he has 'shown.' One might 'object,' for instance, that he has only shown the *possibility* of the radical displacement of any mark, not its necessity. One might claim that though this displacement is possible, it usually does not 'in fact' occur, and that there is usually a reasonably clearly delimitable range of contexts in which a mark can be observed to function, such that the opposition to an 'own other' rather 'naturally' occurs and does not have to be conceived as a form of 'repression.' Such a common sense claim would, however, miss Derrida's point on both a superficial and a more profound level.

At the superficial level, Derrida's reply to Searle makes clear that it was never SEC's aim to show that any mark necessarily becomes detached from the speaker's intention. Its aim was only to show that this is a *necessary possibility*, which must therefore 'be taken into account in any attempt to analyse or to describe, in terms of necessary laws, such a structure' (LI 47-48/96). Derrida then develops this point a little further, suggesting that even in the case in which a mark has not 'in fact' been repeated (supposing that in such a case the mark could even have a sense) and is proffered by the sender in the presence of the receiver, this presence is still 'complicated, divided, contaminated, parasited by the *possibility of an absence* inasmuch as this possibility is necessarily inscribed in the functioning of the mark' (LI 48/96).

A little later Derrida elaborates on this point in order to show that, at a deeper level, the above objection rests on a questionable distinction between actuality and possibility, and therefore on a problematic conception of the event. To this end, Derrida

initially distinguishes two forms of possibility: possibility as *éventualité* (as that which happens to befall an entity) and structural (or necessary) possibility. Yet he suggests that at a certain level it is not possible to separate these two forms of possibility:

It might, however, also be said: *in fact* that doesn't *always* happen like that. But at this point, we must pass to possibility qua necessity [...], and moreover, we must recognize an irreducible contamination or parasitism between the two possibilities and say: "to one degree or another that always happens, necessarily, like that": by virtue of the iterability which, in every case, forms the structure of the mark... What makes the (eventual) possibility possible is what makes it happen even before it happens as an actual event (in the standard sense) or what prevents such an event from ever entirely, fully taking place (in the standard sense) (LI 57/113).

Of course, in order to assess their 'cogency,' Derrida's claims here would need to be significantly elaborated. One way of doing so would be to extract from Derrida's texts a philosophy of 'structural possibility,' alongside a supposedly Derridean philosophy of 'originary diversity.' Derrida's 'position' on possibility could then be directly compared with Hegel's account of the modal categories in the *Wesenslogik*. Building on the reflections in the introduction to this chapter, however, in these closing remarks I shall indicate certain problems with this approach, in order to explain why I shall not adopt it in the subsequent chapters of this study.

Firstly, ignoring the context of Derrida's engagements in this way would not only imply that there is a 'neutral' way of presenting Derrida's 'philosophy'; it would also risk suggesting that there simply 'is' an original diversity or general text that pre-exists, and then comes to be restricted by, the isolation of necessary oppositions. In this way it would also collapse *éventualité* into structural possibility, rather than indicating the

complication of the former by the latter. The form of the approach would thus again contradict, in a simple manner, the content of the 'ideas' it would present.

In the present chapter, I have attempted to avoid this approach by showing how Derrida elaborates a 'graphics' of identity and difference *in and through* his reading of Condillac. For Derrida, as we shall see in chapter 6, the 'general text' or 'writing' does not temporally or logically precede its restriction; since a certain restriction has always already occurred and, moreover, could not but occur, the general text only 'exceeds' its restriction *at the same time as* it is restricted by it. Or, in other words: the sense of the mark is displaced at the same time as it is inscribed. The excess, then, cannot be thought without relation to that which it exceeds.

This leads us to a further reason not to elaborate a general Derridean theory of structural possibility: cut off from the contexts with which Derrida engages, it would invite inane 'counter-examples' of the form: 'just because there is a structural possibility of my becoming a murderer, in Derrida's view I might as well already be a murderer.' Beyond collapsing *éventualité* into structural possibility, such 'objections' would ignore the fact that deconstruction does not set out from nowhere. It is rather elaborated against particular, historically dominant forms of 'repression'; the excesses it points out are excesses over *these* repressive gestures. Furthermore, for Derrida it is a question of showing the complicity of such repressive gestures with a certain value system. Metaphysics, as Derrida reminds us in *Grammatology*, does not just mean the thinking of presence, but the *desire* for presence (G 49/71-2). Even where such 'abstract' concepts as 'possibility,' 'actuality,' and 'necessity' are concerned, it is still a question, as Derrida puts it in *Grammatology*, of 'demonstrating the systematic and historical solidarity of the concepts and gestures of thought that one often believes can be innocently separated' (G 13-14/25).

For these reasons, in considering Derrida's relation to Hegel, rather than elaborating a Derridean theory of difference or of possibility which might 'compete' with Hegel's, it is more important to consider Derrida's analysis of what he takes to be the *mechanism* of repression in Hegel and the value system which is immanent to it. Through a reading of *Glas* in chapter 6 I shall consider how for Derrida the Hegelian attempt to overcome the remainder is concomitant with a desire for mastery that constitutes itself through an exclusion of the feminine. I shall suggest that for Derrida this desire is concomitant with an ingratitude toward that which 'gives to thinking.' This constitutes another reason why the question of whether 'things really do happen like that' cannot be resolved in a supposedly neutral theory, for our response to it is not independent of our response to this gift and its animation of our attention.

Chapter 4: Hegel's Logic of Ground and Modality: The Problem of Relativity

Introduction

Building particularly on chapters 2 and 3, the following chapter considers the further development of Hegel's logic of essence. It first considers the dialectic of 'ground,' which immediately follows that of identity and difference, and then turns to the dialectic of the modal categories near the end of the sphere of essence.

I shall first show that it is in the dialectic of ground, when essence is no longer merely 'formal' but now has a content, that the moment of diversity within the dialectical movement gives rise to a state of relativity. This relativity, I shall suggest, becomes the central problem of essence. I shall then examine the manner in which Hegel takes this state of diversity to sublimate itself into a state of opposition. The sublation of diversity into opposition is, as I indicated in chapter 2, the process through which we move from one stage of essence to the next, and through which the 'remainder' that haunts essence is gradually reduced. Here I shall be concerned to show how, in the dialectic of ground, this sublation is an instance of what in chapter 2 I called the 'all-or-nothing' movement of the dialectic in the sphere of essence. Let us briefly run through the stages of that movement as they appeared in Hegel's logic of identity and difference, since they form a general pattern according to which the subsequent stages of the logic of essence progress.¹

¹ It should be noted, of course, that this is not a pattern that is *simply* repeated throughout the logic of essence. Variations upon, additions to, and complications of, this pattern can be observed in the various stages of essence, yet the pattern presented here is a 'necessary simplification' if we are to bring into

1. The stage of 'going-together.' The difference between the two terms is initially so slight that they immediately collapse into each other.

2. The stage of division or diversity. Since each term has proved to contain within itself both the other and its difference from that other, each term seems to be self-sufficient. Moreover, since the difference that each contains has become only its self-difference, and is thereby taken to make no difference, each term collapses within itself into simple self-identity. The two terms thus become absolutely *indifferent* to one another.

3. The stage of opposition and contradiction. Diversity proves to sublate itself and the dialectical movement now swings back to the other extreme. Yet it does not simply fall back into the peaceful identity of the two terms. Because they had become utterly indifferent to each other, they rebound out of this separation with such force that they come into a relation of mutual exclusion. They oppose themselves to each other, but in doing so each proves to be as much the other as it is itself.

4. The stage of resolution or interpenetration. Here it is because the clash is so violently polemical that the two terms come into an ecstatic union. The remaining difference of identity and difference is overcome and the two terms come to be moments of a *single* reflection which fully encompasses them both. Derrida captures this point clearly in his discussion of the opposition between the divine and the human law in *Glas*, which we shall consider in chapter 6: 'As if two motives [*mobiles*], disposing each of their self-moving principle [*principe automoteur*], starting from their opposite places, crossed or met each other in the course of a circular path, stopped short {*tombaient en arrêt*}, and from the collision formed one single vehicle on an infinite circle' (Gl 170/192). It is only

view the mechanism through which Hegel ultimately takes the sphere of essence to sublate itself into that of the concept.

because the terms come into the unity of a single reflection (the identity of identity and difference) that we move to the next stage of essence, within which the difference of identity and difference will subsequently emerge again.

In the dialectic of ground, it is of course in the second of these stages that the state of relativity arises. Because at this point the ground and that which it grounds (the 'grounded') fall into the indifference of diversity, each term becomes susceptible to being determined in multiple ways, without any of these determinations being able to claim any ultimate authority. The grounding relation thus proves to be an insufficient way of accounting for something, and this failure indicates that something can be accounted for fully only if the conditions of grounding (or what we might call the surrounding context) are also taken into consideration. This wider context initially seems also to be another form of diversity, insofar as it is constituted by a multiplicity of determinations that are indifferent to one another. To this extent it only constitutes an extension of the problem of relativity rather than its resolution, since the conditions are not unified under any one ground. Yet Hegel argues that this diversity sublates itself, and here we observe another instance of the all-or-nothing character of the dialectical movement. The simply external difference between the conditions becomes wholly internal, such that they sublimate their indifference toward one another and through their mutual opposition come to form one, unified whole—they are thereby united under one 'ground.' The context, we might say, thus becomes saturated and simply reflects back on that which is to be explained by it.

In the following, however, I shall claim that this transition cannot be immanently justified, i.e. that it cannot be shown to be necessary on its own terms. I shall suggest instead that its apparent plausibility is achieved in two ways. Firstly, it relies on the all-or-nothing character of the dialectical movement. It is because the conditions are first

presented as simply external to one another that the sublation of this externality might seem naturally to lead to their complete unity. Secondly, and in a manner that foreshadows the Derrida' critique of Hegel that will be discussed in chapter 6, I shall claim that this all-or-nothing movement constitutes a leap from the 'givenness' of the conditions as *indeterminate* to their 'givenness' as 'self-evident.' I shall therefore suggest that the sublation of the state of relativity implicitly relies on an appeal to 'common sense' regarding the authority of the context.² It is then in these two ways that the remainder that haunts the logic of ground comes to be conjured away.

I shall also consider what it is that the all-or-nothing movement serves to exclude here, namely, a certain contamination of 'internal' difference by 'external difference.' Indeed, I shall suggest that were this leap from the former to the latter not to be made, we would arrive rather at a structure similar to that of the Derridean 'general text' that we considered in the previous chapter. For Derrida, as we saw, the context proves *in itself* to open out on to other contexts, and thereby leaves the sense of the terms 'contained' within it open to continual displacement.³

The second part of the chapter will then turn to Hegel's analysis of the modal categories of possibility, actuality, contingency, and necessity near the close of the logic of essence. Although by this point in the sphere of essence the remainder has been greatly reduced, the modal dialectic is seen to exhibit a similar character to the dialectic of ground. I shall therefore claim that the key transition within this dialectic cannot be immanently justified for the same reasons that are applicable to the dialectic of ground.

² To this extent, Derrida's critique of Hegel's appeal to what 'everybody knows' is extremely close to that of Deleuze in the 'Image of Thought' chapter of *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum, 2004), cf. p. 214.

³ This does not mean that a multiplicity of different contexts is presupposed from the outset. The point is rather that if a given context is 'unsaturated' then other contexts are necessarily possible.

Contingency, just like opposition, can be seen as both a particular and a general category of essence, as is noted by Giacomo Rinaldi: ‘The contradiction typical of all the categories of Essence so far examined was, as we have seen, that they involve a *relation* that ‘in itself’ should be ‘internal’, necessary, but *de facto* remains merely ‘external’—i.e., conditioned by *contingent* presuppositions extraneous to its concept.’⁴ Insofar as this contingency or this presupposed ‘remainder’ cannot be shown to be immanently overcome at the key stages of essence that the present study considers, this also means that Hegel cannot demonstrate the necessity of the sublation of the sphere of essence as a whole into that of the concept.

Part 1: Ground

I shall now turn to the text of the *Logic* in order to develop these claims, beginning with Hegel’s dialectic of ground. The category, ‘ground,’ as we saw in chapter 2, results from the self-sublation of the positive and the negative. The collapse of the ‘posited’ distinction between these determinations means that their difference is in truth only a moment within a reflexive movement which encompasses them both. As this reflexive movement, ground thus first of all takes the form of a *self*-relation. It repels itself from itself and then takes back into itself what it has repelled. As Hegel puts it, it is the ‘absolute recoil [*Gegenstoß*] upon itself’ (SL 444/LW 65).

Hegel’s usage of the German term ‘*Grund*’ here brings together two of its senses: the *Grund* is both the ‘basis’ or ‘foundation’ of things and the ‘reason’ of things—i.e. their logos or that which accounts for what they are. Ground is therefore at first a new

⁴ Giacomo Rinaldi, *A History and Interpretation of the Logic of Hegel* (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), p. 213.

manifestation of the self-determining side of essence: it relates to its determinations as moments that it itself has *posited* through its own movement. It will come to be seen, however, that ground is too minimal an ontological category to *fully* account for things. It will therefore have to *presuppose* the wider state of affairs or the ‘conditions’ which allow it, in any given case, to fulfil its grounding function. It is through this mutual mediation between the ground and its conditions that Hegel takes the transition to the next stage of essence—that of ‘existence’ to occur.

Ground is a transitional stage within the logic of essence. It is both the last of the ‘determinations of reflection’ and also the stage in which reflection begins to lose its purity or empty formality and dissolve into immediate existence. Furthermore, it marks more broadly the end of the first sphere of essence, which is characterised by what Hegel calls essence’s inwardness. The inwardness of essence refers partly to its lack of determinate content, which has not yet emerged from the movement of reflection. Nevertheless, in the three preliminary stages of ground,⁵ which I shall not consider here, a content begins to emerge through the grounding movement. We shall join Hegel’s account of essence at the point at which this content has become indifferent to the form which it receives. As the ‘ground of a determinate content,’ ground has now become ‘determinate ground’ (SL 445/LW 66).

1.1 Formal Ground

The first form of determinate ground, which Hegel calls ‘formal ground,’ is thus the ground of a content that is indifferent to its form. For this reason, the content is the same whether it is determined as the ground or as that which the ground grounds (the

⁵ Termed ‘Form and Essence,’ ‘Form and Matter,’ and ‘Form and Content’ (SL 447-455/LW 68-78).

'grounded'). As proved to be the case with absolute identity and absolute difference, the ground and the grounded are thus immediately identical to each other. As Hegel puts it, *'there is nothing in the ground that is not in the grounded, and there is nothing in the grounded that is not in the ground'* (SL 457/LW 80).

This means, however, that formal ground does not yet fulfil the function of a ground at all: because the ground lacks any distance from the grounded, its 'explanation' of the latter can only be tautologous. In other words, it cannot go wrong, because it involves no risk. In the 'Remark' to this section, Hegel associates this principle of formal ground with the 'mere formalism' that would lead one to define gravity simply as an 'attractive force' (SL 458/LW 81). For Hegel this kind of 'explanation' only amounts to a doubling of the immediate phenomenon, or its hypostatisation into the *form* of a principle or 'reflected being' (SL 459/LW 82).

On the one hand, then, the ground and the grounded simply collapse into one another. On the other hand, however, and in a manner that recalls the transition from absolute difference to diversity, each term proves to contain its other and its relation to that other within itself. As Hegel puts it, 'each is in itself this identity of the whole' (SL 461/LW 85) As at the end of the analysis of absolute difference, here the two 'sides' of the relation thus prove to be self-sufficient and so fall apart from each other. Each term now comes to be 'reflected into itself,' such that we are no longer presented with one content which appears in different forms, but with a content that is different in the ground and the grounded. Real ground therefore constitutes a developed form of diversity, and its moments possess a similar indifference toward one another.

1.2 Real/Complete Ground

Since the ground and the grounded have fallen apart, a distance has now opened up between them which on the one hand allows the ground to ground the grounded. It is now possible for the ground to 'account for' the grounded in a manner that is not simply tautological. On the other hand, however, this very distance also *prevents* the ground from grounding the grounded. For since the ground and the grounded, like 'the diverse,' are now indifferent to one another, there is no longer any internal connection between them. Insofar as the two terms are now simply given, the connection between them, Hegel states, can only be 'contingent' (SL 466/LW 89)—i.e. based on an 'external reflection.' The indifferent diversity of the ground and the grounded here causes the spectre of multiplicity to come to the fore. As Hegel writes in the *Encyclopaedia*, 'the ground is not what is simply identical with itself; it is also distinct [*unterschieden*], and for that reason various grounds can be offered for one and the same content' (§ 121 Add.).

The process of grounding is now the attempt to posit the essential determination or aspect of something. But in this movement of positing, ground now comes up against a presupposition: namely, all of the other determinations of the thing to be grounded. As Hegel writes, beyond what the ground posits in the grounded, there is also 'an unessential form, external determinations of the content which, as such, are free from the ground and are an immediate manifoldness' (SL 462/LW86). Now just like the ground and the grounded, these various determinations of the grounded are diverse, and so indifferent to one another. No single determination can then be the ground of all the other determinations. In the 'Remark' Hegel illustrates this point with the example of a stone, the weight (*Schwere*) of which might be taken as its essential determination.

Nevertheless, as Hegel writes, ‘the stone has a further determination of its content by virtue of which it is not merely something heavy but a stone; this is external to heaviness’ (SL 464/LW 87, trans. modified). Furthermore, it also remains essentially indeterminate which of the various determinations of something should be taken as ‘most essential’ (*die wesentliche*) (SL 463/LW 87).⁶

Because the ‘grounded’ might be grounded in diverse ways, the category of ‘real ground’ is therefore marked by a state of relativity. It is only through the ‘external’ or, we might say, ‘transcendental’ perspective of a ‘third’ that a ground can be posited as the ground of something. But this relativity is not ‘epistemological,’ as it were, but ontological. The problem is not that there is a multiplicity of different ‘perspectives’ on the same content—this is rather the state of affairs we encountered in *formal* ground. Here it is rather that the content *itself* has broken apart into a diverse multiplicity. For Hegel, the problem of relativity is only as disturbing as it is because it is *essential*, because there is no stable ‘content’ upon which the various perspectives are directed.

But what, indeed, is the ‘problem’ here, and why should this state of diversity be troubling? It is so, for Hegel, insofar as it might be understood not just as one aspect or ‘side’ of what being proves to be, but as the ultimate truth of being. This, as he notes in both the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Logic*, would allow for the triumph of sophistry, which Hegel, following Plato, conceives as a form of ‘*räsonnement*’ which proceeds on the basis of grounds alone (SL 466/LW 90). The Sophists, as Hegel notes in the *Encyclopaedia*, came on the scene when the Greeks were ‘no longer satisfied with mere tradition and authority,’ and ‘taught people how to seek out the various points of view from which

⁶ Just as that which is to be grounded can have multiple grounds, the same ground can be the ground of many diverse things, and of things that are ‘opposed.’ As Hegel notes, gravity [*die Schwere*] accounts as much for why a house remains standing as for why a stone falls (SL 464/LW 87).

things can be considered' (Enc § 121 Add.).⁷ For Hegel, this was a necessary moment in the progression of thinking; nevertheless, since grounds are essentially distinct from that which they ground, it is also dangerous insofar as 'good grounds' can be given for anything, or any course of action, whatsoever. As Hegel states, 'Everything in the world that has been corrupted has been corrupted on good grounds' (§ 121 Add).

Now of course, to speak of corruption and of sophistry in the pejorative sense supposes that the truth of things is not simply a diverse collection of equally valid and equally invalid grounds. And indeed, Hegel takes the first lesson of 'real ground' to be that grounds, by themselves, are unable to fully account for things. This is made clear in one of Hegel's examples from the *Encyclopaedia*. It is perhaps not insignificant that amidst the ontological chaos of real ground the examples Hegel reaches for in both the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Logic* relate to law and order. In the former he proposes to consider an action—'let us say [...], a theft.' As he writes,

This is a content in which a number of aspects [*Seiten*] can be distinguished. Property has been violated by the theft; while the thief, who was in need, has obtained the means for the satisfaction of his wants. It may be the case, too, that the person from whom the theft was made did not make good use of his property. Well, it is certainly correct that the violation of property which has taken place is the decisive point of view before which the others must give way; but this decision is not entailed by the principle of thought according to which everything must have a ground (§121 Add.).

The essential point for Hegel here is that grounds, in themselves, call for something beyond themselves in order to be able to ground. *In itself*, then, the ground depends on an immediacy that lies outside itself and which will come to be thematised as the

⁷ Hegel, like Plato, is thus concerned to delineate the ontological conditions of possibility of sophistry.

condition [*Bedingung*] of its grounding. We might say, then, that in order to see what is the most important perspective from which something is to be viewed, we need to consider the wider context in which it is situated. But Hegel's comments on the Sophists' break with tradition and authority also seem to imply, consciously or not, that this consideration of the wider context will also serve to temper such a rebellion against authority and tradition.

1.3 The Condition and the *Sache selbst*

The ground, as we have seen, is not intrinsically connected to that which it grounds. This connection only arises when the immediate condition outside the ground connects the ground to the grounded. At this point, Hegel is just making the point that if we wish to consider the most important perspective from which to regard something, we cannot simply *reflect* on that thing itself. For then we will be confronted with a multiplicity of determinations, none of which possesses a claim to being ultimate and authoritative. We therefore have to broaden our perspective to the wider state of affairs in which that thing is situated, and look not simply at what is *posited* in the thing, but at what is *given* in relation it, or what just happens to be there. In the case of the act of 'theft,' for example, the perspective which 'best accounts' for what that act is depends on the wider context of the given personal, social, economic, and political conditions in play.

Let us now turn to this condition. The condition is that which *qua condition* only has its being in relation to the ground, but nevertheless it also has an 'immediacy,' described here by Hegel with the concept of *Dasein*, which refers to the immediacy characteristic of the sphere of being (and not to the particular category of *Dasein* within that sphere). It is important to note here that because the condition is immediate being in

general, it is multiple in itself. As Hegel writes, it is 'first an immediate manifold *Dasein*' (SL 470/LW 94). The condition of ground *as such* therefore always consists in a number of *conditions* which, as immediate determinations, are indifferent to one another. Thus, while at this point Hegel speaks primarily of the condition of ground, he later refers to conditions in the plural. In the following, I shall generally refer to the 'conditions' of the ground.

Now if the conditions were only a form of indifferent *Dasein* then of course the relativity that characterised real ground would remain, for the ground would still only be contingently connected to that which it grounds. There would then need to be a further condition which makes these conditions the condition of this ground, and so on *ad infinitum*. But Hegel attempts to show that the remaining exteriority between the ground and its conditions is only a seeming exteriority. Let us now turn to this demonstration.

We have already seen that the ground presupposes its immediate conditions. But if this is the case, then the conditions are not simply external to the ground: there simply *is* no ground *as such* prior to that which gives it its determinate sense and thus enables it to fulfil its grounding function. It is in ground's very nature then to sublimate itself as pure ground and to become immediate. The conditions, on the other hand, are, as we have seen, only conditions in relation to the ground and 'in themselves' are only a diverse manifold of immediate, indifferent determinations. Nevertheless, Hegel reminds us that, as has been clear since the beginning of essence, there can no longer be any simple immediacy such as there was in the sphere of being. *Dasein* as simply immediate being must sublimate itself into reflection (SL 472/LW 97). This means that the conditions cannot in truth be simply a collection of diverse determinations, but are what they are only by being mediated by one another—by being always already moments of a grounding relation which is constituted by the totality of their relations, or their mutual

interpenetration. It is because this diverse multiplicity comes to take on a coherent sense that the condition *as such* loses its exteriority over against the ground.

The ground, then, does not absorb the condition into itself: condition and ground only are what they are when they meet in the middle, so to speak. Hegel's point, as we noted, is on the face of it quite simple: in order to give an adequate account of something, we have to move from a narrow reflection on the *explanandum* to a wider reflection which encompasses the whole state of affairs in which it stands. This wider state of affairs is then of course found to be not simply indifferent to the matter at hand, but to bear on it in itself. In this wider reflection the border is then broken down between what just happens to be there and what is there 'for a reason' (*was ein Grund hat*).

The separation of ground and condition thus proves to be contradictory, and this contradiction of course contains within itself a new unity. As Hegel writes, 'What is present [...] is simply only *one* whole of form, but equally only *one* whole of content' (SL 473/LW 98). This unity is termed by Hegel the *Sache*.⁸ Near the close of the chapter on ground, Hegel describes the emergence of the *Sache* in the following manner: '*When all the conditions of a Sache are present* it enters into Existence,' and 'when the totality of the *Sache* is posited as groundless immediate, this scattered multiplicity *inwardizes* [*erinnert*] itself in its own self,' (SL 477/LW 102). Indeed, here we should note that this 'inwardisation' or what we might call 'internal completeness' is the more important sense of 'totality' at work here. When Hegel speaks of 'all the conditions' being present he does not simply mean that all of the conditions are necessary in order for the *Sache* to be the particular *Sache* it is; more importantly, he means that all of the conditions, through their mutual mediation, come to form a single, coherent whole. It is only on this basis that the

⁸ As Miller's translation of '*Sache*' as 'fact' does not capture the breadth of the German term, and as there is no one English word which would capture this breadth, I shall leave *Sache* untranslated here.

Sache simply *emerges* into existence and requires no additional conditions in order to be what it is.

The *Sache* is then the unity of the ground and the conditions, or, in other words, the unity of reflection and immediacy. But because it is precisely the unity of two moments that both prove to be *in themselves* the other, the *Sache* is itself a wider *reflection* which includes both the ground and the conditions as its own moments. Just as ground proved first to be the identity of identity and difference, the *Sache* proves initially to be the ground of ground and condition (SL 474/LW 99). What previously seemed to be the 'external' relation between ground and condition has now proved to be the 'tautological movement of the *Sache* to itself' (SL 477/LW 103) which is 'only the vanishing of the illusion [*des Scheins*] of mediation' (SL 476/LW 102).

This movement takes place in two stages: the first is an outward movement in which the *Sache* repels itself from itself, spreading out into what appears to be a 'multiplicity without unity' (SL 475/LW 100). In this outward movement, we might say that the *Sache* *gives* itself its own conditions or *posits* itself as immediate. The second stage is an inward movement in which these seemingly immediate moments are seen to be what they are 'solely through the reflection of the ground-relation which posits itself as sublated.' In other words they are seen to be *pre*-posited by the ground which 'relates them, so making them moments in the unity of the *Sache*' (SL 476/LW 101). The *Sache* is therefore an *immediate* self-relation which will form the basis of the next stage of the logic of essence, 'existence.'

As we have seen, then, the *Sache* is the ground of ground and condition. Yet here we might still ask: what is the condition of the *Sache*'s being the ground of ground and condition? What enables the *Sache* first of all to be formed as one *single* reflection which

contains its conditions within itself? The *Sache* can only be such if the diverse conditions sublate themselves as diverse, and in their opposition to one another come to form one, unified whole. Because the conditions thoroughly interpenetrate one another, the 'context' that they constitute is thus *saturated*. And since the context is saturated in this way there is no longer any need for a condition of the condition, i.e. for a form of 'external' mediation, or a 'transcendental' perspective.

But how does Hegel arrive at this saturation of the context? This can again be explained by the all-or-nothing character of the dialectic as it manifests itself in the above transition. The conditions first appear as simply immediate over against one another; Hegel then reminds us that there can no longer be such simple immediacy, so that we move from this absolute exteriority straight to the absolute interpenetration of the conditions. It is once again because the terms have been held apart in such abstraction from each other that, on rebounding out of this separation, they come to oppose themselves to one another and thereby come to form one unified whole.

Now Hegel's argument here is based on the transition from the sphere of immediate being to the sphere of essence that we considered in chapter 1. There we saw that being could no longer take the form of simple immediacy, but rather proved to be a process of mediation. But this in itself does not take us very far. It only shows that *formally*, being must be reflexive, which means here that the determinations of being (the conditions) cannot be simply immediate, but are what they are only through their mutual mediation. But this by itself does not solve the problem encountered in real ground, namely that a number of grounds could be given to explain the same thing. The problem there was not that of the *form* taken by being, but of a multiplicity of *content*—the plurality of different grounds. Now it was *after* the transition to essence that a remainder was seen to be generated by the process of reflection, which prevents

reflection from being simply self-determining or from closing on itself, since it is disrupted from within by that which it cannot 'get behind.' The mode of Hegel's presentation here thus serves to mask the fact that there is no immanent reason why such a remainder should not persist between the various conditions such that they do not form a *single* whole. In this case, while the conditions could not simply exist 'outside' *any* ground, they could still be unified by a number of different grounds.

If this were the case, then we would be presented with a structure very close to the Derridean 'general text' which we considered in the previous chapter.⁹ If the remainder were to persist here, then the *Sache* could not be the movement out from itself and back to itself—the reciprocal movement between the ground and its conditions—for the 'context' would remain unsaturated and would open out, in itself, on to other contexts. Instead of a movement of self-repulsion and return, there would be a movement outward that always risks not returning, a movement of dissemination whereby the conditions would continually call for further conditions. This would mean that the sense of the *Sache* would remain indeterminate and essentially susceptible to redetermination. In this case, we could not say that the *Sache* ever simply 'emerges' into the immediacy of existence, for such simple existence presupposes that the 'external mediation' characteristic of the grounding relation in 'real ground' has vanished.

If the transition to the complete immanence of the *Sache* cannot itself be justified on an immanent basis, how might we explain Hegel's confidence regarding this transition? The Derridean 'objection' to Hegel outlined above might be seen as a critique

⁹ Nevertheless, it is crucial to note here that if the *Logic* were to open on to such a structure, then this would be the point at which it would break down *as a pure onto-logic*. For it would have opened on to a form of difference that, in being essentially multiple, could no longer be presented within such a logic, for the reasons we discussed in relation to Derrida in the previous chapter. It is thus only by repressing this possibility that the *Logic* is able to constitute itself *as a logic*.

of 'common sense,' of a certain surety concerning the unity and authority of the context. This surety seems to be evinced by a rapid slide from one sense of immediate 'givenness' to another, a slide which shall form one of the central themes of chapter 6. In the present case, the conditions which make up the surrounding context are initially immediately 'given' in the sense that they are essentially *indeterminate*. This indeterminate givenness then immediately proves to be a form of givenness as self-evidence. The slide between these senses is evident if we return to Hegel's example of the 'theft.' On the one hand, the conditions surrounding the act are not *directly* connected with it, and so are not already contained within any particular 'ground' of the act. And yet, Hegel assumes that these conditions will show that 'it is certainly correct that the violation of property which has taken place is the decisive point of view before which the others must give way' (Enc § 121 Add.).

For Derrida, as we shall see in more detail in chapter 6, this appeal to what is given in the second sense can be seen as a repression of the very question of 'diversity' that Hegel's thought opens on to. Hegel opens this question, and to that extent is 'also the thinker of irreducible difference' (G 26/41), yet immediately attempts to close down this troubling instability by treating it as *merely* external difference, as opposed to wholly internal difference. As Derrida suggests in *Writing and Difference*, Hegel thereby 'blinds himself' to what he himself reveals.¹⁰ In the *Encyclopaedia* example, for instance, Hegel does not even countenance the possibility that a consideration of the wider context *could* lead to a more radical transformation of how the act is seen, such that, for example, it

¹⁰ Cf. Jacques Derrida, WD 327–9/380-2. 'In naming the without-reserve of absolute expenditure "abstract negativity," Hegel, through *precipitation*, blinded himself to that which he had laid bare under the rubric of negativity. And did so through precipitation toward the seriousness of meaning and the security of knowledge' (WD 328/381).

might no longer be conceived as a 'theft' at all. Perhaps it would not be going too far to suggest that there are traces of a certain repression evident in the closing passages of the logic of ground, when Hegel repeats a seemingly straightforward formula three times in the space of a paragraph, with slight variations: '*When all the conditions of a Sache are present it enters into Existence*'; 'When [...] all the conditions of the *Sache* are present, that is, when the totality of the fact is posited as a groundless immediate, this scattered multiplicity inwardizes [*erinnert*] itself'; 'When [...] all the conditions of the *Sache* are present, they sublimate themselves as immediate being...' (SL 477/LW 102-3).

Part 2. Contingency and Necessity

I shall now turn to Hegel's analysis of the modal categories near the end of the logic of essence. This analysis is separated from the dialectic of ground by a number of dialectical stages. At each of these stages, the relevant contrary terms ultimately come into opposition and contradiction; their sublation produces a new unity which forms the starting point of the next stage. These categories include: the thing and its properties; the appearing world and the world that is in and for itself; the whole and the parts; force and expression; and the inner and the outer. Throughout this progression, the trace or remainder has become less and less resistant to reflection, and at the point at which the last major section of the logic of essence is reached, which Hegel terms 'actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*), it has been reduced to almost nothing. With the sublation of the difference between the inner and the outer, essence becomes a process of manifestation which is no longer, as Hegel states, a *Scheinen* in an other, but only within itself. Essence has then nearly acquired the complete transparency which characterises the concept. As Hegel writes, 'The actual is [...] *manifestation*; it is not drawn into the sphere of *alteration* by its

externality, nor is it the *Scheinen* of itself in *an other*, but it manifests itself, that is, in its externality it is *itself* and is *itself* in that alone, namely only as a self-distinguishing and self-determining movement' (SL 541-2/LW 175).

I shall consider the second chapter of Hegel's account of 'actuality,' which deals with the categories of possibility, actuality, contingency, and necessity. Even at this stage of essence, when the distinction between the inner and the outer has been overcome, reflection still has not come to coincide with itself completely and is therefore still haunted by an other within itself. Although the modal dialectic is not the last stage of the logic of essence, it is nevertheless in the transition from real possibility to real necessity that the last really significant presupposition of reflection, which takes the form of contingency, is seen by Hegel to be overcome. In the following reading of the modal dialectic, I shall claim that in the stages of formal actuality and real actuality, the necessity of contingency is maintained, but that in absolute necessity this remaining contingency is annulled in all but a negligible sense. As we shall see, the transition to real necessity, which forms the basis for the transition to absolute necessity, significantly resembles the transition from 'real ground' to the *Sache*, and I shall claim that it too cannot be demonstrated to be necessary.

2.1 Formal Actuality

Now that the difference between the inner and the outer has been sublated, the question is no longer *whether* being manifests itself completely, but *how* it does so, i.e. how this process takes shape as the movement between possibility and actuality. As in the dialectic of ground, these two categories are first determined formally—they are only *modes* of presentation of a content that in itself is indifferent to them, just as formal

ground only involves a change of 'perspective' on the same content. Possibility is this content in the form of 'reflection into self'; actuality in the form of its immediate existence (SL 542/LW 176). As George di Giovanni puts this, the former is 'a mere self-reference,' the latter 'a mere presence.'¹¹

Hegel initially focusses on possibility, drawing out first its positive and then its negative sense. Positively, it is initially characterised according to the traditional schema of identity: what is possible is that which is not self-contradictory (SL 543/LW 177). But this minimal and purely formal description puts almost no limit on what is in truth possible: considered in abstraction, anything is just as possible as its opposite, which latter would exclude it. This definition of possibility in terms of non-contradiction therefore comes to contradict *itself*; were it to be used as a criterion, we would have to say that anything is as impossible as it is possible. The same result is reached through the negative definition of possibility as that which is not what it is by itself: what determines whether it is really possible lies entirely outside itself (SL 543-4/LW 177-8).

In this way, the minimal determination of possibility as a mere self-reference proves to be insufficient to distinguish possibility from the 'mere presence' or bare immediacy of actuality. Hegel thus writes that possibility 'is therefore also the immediate and thus becomes actuality' (SL 544/LW 178). This does not mean there is now only actuality, however, because the merely formal actuality into which possibility has sublated itself is, in its bare immediacy, *itself* just as much possible as it is actual. Neither possibility nor actuality constitutes the ground of that which is nonetheless actualised; what is actualised, then, just *happens* to be actualised.

¹¹ George Di Giovanni, 'The Category of Contingency in the Hegelian Logic', in *Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy*, ed. by Warren E. Steinkraus and Kenneth L. Schmitz (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), p. 185.

This is of course where contingency enters. For, as Hegel writes, 'The contingent is an actual that at the same time is determined merely as possible' (SL 545/LW 179). We might then say that the contingent is that which, in itself, cannot account for itself, or that which is marked by a certain givenness. To this extent, Hegel notes, it both has a 'ground' and lacks a ground.¹² It lacks a ground in itself but it has its ground in an other (SL 545/LW 179). But this ground is not yet to be thought as the conditions and wider circumstances by means of which any possibility comes to be actualised, as these are not yet on hand. All that there currently is, then, is the passing over [*Umschlagen*] of possibility and actuality into each other, which Hegel describes as the 'absolute unrest' of becoming (SL 545/LW 180). Each calls upon the other in order to ground it, but each is equally incapable of such grounding, due to its empty, immediately self-sublating indeterminacy.

Just as in the case of becoming in the Doctrine of Being, however, Hegel finds that this restless movement comes to a halt, not this time in the category of Dasein, but in that of *necessity*. Hegel states that 'because each immediately turns into its opposite, equally in this other it simply *unites with itself*, and this identity of both, of one in the other, is *necessity*' (SL 545/LW 180). Now here we should note that this formal conception of necessity is extremely minimal. The necessity in question clearly cannot be that which *guides* the process of actualisation, as there is nothing on hand that could do so. But it is precisely because there is nothing outside of what there *happens* to be that

¹² Ground here is to be understood in a general sense as that which provides a *reason* why something is actualised. It is not to be identified with the specific category of ground we considered in the first part of this chapter.

the latter is all that there can be, and so in this sense is necessary. As Stephen Houlgate notes, necessity here can then only be the necessity of *contingency*.¹³

2.2 Real Actuality

Formal necessity, as the necessity of contingency, is then the necessity *that* possibilities be actualised, but not the necessity that any particular possibilities rather than others be actualised. The second stage of the modal dialectic begins from the manifold content that is generated according to this necessity. Hegel's attention again turns first to the meaning of possibility. Given the existence of such a manifold content, possibility can no longer be simply the non-contradiction of something with itself. If something is *really* possible, as Hegel writes, it 'must also not be self-contradictory with respect to its developed and distinct [*unterschieden*] circumstances and everything with which it stands connected' (SL 548/LW 182, trans. modified). Its *real* possibility is then no longer in itself, as was the case with formal possibility, but is rather constituted by 'the existing [*daseiende*] multiplicity of circumstances [*Umstände*] which are connected with it' (SL 547/LW 182).

Like the ground and the grounded in the sphere of real ground, possibility and actuality have now fallen apart from one another. Possibility is now the possibility of something *else* being made actual. This is true of every possibility that has been actualised, insofar as it is now a moment within a state of affairs which makes other terms possible; but it is also true of the totality of the determinations making up this state of affairs, insofar as they are in themselves the real possibility of generating a new totality of circumstances. As Hegel writes, 'real possibility constitutes the totality of conditions, a

¹³ Stephen Houlgate, 'Necessity and Contingency in Hegel's *Science of Logic*', *The Owl of Minerva*, 27 (1995), 37–49 (p. 41).

dispersed actuality which is not reflected into itself but is determined as being the in-itself of an other' (SL 547/LW 182, trans. modified). Indeed, here we see how in real possibility the sphere of actuality comes to take on its generative aspect; Hans-Peter Falk thus suggests that 'real possibility' could equally be termed 'potentiality'¹⁴

We can now turn to the manner in which Hegel conceives this separation of real possibility from actuality to undo itself. As we have seen, whether something is really possible depends on the state of affairs constituted by the given multiplicity of other determinations which make up the surrounding 'context.' These conditions are described by Hegel as '*diverse* determinations, and [...] a *manifold* content in general' (SL 546/LW 181) and, as we saw above, an 'existing [*daseiende*] multiplicity' (SL 547/LW 182). Now to the extent that these conditions remain diverse, then precisely *what* they make possible remains external to them: in other words, what will be actualised remains *contingent*. Nevertheless, at this point Hegel refers back to the argument from the dialectic of identity and difference that diversity sublates itself into opposition, though without demonstrating its validity in the context of modality. 'Manifold existence, Hegel writes, 'is in its own self, this, to sublata itself and fall to the ground' (SL 548/LW 183). Yet Hegel appears to explain what is meant here *also* by repeating, almost word for word, the claim made at the end of the dialectic of ground: 'When all the conditions of a *Sache* are completely present [*vollständig vorhanden sind*], it enters into actuality' (SL 548/LW 183). Hegel's claim can therefore be taken to be that the more something comes to be *really* possible rather than possible in only an empty, formal sense, the more it comes to be actual, and thus proves to be *necessary*. As John Burbidge interprets Hegel's point, 'On the one hand, a set of conditions are not the real possibility of a thing unless all the

¹⁴ Hans-Peter Falk, *Das Wissen in Hegels 'Wissenschaft der Logik'* (Freiburg: K. Alber Verlag, 1983), p.

conditions are present. On the other hand, when all the conditions are present, the thing is no longer simply possible, but actual.¹⁵ Just as in the case of formal necessity, it is then through the sublation of the difference between possibility and actuality that real necessity arises. Simply put, if whatever is really possible is actual, then what is really possible is necessary: it could not be otherwise. 'Under these conditions and circumstances,' Hegel writes, 'nothing else can follow' (SL 549/LW 184, trans. modified).

For Hegel, this again does not mean there is now only actuality, but rather that there is no longer a separation between what is possible and what is actual, no longer a leap from the one to the other, for each is in itself the other. The transition from possibility to actuality is thus 'not a *transition*, but a going-together-with-itself' which in its self-sublation brings forth 'the same moments which were already there' (SL 548/LW 183). Likewise, in sublating itself, the immediate existence of actuality makes itself into the 'in itself [i.e. the possibility] which it already is' (SL 549/LW 184). As di Giovanni writes, then, 'the one significant reality is the emergence of an event as process.'¹⁶ Di Giovanni is right to refer to a process here, and thus to a certain development, but we also need to note that this development is at the same time always already cancelled as such, for it always already will have occurred. Here we can see, then, just how much the remainder, or the delay between positing and presupposing, has been reduced at this point in the logic of essence.

Though this transition appears to be straightforward, we might raise the same objection to it as we did to the transition to the *Sache* in the sphere of ground, namely that Hegel

¹⁵ John W. Burbidge, 'The Necessity of Contingency', in *Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy*, ed. by Warren E. Steinkraus and Kenneth L. Schmitz (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), p. 208.

¹⁶ Di Giovanni, p. 190.

cannot show in an immanent manner that a remainder of exteriority should not persist between possibility that actuality, and therefore that a degree of contingency or indeterminacy as to what may be actualised does not remain. Now in raising this objection, it is important to make clear what does the real work in Hegel's argument. Although aspects of Hegel's presentation suggest otherwise, the transition to necessity is not brought about through the 'external completeness' of the conditions. Real necessity is the notion that something *in particular*, i.e. something determinate, is contained within and must follow from a given state of affairs. This form of necessity cannot then be reached simply through the external coming together of a number of conditions. For if these conditions remained merely diverse over against one another, then as was the case in ground, they would not be *in themselves* the conditions of one particular thing rather than another. There would then need to be another condition which makes these conditions the condition of possibility of something in particular, rather than of anything else, and so on *ad infinitum*.

In truth, the transition to real necessity takes place, then, not when a new condition comes to be added to the existing set of conditions, but rather when the conditions that are *already there* prove not to be simply diverse but rather to relate to one another in such a way that they form one coherent whole. Only in this way do they contain *in themselves*, and thus by themselves make *necessary*, something in particular. As we saw di Giovanni note, the actualisation then becomes a wholly immanent process of development, a movement, we might say, of the self to itself, rather than a leap from one moment to the next. And as Hegel himself states of actuality: 'when its *immediate existence*, the circle of conditions, sublates itself, it makes itself into that *in-itself* which it already is' (SL 549/LW 184).

Once again, however, this complete coherence of the conditions cannot be immanently justified, but is made seemingly plausible through Hegel's presentation of this transition as a moment within an all-or-nothing dialectical movement, as well as his appeal to a 'self-evident' notion of external completeness (i.e. 'when all the conditions are completely present...') which does not do the real work of his argument. If a remainder were then to persist here between the conditions, their complete unity would not be attained and precisely *what* they give rise to would remain indeterminate. In chapter 6, I shall pursue this point through Derrida's critique of the notion of necessity in Hegel's 'system' more generally.

2.3 Absolute Necessity

The transition to real necessity forms the basis of the transition to 'absolute necessity.' In the final part of this chapter, I shall suggest that it is through this latter transition that contingency is 'overcome' in an important sense. First, however, we need to consider in what sense contingency still remains. Real necessity, as we have seen, expresses the complete mediation of possibility and actuality. Yet Hegel notes that such necessity is still based on a presupposition that falls outside this mediating movement, namely on a moment of contingency which remains unaccounted for. This is because real necessity constitutes the mediation of those determinations which in the process of formal actuality *happened* to be actualised. Real necessity, in Hegel's view, can account for the unity of these determinations, but not for what was first of all there to be mediated. As Hegel puts it, 'it has its starting point in the *contingent*' (SL 549/LW 184). As Giacomo Rinaldi notes, real necessity is then the kind of relation usually expressed in the form of a hypothetical judgement: 'an existence is 'really' necessary in that, once the totality of its

conditions is posited, it *must necessarily* actualize itself. Yet *that* the totality of its conditions be posited is by no means determined by its very essence.¹⁷ The transition to absolute necessity thus constitutes another example of the movement by which essence attempts to 'get behind' the remainder that seems to fall outside of reflection, and so to account for its own beginning. For Hegel, it will be a question here of showing that this presupposed contingency is in truth a moment of necessity itself, i.e. that necessity is not merely the mediation of pre-given determinations, but is also that which first of all generates these terms. The presupposition of real necessity will thus prove to be '*its own becoming*; - or the *presupposition* which it had is its own positing' (SL 551/LW 186, trans. modified).

The passages in which Hegel attempts to demonstrate this overcoming are some of the most dense and elliptical in the *Logic* (SL 550-1/LW 186-7). Nevertheless, Hegel's central point does not amount to a new logical development, but can be seen as an extension and radicalisation of a consequence implicit in the structure of real necessity. This consequence can be put in the following way: the previous dialectic has, in Hegel's view, shown that any possibility that is 'really real,' as it were, cannot but be actual. But if this is the case, then there is no longer any sense to the notion that things might have been otherwise; the notion of possibility that such a thought involves is purely formal, and formal possibility has been seen to sublate itself—it has proved to be mere *Schein*. Thus, if in truth there cannot be a genuine possibility that is not already actual, then there can no longer be any 'original' contingency. Indeed, with the closure of reflection on itself we lose the notion of any origin *überhaupt*, for such a notion is seen to be an 'illusion' generated *by reflection itself*, just as it was in the opening chapter of the logic of essence. In truth, what seemed to be simple immediacy will have been reflected immediacy.

17 Rinaldi, p. 215.

Absolute necessity therefore corresponds to the *Sache selbst* in the sphere of ground: it is that which posits its *own* conditions.

Hegel maintains, however, that even absolute necessity remains, in a certain sense, the necessity *of contingency*. This point is taken up by both di Giovanni and Dieter Henrich. The former writes that to determine reality absolutely, in the manner of absolute necessity, 'does not mean to enumerate exhaustively the ready-made qualities which supposedly make up its content, but to define it precisely as generating *its own* problems of determination.'¹⁸ Yet insofar as these 'problems' are only generated *by* absolute necessity itself, it is difficult here to see why they should be *genuine* problems. Why this is the case emerges more clearly if we consider Henrich's very similar position. Henrich writes that it would be legitimate to see contingency as being annulled by necessity in Hegel's *Jena Logic*, but that in the *Wesenslogik* of 1813 this is no longer the case. In the latter, he states, necessity posits its conditions, but it posits them precisely *as* contingent.¹⁹ Here Henrich draws on Hegel's statement that it is '*necessity itself* which determines itself as contingency – in its being repels itself from itself and in this very repulsion has only returned to itself' (SL 551/LW 187). Yet neither Henrich nor Hegel elaborates on precisely what it would mean for necessity to posit itself as contingency, and it is difficult to see how such an elaboration could be given, for up to this point in the *Logic* contingency has referred to that which precisely *is not posited*—that which can only be *presupposed*, even if *by* reflection, as falling outside the circle of reflection.

Absolute necessity does not come up against such a presupposition since, as a pure self-relation, nothing any longer remains opaque to it. As Hegel writes, 'the form in its realisation has penetrated all its differences and made itself transparent and is, as

¹⁸ Di Giovanni, p. 193.

¹⁹ Dieter Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 164.

absolute necessity, only this simple *self-identity of being in its negation or in essence*' (SL 551/LW 187). To the extent that it is a movement that only goes together with itself, absolute necessity has thus come to reconstitute the simple immediacy of pure being as pure reflected immediacy. It can therefore be thought as the thoroughgoing mediation of mediation and immediacy. As Hegel puts this, absolute necessity is, 'being which in its negation, in essence, is self-related and is being. It is as much simple immediacy or *pure being* as simple reflection-into-self or *pure essence*; it is this, that these two are one and the same' (SL 552/LW 188).

Absolute necessity has then almost entirely 'overcome' and accounted for contingency. Nevertheless, just because it has come to reconstruct the simple immediacy of being through its thoroughgoing self-mediation, it remains in a minimal sense still the necessity *of contingency*. It is such because, although the manifold content from which real necessity seems to begin is in truth only *posited* by absolute necessity, there is still no reason *why* what is posited is posited.²⁰ This content simply *is* necessary, without any further explanation; in other words, what must be must be, but it is not yet clear why what must be must be. Hegel therefore states that, because it is immediate, 'that which is simply necessary only *is* because it *is*; it has neither condition nor ground.' On the other hand, however, since this immediacy is mediated or reflected immediacy, Hegel also states that 'it is, *because* it is. As reflection, it has a ground and condition, but it has only *itself* for ground and condition' (SL 552/LW 188).

²⁰ My thanks to Stephen Houlgate for pointing out this dimension of absolute necessity. Houlgate also notes one further sense in which absolute necessity might be considered the necessity of contingency. On his view, it 'determines nothing other than the unavoidable fate *of* all contingent things, namely that they will end' (Houlgate p. 47).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I claimed that it is in the sphere of 'ground' that difference as diversity explicitly gives rise to the central problem of essence: relativity. This state of diversity is taken by Hegel to sublimate itself in the dialectic of ground and in that of the modal categories. I claimed, however, that this sublation could not be justified on an immanent basis. I suggested instead that it gains its plausibility through the all-or-nothing movement from one moment of the dialectic to the next, and through a more implicit appeal to the authority of the context. As I shall suggest in chapter 6, in Derrida's view this surety constitutes itself through the repression of the possibility of reconceiving the sense of any 'given' context.

In the present chapter, very little was said about Derrida's relation to Hegel's logic of contingency and necessity. Here I would like to reiterate the reasons for this, while also foreshadowing the manner in which, in chapter 6, I shall nonetheless consider Derrida's *Auseinandersetzung* with the role of contingency and necessity in Hegel's 'system' more broadly.

Firstly, just as Derrida cannot simply affirm the excess of *Hegelian* diversity over opposition, he cannot affirm the excess of *Hegelian* contingency over necessity. To do so would already be to accept the basis of Hegel's distinction between these categories, according to which contingency is the symmetrical 'own other' of necessity, in the form of 'external' rather than internal difference. Indeed, as I shall discuss in chapter 6, Derrida points out that Hegel can only determine contingency as *mere* contingency to the extent that it can meaningfully be contrasted with true necessity. Contingency is therefore only determined *as such* once it has been overcome. If it is not overcome, then of course 'contingency' can no longer be 'mere' contingency.

Secondly, Derrida also cannot offer an alternative *general* theory of contingency and necessity. For to give a general theory of contingency would already be to determine contingency on the basis of necessity and so to privilege the latter; it would be to determine what contingency *necessarily* is, in all contexts. Furthermore, to state that contingency, thus defined, always exceeds necessity would be to make a universal, necessary claim.

Derrida therefore cannot simply argue for the excess of contingency over necessity in general, whether in the form of a more radical necessity of contingency or the contingency of all necessity. To do so would lead toward the contradiction into which Markus Gabriel runs in his *Transcendental Ontology*. In that work, Gabriel draws on Schelling in order to argue, against Hegel, for the contingency of necessity. But Gabriel also notes that 'if contingency is to truly have the last word, we cannot even claim that this is necessary: this means that there is no theoretical operation that can guarantee even that at least contingency is necessary.'²¹ Now while Gabriel is content merely to acknowledge this contradiction, Derrida recognised that it must affect the very bases of his methodology: this, as we noted in the previous chapter, is why Derrida always has to speak from within, although at the same time always from the edge of, particular contexts, such that the universal validity of any statements made within these particular contexts is always already problematised and subject to displacement.

Furthermore, even 'within' these contexts, it is not Derrida's aim to critique the authors he engages with by appealing to that which *must* be universally acknowledged. The same is true, as we shall see in chapter 6, of Derrida's critique of the shift from diverse structures to oppositional structures at various moments in Hegel's system.

²¹ Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.

Appealing to that which is 'obvious,' 'plain to see,' or 'given,' would already, as we saw above, conform to the manner in which Hegel arrives at the notion of necessity or the *Sache selbst*. For Derrida, by contrast, it will always be a question of attempting to remain open to the 'other other' that does not push itself to the fore, and also to the mechanism by which this other other is repressed.

Chapter 5: Hegel's Concept

Introduction

The following chapter is devoted to the beginning and end of the third and final book of Hegel's *Logic: The Doctrine of the Concept*. In the first part of the chapter I shall give a characterisation of the general structure of the concept, particularly by contrasting it with the sphere of essence. On the basis of this characterisation, I shall also consider the status of difference in the conceptual sphere. It is particularly important to undertake this investigation in relation to the concept because, as Michael Theunissen notes, it is with the concept that the *Logic* ceases to be a critical presentation of prior attempts to grasp the truth of being and comes to be the presentation of this very truth, as Hegel conceives it.¹ Difference as it appears in the concept is then the truest and 'highest' form of difference for Hegel. Nevertheless, I shall claim that in the conceptual sphere identity comes to be privileged over difference in two ways. Firstly, identity comes to be privileged at the 'meta-level' of the identity of identity and difference, insofar as the different moments of the concept form a totality. I shall claim that this form of identity as the self-relation or self-presence of the concept follows as a direct consequence of the sublation of the sphere of essence. Secondly, identity comes to be privileged in a more straightforward manner, insofar as the movement of the concept as such is identified with the unfolding of *one* of its determinations: the universal. I shall claim that this form of identity as the active self-determination of the concept does not strictly follow from the

¹ Michael Theunissen, *Sein und Schein: Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik*, 2 ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), p. 38.

sublation of the sphere of essence, but constitutes Hegel's interpretation of this sublation.

In the second part of the chapter, I shall consider how the 'absolute method' introduced at the very end of the *Logic* comes to reconceptualise both the beginning of the *Logic* and the process of its subsequent development. As the 'universal self-consciousness' of the *Logic*,² the absolute method thus brings a certain closure to the logical system, in demonstrating what this system will have been, in truth.

Part 1: The Concept in General

1.1. The Diachrony of Essence

As Hegel makes clear, the sphere of the concept is distinguished from that of essence by its transparency (SL 582/LB 11). As we saw in chapters 1, 2, and 4, essence is characterised by a certain opacity. This opacity is due to the remainder of being which continually eludes the reflexive self-determination of essence. Essence, as a movement of positing, continually came up against that which it could not have posited by itself, but which it had to *presuppose*. Now what it presupposes, as we noted in chapter 1, itself does not lie outside this movement of positing—this is why it is not a 'remainder' in a simple sense, i.e. not a 'leftover' from the sphere of being that has not completely disappeared, but rather a 'past that has never been present' and that only will have preceded its being posited. Yet it is just because the remainder is 'generated' through the very movement of reflection on it that this reflection cannot definitively 'get behind' it. Each time that essence catches up with it, it immediately reappears again. The opacity of

² Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, trans. by Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 167.

essence is thus concomitant with the diachrony of essence.

The logical 'present' of essence is thus continually disrupted by the spectre of the 'past,' such that what this past will have been cannot be definitively determined: essence as reflection or *Erinnerung* cannot close upon itself. This disturbance manifests itself, on the one hand, as a 'delay,' or a jolting movement from one determination to the other. Each determination of essence is in itself its other, but is not quite *at the same time* that other; they are still separated by the remaining difference of identity and difference. According to the all-or-nothing dialectical movement of essence, they therefore fall apart into reflections that are apparently complete in themselves, and so fall into a state of diversity.

Now as we saw in chapter 4 in particular, it is through the logic of opposition that runs through the sphere of essence that the remainder, and thus the diachrony of essence, is gradually reduced. Although the diachrony of essence continually returns, each instance of opposition serves to further reduce the gap between 'past' and 'present' by further reducing the remainder on which it rests. By the end of the logic of essence, the 'delay' between positing and presupposing has become so slight that it ultimately disappears. This occurs when, at the end of the sphere of 'actuality,' the categories of activity and passivity sublate themselves into each other in a similar manner to the positive and the negative that we observed at the end of the dialectic of identity and difference (SL 568-9/LW 207-8). They thereby form one single process—which Hegel terms *reciprocity*—wherein each term only goes together with itself in its other. At this point, being comes to take on conceptual, rather than essential, form. As Hegel writes, 'The mutual opacity of the substances standing in causal relationship has vanished and become a self-transparent clarity, for the originality of their self-subsistence has passed into a positedness; the *original* substance [*Sache*] is original in that it is only *the cause of*

itself, and this is *substance raised to the freedom of the concept'* (SL 582/LB 11).

1.2. The Simultaneity of the Concept

The concept is thus no longer disturbed by the remainder. But this does not mean that it falls into a static form of self-identity and that the process of negativity comes to a halt. The latter remains integral to the concept, which means that the negation still separates from itself and comes to coincide with itself again. Indeed, in the conceptual sphere, negativity,

constitutes the *turning point* of the movement of the concept. It is the *simple point of the negative relation* to self, the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual self-movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true (SL 835/LB 296).

What separates the logic of the concept from that of essence is rather the *form* that this movement takes. In the sphere of the concept, this movement is no longer subject to a logical delay; both of its phases rather occur *simultaneously*, such that the movement 'outward' is *at the same time* a movement of return. In other words, the relation to the other is at the same time, because *equally*, a relation to self. The concept, as we shall see below, therefore amounts to the complete mediation of mediation and immediacy.

Whereas in essence, then, there was a jolting movement from one determination to its other, in the concept there is a flowing movement. As Gerard Lebrun puts it, the concept is defined by *development* rather than the appearing (*paraître*) that characterises

essence.³ Thus, whereas in the logic of essence it was possible to speak of the relation between, for example, the thing and its properties, here it is initially no longer appropriate to speak of things as such, but only of a process: what comes into focus with the concept is no longer being as divided into distinct, internally complex terms but the *formal* structure of being as movement.⁴ This movement does not proceed from one distinct point to another, but is the *continuous development* of the self in the other.⁵

To this extent, then, it is difficult to see how Hegel's concept could so often have been regarded as the sphere in which his thought comes to rest—as the moment of its simple closure on itself. Recent scholarship has therefore attempted to counter this misreading by stressing the dynamism of the concept.⁶ But in doing so, it is in danger of overstating its case and missing what remains valid in this too simplistic criticism of Hegel: for that the music has not come to a stop does not yet tell us what we are listening to. As we have seen, the transition to the concept is characterised by the overcoming of a distinction between identity and difference, or the self and the other. This means that both moments are given *simultaneously*, as each is *immediately* the other. Thus, while the concept is in one sense only movement, in another sense, this movement has *always already* occurred. It is a movement, in other words, that brings forth only what is already there. This is why Jean Hyppolite notes that the concept is marked by the coincidence of

³ Gérard Lebrun, *La patience du concept: Essai sur le discours Hégélien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp. 332–3.

⁴ Nevertheless, later in the logic of the concept this process will come to reconstruct mechanical and chemical objects.

⁵ This is why the language of positing and presupposing should no longer be appropriate to the sphere of the concept. Nevertheless, in the following, we shall see that at certain crucial points Hegel continues to speak of positing, though not of presupposing.

⁶ In the following, I shall consider an example of such a reading in Lebrun.

‘invention’ and ‘comprehension.’⁷

Just as essence proved to be the truth of being, the concept has now proved to be the truth of both being and essence, or the ‘objective logic.’ As we know from the consideration of essence, however, the concept cannot be the truth of the preceding spheres if it does not both incorporate and account for their *seeming* truth through a structure which, as Houlgate notes, ‘preserves aspects of both but is reducible to neither.’ As he states, ‘the concept has the simple *self-relation* that characterises immediate being, and it also incorporates the sheer *negativity* or ‘reflexion’ that characterises essence.’⁸ As I shall now discuss, these two dimensions of the concept correspond to two ways in which identity comes to be privileged within it.

1.3 Conceptual Difference

1.3.1 The Concept as Self-Relation

The concept results from the sublation of the distinction between the passive and the active, or, as we might more broadly put it, between identity and difference or self and other. From a Hegelian perspective, difference is then held to reach its apotheosis in the concept because there can no longer be any identity that is not always already shot through with difference. Hegel writes, for instance, that it is only a superficial conception (*Vorstellung*) that conceives all multiplicity as standing outside of the concept. In truth, however, ‘*differentiation*’ (*das Unterscheiden*) is an ‘essential moment of the concept’ (SL

⁷ Hyppolite, p. 182.

⁸ Stephen Houlgate, ‘Why Hegel’s Concept Is Not the Essence of Things’, in *Hegel’s Theory of the Subject*, ed. by D. G. Carlson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 20.

588-9/LB 19). This is what allows Hegel to say that the concept holds the highest contradiction within itself.

The concept, as we shall see, is thus nothing other than the differentiating process which separates out the moments of the universal, the particular, and the singular. Nevertheless, since each of these moments, in relating to the others, only goes together with itself, they all form a single whole or *totality*. As Hegel puts this, 'The concept in its simple self-relation is an absolute *determinateness* [i.e. is *difference*] which, however, as purely self-related is no less immediately a simple identity' (SL 582/LB 11). Within the concept, difference is then immediately self-difference. Identity is thus privileged here at the meta-level of the absolute identity of identity and difference.

The 'self' in question here cannot be thought as *that which* mediates these moments, but is only the unity that results from their complete interpenetration. While the concept can then be said to 'continue itself' through these various moments, it does not precede and is nothing outside of these moments. Furthermore, this identity of identity and difference is based on the equality and equiprimordiality of the different moments; no single moment is privileged over the others.

This unity has of course been reached through the logic of opposition which ran through the sphere of essence, and which gradually reduced the remaining difference of identity and difference to nothing. As I shall discuss in more detail later, this reduction proves in the sphere of the concept to be the overcoming of each moment's resistance to its inclusion in a *univocal* totality. As shall also be discussed, the fundamental unity of the concept in this sense leads to the inevitable return and meta-level privileging of such terms as 'identity,' 'inner,' and 'essence.'

1.3.2 The Concept as Self-Determining

Identity is also privileged at a more simple level, in a manner that does not strictly follow from, but in a certain sense runs counter to, the logic that Hegel has thus far elaborated. This takes place insofar as the concept comes to be determined not just as a form of self-relation or self-presence but also as an active process of self-determination. The result of the sublation of the difference between the passive and the active thus comes to be thought as the active. This first becomes evident in Hegel's discussion of the transition from essence to the concept, which is reminiscent of his discussion of the transition from being to essence. The concept has thus far proved to be the truth of both being and essence, but only insofar as it is their *result*. To this extent, it is only, as Hegel puts it, their 'abstract truth' (SL 591/LB 22). In order to constitute the full truth of being and essence, however, the concept must not only incorporate these spheres within itself, but must also show how they are in truth generated from out of itself (SL 591/LB 22).⁹ In its initial form, the concept is incomplete, Hegel writes, because it 'has not yet given itself a reality of its own, a reality produced from its own resources' (SL 591/LB 22). It is only in doing so that it can throw off its status as a result and can become the absolute beginning, or the freedom, that it already is: 'this identity must itself posit that which it is' (SL 596/LB 28, trans. modified).

⁹ Here we again encounter the paradoxical logic of the future perfect which has its fullest expression in essence, and whose status in the *Logic* as a whole we shall later question in more detail. The concept does not precede being and essence, and, on reaching the concept, Hegel describes these spheres as the 'becoming' of the concept or the '*genetic exposition of the concept*' (SL 578/LB 5). Nevertheless, while this 'becoming' in one sense precedes the concept and while the concept is nothing in truth prior to the unfolding of these spheres, their development is also a form of 'return' into what Hegel describes as their '*unconditioned ground*' (SL 591/LB 22).

Now of course 'identity' and 'activity' mean something very different in the logic of the concept than they do in the logic of essence, and the two senses should not be confused. This is why, as Houlgate notes, Hegel's description of the concept as 'ground,' is rather unhelpful here, for it brings to mind the relative mastery of essence. By contrast, the activity appropriate to the concept cannot amount to an exertion of force. It cannot be an activity that *acts on* its determinations, as it can no longer take any distance from them. Houlgate makes this quite clear when he writes:

When being proves to be concept, the determinations of immediate being and essence do, indeed, show themselves retrospectively to have been *concepts*, rather than merely immediate or reflexive determinations. They do not, however, turn out to have been under the sway of an all-powerful concept that determined behind their backs how they would develop. They turn out, rather, to have been the initial, abstract forms *of* the concept itself, that is, to be the concept itself in an undeveloped form. With the move into the sphere of the concept, the transitions of being and the reflexive positings of essence are thus revealed to have been the initial ways in which the concept freely determined itself and set itself on the path towards becoming explicitly self-determining.¹⁰

To this extent, then, even this form of identity as self-determination cannot amount to a form of identity that is *opposed* to or distinct from difference. Nevertheless, it still remains unclear how we can speak of self-determination here at all. If the concept results from the sublation of the active and the passive, then of course, there can now only be *one* process in which these determinations are moments; to that extent, this process can be conceived as a form of self-*relation*, in the manner described in 1.3.1, above. But why

¹⁰ Houlgate, p. 26.

should this self-relation be thought as self-*determination* if it is equally active and passive?

This only becomes clear when we see that Hegel takes the movement of the concept as a whole to be a movement that sets out from *one* of the concept's determinations, namely the universal. The universal, of course, corresponds to the moment of identity within the sphere of essence: it is that form of negativity in which the self-coincidence of the negative is emphasised, or the moment of unity. As we shall see, the universal first determines itself as the particular, and the universal and the particular then come to be united with one another as the singular. The movement of the concept as a whole is thus thought by Hegel as the self-determination of the universal, which in dividing itself from itself, or 'becoming other,' only returns to itself (SL 601/LB 33).

Now it is important to emphasise again that the universal cannot be *that which* stands outside this process of differentiation and guides it from behind the scenes. As we shall see, the universal is always already particularised, or as Hegel puts it, 'concrete.' Nevertheless, the fact that—without apparent justification—Hegel associates the movement of the concept with the movement of the universal, rather than the particular, makes an important difference here: it means that this movement is conceived as beginning and ending with a moment of unity rather than of disunity. The movement as a whole thus comes to be thought, as Theunissen notes, in the quasi-religious terms of the *Heruntersteigen* of the universal.¹¹ In this way, although the universal does not stand

¹¹ Theunissen, pp. 43-44. Beginning with one term rather than another also makes a greater difference in the sphere of the concept than it did in that of essence. For in the latter, although we began each dialectic with the 'positive' result of the sublation of the previous stage, this positive term came up against a presupposition, by which it was transformed. Since in the sphere of the concept this presupposition is not encountered—since the universal *continues* itself through its differences, rather

outside this movement, it still plays a determining role within it, for it is the unfolding of its *own* differences. We might then say that Hegel's blind spot here is to think that because the domination concerned is not *external*, it cannot be any form of domination at all.

Now of course, the concept is not presented *purely* in terms of the *Heruntersteigen* of the universal, and there are tensions in Hegel's account just because this relatively simple privileging of identity is in conflict with the logic he is following. As in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, then, where Hegel notes that the identity of identity and difference in ground is equally the difference of identity and difference, Hegel also on occasion describes the concept as *original division* (e.g. in his analysis of the forms of judgement, SL 622/LB 57). Nevertheless, such remarks are relatively isolated and do not significantly interfere with the general thrust of Hegel's presentation. Furthermore, this privileging of the universal is not rectified or balanced out even after the whole course of the conceptual logic's development. As we shall see in the second part of this chapter, in the absolute method through which the whole of the *Logic* is reconceived, the beginning of the *Logic* comes to be reconceived as the universal and the subsequent development as the process of its self-determination.

I shall now consider the manner in which these two forms of identity manifest themselves in Hegel's description of the general tripartite structure of the concept. The second form is particularly evident in Hegel's account of the universal and the particular, and the first more prominent in his account of the singular.

than shining in them—this movement comes to be dominated, in a sense that will be discussed below, by the term from which it begins.

1.4 The Universal

Like identity in the sphere of essence, the universal is a form of negativity that is accented on the moment of its self-coincidence, and thus appears as an 'utterly *simple* determination' (SL 601/LB 33). Indeed, Hegel's initial description of the universal seems to recall that of identity:

The concept is, in the first instance, the *absolute self-identity* that is such only as the negation of negation or as the infinite unity of negativity with itself. This *pure relation* of the concept to itself, which is this relation by positing itself through negativity, is the *universality* of the concept' (SL 601/LB 33).

As a determination of essence, however, identity is a process of 'shining' in difference. A gap or a delay still separates these two determinations, such that the passage from the one to the other is not completely smooth. Identity and difference can then be thought as each other's 'quasi-transcendental' condition but each is not wholly immanent to the other. In the 'infinite' self-relation of the universal, by contrast, there is no remaining exclusion of difference. In its self-relation, the universal is *at the same time* a process of differentiation. As Hegel states, the universal is thus the

soul of the concrete which it indwells, unimpeded and equal to itself in the manifoldness and diversity of the concrete. It is not dragged into the process of becoming, but *continues* itself through that process undisturbed and possesses the power [*Kraft*] of unalterable, undying self-preservation (SL 602/LB 35).

The universal, then, only *is* the universal as always already concrete. In this sense it is

quite right to say, as Houlgate does, that the universal is only ‘in determining itself to be particularity and individuality’ or, even more strongly, that it comes to *be* nothing but particularity and individuality.¹² Yet since it is precisely the universal which determines *itself* as particular, this particularity has always already been recuperated by the universal and does not fall apart from it. This recuperation-in-advance is achieved through what Hegel calls the ‘*Doppelschein*’ of the universal. This is a form of seeming (*Scheinen*) which, on the one hand, is directed outwards toward ‘another’ (though at this point in the *Logic* it is not clear what this term can mean) but at the same time is always already directed back inwards.

Now this *Doppelschein* can take two forms, one of which is appropriate to the concept *as such*, and the other to both determinate (that is, particular) concepts and to the inadequate conception of the universal held by the understanding. According to the latter, the particularity of the universal is resolved not in the universal as such, but in a ‘higher universal’ (SL 604/LB 37). But this is an incomplete, and so not a fully conceptual resolution, because it necessarily leaves open the possibility that the universal into which the particular has been taken up might itself be taken up as a particular moment within a universal that is higher still. It leaves open, then, the *necessary possibility* of a progress to infinity, because the unity reached in this case can only ever be that of a provisional agglomeration. The understanding therefore does not comprehend that the true, conceptual universal no longer leaves open the possibility of the kind of indifferent diversity that we observed in the sphere of essence.

The *Doppelschein* of the concept as such takes a different form, and in describing it Hegel again resorts to the language of positing. Here, particularity is, as it were, always

¹² Houlgate, p. 27. This of course does not mean that the universal is nothing *but* particularity and singularity.

already recuperated by the universal because it is only posited *by the universal*. As Hegel puts it: 'The truly higher universal is that in which this outward-going side is taken back into the universal, the second negation, in which the determinateness is present simply *as posited or as Schein*' (SL 605/LB 37, trans. modified). The particularity posited by universality is thus not a form of diversity but is always already a *totality*. In that the universal only goes together with itself in determining itself as the particular, it has always already returned to itself in the form of the singular.

Now the above is a description of the conceptual process *from the perspective of the universal*; we might then expect that, in Hegel's presentation of the particular and the singular, this description will be modified such that the process is portrayed from the perspective of the latter terms. To some extent this does occur, but, as we shall now see in regard to the particular, the process is on the whole still conceived in terms of the universal's self-determination.

1.5 The Particular

The particular is the moment of the tripartite structure of the concept which corresponds to difference in the sphere of essence or finitude in the sphere of being—the moment in which the negative is divided from itself. Now as we have seen, the universal does not logically precede, and is nothing outside of, its particularisation. Furthermore, as we shall see in more detail later, the particular itself 'contains' the universal and 'through its determinateness also exhibits it' (SL 606/LB 38). Nevertheless, on the dominant tendency of Hegel's account, it is clear that the relation of dependence between the universal and the particular is not equal. For while the particular contains the universal, it contains it as that which 'constitutes its substance' (SL 605-6/LB 38). The particular is thus only equal to

the universal insofar as it is a posited moment of the latter. Once again, then, Hegel has recourse to the language of positing here, stating that the particular is 'the universal's own, immanent moment' and that 'it has no *other* determinateness than that posited by the universal' (SL 605/LB 38, trans. modified). As in Hegel's discussion of the universal, the particular is thus conceived in terms of the *self*-differentiation of the universal. Hegel even goes as far as to say that the particular is 'the universal itself' in the moment of its '*shining [Scheinen] outwards*' (SL 606/LB 39).

The unity achieved through this form of the relation of the universal to the particular is again contrasted by Hegel with a lower form of unity, of the kind conceived by the understanding. As in the logic of essence, an all-or-nothing comparison is made here between an absolutely external difference and an absolutely internal difference. Yet in contrast to the sphere of essence, this external difference is not a difference which breaks out within the sphere of the concept itself, but is rather that which lies outside it, in the realm of the understanding and of nature. Because the understanding can only conceive a multiplicity in the form of a collection of *distinct* entities, the only unity it can attribute to them is an immediate unity. The inferiority of such a unity, for Hegel, lies in the fact that the universal through which such a diverse multiplicity is unified can only be applied *externally*: 'There is no inner standard or *principle* that could apply to them, simply because *diversity* is the difference without unity' (SL 606/LB 39). This of course means that such a diversity could come to be united by many different universals, without any of the latter having a claim to ultimate authority.

As Hegel famously remarks, this is the kind of diversity that can be found in nature, but it is not appropriate to the concept. In the truly conceptual unity, the universal is 'the totality and principle of its diversity, which is determined wholly and solely by the

universal itself' (SL 606/LB 39).¹³ Here there can only be *one, inner* unity of the particular determinations. Because the domain of the particular is thus not diverse, but absolutely unified within itself, the particular as such enters into a pure relation of opposition with the universal as such. As Hegel puts this, 'the determinate side of particularity is *complete* in the difference of the *universal* and the *particular*, and [...] these two alone constitute the particular species' (SL 607/LB 40). In nature, by contrast, there are always more than two species in a given genus, and these species are not unified as a totality but according to their external or 'contingent' completeness (SL 607/LB 40). Nature is thus the absolute or own other of logic:

This is the impotence [*Ohnmacht*] of nature, that it cannot adhere to and exhibit the strictness of the concept and runs wild in this blind irrational [*begrifflos*] multiplicity. We can *wonder* at nature's manifold genera and species and the endless diversity of her formations, for *wonderment* is *unreasoning* and its object the irrational [*das Vernunftlose*] (SL 607/LB 40-41).

Now although, in the conceptual unity, the particular determinations are produced through the self-diremption of the universal, Hegel wishes to see this process as one in which the universal does not dominate, or exert any violence over, its determinations. In a frequently quoted passage, Hegel writes that the universal is '*free* power [...] but not as a

¹³ In a manner that foreshadows the absolute method at the end of the *Logic*, in another passage Hegel again invokes the language of essence in describing what it means for the universal to be the principle of its determinations: 'a principle contains the beginning and the essence of its development and realisation' (SL 610/LB 43, trans. modified). A little earlier Hegel had already used the term 'essence' in a similar context, stating that 'the particular has universality within it as its essence' (SL 608/LB 41, trans. modified).

violent force [ein Gewaltames]; on the contrary, the universal is, in its other, in peaceful communion with itself [*ruhig und bei sich selbst ist*]’ (SL 603/LB 35-36). It could therefore, he writes, also be called ‘*free love* and *boundless blessedness*, for it bears itself towards its *other* as towards *its own self*; in it, it has returned to itself’ (SL 603/LB 36).

Yet even if we leave to one side the language of positing used by Hegel in this section, and if we acknowledge that the universal has no *simple* priority over its determinations, we might of course ask whether there is not a more subtle form of violence and domination implicit in such a self-presence—a relation to the other ‘only as to itself.’ Furthermore, there is only a lack of violence here insofar as the other precisely results from the *schöpferische Macht* of the universal, that is, insofar as there is no genuine *other* on hand, but only a modified version of the self.¹⁴ Even if the term ‘positing’ is used ‘metaphorically’ here (and we would have to question what this could mean in the *conceptual* logic), then the universal still enjoys a *determining* role in the whole process. It does so not through a simple mastery *over* its determinations, but through its *Heruntersteigen* to them.

Now of course, one might suggest that the *Heruntersteigen* of the universal is precisely the moment at which it renounces its privilege and ‘priority’ over the particular and freely gives itself over to the latter.¹⁵ Nevertheless, as Hegel describes it, this is a movement in which, as Derrida might put it, the universal gives itself up while keeping hold of itself: its particular determinations remain *its* determinations and are always already unified by it as a totality. This ‘restricted economy’ will be considered in greater

¹⁴ In chapter 2 we saw how Miguel de Beistegui characterises the dialectic of identity and difference in these terms. At that point in the *Logic*, such a characterisation was seen to be invalid, though here it can be applied to the conceptual movement as Hegel describes it.

¹⁵ My thanks to Stephen Houlgate for highlighting this point.

detail in the following chapter through a reading of Derrida's *Glas*.

As I noted above, this explicit privileging of the universal as *one* moment of the concept, rather than as the totality constituted by the interrelation of *all* of the moments of the concept, is not a necessary consequence of the structure of the concept as such. It is Hegel's interpretation of the latter. For this reason, we can agree here with Adorno's statement that Hegel's 'dismissive gesture' toward the singular (or in this case, the particular) precisely 'contradict[s] [...] his own insight.'¹⁶ Yet Hegel's description of the concept as the self-diremption of the universal cannot be merely brushed aside as a heuristic, an introductory device, or simply an 'accidental' feature of what the Hegelian concept comes to be, particularly as this description returns at the culmination of the *Logic* in order to define the movement of the *Logic* as a whole. Nevertheless, Hegel's presentation of the concept in this way also runs alongside a more subtle presentation of the concept as the equality and interpenetration of all of its moments. This latter dimension comes to the fore in Hegel's account of the singular. As we noted in section 1.3.1, however, and as I shall discuss at the end of the following section, even in this form the concept still constitutes a univocal totality.

1.6 The Singular

The final moment of the conceptual process—that of singularity—is the point at which the negative comes to coincide with itself again after having separated from itself as the particular. This returning movement can be regarded as the second phase of the *Doppelschein* of the universal. As Hegel puts it, the singular is 'The *reflection* of the

¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E. F. N. Jephcott

(London; New York: Verso, 2005), p. 16.

concept out of its determinateness *into itself*. It is the *self-mediation* of the concept insofar as its *otherness* has made itself into an *other* again, whereby the concept has established [*hergestellt*] itself as self-identical, but in the determination of *absolute negativity*' (SL 618/LB 53, trans. modified).

The true conceptual form of the singular is once again contrasted with the manner in which it is conceived by the understanding or representational thinking (*Vorstellung*). As with the first two moments of the concept, the understanding abstracts the singular from the total movement of the concept. It sees the closure of this movement as the formation of an atom that is self-sufficient in its separation from the whole. In doing so, it again takes the universal to be external to the singular, as that which is '*common to several singulars*' which in themselves are indifferent substances (SL 621/LB 56). This is again contrasted with an adequate conception of the singular, 'to which the universal in the determinateness itself descends [*heruntersteigt*]' (SL 619/LB 53). At this point, the unity of the concept is once again grounded in the self-division of the universal, which prevents any diverse multiplicity from entering here.

This is still, however, to focus only on the more contingent and more obvious way in which identity is privileged in Hegel's account of the concept, namely as the self-determination of the universal. But it is particularly in Hegel's subsequent description of the singular that a more subtle relation between the moments of the concept comes to the fore, which provides a more sophisticated account of its unity.

This conception of the unity of the concept is based not on the self-differentiation of one of its moments, but on the mutual opposition between these moments as 'equiprimordial' terms. In order to explain this relationship, it is helpful here to return to the transition from essence to the concept. As we saw, this transition represents the culmination of the logic of opposition through which each stage of essence sublated itself

into the next: in being *totally* opposed to each other, the passive and the active passed into each other without remainder. The concept results from, and is defined by, this logic of total opposition. Each of the terms—the universal, the particular, and the singular—contains both of the others within itself, and thus the whole conceptual process. In this respect, no moment is subordinate to any other since each contains the others just as much as they contain it. Each is therefore the ‘totality’ in which it is also a moment, and can then be considered the ‘ground’ of the others:

The universal has proved to be not only the identical, but at the same time the different [*Verschiedene*] or *contrary* as against the particular and individual, and in addition, also to be opposed to them or *contradictory*; in this opposition, however, it is identical with them and is their true ground in which they are sublated. The same is true of particularity and individuality which are likewise the totality of the determinations of reflection (SL 616/LB 50, trans. modified).¹⁷

It is through this total opposition that the ‘inseparability’ of the determinations of the concept is achieved, and that each moment simply ‘dissolves’ or continues itself in the others (SL 620/LW 55). We should note, of course, that this immanent unity of the concept does not imply that its moments can no longer be distinguished. As Houlgate writes:

Each moment of the concept is thus the whole concept in a different form or with a different emphasis. The universal is *self-relating* being that continues in its

¹⁷ Cf. also SL 620-21/LB 55-56; SL 600/LB 32: ‘each of these moments [universality, particularity, and singularity] is no less the *whole* concept than it is a *determinate* concept and *one determination* of the concept’ (trans. modified).

differences: it is thus one, single self-identical being. Particularity, on the other hand, is that same universal explicitly differentiated into two (or more) contrasting moments [...] Individuality, finally, is this explicitly differentiated and determinate universal, understood as reflected back into itself and thus as free standing.¹⁸

Although the *Heruntersteigen* of the universal does play an important part in Hegel's description of the ultimate unity of the concept, then, it does not *have to be* invoked in order to explain the moment of 'return' constituted by singularity. Indeed, Hegel also writes that 'The return of the determinate concept into itself means that it has the determination of being, *in its determinateness, the whole concept*' (SL 621/LB 56). Here it is precisely because the singular is *not* simply posited by the universal and because it is 'reflected into itself' that it comes to be united with the universal.

It is on the basis of this immanent unity that Gerard Lebrun defends Hegel against the criticisms that have often been made against the concept, and which he draws from the Althusserian reading of Hegel in particular. The concept, Lebrun remarks, can be neither an inner essence which expresses itself through its (phenomenal) determinations nor that which subjugates such finite determinations to a given principle. For to conceive the concept in such a way would already be to fall back into an essentialist form of thinking, one which maintains a certain separation between the inner and the outer or essence and appearance and in which the essence maintains a certain power *over* its determinations.¹⁹ As he writes, in such criticisms of the concept, 'it is as though Hegel were accused of having reinstated in his turn a division that he precisely aimed to dismiss.'²⁰

¹⁸ Houlgate, p. 25.

¹⁹ Lebrun, pp. 349–50.

²⁰ Lebrun, p. 350.

The totality of the concept, he notes, cannot be thought as that which ‘results from a reunification of given elements’—as a form of magic trick solution to the problem of diversity.²¹ This would of course amount precisely to the external application of a universal that we saw Hegel contrast with the immanent unity of the concept. The concept is rather, Lebrun states, that structure within which ‘each of the different terms has meaning only to the extent that it exhibits the persistence and continuation of the others through it; the function of each moment is to affirm that it is a moment *of this totality*.’²² His reading, then, affirms that the conceptual totality is achieved through the self-sublation of its moments as *merely* finite moments. To this extent he claims that it is a ‘totality without totalisation.’²³

Now Lebrun is of course right to point out that objections to Hegel along the above lines would fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the concept. The concept, even as *self-determining*, is of course not conceived by Hegel as a violent subjugation of finitude. For Lebrun, however, this is the end of the matter. Like Hegel, he does not consider whether any more subtle form of ‘violence’ might remain after its most obvious form—that of external subjugation—has been ruled out. But here one might of course object that there is no longer any ‘external’ violence precisely because each ‘finite’ term has already lost any resistance to its inclusion within *one*, univocal whole. And as Lebrun would be the first to agree, this whole does not include simply all that there happens to be: rather, all that there is *only is what it is* as part of and as containing within itself this one whole. Because the remainder within the terms has been reduced to nothing through the logic of opposition within the sphere of essence, there is no longer a possibility of

²¹ Lebrun, p. 353.

²² Lebrun, p. 346.

²³ Lebrun, p. 353.

reconceiving or determining otherwise the sense of this whole or that of its moments. Rather than a 'totality without totalisation,' one might therefore call the conceptual unity a form of 'totalisation without a totalising agent.'

Furthermore, in this way, as we saw above, the concept cannot but reinstate the privilege of terms such as 'inner, 'essence,' 'identity,' etc., even if they are not reinstated in their essential sense but at a 'meta-level.' When this reinstatement takes place, there is always the risk that one will come to forget that it has occurred at a meta-level and will fall back into a simpler usage of such terms. We have seen that this occurs when Hegel comes to privilege one moment of the concept over the others. Likewise, Lebrun himself proves not to be immune to this slippage when he writes that the concept 'neither expresses itself nor signals itself through its determinations: it shows itself [*s'y démontre*] by dissolving them and nullifying [*en niant*] their seeming independence.'²⁴ For these reasons, the concern that underlies the Althusserian critique of the concept remains valid even if the critique itself misses its mark.

Why is it, then, that Lebrun does not consider such reservations regarding the Hegelian concept? This would seem to be because he remains within the horizon of an all-or-nothing Hegelian logic that distinguishes only between the violence of external subjugation and the peace of a wholly internal harmony. In leaping from the one to the other he therefore does not consider that the latter might not simply constitute the resolution of all violence. Now in the following chapter we shall see that Derrida, for his part, does not disavow a certain 'originary violence' or necessary repression. But this violence is not 'overcome,' for Derrida, by working toward the 'phantasm' of a final peace; and this means that this violence, in truth, can never be *definitively* overcome, but only continually displaced. This takes place through the affirmation of a remainder which

²⁴ Lebrun, p. 353.

prevents any given unity from being ultimate.

Having now given a characterisation of the general structure of the concept, the second part of this chapter will turn to the end of the logic of the concept, which is also the 'end' of the *Logic* as such. Here I shall consider how the *Logic* comes to turn around upon itself and reconceive its 'original' beginning and subsequent development.

Part 2. The Hegelian Future Perfect

In the second part of this chapter, I wish to consider the manner in which a fundamental dimension of Hegel's thought manifests itself at the level of the *Logic* as a whole. This dimension is what I shall call a logic of originary belatedness or a logic of the future perfect, according to which the 'truth' of things is not what they at first or immediately present themselves to be. It is only later, *après coup*, that it will be possible to state what they will have been. This logic is perhaps most famously encapsulated in Hegel's remark at the end of the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk.

This logic is manifested throughout Hegel's *Science of Logic* insofar as each new stage of the work shows what the previous stage will have been, in truth. But as we have seen, it first comes explicitly to the fore in the logic of essence, when essence comes to reconceptualise the sphere of being. It is also a feature of the concept, insofar as the latter reconceives, in turn, the truth of both being and essence.

This logic of originary belatedness has had an enormous influence on post-Hegelian thinkers and is one of the most important reasons why we might say that we are still living in Hegel's shadow. In Hegel's *Logic*, this belatedness cannot be considered to be temporal, but it is its temporal form which has marked the post-Hegelian imagination. It

has played a crucial role in T.S. Eliot (notably his *Four Quartets*), Proust, Borges, Levinas, Ricoeur, Freud, and of course in Derrida's thinking of originary supplementation²⁵ Insofar as Hegel will have been the precursor of these thinkers, this does not mean that their various elaborations of a logic of the future perfect constitute mere footnotes to him. In a text referred to by Derrida in *Writing and Difference*, Borges writes that 'It may be that universal history is the history of the different intonations given a handful of metaphors.'²⁶ We might also say that one way of viewing intellectual history since Hegel would be as a series of intonations on the logic of the future perfect. But it could only be presumptuous here to think that a difference in intonation might not have profound consequences. We can see why this might be if we consider what could be called two aspects or forms of this logic.

On the one hand, the logic of the future perfect may be deeply unsettling, insofar as it implies the radical instability of the past and the necessary possibility of its continual reconceptualisation. It thus serves to make every moment, as Eliot puts it, 'a new and shocking valuation of all we have been.' This form of the future perfect comes particularly strongly to the fore in the logic of essence. It involves an uneasy co-dependence of the past and the present, where on the one hand, the past does not precede the reflection

²⁵ Cf. Jorge Luis Borges, 'Kafka and His Precursors', in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. by James East Irby and Donald A. Yates (London: Penguin, 1970); Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being, Or, Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague ; London: Nijhoff, 1981), and particularly 'Enigma and Phenomenon', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 2003).

²⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Fearful Sphere of Pascal', in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. by James East Irby and Donald A. Yates (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 227.

upon it (it is a past that has never been present), yet insofar as this past is also constituted by a resistant remainder, it cannot simply be *reduced* to any given reflection. The remainder, then, prevents any particular reflection on this past from being complete, and thus prevents the coincidence of past and present. Because of this essential diachrony, what the past will have been remains always still to come.

On the other hand, the logic of the future perfect may be liberating and even, perhaps, 'soothing.'²⁷ That the past is not fixed in its 'original' givenness means that what appeared to be lost, wasted, or misspent time can ultimately be regained and redeemed. Even more liberating, perhaps, is the idea that this past could be redeemed once and for all, i.e. that the unsettling possibility of its continual reconceptualisation might give way to a reconceptualisation that would capture its definitive truth. This second form of the logic of the future perfect, then, would be that which has overcome the first form—that which, through the gradual transformation of the opacity of the remainder into complete transparency, would have overcome the state of diachrony. The jolting movement between past and present would then be bent into a smooth, circular movement. This is of course the future perfect of the concept, or of absolute knowing in the *Phenomenology*. As Hegel writes in the final chapter of the latter: 'Spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure concept, i.e. has not annulled time [*die Zeit tilgt*] [...] Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of spirit that is not yet complete in itself' (Ph 487/584-5). In Hegel, Proust, and Eliot, this time of 'falsity' or *Schein*, or this clock-time, is also a necessary condition of redemption. It is only by traversing the way of despair in a spirit of self-sacrifice that it is possible to reach a truer level of time, or even the eternal. 'Through time time is conquered,' in Eliot's words.

²⁷ Cf. Derrida, D 21/30.

It would of course be far too large a task for the present thesis to consider the above thinkers' relation to these forms of the future perfect. To the extent that they do depart from Hegel, however, I would argue that it is in not ultimately collapsing a version of the first form of the future perfect into the second. In the following chapter I shall consider Derrida's questioning and displacement of the transition to the 'conceptual' future perfect within the Hegelian 'system' in general and in the *Phenomenology* in particular. In the present chapter, however, I wish to consider the logic of the future perfect at the level of Hegel's *Logic* as a whole. As we have seen, the concept is completely transparent to itself. Yet this does not mean that the unsettling form of the future perfect has completely disappeared, for a question still remains as to the relation between the highest truth of the *Logic* and its 'history,' namely, the 'original' beginning and subsequent development of the *Logic*. In the following, I shall consider how the 'absolute method' which emerges at the end of the *Logic* brings a certain closure and completeness to the *Logic* as a whole.

2.1 The Absolute Method

The absolute method emerges from the absolute idea. The latter represents the concept's complete reconciliation with itself after having divided itself into its successive stages: those of judgement and the syllogism in the domain of subjectivity, then mechanism, chemism, and teleology within the domain of objectivity, and finally life, knowing, and the good in the domain of the idea. Uniting both the theoretical and the practical, the absolute idea constitutes the perfection of the conceptual process, wherein, as Lebrun puts it, 'the *unity of and in difference* is brought to its perfect fluidity.'²⁸ Though I am

²⁸ Lebrun, p. 545.

unable to give it detailed consideration here, in this unity a privilege is again returned to identity in the manner discussed in the first part of the present chapter. Hegel writes, for example, that the absolute idea is ‘the rational concept that in its reality only goes together with itself’ (SL 824/LB 283, trans. modified). And while he states that it ‘contains within itself the highest opposition,’ this is only in the sense that it has ‘in its other[...] *its own* objectivity for its object’ (SL 824/LB 284). As at the beginning of the conceptual logic, and to an even greater extent here, there is no longer any remainder of a difference that would be *resistant* to its inclusion within a totality.

The absolute idea is the highest truth of the *Logic*, in comparison to which, Hegel writes, ‘all else [*alles Übrige*] is error, confusion, opinion, endeavour [*Streben*], caprice and transitoriness; the absolute idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life*, *self-knowing truth*, and is *all truth*’ (SL 824/LB 284). Now, as Angelica Nuzzo notes, this is a strangely definitive formulation at this point in the *Logic*, insofar as it seems to indicate an opposition between the ‘finite’ and the ‘infinite’ that should have been overcome. It suggests that, as Nuzzo puts it, there is, ‘something, a whole realm of negativity, that remains as an uncomfortable rest (*übrig*) placed in front of the absolute idea and opposed to it in a sort of un-dialectical Manichaeism.’²⁹ Nevertheless, Hegel’s highlighting of this opposition can be taken merely as an indication that a final sublation of the finite-infinite distinction is necessary, one which, at this point, must consist in a reconceptualisation of the *Logic as a whole*. Here it will be a question of showing how the highest truth of the *Logic* can account for the truth of the path that has led to it.

I would disagree here, however, with the instrumental terms in which Nuzzo couches the necessity of this reconceptualisation. For Nuzzo, the absolute method

²⁹ Angelica Nuzzo, ‘The End of Hegel’s Logic: Absolute Idea as Absolute Method.’, in *Hegel’s Theory of the Subject*, ed. by D. G. Carlson (Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 189.

becomes necessary as a response to what she calls the ‘radical risk’ that the *Logic* could still be ‘hijacked by external reflection.’³⁰ Such reflection might either take any one of the particular stages in the *Logic* as ‘a possible – yet entirely arbitrary – conclusion,’ or might exploit ‘the openness that the absolute idea still displays’ by engaging in an endless reconceptualisation of the *Logic*.³¹ For Nuzzo’s Hegel, then, the question that must be answered in reflecting on the beginning of the *Logic* from the perspective of absolute method is, ‘How should such a beginning be understood in order for the logic to be able to reach its conclusion?’³²

Such ‘external’ concerns, however, do not need to be introduced here in order to explain why the end of the *Logic* should turn around upon itself to consider its ‘history.’ The necessity of bringing a certain closure to the *Logic* rather develops immanently out of the kind of ontological process that the absolute idea is: we might say that the ‘desire’ for this closure is then already immanent to it. This can be explained as follows. In returning to itself from out of its self-diremption, the concept, in the form of the absolute idea, again takes on the form of universality. It contains all the prior particularity of the *Logic* within itself, such that this logical content is fully transparent to it. As the ‘soul of all objectivity,’ it can therefore no longer, as Hegel puts it, be ‘resisted’ by any given content (SL 825-6/LB 285-6). But if this is the case, then its own ‘past’ cannot remain opaque to it, and the reflection on the latter undertaken by absolute method only amounts to taking the self-transparency of the absolute idea to its logical conclusion. Absolute method is then, as Jean Hyppolite puts it, the ‘universal self-consciousness of the *Logic*.’³³

³⁰ Nuzzo, p. 193.

³¹ Nuzzo, p. 194.

³² Nuzzo, p. 197.

³³ Hyppolite, p. 167.

The absolute method thus reconceives what the course of the *Logic* will have been in truth. Here it will again be a matter of an *active* reconstruction of this development, for the concept is now, Hegel writes, ‘*everything*, and its movement is the *universal absolute activity*, the self-determining and self-realizing movement’ (SL 826/LB 286). As nothing can be left out of this reconstruction, it must begin at the beginning.

2.2 The Beginning of the End

Before discussing Hegel’s reconceptualisation of the beginning, it is first of all necessary to briefly present the original beginning. The *Logic* begins with the category of being. Being, here, has the utterly simple immediacy that we considered in chapter 1. Pure being is thus not a mediated immediacy or a self-relation; nor is it reached, in Hegel’s view, through an explicit abstraction from a process of mediation, for then it would already be mediated by what it is not. Pure being simply is what it is. But in being such simple, indeterminate immediacy, being proves immediately to be nothing. Insofar as nothing, however, is likewise simply indeterminate immediacy, it proves to be indistinguishable from being (SL 82-83/LS 71-72). In the ‘original’ development of the *Logic*, the movement between being and nothing then comes to be conceived as ‘becoming.’ It is when this process of becoming settles into the relative stability of ‘determinate being’ or *Dasein* that this first stage of the *Logic* comes to an end and immanently provides the basis for the next dialectical stage.

From the perspective of the absolute method, the simple immediacy of the original beginning is reconceived as the self-relating negativity of the universal. The universal is a form of mediated immediacy or a self-relation, and so is not the same as the wholly simple immediacy of the original beginning—for the latter was too simple to be a

self-relation. Yet as a conceptual determination, the universal is a form of mediation which, in being only *self*-related and wholly transparent to itself, is *as immediate* as—and thereby, we might say, ‘equivalent to’—pure being. As Hegel puts it, ‘Because it is the beginning, its content is an *immediate*, but an immediate that has the sense and form of *abstract universality*’ (SL 827/LB 287-trans. modified). We might then say that pure presence here is reconceived as pure, abstract *self*-presence.

Having reconceived the beginning, it now becomes necessary to reconceive the *development* (*Fortgang*) of the *Logic*, or, in other words, to describe the motor of its progression. This reconceptualisation is contrasted here with the ‘original’ development. For while the latter progressed immanently, the absolute method, Hegel writes, ‘knows that universality is only a moment and that in it the concept is not yet determined in and for itself’ (SL 829/LB 289). For the absolute method, the universal is not ‘simply abstract’ but is implicitly (*an sich*) the ‘*concrete totality*.’ Yet this truth is not just ‘known’ by the absolute method, but is also explicitly implicit within the ‘objective universal’ itself. As a moment of the concrete totality that ‘contains [...] within itself the beginning of the advance and the development’ (SL 830/LB 290), the universal of the absolute method must then come to unfold itself in the manner of the universal within the concept in general. Once again, then, this unfolding is conceived in active terms. The second moment, which is that of particularity, or the ‘mediated’ moment, is thus reached through the universal’s determining of itself as its *own other*.³⁴

³⁴ Hegel describes the development as both analytic and synthetic. It is analytic in that it is only the unfolding of what is already implicitly present in the universal; as Nuzzo stresses, we move forward only by remaining in place. But it is synthetic in that it also amounts to the universal’s ‘othering’ of itself, such that ‘in its very immediacy and universality’ it ‘shows itself as an *other*’ (SL 830/LB 291). Now it is not possible to pursue this point here, but our objection to this description would of course be that since the universal remains the beating heart of this development, the status of the synthetic dimension of

Now the second moment that has been generated—the moment of particularity or difference—is not an ‘indifferent’ other, but the other of the first moment, ‘the *negative of the immediate.*’ Since each is the other’s own other they therefore come into opposition and contradiction. Now while Hegel affirms that ‘the thinking of contradiction is the essential moment of the concept’ (SL 835/LB 296), by now it is clear that the conceptual form of contradiction is *at the same time* the resolution of this contradiction into a remainderless unity. Thus, Hegel writes that ‘the *second negative*, the negative of the negative [...] is this sublation of the contradiction’ (SL 835/LB 297).

This sublation results in a third moment, which Hegel calls the ‘*restoration* [Herstellung] of the *first immediacy*’ (SL 836/LB 297)—not, however, simply *as* that initial universal immediacy, but as the singular, i.e. as a form of immediacy that is no longer abstract since it incorporates the particular within itself.³⁵ The movement has now reached its end point in the singular as the ‘*concrete subject*’ or ‘the universal [...] *posited in the subject*’ (SL 837/LB 299). As we can see, although the movement culminates in the singular, the universal still retains its privileged position, for the singular is not only that in which the universal realises itself most fully as the ‘*identity of its moments*’ (SL 838/LB 299) but is also itself taken up as the universal basis of the next dialectical stage. Now once again, this does not mean that the universal is *simply* privileged: it does not relate to the singular as a moment that it has *posited* in an external manner; it has rather come to determine itself as singular. Yet it is still the case that it has determined *itself* as singular, so that we might again say that it keeps hold of itself even in giving itself up.

Now of course a lot more could be said about Hegel’s description of the absolute

the latter cannot be equal to its analytic dimension.

³⁵ This is why Hegel uses the term *Herstellung* rather than *Wiederherstellung*—a point that is not captured in Miller’s translation.

method and its reconstruction of the logical development. What I wish to point out is simply that here we are given an importantly different explanation of *what* the logical science begins with and *why* the Logic moves forward than that which we were originally given. It is important to note, however, that this reconceptualisation of the beginning is still an account of what the beginning *will have been*, in truth; it does not simply replace that original beginning or show that that beginning simply *was* the self-determination of the universal all along. Furthermore, in this reconceptualisation the necessity of the development is in no way dispensed with. Even from the perspective of the absolute method, logical truth consists only 'in the extended course of the process and in its end' (SL 842/LB 304, trans. modified).

2.3 The Circle of Circles

We can now consider why, for Hegel, *this particular* reconceptualisation of the beginning and the subsequent development differs from all of the other reconceptualisations that have been given throughout the *Logic*, that is, how it can fulfil the role of a *final* truth of the *Logic* that does not itself remain open to a new reconceptualisation. In other words, we can see why it should definitively overcome the unsettling form of the future perfect.

The sphere of essence was still marked by this form of the future perfect due to the remainder which prevented the closure of reflection on itself. In attempting to determine the 'origin' purely on the basis of its own reflection, essence thus found the origin to continually escape its grasp. It thus oscillated between positing and presupposing. For this reason, essence as a whole was characterised by Hegel as the incomplete mediation of mediation and immediacy. By contrast, the universal of the absolute method is no longer disturbed by such a remainder: since it is a form of

mediation which is *pure* self-mediation, it coincides with—by being ‘as immediate’ as—the simple immediacy of the beginning. In this way, the reflection on that beginning is no longer thrown back on itself, but continues itself within the latter in a circle which eventually leads back to itself. This circle, Hegel writes, now forms a *system of totality* (SL 840/LB 301-1).³⁶

Throughout the *Logic*, Hegel has emphasised that the logical development can and must be read in two ways: as a movement forward to new, richer determinations, and a movement backward into a ‘ground.’ Yet this is the first time that the movement forward is *at the same time* a movement of return, and vice versa, rather than an oscillation from one to the other. The diachrony of essence has thus been replaced with the synchrony of the concept. As Hegel puts this:

It is in this manner that each step of the *advance* in the process of further determination, while getting further away from the indeterminate beginning is also *getting back nearer* to it, and that therefore, what at first sight may appear to be different [*verschieden*], the retrogressive grounding of the beginning, and the *progressive further determining* of it, coincide and are the same’ (SL 841/LB 303).

This is also why nothing gets lost or left behind in this development, for everything can be accounted for by the end to which it is transparent. What is ‘returned’ to at the ‘end,’ however, is of course not *identical to* that which constituted the ‘original’ beginning, even from the perspective of the absolute method, for ‘The method is the pure concept that relates itself only to itself; it is therefore the *simple self-relation* that is *being*. But now it is also *fulfilled being*, the *concept that comprehends itself*, being as the *concrete* and also

³⁶ We should of course note that while the *Logic* comes to its circular completion in this way, the circle is also broken in that the end of the *Logic* also leads on to a wholly new beginning with nature.

absolutely *intensive* totality' (SL 842/LB 304-5).

The absolute method has now definitively reconceptualised the beginning and subsequent development of the *Logic*, thereby creating what appears to be the most fully virtuous circle—one that is no longer troubled by the spectre of the 'bad' infinite. The pre-original sin of the simply immediate beginning has thus been fully redeemed, its initial opacity and indeterminacy made fully transparent by the light of the highest ontological truth. To this extent, we might then say that this truth has come to give itself its own beginning. In the following chapter, I shall consider Derrida's questioning of the manner in which such a circle comes to be established. I shall suggest that, for Derrida, it is reached through the appropriation, and thus the disavowal, of a gift that cannot be given to the self by itself.

Chapter 6: Derrida's *Glas*

Introduction

The following chapter is devoted to Derrida's *Glas*. One might be tempted to think that this work is irrelevant to a consideration of Hegel's and Derrida's respective conceptions of difference. Since the 'theme' of *Glas* is the role of the family in Hegel, one might assume that it deals with too restricted or too 'ontic' a domain to really bear on such a fundamental difference between the two thinkers. Yet part of what separates Derrida from Hegel, as we saw in chapter 3 with regard to linguistics, is that for Derrida such an ontic domain cannot be disregarded in considering the 'truth' of difference. Indeed, the relevance of *Glas* here consists in its challenge to a certain independence or priority of 'pure' ontology. *Glas*, however, questions not only the independence of the ontological from the ontic but also, more broadly, the independence of the 'ideal' from the 'real': the 'contingent,' the 'historical,' the 'empirical,' and even the 'personal.'¹

There are at least two ways in which one might attempt to elaborate such a challenge to Hegel. In chapter 4, it was argued that the transitions from ground to existence and contingency to necessity could not be demonstrated to be necessary at the purely onto-logical level. One might then take Hegel's logic as a 'finished product' and consider a variety of 'real' contexts in order to see whether, in reality, things 'really do

¹ The scare quotes here indicate that the sense of these terms will be subject to displacement in Derrida's reading of Hegel. Indeed, for Derrida, as we shall see in the following, drawing a rigorous distinction between contingency and necessity supposes that one has already surpassed 'contingency' and acceded to the standpoint of necessity.

happen like that' (*comme ça*). Through the accumulation of cases in which things do not happen like that, one might then come to question whether the 'truth' of a concept can be determined without reference to these particular contexts, and whether such a determination would not rather be a 'phantasm' (GI 224a/250a). Derrida's entire oeuvre might be seen as constituting such a challenge to Hegel, even where it does not address Hegel directly. But this is not the 'strategy' he adopts in *Glas*.

This is because the 'phantasm' is not without considerable power, against which the above notion of reality, as Derrida acknowledges with a serious irony, might appear 'confusedly empirical' (GI 224a/251a, trans. modified).² In *Glas*, he therefore takes the contrary, genealogical approach, considering not the 'correspondence' of Hegel's ontology to 'reality,' but rather the path which Hegel takes to lead to the standpoint of *Wissenschaft*, from which Hegel's systematic works are written. The figure of the family allows Derrida to trace Hegel's indebtedness to the historical (and sometimes personal) conditions of, or potential influences on, his ontology and systematic philosophy. The first part of this chapter considers Derrida's account of Hegel's indebtedness to Christianity in particular.

Derrida's tracing of this debt does not in itself constitute an 'objection' to Hegel, insofar as Hegel himself acknowledges that his logical project can only become possible at the culmination of a historical development, through which the standpoint of *Wissenschaft* has come to be attained. It is worth repeating that insofar as Derrida 'objects' to Hegel, he does not contend that the latter posits an 'Absolute' that would guide this historical development from the outset. His objection, as I suggested in

² As will become evident later in this chapter, there is also the problem that such supposed 'counter-examples' could never be entirely irrefutable, insofar as Derrida seeks in them precisely that which does not *have* to be read or acknowledged.

chapters 2, 3, and 5, and as I shall further discuss below, is to a logic of the future perfect in Hegel, through which the 'contingent' historical sources of philosophical concepts come to be reduced and ultimately sublated. This occurs when they are retrospectively determined as necessary through their belonging to a single pathway that ultimately comprehends itself and its beginning. One of Derrida's aims in what might be considered the second part of *Glas* is to draw out the mechanism through which this circle comes to be formed: the determination of difference as opposition from out of an initially diverse multiplicity. In addition, Derrida also draws attention to what he suggests is a certain violence or repressive force inherent in this restriction of difference.³ As Henry Sussman notes, *Glas* is then less concerned to offer a logical argument against the Hegelian reduction—an argument that would state that such a reduction is 'impossible'—than to unravel the value-system with which it is bound up.⁴ The second part of this chapter considers this mechanism of repression and its axiological underpinnings in the context of Derrida's reading of the 'Ethical World' (*Sittlichkeit*) in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. It therefore extends and feeds back into the analysis I gave of the transition from diversity to opposition in Hegel's logic of ground—a transition which was prevented from being derailed by the remainder through an implicit appeal to 'common sense.'

³ *Glas* might then be read as an affirmation of Foucault's statement, in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' that 'Knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason; its development is not tied to the constitution and affirmation of a free subject; rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence' (in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 96).

⁴ Henry Sussman, 'Hegel, Glas, and the Broader Modernity', in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. by Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 269.

In the third and final part of the chapter I show how the question of debt that runs through *Glas* is brought to the fore by Derrida through the problematic of the gift. I claim that on Derrida's reading the Hegelian mastery that is achieved through repression is a form of *ingratitude* toward that which both gives to thinking⁵ and stops thinking in its tracks.⁶

Part 1: Inheriting

1.1 The Double Mark of the Family

Glas begins as an investigation into the role played by the figure of the family in Hegel, and it is through this figure that Derrida approaches the Hegelian 'system' more broadly.⁷

⁵ Where 'that which gives to thinking' is to be understood both as that which gives rise to thinking and that which continues to animate and disturb thinking.

⁶ It should be noted here that my reading considers only the 'Hegel column' of *Glas*. It itself will then neither avoid doing a certain violence to Derrida's text nor losing something of its force.

⁷ 'The system,' in Derrida's usage, would seem to refer not just to the system of philosophy envisaged by the mature Hegel, but rather to Hegel's entire oeuvre, including his letters. But in order to understand the sense of 'system' that Derrida is employing here, it is necessary to carefully consider the role that development plays within it. In his commentary on *Glas*, Simon Critchley contends that Derrida rejects Bernard Bourgeois' developmental reading of Hegel in favour of a systematic reading ('A Commentary upon Derrida's Reading of Hegel in *Glas*', in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. by Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 198). But this, I think, is to separate these two forms of reading in a way that Derrida would find unsatisfactory. Derrida does indeed ask: 'How does one distinguish philosophically a before from an after, if the circularity of the movement makes the beginning the end of the end?' (Gl 84a/97a). Nevertheless, I would claim that in Derrida's view the systematic coherence of the whole only *comes to be* through its development, at the end of which its beginning becomes

Why the family? In a certain sense, as Kevin Thompson notes,⁸ the family might be any moment of the system, insofar as the latter implies an internal coherence, in which each moment is what it is only in its relation to all the others. In this case, the universal truth of the whole will be 'contained' in every one of the parts. As Derrida writes: 'in the Hegelian systematics, there is never simply any hierarchic relationship between genus and species: each part represents the whole, each region is capable of everything' (Gl 133-4a/152a). This is why Derrida writes that the family is 'marked twice' within the system: both as a finite moment of it and as that in which the system's 'infinite totality thinks, produces, and reflects itself.' The family thus 'figures [...] the system's totality' (Gl 21a/28a) where the figure is, as we shall see, to be distinguished from a representation, a metaphor, or an example.

Nevertheless, the family is not *simply* one moment among others. The family forms a moment of passage between certain crucial stages in Hegel's works. It emerges, for example, from the transition from *Moralität* to *Sittlichkeit* in the *Philosophy of Right*,

transparent to it. Its systematic threads will have been there at the outset only when the end has been reached. This point is crucial, because it is only if the system is understood in this way that Derrida could hope to interrupt it: if its systematicity were present from the outset and its circularity already guaranteed, what point would there be in attempting to locate those moments within it which might resist this internal coherence? In a more nuanced passage than that quoted by Critchley, Derrida therefore states that in reading Hegel, 'we can neither avoid nor accept as rule or principle teleological anticipation, neither accept nor avoid as rule or principle the empirico-chronological delay of the narrative, the *récit*' (Gl 6a/12a).

⁸ Kevin Thompson, 'Hegelian Dialectic and the Quasi-Transcendental in Glas', in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. by Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 244.

which, as Critchley notes, could be thought as the passage ‘from Kant to Hegel.’⁹ In the shape of the Christian Holy Family, it is also the moment of passage from Religion to Absolute Knowing (in French, *Savoir absolu*—usually abbreviated to *Sa* throughout *Glas*) in the *Phenomenology* (Gl 94a/109a). In the early sections of the Hegel column, Derrida is concerned primarily with the Holy Family in Hegel’s early writings. As Critchley notes, on Derrida’s reading of Hegel, ‘the incarnate human family is an echo of divine filiation’¹⁰ insofar as ‘before Christianity, the family had not yet posited itself as such’ (Gl 34a/42a). Nevertheless, Derrida is of course also attentive to the Hegelian logic of the finite and the infinite, according to which the ‘infinite’ family is not an abstract universal and must therefore be incarnated in human families (Gl 64a/75a).

1.2 Metaphor

It is both because the family is ‘marked twice,’ and because of the relative privilege it receives within this system, that Hegelian family discourse, for Derrida, ‘would not know how to be [*ne saurait être*] relegated to the subordinate regions of a rhetoric, an anthropology, or a psychology’ (Gl 94a/109a). The figure of the family therefore cannot be a metaphor for the system, to the extent that metaphor implies a distinction between a literal or ‘proper’ sense and a figurative sense. If the family is indeed *integral* to the system, then no literal sense of the system can be isolated that would not already include what might otherwise function as a metaphor for it. Neither can the family function as a

⁹ Simon Critchley, ‘A Commentary upon Derrida’s Reading of Hegel in *Glas*’, in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed.

by Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 200.

¹⁰ Critchley, p. 203.

synecdoche, since in containing the whole within itself it is not merely a part of the system. As Derrida writes,

Will one rashly say that the finite family furnishes a metaphoric model or a convenient figuration for the language of philosophical exposition? A pedagogical ease? A good way to speak of abstract things to the student {*élève*}¹¹ while playing with the familiarity of abstract significations? Even then what the absolute familiarity of a signification is must be known. If that can be thought and named without the family. Then one needs to ascertain that the finite family in question is not infinite already, in which case what the alleged metaphor would come to figure would be already in the metaphor (Gl 21a/28a).

Thus far, Derrida is not offering a critique of Hegel, but is only drawing the consequence of the Hegelian logic of the finite and the infinite. But in emphasising the significance of what the family figure *gives* to the system, Derrida begins to raise the question of whether *Sa* will be able to fully appropriate this gift for itself, that is, whether *Sa* will ultimately be able to account for itself purely *in its own terms*. Here a brief reference to the broader context of Derrida's engagement with metaphor in Hegel in his 'White Mythology' may be helpful. In the latter, Derrida acknowledges that for Hegel conceptual meaning does not historically precede metaphorical figuration. Historically, certain images provide thinking with the means to represent ideas. It is only through the gradual reduction of the representation that the truly conceptual, or 'proper' sense of the idea emerges (cf. M 225-6/268-9). Derrida himself uses the figure of the coin to describe this

¹¹ In the quotations from *Glas* given throughout this chapter, braces indicate Leavey and Rand's interpolations of Derrida's French terms; square brackets indicate my own interpolations, and parentheses indicate Derrida's interpolations of Hegel's German.

process, the two faces of which are gradually worn away, such that the symbolic value is, through the hard work of the negative, 'returned' to its *truly* immediate value. Now, as we shall see in the following, Derrida suggests that this reduction is achieved through a certain violence. He does not do so in order to 'save' representation, but rather to *complicate* the relation between metaphor and conceptuality: for the very distinction between the two only makes sense from the standpoint from which metaphor has supposedly been surpassed. We shall return to this point later, but for now let us consider in more detail what it is that the (holy) family gives to be thought.

1.3 The Passage Through the (Holy) Family

On Derrida's analysis—which now turns from the *Philosophy of Right* to the texts of Frankfurt and Jena and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the family figures the self-proximity of spirit. First of all, the family is not a static unit, but rather a *process*; it produces itself through a smooth movement from an initial immediacy, through a moment of self-division, to a final moment of reconciliation. Because the moment of division in this process is only one of *self*-division, in the manner we observed in chapter 5 in relation to the concept, the family remains in possession of itself throughout its circular course. Likewise, Derrida notes, 'Spirit's being-(close)-by-self actively produces itself through an unlimited negativity' (Gl 24a/31a), giving itself 'its own proper element' (Gl 22a/29a). In more 'general' terms, what is figured here is also the movement from the universal to the particular and then to the singular that we considered in the previous chapter. Now, following in the footsteps of Marx, Derrida sees the family figure as the intersection of the philosophical and economic senses of 'speculation.' Insofar as the family's self-production is a process in which nothing is in danger of getting lost along the way and in

which a return is guaranteed, it can be considered as a closed economy.¹² Later in *Glas* this original economy is suggested to be not only the figure of spirit's self-relation but also the figure of philosophy itself: 'the *eidos*, the general form of philosophy, is properly familial and produces itself as *oikos*' (Gl 134a/152). Let us now turn to the three moments figured by the Holy Family in Derrida's reading of Hegel's *Spirit of Christianity*.

God the father is of course the first moment of this trinity, and yet this priority is immediately displaced. For the father only *becomes* the father in having a son. Here Derrida is attentive to the original division of this universal moment of the trinity, which prevents the father from dominating the movement in a straightforward sense (Gl 31a/39a). The father is rather a 'concrete universal' of the form we encountered in Hegel's conceptual logic.

The second moment of the trinity is the father's 'fall into the finite' (Gl 30a/38a) in the form of the son. Though the father does not explicitly dominate this process by guiding it from 'behind the scenes,' he still *continues* himself in the son because the latter is created through the father's *self*-division. The father manifests himself as concrete spirit, Derrida writes, 'by dividing himself in his seed that is *his* other, or rather that is himself as the object for himself, the other for him and that then returns to him, in which he returns to himself: his son {*fils*}' (Gl 31a/39a). The son himself is both finite and infinite: he is infinite both in virtue of being the son of God, but also—and here Derrida is again attentive to the possibilities of dialectical reversal in Hegel's account—by giving 'to God his image' (Gl 31a/39a); he is finite in that he is 'God separated from himself' and in

¹² This restricted economy comes to the fore here because, in this part of *Glas*, Derrida focusses particularly on the Holy Family. In his discussion of the 'Ethical World' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, however, we shall see that the moment of division within the family structure also has the potential to lead to a radical break, one which risks not being recuperated.

that he represents the passage from the finite to the infinite through his death and resurrection.

The third moment of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, is not a distinct moment within this family movement but the *form of the relation* between the first two moments, or, 'the element of the infinite's relation to self' (Gl 31a/39a). It is the familiarity itself of the family—the unity of the father and son. As Derrida puts it, 'The spirit is the element of the *Aufhebung* in which the seed returns to the father' (Gl 31a/40a).¹³ We might say that the element of this element—that which ensures the *Aufhebung* and the familial unity—is the structure of an opposition to an *own* other. It is because the son is the father's own other that the movement as a whole meets no resistance and requires nothing outside of itself in order to effect its reconciliation.

But what is missing from the above family picture? Why is there no (longer any) resistance? Throughout the Hegel column, as Critchley remarks, Derrida's approach largely takes the form of a commentary. Derrida's critique of Hegel, as he himself notes, seeks no spectacular explosion of the Hegelian framework, but rather a minute displacement of it which may nevertheless reveal an abyss, or a hidden crypt (Gl 107/124a).¹⁴ In the present case, it is through the slight distance that his commentary takes on Hegel's text that the absence of a mother or a daughter in the family picture is

¹³ It is important to note, however, that Derrida does not understand the Hegelian *Aufhebung* as an abstract universal that would be externally applied to and indifferent to its content: 'The *Aufhebung* is not some determinate thing, or a formal structure whose undifferentiated generality applies itself to every moment. The *Aufhebung* is history, the becoming of its own proper presentation, of its own proper differentiating determination, and it is subject to the law, to the same law as what it is the law of' (Gl 121a/139a).

¹⁴ Here and elsewhere in *Glas* I take Derrida to be distinguishing his 'way out' of metaphysics from the Heideggerian 'leap' discussed in the latter's *Der Satz vom Grund* (Cf. Gl 216a/242a).

revealed. The mother is nevertheless not entirely absent; she represents, as Critchley notes, 'but a 'short detour' into materiality,' whereas the daughter, 'does not even figure.'¹⁵ In the second and third parts of this chapter I shall consider Derrida's analysis of the repression of sexual difference on the path to absolute knowing in greater detail, but for now I shall turn to the wider significance of the trinity for Hegelian speculation.

1.4 The Holy Family and Ontology

A little later in *Glas* Derrida comes to claim that the import of Christianity and the Holy Family for Hegel is not limited to his conception of spirit. Its deepest significance is rather ontological, in that it allows philosophical thought to comprehend unity as the reconciliation of an original division by means of interpenetration. The Holy Family thus first gives a *speculative* sense to the copula in the proposition 'the Father *is* the Son, the Son *is* the Father': 'The spirit of Christianity is rather the revelation of the essentiality of the essence that permits in general copulating in the *is*, saying *is*. Unification, conciliation (*Vereinigung*), and being (*Sein*) have the same sense, are equivalent in their signification (*gleichbedeutend*)' (Gl 56a/67a). It is therefore only by traversing Christianity in its historical course that being can become what it is or will have been *in truth*.

This is why Derrida contends that Christianity, for Hegel, does not merely provide a new *basis* for ontology but first makes it possible as such. Even if Christianity appears historically as a graft or supplement to Greek thinking, still 'no ontology is possible before the Gospel or outside it' (Gl 56a/67a). Derrida seems to be suggesting here that while Hegel of course acknowledges that prior to the advent of Christianity, philosophical enquiry into the nature of being had been undertaken, such enquiry lacked the means to

¹⁵ Critchley, p. 203.

adequately conceive being, and so could not amount to *true* ontology. This is one reason why Derrida states that, for Hegel, the passage through the trinity cannot be considered as simply an ‘empirical event in the spirit’s history.’¹⁶ It also explains why there can be no ontology ‘outside’ the Gospel;¹⁷ for if the basic ontological truth is revealed by it, then all future ontology must remain within the framework that it provides. Before considering how Hegel negotiates *this* historical debt, we should first place Christianity in the context of the path in which it has come to be determined as ‘absolute religion.’

1.5 Christianity and Judaism, Kant and Hegel

In *Glas*, Derrida spends some time commenting on Hegel’s analysis of Judaism. At the same time—and this is another way in which we might read Derrida’s claim that Christianity is more than an empirical event—the supposed sublation of Judaism by

¹⁶ One way of understanding Derrida’s claim would be to compare this historical shift to that from the objective logic to the subjective logic in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. As we saw Theunissen observe in chapter 1, the logic of being and the logic of essence both constitute a critical presentation of prior metaphysical thinking. It is only with the transition to the concept—the structure of which corresponds to the figure of the Holy Family—that Hegel’s presentation of his true ontology begins (Cf. Michael Theunissen, *Sein und Schein: Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik*, 2nd edition (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 24–27).

¹⁷ Just before this point, Derrida writes of the significance of the Christian family: ‘Thus is opened and determined the space in which the ontological (the possibility of *Wesen, Sein, Urteilen*) no longer lets itself be unglued or decapitated from the family. And par excellence from the question of the father-to-son’ (Gl 56a/67a).

Christianity is read alongside the Hegelian sublation of Kantianism, due to the structural similarities between these two sublations.¹⁸

For Hegel, the ultimate shortcoming of Judaism is to conceive difference as radical distinction. God or the infinite is posited as being distinct from, and beyond the finite, such that He can never manifest *himself* in the finite, but can only ever be *represented* by it. The idol remains only ever an idol and ‘the Jew’ can see ‘only a metaphor’ in the figure of the tree of life (Gl 73a/86a). Judaism—and by association, Kantianism—is thus a form of essentialist or representational thinking which subjects the finite to the mastery of the infinite behind the scenes. As we have seen, Christianity would overcome this division—which in Hegel’s eyes is the sole source of mastery and domination—through the interpenetration of the finite and the infinite. Through this interpenetration, the metaphor becomes the figure of an ‘objective ligament,’ to the extent that bread and wine, for example, are no longer conceived as *signs* (Gl 66a/77-8a). Christianity, therefore, ‘will have precisely performed this relief of the idol and of sensible representation in(to) the infinite of love and beauty’ (Gl 49a/59a).

What makes this transition possible in Christianity, and what was lacking in Judaism, Derrida observes, is love. More specifically, in its passage through Christianity, being comes to be determined as subjectivity which pours forth from itself as the ‘free love and boundless blessedness’ Hegel famously ascribes to the universal in the conceptual logic. The absence of this love in Judeo-Kantianism is what prevents the relation of figuration from being seen from the inside, thus obstructing the passage to philosophy through the overcoming of representation.

This would then be the ‘essential difference’ between Judaism and Christianity. Now Derrida’s use of this ‘example’ in *Gl/As* serves to throw into relief the violence implicit

¹⁸ Cf. Critchley, 202; Gl 34a/42a.

in the determination of 'essential' differences, and not only where religion is concerned. Determining differences in this way would already presuppose a perspective from which one could exhaustively analyse both of the terms being distinguished. More narrowly, it might also suggest, as Critchley remarks, that the desire for a certain kind of family and community may be 'predicated on a reduction of the other's otherness,'¹⁹ that is, on an exclusion of what cannot be reduced to the reflection of the same or the same's own other.

1.6 Christianity and Philosophy

Having briefly considered the manner in which Christianity is attributed 'absolute' status, we can now return to the relation between Christianity and philosophy. Though it has surpassed Judaism, even the truly speculative religion remains *as religion* representational. It does not accomplish the complete reconciliation between the finite and the infinite that only philosophy will achieve. On Derrida's reading of Hegel's *Spirit of Christianity*, this full reconciliation is lacking both in the life and in the death and subsequent ascension of Christ. In his life, Derrida observes, 'He did not know how to fight, in the world, against the Jewish reality. From then on he had, paradoxically, to repeat Judaism. Like Abraham, he was separated from his family; further he loved no woman, begot no child. He even left his mother.' Equally, following his resurrection, his ascension reinstated a cleft between the finite and the infinite: 'he preferred to reconstitute in the presence of his father, in ideality, a disappointed life.' This departure would then leave in its wake a *remainder (reste)* of time in the form of a displacement of

¹⁹ Critchley, p. 204.

the present into the past and future. Jesus' disciples are left 'suspended between memory and hope' (GI 91a/105a), a condition that is then transferred to all believers:

Through the death of the mediating term, the reconciliation still remains affected by the adverse opposition of a beyond (*Gegensätze eines Jenseits*), remains distant, in the distance of a future (the Last Judgement for the religious community) and in the distance of a past (the Incarnation of God). The reconciliation is not present. Present in the heart, it is cut off [*coupée*] from consciousness, divided in two (*entzweit*). Its actuality is broken. (GI 94a/108a)

As Derrida notes, it is no accident that Christianity is disturbed by this troubling division (GI 93a/107a); indeed, we can say that the latter is inevitable insofar as, *qua* religion, it is still representational. In maintaining a division between the finite and the infinite, it entails a delay in the infinite's self-manifestation: the infinite is not *immediately* present to itself in the finite. Thus, when Derrida writes later in *Glas*, in regard to the *Phenomenology*, that 'in absolute religion, division in two (*Entzweiung*) is *not yet* absolutely overcome by reconciliation,' (GI 219a/245a) this is precisely because religion's own *internal* 'not yet' has not been overcome. While one can then say, as Derrida does later in *Glas*, that 'religion is representative because it needs time' (GI 220a/246a), it would perhaps be more accurate to say that religion needs time *because it is representational*.

It is because of the remaining representational character of Christianity that it has only *partially* overcome its historical character. It is not because Christianity is 'in time' that it remains historical but because it is *internally* temporal. In order to understand more fully the representational basis of this temporality, we might depart from Derrida's focus on the *Spirit of Christianity* here and supplement it with certain of Hegel's remarks

in the 'Revealed Religion' chapter of the *Phenomenology*. There Hegel states that, in a certain sense, it is not the *content* of the trinity that is deficient, but rather the manner in which it is thought. The separation into a 'Here' and a 'Beyond' means that these two sides can only be externally connected to one another (Ph 463/556). But slightly later Hegel suggests that, at a more exacting level, it is indeed a matter of content: the externality of the connection is ultimately grounded in the fact that the terms are not thought conceptually, but through the 'natural relationships of father and son' (Ph 465-6/560). The temporality of Christianity is then ultimately grounded in its failure to fully overcome the realm of *nature*. The latter, as we have seen in chapter 4, is for Hegel the paradigmatic realm of contingency. Nevertheless, while Christianity has not fully overcome its natural basis, it has done so to a large extent. We might consider it analogous to the logical category of 'absolute necessity,' which still rests on a minimal degree of contingency. This is why Derrida states that Christ's death and ascension has the character of destiny or fate, as opposed to the freedom of conceptual understanding (Gl 93a/107a).

This remaining contingency means that while the bread and wine of Christianity are no longer symbols or metaphors, on the other hand they cannot, as Derrida observes, be wholly absorbed without losing their divine character (Gl 71a/83a). They remain between the metaphorical and the conceptual, and their materiality still sticks in the throat. Christianity thus gives food for thought that can only be truly digested and assimilated, without any leftovers, by philosophy.

It is because Christianity contains the kernel of the Idea that it is more than *merely* historical. It is, Derrida writes, a 'historically determinate religion,' one among others, but its speculative character raises it for Hegel to the status of absolute religion, the religion which points the way to the overcoming of time. Derrida quotes the following

important passage from Hegel's Introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* concerning this proto-speculative character:

It is this trinity {this tripleness, *Dreifaltigkeit*} which raises Christianity above the other religions. If it did not have this trinity, the other religions might well provide more material for thought than it does. The Trinity is the speculative part (*das Spekulative*) of Christianity, and it is through it that philosophy can discover the Idea of reason in the Christian religion too (quoted in GI 31a/40a).

In passing to philosophy, the content and the form of *das Spekulative* are brought together. The moments of the trinity are thought *adequately*—that is, conceptually—in their interpenetration. This is at the same time the transition from necessity to freedom, the complete transparency of the self to itself in an eternal self-presence that is the overcoming of (historical) time. We shall consider this transition in more detail in section three, but for now let us consider 'how far we have got' with the question of debt and the gift that we are tracing through *Glas*.

The transition from Christianity to philosophy might be described by adapting the economic formula employed by Derrida later in *Glas*: we might say that, from the standpoint of philosophy, one has to lose God in order to keep (the truth of) God. As Derrida writes: 'in passing to *Gottlosigkeit* (the harsh godlessness) is the Last Supper fulfilled; thus is developed speculatively what was only historical in the Last Supper' (GI 97a/112a, trans. modified). Here it is hard not to imagine that Derrida has Hegel's famous statement from the *Phenomenology* in mind, that 'God is attainable in speculative knowledge alone and *is* only in that knowledge, and is only that knowledge itself, for He is

Spirit; and this speculative knowledge is the knowledge of the *revealed* religion' (Ph 461/554).²⁰

I would like to suggest that, for Derrida, this speculative appropriation and 'purification' of Christian teaching constitutes a certain kind of disavowal of a debt to that which gives to thinking. This disavowal-as-appropriation takes place precisely by taking the gift 'as given.' Taking the gift as given means interpreting it in a way that denies that an interpretative 'choice' takes place, i.e. claiming that this interpretation is the gift's self-revelation of its ultimate, *essential* contribution to thinking. As Derrida states, for Hegel it is not the 'facts'—the 'actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*)—of the Gospels that are important, but what they will have become in philosophy as 'speculative dialectics' (Gl 62a/73a). The passage to philosophy will have amounted to the sublation of the very 'contingency' of the 'facts' that allows, or even calls for them to be interpreted in various ways. We can elucidate quite what I take Derrida to be getting at if we consider the way in which the question of inheritance is raised in his later *Specters of Marx*.²¹ There Derrida claims that to consider historical inheritance as a matter of cause and effect is precisely to deny the task of inheriting, which is always a question of an interpretation that acknowledges that something still remains to be thought in what has been bequeathed, just as the line 'The time is out of joint,' licenses its various French translations. The task of interpretation of course does not preclude, but precisely enjoins, a critical engagement with the gift—or rather, with what has already been made of the gift, covered over or repressed in it, an 'example' being the exclusion of the mother in the self-constitution of the Holy Trinity.

²⁰ Hegel spells out this statement as follows: 'Speculative knowledge knows God as Thought or pure Essence, and knows this thought as simple Being and as Existence, and Existence as the negativity of itself, hence as Self, as the Self that is at the same time *this* individual, and also the *universal*, Self' (Ph 461/554).

²¹ Cf. especially p. 18/40.

For Derrida, Hegel would then reject the gift through a seemingly uncritical acceptance of it which masks the philosophical desire to master and appropriate it. The transition from ‘absolute religion’ to philosophy is but the last stage in a long series of such disavowals. And since philosophy is predicated on the *essential* truth of Christianity, it remains in a certain sense governed *by Christianity*, since it does not question it enough.

Having outlined the broad problematic of this chapter—Hegel’s disavowal of the gift—we can now turn to Derrida’s discussion of the ‘Ethical World’ in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. This will make it possible to consider in more detail the mechanism through which difference is determined as opposition in the context of the ethical family. Before beginning this examination, we should note that one of the reasons Derrida takes the family as one of his ‘themes’ in *Glas* is because it is not simply a locus of repression, but of the repression of what is potentially the *greatest difference*: a rupture that would be irrecoverable. In this way, the family figures the *Aufhebung* as the ‘absolute reappropriation of the absolute loss’ (Gl 133a/152a).

Part 2: Family Ties

2.1 Universality and (Universal) Individuality

In what we could call the second major part of the Hegel column of *Glas*, Derrida’s attention turns to the opening chapters of the ‘Spirit’ section of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*: ‘The Ethical World. Human and Divine Law: Man and Woman,’ and ‘Ethical Action. Human and Divine Knowledge. Guilt and Destiny.’ I shall first give some context to the chapters addressed by Derrida, which will also help to see how Hegel establishes a structure that already tends toward contradiction.

Reason, the previous sphere of the *Phenomenology*, becomes spirit when 'its certainty of being all reality has been raised to truth, and it is conscious of itself as its own world, and of the world as itself' (Ph 263/324).²² Spirit thus refers to the unity of consciousness and self-consciousness. At this initial stage in the evolution of spirit, its certainty is of the immediate unity of individuality (or singularity – *Einzelheit*) and universality. In the concrete 'substance' in which spirit is here incarnated, this unity takes the form of an immediate identification of an individual with an ethical principle taken to have universal validity. The individuality in question is, it is important to note, that of 'self-consciousness in general [*überhaupt*], not of a singular, contingent consciousness' (Ph 267/329 trans. modified).

This immediate unity is broken and the ethical substance divided because a diverse range of laws are acted on by individuals. Without argument or explanation, however, Hegel asserts that 'the superfluous [*unnütze*] plurality of properties concentrates itself into the essential opposition [*Gegensatz*] of individuality and universality' (Ph 267/328-9, trans. modified). At this point in the *Phenomenology*, then, we again witness the movement we observed in Hegel's logic of essence whereby a diverse multiplicity comes to be determined as the symmetrical relation between opposites. Now Derrida does not focus on *this* contraction of diversity to opposition but, as we shall see, on its later incarnation in the relation between man and woman. It is interesting to note, however, that the exclusion of multiplicity he will later attend to reflects a more 'general' exclusion which takes place at the outset of Hegel's presentation.

²² Or as Hegel puts it later in the *Phenomenology*, 'Spirit is the knowledge of oneself [*seiner selbst*] in the externalization of oneself; the being that is the movement of retaining its self-identity in its otherness' (Ph 459/552)

The ethical substance thus divides itself into the law of individuality or the *divine* law on the one hand, and the law of universality or the *human* law on the other. Yet at this point in the *Phenomenology*, the complexity of the relation between the two contrary laws is such that each also contains the other within itself. The human law, being universal, is the law of full illumination, of clear self-evidence, or 'the authority which is openly accepted and manifest to all [*die offene, an dem Tage liegende Gültigkeit*]' (Ph 268/329). It is embodied by the 'nation' [*das Volk*], which expresses the actuality of spirit as 'a reality that is conscious of itself' (Ph 267/329). At the same time, it also contains its opposite: in that its content is immediately self-evident, it implicitly lacks the full self-consciousness that mediation will later bring. In addition, the nation as the universal is itself *individualised* in the government.²³

Rather than its actuality, the divine law expresses 'the general [*allgemeine*] possibility of the ethical sphere as such [*überhaupt*]' (Ph 268/330, trans. modified).²⁴ Like the human law, it has an immediate self-evidence,²⁵ but in the form of an inner and unconscious essence which shuns the light of day. Whereas the universal law of the nation is rooted in the individuality of government, the individual law is rooted in the relation to the '*natural* ethical community' constituted by the family. We can see then, that in both the human, universal sphere, and the divine, family sphere, both individuality and universality are represented. The interweaving of universality and individuality in the family unit is developed in Hegel's consideration of the particular duty of the family.

²³ Furthermore, Hegel states that the human law is also exhibited by the individual as 'the actual certainty of itself' (Ph 267-8/329).

²⁴ This 'general' possibility of the ethical 'as such' already indicates a certain privilege of the universal even within this domain of individuality.

²⁵ This is perhaps what Hegel means when he rather obscurely states that it possesses an '*immediate* consciousness' of itself.

The divine law includes within itself individuality and universality in the form of the relation between an individual and a wider (natural) community. But it is important to stress that this relation, as Hegel considers it, takes place in a context (the ethical world as a whole) that has already been determined in terms of universality in at least two senses. Firstly, each law is, as such, 'intrinsically [*an sich*] universal' (Ph 268/330); as one of the two fundamental laws of the ethical sphere, the divine law thus represents the universal validity of the principle of individuality. Derrida notes this when he writes: 'The two terms of the opposition are not the singular and the universal but the *law* of singularity and the *law* of universality. The opposition is determined between these forms of generality that these laws [...] are, since the opposition works within the ethical reign that is the reign of law.' When Derrida thus speaks here of a 'dissymmetrical opposition between the singular and the universal' (Gl 142a/161a), it is crucial to note that he is not claiming that the universal *as one of the opposed terms* is placed in a dominant position; he is rather suggesting that the opposition between singularity and universality itself arises *in the element* of the universal. Derrida is thus drawing attention to the structural condition of the eventual sublation of the distinction between the two laws.

Secondly, insofar as the family is treated from an ethical perspective, it is not the *natural*, but rather the spiritual relations between its members that will be at issue. These relations are universal, as we shall see in more detail later, because they are not based on the *contingency* of the natural feelings that happen to be present in the individuals concerned. The divine law is then not just *formally* universal *qua* law, but it also has for its *content* the universal individual. As Hegel writes, 'In the ethical household, it is not a question of *this* man or *this* child, but of *a man and children in general* (Ph 274/337, trans. modified).

Accordingly, while the family's duty is to the individual, it is to the individual in his generality, or to the individual *as a whole* (Ph 269/331), 'as a *universal* being freed from his sensuous, i.e. individual, reality' (Ph 270/332). Yet what is left when the individual is stripped of his contingent, natural properties is, in a sense, 'nothing.' Because at this stage of the *Phenomenology* particularity has not entered as a mediating term between the universal and the individual, it is only through the absence of all properties that the individual can come into a unity with universality—a universality that is therefore necessarily abstract. It is then only the dead individual who can be the object of a specifically *ethical* duty.

The family's care for its dead through the practices of embalming and burial on the one hand serves to raise the individual from his individuality to the universality of spirit. It symbolically prevents the individual from returning to nature and protects him from, as Derrida puts it, the 'dishonouring operations of unconscious desires' (Gl 145a/164a). Yet Derrida also notes that only a banal reading of Hegel's text would consider the end of the family's care to be merely the prevention of natural and contingent decomposition. For at the same time, this care serves to preserve the very individuality of the individual by, as Hegel puts it, 'wed[ding] the blood-relation to the bosom of the earth, to the elemental imperishable individuality' (Ph 271/333). Again, of course, it has to be noted that the individual is wedded here to the most universal individuality of all: nature *as such*.

2.2 The Familial Bond

Within the family, the purest ethical form of recognition—that is, the recognition in which another individual is recognised without the intrusion of natural desire, feeling, or need—

takes place for Hegel between the brother and sister, and particularly in the form of the sister's recognition of the brother. As he writes,

The relationship in its unmixed form is found [...] in that between brother and sister. They are the same blood which has, however, in them reached a state of rest and equilibrium. Therefore, they do not desire one another, nor have they given to, or received from, one another this independent being-for-self; on the contrary, they are free individualities in regard to each other' (Ph 274/336).²⁶

Within the 'natural' ethical community of the family, the brother-sister relation is thus the relation that is most purely ethical: it has its basis in the 'naturalness' of the community, but the relation of recognition itself is not natural. Now Derrida's attention is drawn to the seeming anomaly that this relation represents in the context of the Hegelian 'system'; for the brother and sister would seemingly be the 'two single consciousnesses that, in the Hegelian universe, relate to each other without entering into war' (Gl 149a/168a). They therefore represent a

unique example in the system: a recognition that is not natural and yet that passes through no conflict, no injury, no rape: absolute uniqueness [*unicité*], yet universal and without natural singularity, without immediacy; symmetrical relation that needs

²⁶ Here we see another implicit exclusion of a multiplicity, such that Derrida asks, "but then why brother/sister and not brothers or sisters? That is because in truth a sexual difference is still necessary, a sexual difference posited as such and yet without desire' (Gl 149a/169a). Derrida seems to mean that the brother and sister are required in order, as we shall see, to embody the two essential ethical laws. A binary sexual difference is required in order that sexual difference may then be overcome through opposition and contradiction.

no reconciliation to appease itself, that does not know the horizon of war, the infinite wound, contradiction, negativity. Is that the inconceivable? What the greater logic cannot assimilate? (Gl 150a/170a)

The anomalousness of the relation consists in its being a relation of recognition between two individualities that is peaceful from the outset, whereas recognition, peace and individuality are usually only achieved at the *end* of any dialectical development. Derrida even goes as far as to say that such a relation cannot be assimilated by, and is excluded from, the system. It is a form of 'original' peace which would seem to fall outside the violence of the Hegelian dialectic. Derrida therefore suggests that it represents an inconceivable relation: 'Given the generality of the struggle for recognition in the relationship between consciousnesses, one would be tempted to conclude that at bottom *there is no* brother/sister bond, there is no brother or sister' (Gl 149a/168a). Nevertheless, such a relation would be of no interest to Derrida if it were *simply* anomalous—if it were not a condition of possibility of the system as well as its condition of impossibility. He therefore asks:

And what if what cannot be assimilated, the absolute indigestible, played a fundamental role in the system, an abyssal role rather, the abyss playing a quasi²⁷-tran [...] scendental role and allowing to be formed above it, as a kind of effluvium, a dream of appeasement? Isn't there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system's space of possibility? The transcendental has always been, strictly, a transcategorial, what could be received, formed, terminated in none of the categories intrinsic to the system. The system's vomit. And what if the sister, the

²⁷ Derrida's French is '*quasi*' which is translated by Leavey and Rand as 'almost'.

brother/sister relation represented here the transcendental position, ex-position?

(Gl 151-162a/171-183a)

The seeming anomaly, Derrida suggests, functions then in both an enabling and an undermining manner. And it does so *by being repressed*, allowing a dream or, as Derrida will later put it, a phantasm, to rise above it. In other words, it is that which forms a pre-condition of the system but which cannot be contained within it and must be, in Derrida's words, 'excluded,' or as Hegel would put it, 'overcome.' Now if the brother-sister is related to the systematicity of the system in this manner, then it must be the embodiment of what Hegel would call 'contingency.' There are two ways in which Derrida addresses the 'contingency' of this relation.

On the one hand, he suggests that there is a certain contingency to the manner in which the brother-sister relation comes to be determined as the primary locus of the divine law *by Hegel*. In the passage quoted directly above, the ellipsis interrupting 'transcendental' stands in for twelve pages of Hegel's letters to or about his 'quasi-sister' Nanette and his future wife Marie. Derrida's inclusion of these letters may be intended to suggest that Hegel's account of the family is not immune from personal influence—that Hegel's exclusion of the natural from the ethical family may have its reflection in Hegel's own repression of his desire for Nanette and its sublimation into an ethical commitment to Marie of the form elaborated in the *Philosophy of Right*. The importance Derrida attributes to this potential personal influence is indicated by the fact that these letters interrupt the text of *Glas* at this crucial point in its development. Later in *Glas*, Derrida also seems to suggest that Hegel's account of the relation between the woman and the public life of the nation is mirrored in Hegel's relation to his sister, Christiane.

Furthermore, Derrida also suggests that the very singularity and 'irreplaceability' of the brother for the sister cannot be fully accounted for by the structural account given

in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Derrida indicates that this irreplaceability perhaps has an 'empirical' source in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Hegel's personal investment in which, Derrida notes, is signalled by his rare use of the first personal pronoun in his discussion of the play in the *Aesthetics* (GI 150a/170a). As Derrida writes, 'Will one say that Hegel has transformed into structural and paradigmatic legality an empiric situation described in a particular text of the history of tragedies? And that for the needs of a cause—or a sister—that is obscure?' (GI 165a/186a). In the following, however, I shall not focus on these suggestions of Derrida's, partly because such claims gain their force not so much on an individual basis as through their accumulation throughout *Glas*. I shall focus rather on the other element of contingency to which Derrida attends. This contingency is internal to the brother-sister relation insofar as it has its basis in the *natural* consanguinity and natural sexual difference of the siblings.

2.3 From Diversity to Opposition

For Hegel, overcoming this contingency will be at the same time overcoming its ever having been contingent i.e. retrospectively determining it as always already having been necessary, from a more elevated perspective. Now as we saw in chapter 5, that which is contingent is that which is in a certain sense simply given. As became explicit in the sphere of real actuality, this givenness consists in a form of reflection-into-self or indifference. In this sense, contingency is derived from, or a fuller explanation of, the category of diversity, for the latter is a state where the indifference of beings toward one another means that they only allow themselves to be compared according to isolated respects of likeness and unlikeness. Diversity licenses a certain 'relativity' in that it *intrinsically* calls for 'external comparison,' because the indifference of the terms resists

their unification within an all-encompassing 'ground.' It therefore licenses a multiplicity of respects of comparison, even if only between two terms, because an 'essential difference' between these terms cannot be determined. The overcoming of the diverse character of the brother-sister relation, which will be discussed below, will then at the same time constitute the overcoming of its contingent basis.

My reading of *Glas* here is indebted to that of Kevin Thompson, for whom 'the impossible yet necessary bond between brother and sister [...] reveals a problematic whose implications will not be able to be confined either to the realm of *Sittlichkeit* or to its treatment of the family. The relation between brother and sister represents a general structure endemic to the very nature of the Hegelian system.'²⁸ We can now begin to see why the condition of impossibility formed by the brother-sister relation is at the same time a condition of possibility for the Hegelian 'system.' This is because it is through the transformation of a state of indifferent diversity into intrinsic opposition that the dialectical movement progresses from one stage to the next. As we saw in the previous chapter in particular, it is through this process that, in the *Logic*, what initially has to be taken as simply given ultimately comes to be given by the concept to itself. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the form of 'diversity' manifested in the brother-sister relation is not the *pure* form of diversity we considered within the *Logic*. It is not simply external difference, and this is perhaps one reason why Derrida focusses on the brother-sister relation, for it is an example within the 'system' where a contamination seems to be indicated between extrinsic and intrinsic difference.

The brother and sister are 'diverse beings' (*Verschiedenheiten*) as Hegel puts it, because their difference is a *given, natural* sexual difference. As Hegel writes, 'These two

²⁸ Thompson, p. 251. This does not mean, of course, that this 'general' problematic can be thought or broached without reference to the brother-sister relation.

universal beings of the ethical world have, therefore, their determinate *individuality* in *naturally* distinct self-consciousnesses' (Ph 275/338). Insofar as this difference is naturally given, it is essentially indeterminate: in truth, then, it is not *a* difference, but a multiplicity of various differences, or, as Hegel puts it, a 'contingent diversity of dispositions and capacities' (Ph 276/338). None of these alone therefore *defines* sexual difference.

On the other hand, however, the brother and sister are not monads that are *absolutely* indifferent to each other; they are intrinsically different from one another insofar as the sexual nature of each is *not* that of the other, yet at the same time the 'essence' of their respective sexual natures remains indeterminate. To this extent, then, their difference is both internal and external. With some caution, we might therefore say that their respective sexual natures function here as the 'minimal identity' or the 'remainder' which allows a multiplicity of differences to circulate between them, and thus leaves that in which their difference consists open to continual reconceptualisation.²⁹

²⁹ Caution is needed here, however, because insofar as the sexual natures are also simply *given*, they do not wholly correspond to the notion of the remainder as we have considered it throughout this study. It would be misleading, then, to suggest that Derrida departs from Hegel in affirming the importance of this diverse relation as a *natural* relation. As Derrida's *Grammatology* makes clear, his aim is absolutely not to reassert a priority of 'nature' over 'culture.' As Derrida writes: 'Thus, as it goes without saying, the trace whereof I speak is not more *natural* (it is not the mark, the natural sign, or the index in the Husserlian sense) than *cultural*, not more physical than psychic, biological than spiritual. It is that starting from which a becoming-unmotivated of the sign, and with it all the ulterior oppositions between *physis* and its other, is possible' (G 48/70). Indeed, Derrida's objection to Hegel, as I read him, is that it is precisely because Hegel ignores the cultural determination of nature that he can slide from the 'givenness' of the brother's and sister's natures as *indeterminate* to the givenness of these natures as *self-evident*. As we shall see below, the 'initial' givenness or the gift is then made wholly transparent and ultimately given by absolute knowing to itself.

As we shall see, this diverse multiplicity comes to be determined by Hegel as essential opposition. This takes place when the indeterminate, natural, sexual difference comes to embody an essential difference. Now on Thompson's reading, Derrida's objection to this transition constitutes a *necessary* claim concerning the impossibility of such a transition from diversity to opposition. This leads Thompson to question whether Derrida does enough to justify such a claim, and whether in principle it could be justified:

Derrida has never articulated the impossibility of the movement from a given multiplicity to its intrinsic opposition. He has instead relied upon this very transition to reveal the space of possibility within which the dialectic moves. But if this space is the reflection-into-itself of the third, then in fact will not the very attempt to maintain its various aspects give way, as Hegel shows, to intrinsic opposition and, ultimately, to speculative contradiction? If so, the enigma of affinity remains perhaps the most troubling and inescapable matter for one concerned with Derrida's work.³⁰

As I read him, however, it could never have been Derrida's intention to articulate such an impossibility. This is, firstly, because it would amount to the assertion of the *necessity* of contingency that in chapter 5 I argued Derrida cannot make, for this assertion would be universal and context-independent. Derrida claims to speak from no such standpoint; as I discussed in chapter 3, his claims are rather almost always articulated from within (yet also on the margins of) particular contexts. For the same reason, as I noted in chapter 4, Derrida cannot be arguing for the weaker, but still universal thesis of the contingency of all necessity. Furthermore, even when Derrida articulates the displacement of a conceptual opposition within a particular context, this is not achieved through an appeal to that which is supposed to be self-evident or which *must* be acknowledged, but rather

³⁰ Thompson, p. 259.

to that which could always be ignored or left unread, depending on the manner in which one approaches it. Whether diversity 'can' or 'cannot' be determined as opposition is therefore not the question, since it already presupposes what we might call a rather 'flat' ontology.

In the present context, then, Derrida's aim can be seen as relatively modest. It is not to give a positive argument for the impossibility of the transition from diversity to opposition, but rather to ask: what happens to a multiplicity when it is determined as opposition in Hegel's text? What drives this process and what might it fail to 'account for'? It is only on the basis of this engagement with this *Hegelian* determination of difference that one might come to 'speculate' on what might be repressed more generally by operations of a similar type.

It is in this way too that Derrida comes to *displace* the opposition between contingency and necessity in Hegel, rather than to simply affirm contingency over necessity. Indeed, one of the most important points that arises in his analysis of Hegel's ethical world is that the notion of contingency only makes sense, or is only retroactively determined, from the perspective of necessity.³¹ If the standpoint of necessity is not acceded to through the determination of an essential difference, then what precedes this standpoint can no longer be called contingent. And this is not to say that it then takes on *another* form of necessity by default. This is perhaps why he writes that the family model Hegel interrogates is 'perhaps not as empiric as imagined' (Gl 165a/186a) and that, more cryptically, 'The greater logic is there to suspend any choice and to prevent you from cutting through to a decision between the transcendental sister and the empirical sister' (Gl 164a/185a, trans. modified).

³¹ This is also the root of Derrida's objection to Saussure's thesis of the 'arbitrariness of the sign' in *Grammatology*, which Derrida writes is 'so badly named' (G 44/65).

Furthermore, even if the transition to opposition can only take place through repression, this does not entail that a certain level of repression is avoidable, insofar as, for Derrida, marks constitute themselves as the marks that they are through their exclusion of other marks. As we shall see, Derrida's departure from Hegel will not consist simply in attempting to 'undo' this repression—that is, to 'return' to a state of 'nature.' As we saw in chapter 3, the 'general text' manifests itself only as the excess over any given determination of an 'essential difference'; it therefore does not simply precede such repression, but rather multiplies it, as it were. We shall consider this Derridean response in the third part of this chapter. For now, however, let us consider how the transition from diversity to opposition takes place in Hegel's ethical world.

2.4 From Diversity to Opposition in the Ethical World

As the essence of the family, the brother-sister relation is also its 'limit concept'—the point at which the family unit(y) breaks up through the brother's departure from the family home. The essence of the family is thus at the same time the point of rupture in its closed economy—that which it would seem unable to take into account. And yet, this rupture is reappropriated by means of the general significance that now comes to be embodied by the brother and sister, as 'man' and 'woman,' such that the life of the family is *continued* into, and comes into a new reconciliation with, the public sphere. For it is at this point that 'man' and 'woman' are determined as the 'elements' in which the two ethical laws have their 'natural selves and operative individuality.' They now come to embody the opposition between the two fundamental laws of the ethical world. The man leaves the home and the divine law under which he has thus far lived in order to take part

in the public life of the nation; the woman becomes the head of the household either through marriage or on the death of the parents (Ph 275/388).

What was previously the brother and sister's merely natural difference now serves as the basis of their essential difference. As Hegel puts this, 'This moment loses the indeterminateness which it still has there, and the contingent diversity of dispositions and capacities. It is now the determinate opposition of the two sexes whose natural existence acquires at the same time the significance of their ethical determination' (Ph 276/338, trans. modified). It is here, then, that the merely 'given,' natural difference comes to be attributed an essential significance. This does not mean that the natural difference is simply left behind or discarded. It is rather sublated or overcome (*überwunden*) in that it is raised to the status of an ethical difference by serving as the basis that allows the brother and sister to embody the respective ethical laws. As Derrida is careful to note, it is only after it has been elevated to this essential difference that its previous form is seen to have been merely indeterminate in contrast to the 'true opposition.'

The opposition of the two laws is at first peaceful rather than polemical. Each law serves to complement or 'authenticate' the other, and the ethical realm is 'a tranquil transition of one of its powers into the other, in such a way that each preserves and brings forth the other' (Ph 278/341). Their 'middle term' is their 'immediate interpenetration' in the union between man and woman. This delicate balance is upset by the deed, through which each law, Hegel writes, 'proves to be the non-reality [*Nichtigkeit*]' of itself and the other' (Ph 279/343). Yet because the two laws are linked 'in essence,' acting in accordance with one necessarily 'evokes' the other as having been contravened and requiring recompense (Ph 283/347). It thus leads to a state of guilt.

The ethical contradiction is thus brought to light, or, more precisely, this contradiction is itself the bringing to light of what is merely implicit in opposition.

Derrida's attention to the structure of this contradiction reveals a repression of one of its moments and a privileging of the other. Yet Derrida does not suggest that one of the contradictory terms simply dominates or absorbs the other; it is rather the case that the *form* of contradiction itself cannot but privilege one term over the other. This is because contradiction implies the full manifestation, or full illumination of the negative unity of the terms. But when these terms are the obscure divine law and the human law of daylight, this full illumination cannot but privilege the latter and distort the former. For the divine law is that which appears only through its withdrawal from or resistance to appearance; contradiction therefore forces it to appear in a form that is alien to it. Thus as Derrida writes, 'the diaphanous law of consciousness (man) and the obscure law of the unconscious (woman) must become identical at the bottom of their opposition. But then they come before the light, they appear in the light, the law of laws. The opposition of noon and midnight resolves itself into noon' (Gl 169a/191a).³²

The contradiction cannot but then repress the divine law through its very comprehension of it. Furthermore, even though both contraries are given 'equal weight' *within* the contradiction, the contradiction cannot but, at a 'meta-level,' determine the obscure, divine, feminine law of individuality as 'bad' and the clear, human, masculine law of universality as 'good.' This is because, in revealing the fundamental *unity* of the two ethical principles, the contradiction locates the fault in an excessively isolated being-for-self, or *individuality*. As Hegel writes, 'In the *deed* they exist as beings with a self, but

³² Insofar as the two laws here may be seen to figure concealment and unconcealment in general, it is clear that the significance of Derrida's point ranges far beyond this section of the *Phenomenology*, and extends to what might be considered an implicit violence in dialectical contradiction as such. Wherever a contradiction arises between what can manifest itself only by withdrawing from manifestation on the one hand and what is 'open to the light of day' on the other, we might question whether something is not repressed in this process.

with a diverse self; and this contradicts the unity of the self, and constitutes their unrighteousness and necessary destruction' (Ph 285/349).

2.5 Repression

The repression of the divine law in contradiction is of course also a repression of death³³—of the death of the individual and the mourning for this individual.³⁴ In a certain sense it constitutes a refusal to *give time* to what ought to stop time and call a halt to any productive development. Derrida's reading of Hegel's reading of *Antigone* here reprises the theme of his earlier essay on Bataille's reading of Hegel: the manner in which the Hegelian *Aufhebung* attempts to *account for* and put to work what should be an irrecoverable loss.³⁵ As Derrida puts it, 'What speculative dialectics means (to say) is that

³³ 'Repression of death' means here that death is still seen as a way of *being*. The significance Derrida accords this repression cannot be overestimated, insofar as he states that the 'whole question of deconstruction' is whether ideality as death is 'to *be* dead or to be *dead*' (Gl 133a/151a). In the 'Revealed Religion' chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel indicates that in the sphere of absolute knowing, not only time but also death as such will be overcome. The self-consciousness reached in this sphere 'does not actually *die*, as the particular self-consciousness is pictured as being actually dead, but its particularity dies away in its universality, i.e. in its knowledge, which is essential being reconciling itself with itself' (Ph 475/571).

³⁴ For Critchley, this is also a repression of a certain possibility of ethics, insofar as 'Antigone marks a place ('an impossible place') within the Hegelian system where an ethics is glimpsed that is irreducible to dialectics and cognition, what I would call an ethics of the singular' (Critchley, pp. 210-11).

³⁵ 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,' in WD pp. 317-351. Cf. particularly: 'The blind spot of Hegelianism, *around* which can be organized the representation of meaning, is the *point* at which destruction, suppression, death and sacrifice constitute so irreversible an expenditure, so radical a negativity—here we would have to say an expenditure and a negativity

the crypt can still be incorporated into the system. The transcendental or the repressed [*refoulé*], the unthought or the excluded must be assimilated by the corpus, interiorized as moments, idealized in the very negativity of their labor. The stop, the arrest, forms only a stasis in the introjection of the spirit' (Gl 166a/187a). This interiorisation through repression is precisely not an attempt to eliminate the divine law, but to harness it. We can now consider how this takes place by considering how the contradiction lives on even after it has come to light.

For the ethical world represents something of an anomaly in Hegel, insofar as the contradiction here does not immediately collapse into a new unity with which the next dialectical development will begin. As Derrida puts it, here the contradiction 'appeases nothing' (Gl 174a/192a). It only reveals the negative unity of the two laws, without yet pointing to their positive unity. Each depends on the other in order to be what it is, but each is also opposed to the other. Let us consider the structure of this negative unity in more detail.

The divine law lives on or *remains* in the form of the irony of 'womankind.' The latter, as Hegel describes it, mocks the universal aims of the nation, and attempts to 'change by intrigue' the universal ends of the government into private ends and 'pervert' universal property into private property. In Hegel's description of this phenomenon, it is difficult not to hear an echo of his own reprimand to those who would attempt to enter the logical science with unbridled enthusiasm: 'Woman in this way turns to ridicule the earnest wisdom of mature age which, indifferent to purely private pleasures and enjoyments, as well as to playing an active part, only thinks of and cares for the universal. She makes this wisdom an object of derision for raw and irresponsible youth and

without reserve—that they can no longer be determined as negativity in a process or system' (WD 327/380).

unworthy of their enthusiasm' (Ph 288/353). The irony or scepticism of woman is then implicitly or explicitly conceived as parasitic on, and obstructive of, the earnest striving of the representatives of the universal.

The human law lives on by 'consuming and absorbing' (Ph 287/352), or as Derrida would put it, 'repressing,' the irony and 'separatism' of womankind. It dissolves the distinct families into 'the fluid continuity of its own nature' (Ph 288/352). In this way, the nation prevents the universal ends of the community from being undermined by womanly irony. It is a measure of the 'threat' posed by the latter that it can only be subdued and brought back into line with the purposes of the whole community by means of war. Though Hegel of course does not put it this way, war in this instance would then have to be conceived as a turning against the initial peace of the sister's relation to the brother—in short, as war on peace. War not only makes the individual feel 'the power of the negative,' and so realise how fragile he or she is in isolation from the community, but also harnesses the essential power of the individual, which, properly directed, 'preserves the whole' (Ph 289/353). The community as a whole thus flourishes by sacrificing what would confront it with death—that is, by repressing the rem(a)inder of death.

We can now begin to see precisely what interests Derrida in the negative unity of the two laws. For this unity is governed by the same paradoxical logic that we encountered in Hegel's *Doctrine of Essence*. In the present case, this means that each law will and will not have been prior to the other. The divine law, as we saw above, is in one sense characterised as parasitical upon the human law. Yet as becomes particularly evident in war, the human law is also dependent on the divine law for its motive force. The 'publicly manifest spirit' Hegel writes, has 'the root of its power in the netherworld' (Ph 287/351). As Derrida is careful to observe, the divine law is not simply a hostile principle for the nation; the latter must include the former within its own law, but it must

include it *as excluded*. Furthermore, in doing so it also in a certain respect ‘creates it,’ since the divine law is not what it is prior to its relation to the human law. As Hegel himself writes, ‘Since the community only gets an existence through its interference with the happiness of the family, and by dissolving self-consciousness into the universal, it creates for itself in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it an internal enemy in womankind in general’ (Ph 288/352, trans. modified). The divine law might then be conceived as the ‘quasi-transcendental’ condition of possibility and impossibility of the human law. The manner in which repression ‘creates’ its own transcendental field or ‘essence’ through its very action is one of the central themes of *Glas*. Such an ‘essence’ does not precede the repression, and yet the repression also cannot fully master what it ‘creates,’ because from another perspective it only finds this creation before it. This is precisely the logic of the essential remainder or of failed mastery that we saw in Hegel’s account of reflection. Suppression [*répression*] therefore, as Derrida puts it,

produces just what—the singularity of the unconscious, the irony of femininity—it suppresses [*réprime*] as its own “essential moment.” It traps itself, and glues, limes itself [*s’englue*] in its own essence. Whence the eternal burst {*éclat*} of laughter of the unconscious—or of the woman, the exclamation that indefinitely harasses, questions, ridicules, mocks the essence, the truth (of man)’ (Gl 188a/211a).

Here again, Derrida is only commenting on what is already more or less explicit in Hegel’s account of the two laws. Yet Derrida now begins to draw certain conclusions from the logic by which they are governed that Hegel does not and would not. The quasi-transcendentality of the divine law means that, ‘If God is (probably) a man in speculative dialectics, the godness of God—the irony that divides him and makes him come off his

hinges—the infinite disquiet of his essence is (if possible) woman(ly)’ (Gl 188a/211a). Furthermore, in identifying repression with the dialectic itself (Gl 191a/214a), Derrida also seems to suggest that the latter will always ‘create’ for itself an irreducible remainder that it can only retroactively ‘get behind’ through repeated instances of repression which allow the phantasm of absolute mastery to arise. When Derrida remarks above that suppression becomes ‘glued’ in its own essence, this is surely a reference to the Introduction to Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, where Hegel states that if cognition were thought of as an ‘instrument’ such as the lime-twig used to catch a bird, an unbridgeable gap would already have been posited between cognition and its object. The bird would then ‘laugh our little ruse to scorn’ (Ph 47/69). Now Derrida seems to be suggesting that, in attempting to overcome *this* kind of division or this notion of the transcendental, Hegel reinstates another, *quasi*-transcendental in which ‘we’ would be caught, and the bird would still laugh itself to death.

Now could one not argue that Derrida misreads or misrepresents Hegel here? For after all, the ethical world does not represent Hegel’s ultimate conception of the relation between the individual, or individuality, and the state. Might we not then interpret Hegel himself as saying that it is precisely because of the repression that the ethical world must meet its destruction? For the desecration of Polynices’ corpse brings the wrath of other communities to bear on the nation, which necessarily leads to its eventual downfall. In other words, might we not say, yes, there is repression as long as the ethical world endures, but it is *because* there is repression that it does not indefinitely endure? Yet this objection would be premature, for if we look a little more closely at Hegel’s text, we see that it is not because the repression is too excessive that the ethical world collapses, but because it is not repressive enough.

The community does not collapse just because repression brings war; it collapses because whether it wins a given war will depend on the natural gifts with it has been endowed. Sooner or later, the community will be outmatched in this regard. As Hegel writes, 'Because the existence of ethical life rests on strength and luck, the *decision is already made* that its downfall has come' (Ph 289/354). The ethical world thus collapses because its subsistence rests on 'the *natural* allocation of the two laws to the two sexes' (Ph 282/346), that is, upon a diverse, contingent basis. We should not forget, of course, that a state of diversity, as Hegel frames it, is a state of excessive 'individualism' (or as Derrida might put it, a resistance to totalisation); at root it is thus, at a 'meta-level,' the feminine, divine law which is to blame for the collapse of the ethical world. The opposition here has not been able to overcome this diverse basis sufficiently to prevent a tragic denouement. It is not therefore less repression that is needed, but further repression in order to overcome the contingency of this still too *natural* origin.

Having considered more closely the mechanism of repression involved in these chapters of the *Phenomenology*, we can now proceed to Derrida's *Auseinandersetzung* with what he takes to be the phantasmatic triumph of repression in the final overcoming of sexual difference, which is at the same time the transition to absolute knowledge. But to reiterate, his attempt to divert this transition will not consist in simply 'undoing' the repression. As we have seen above, there is no origin prior to the repression, from which a pure unrepressed 'identity' could be retrieved. As Derrida writes, 'In short, can it be asked if repression is good or bad?' If it must be, then the question of its '*value*' is laughable (Gl 197a/221a). To counter Hegelian repression will not then be to reverse the

dominance of that which represses and that which is repressed, but to indicate the potential inexhaustibility of that which has been repressed by any given repression.³⁶

Part 3. The Outside Inside

3.1 Absolute Knowing, Sexual Difference, and the Phantasm

As we saw in part 1 of this chapter, the transition to ‘Absolute Knowing’ in the *Phenomenology* is the point at which the ‘absolute sense of the absolute family’ is illuminated by speculative thinking. As Derrida notes, this transition to *Sa* is concomitant with the overcoming of the remaining sexual difference between the mother and the father in the Christian family. This sexual difference is referred to twice in Hegel’s account of ‘revealed religion’: once in its first few pages, and in slightly more detail on its last page. There Hegel writes:

Just as the *individual* divine man has a father *in principle* [*ansichseienden Vater*] and only an *actual* mother, so too the universal divine man, the community, has for its father its own doing and knowing, but for its mother, eternal love which it only *feels*, but does not behold in its consciousness as an actual, immediate *object*. Its reconciliation, therefore, is in its heart, but its consciousness is still divided against itself and its actual world is still disrupted [*gebrochen*] (Ph 478/574, also quoted in GI 222/248)

³⁶ This does not mean that Derrida posits an ‘original plenitude’ which would be always ‘more than’ what it is determined as being. The gift is rather quasi-transcendental in that it manifests itself only through the displacement of the manner in which it has always already been determined. (Cf. Derrida’s comments on negative theology in M 6/6).

The possibility of the transition to the standpoint of science, and so the possibility of a philosophical logic *überhaupt*, depends then, on the overcoming of this difference. Indeed, on Derrida's reading, the latter would be the overcoming of opposition itself, insofar as 'The opposition of father and mother is equivalent to all the other oppositions of the series. Equivalent, then, to *opposition itself*' (Gl 223a/249a). Why 'opposition itself'? Derrida might be taken to mean that, on the one hand, in being the final opposition before the transition to *Sa*, it gathers up within itself all of the oppositions that have preceded it and proves to have been the ultimate opposition underlying them all. On the other hand, due to the interpenetration of the finite and the infinite discussed in part 1 of this chapter, the opposition of sexual difference cannot be merely a 'finite' 'example' of the 'general' structure of opposition, but rather 'exemplifies' it. It does so because it includes within itself all of the other 'finite' terms through which such an opposition might be figured, and only is what it is by including them within itself. The father is thus not dissociable from, among other things, activity, consciousness, and knowledge, and the mother not dissociable from passivity, unconsciousness, obscurity, and feeling.

Now as in the ethical world, what is repressed in the *formation* of this opposition is again the diverse, manifold character of sexual difference. As in the ethical world too, Derrida does not conceive the subsequent *overcoming* of the opposition to take place through the simple absorption of one term by the other. The sublation rather consists in *both* of the terms coming to include the other *in* themselves and thereby figuring the whole *by themselves*. As Derrida puts it, each has an 'independence' and 'absolute mastery'—a mastery that is not the mastery of *essence* but the conceptual mastery we encountered in chapter 5, which does not consist in the external application of force.

Yet just as the obscurity of the divine law in the ethical world was brought out into the light of day through the structure of opposition, here it is the finite actuality or, as we saw Critchley note, the *materiality* of the mother that becomes ideal. It is only when it becomes ideal that the smooth family movement from father to son and ‘back’ can take place without resistance. This is why Derrida writes that the determination of difference as opposition ‘maintains a historical and systematic relation with the Immaculate Conception (IC) [...] if not with the dogma concerning the birth of Mary, at least with its premise or conclusion, the virginity of the mother’ (Gl 223a/250a). The obscurity of the mother’s love, which is based on the contingency of natural feeling and which is first of all necessary in order to overcome the coldness of the Jewish family, is now itself overcome in favour of the whole’s self-transparency and self-*comprehension*.

Once again, the opposition is not a means of ‘having done with’ the mother or simply absorbing the maternal into the paternal, but rather of ‘idealising’ the mother such that she can figure the whole. But in that this idealisation represses what had been the essential determination of the mother—her finite, resistant actuality—it serves to make the mother more like the father.³⁷ It makes her, we might say, a ‘meta-level’ father. It is in this way that the IC is bound up with the ‘phantasm’ mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a phantasm that can no longer be avoided, Derrida writes, ‘as soon as the difference is determined as opposition.’ The phantasm is that of the ‘infinite mastery of the two sides of the relation’ (Gl 223a/250a), the mastery that is achieved through the supposed complete transparency of each side to the other.

³⁷ Derrida’s ‘objection’ here will of course not be that the distinctive characteristic of the mother should rather be maintained over against that of the father, for this supposedly distinctive characteristic is already a function of the repression of multiplicity.

Derrida thus writes that 'If the sexual difference as opposition relieves difference as opposition, the opposition, conceptuality itself, is homosexual' (Gl 223a/249a); conceptuality begins to become such as soon as 'the sexual differences efface themselves and determine themselves as *the* difference,' that is, when they determine themselves within the element of identity. Now Derrida does not say 'asexual' since there is still a smooth intercourse between or interpenetration of the moments of the unity to which the opposition has led. Generation still takes place, yet this generation is a result of self-insemination, of the father giving himself his own image. The opposition is therefore masculine in an undifferentiated sense, no longer containing any *trace* of the feminine.

The 'phantasm' that is reached at the end of the *Phenomenology* is the standpoint of *Wissenschaft*—the unity of thought and being with which the *Logic* begins. Insofar as the *Phenomenology* is a precondition for the *Logic*, Derrida's point would then be that the *Logic* is only made possible through a long series of repressive acts.³⁸ And it is here that Derrida states that once the phantasm has been established, there is a certain futility to the attempt to present counterexamples to it. This is of course why, as we noted in the introduction to this chapter, *Glas* addresses the *genesis* of the phantasm rather than opposing it directly. As Derrida asks:

³⁸ Although it is impossible to enter into this debate here, this is not the only way in which the *Logic* would begin from a series of repressions. Even if the *Logic* is taken to begin with the pure resolution to think immediacy, Derrida would undoubtedly be in agreement with Kierkegaard's contention that it is impossible to begin immediately with immediacy—that this would rather involve an interminable series of abstractions from (or repressions of) the fact that one has abstracted the indeterminate from the determinate (cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 96–103).

In front of what would the phantasm of the *IC* have failed? In front of “reality”? But measured by the power of the greater logic that thinks the truth of the *IC*, this notion of “reality” also remains very confusedly empirical. Who would dare say that the phantasm of the *IC* has not succeeded? Two thousand years, at least, of Europe, from Christ to *Sa*, without speaking of retroactive effects, of representations, of edging and de-bordering effects {*effets de bordure et de débordement*}, of all that could be called the imperialism or the colonialisms and neocolonialisms of the *IC*. Will it be said, to determine the *IC* as phantasm, that the *IC* is not *true*, that that (*ça*) does not happen like that (*comme ça*), that this is only a myth? That would indeed be silly, and the silliness would again claim “sexual experience” as its authority. But yes, that (*ça*), happens like that (*comme ça*), and what the greater logic impeccably—this is the right word—demonstrates is that not only is this myth true, but it gives the measure of truth itself, the revelation of truth, the truth of truth. Then the (absolute) phantasm of the *IC* as (absolute) phantasm is (absolute) truth. Truth is the phantasm itself. The *IC*, sexual difference as opposition (thesis against thesis), the absolute family circle would be the general equivalence of truth and the phantasm. Homosexual enantiosis’ (Gl 224a/251a).

3.2 The Overcoming of Time

Sa is termed by Derrida the ‘final accomplishment of the phantasm, the being-(close)-by-(it)self of the *logos*’ (Gl 225a/251a). This self-proximity of absolute knowing is at the same time the overcoming of time, insofar as it is the transformation of representation—of the remaining distance between the infinite and the finite—into the self-presence of absolute knowing. Derrida is careful, however, to note the ambiguity of the manner in which time is overcome in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*: as Derrida notes, Hegel states

that it is both 'annulled' (*'getilgt'*) and that it is sublated (*'aufgehoben'*).³⁹ We can give some explanation of this ambiguity if we look more closely at the nature of *Sa*'s self-presence.

At the end of the *Phenomenology*, a very similar development occurs to that which we saw at the end of Hegel's conceptual logic: just like absolute method, absolute knowing comes to reconceptualise the path that has led it to itself, or rather to actively reconstruct this path from out of itself—as that which in truth will have been posited by it as the pure 'I.' At this point, Derrida notes, the phantasm can no longer be rejected as 'nothing but' a phantasm, precisely because there is nothing but the phantasm (GI 225a/251a).

Like the logical concept that we described in chapter 6, *Sa* is then in one sense only a continual *process* of self-division, but since in this process the self only goes together with itself, it is also a process that has always already occurred. As Hegel puts this in a passage from the penultimate chapter of the *Phenomenology* that is quoted by Derrida and that points forward to this speculative transparency: 'Thus the distinctions made are immediately resolved as soon as they are made, and are made as soon as they are resolved, and what is true and actual is precisely this movement circling in itself (*in sich kreisende Bewegung*)' (Ph 465/559a, quoted in GI 230a/257a). This is why time is both *getilgt* and *aufgehoben* in *Sa*. Time in the form of the delay caused by the opacity of substance is annulled, but time persists in sublated form as the time that absolute knowing gives *itself*. The latter is the time of the eternal present of eternal self-presence—time conquered.

³⁹ Furthermore, Derrida states that this ambiguity is the source of the 'extraordinary difficulty, if not impossibility, of this thought of *Sa* in/as its time' (GI 220a/246a).

3.3 The Remains of Time

Derrida now asks, 'What can there be outside an absolute phantasm? What can one yet add to it? Why and how does one desire to get out of it?' (Gl 225a/252a). The 'how' here is of course bound up with the 'why,' for the 'way out' will be reached through an attention to that which has been repressed through the logic of opposition that has allowed the circle of *Sa* to be formed. It will require an openness to a certain spectre which continues to haunt the peace of the pure self-relation which lives through repression. If hospitality is extended to it, this spectre may give pause for thought, arresting the sure progress of the absolute knowing that has come to coincide with sense-*certainty*. It may then give us to think a remainder (*reste*) of *time* which prevents the circle of *Sa* from closing.

Building on the analysis of the remainder undertaken throughout this study, we might first consider what this *reste*, in the context of *Glas*, cannot be. It cannot be a *reste* in the sense of a 'something' possessing the simple immediacy of what Hegel would term 'substance.' That is, it cannot be a something that would persist in simple indifference, in *opposition* to the dynamism of *Sa*. As Derrida writes, it can be neither 'presence, substance, nor essence,' nor 'permanent, substantial, subsistent,' nor that which would simply fall 'outside' the circle as its negative (Gl 226a/252-3a) or fall from it as a leftover or 'to the tomb.' This is because at this point in the *Phenomenology* all such forms of remaining have been shown to be in truth the *Schein* generated by the movement through which *Sa* determines itself. All instances of seemingly simple presence are in truth the self-presence that *Sa* has 'restored' for itself through its self-mediation. It is precisely because of their (seeming) immediacy that such moments can be brought into the structure of *determinate* opposition through which they are sublated. If it is possible

to 'leave' the circle, then, such a 'departure' could only be accomplished, paradoxically, by not leaving it, but rather by remaining (otherwise) within it.

We cannot then ask 'what is the *reste*?' nor even, Derrida adds, 'what does it mean to remain' insofar as such questions would already enquire into the essence of the *reste* or of remaining. To attempt to leap out of the circle so directly would be to find oneself back in the midst of it. It will be rather be a matter of remaining within the circle⁴⁰ and of attending to that which constitutes its quasi-transcendental condition but which cannot be exhausted by it. If the circle of *Sa* arises through the opposition which represses multiplicity, it will then be a question of letting this multiplicity resonate discordantly within *Sa*. We can now say, then, that the *reste* of time can only be a fleeting moment that is carried off from itself in its very appearance and that resists the attempt to comprehend it through its refusal to *remain* in place. It is this non-sense, for Derrida, that provokes thought and sets it in motion, but at the same time prevents thought from recovering its origins. In other words, it is that which gives to thinking but which does not give itself to be thought through. In order to locate the possibility of this *reste* within the *Phenomenology*, Derrida casts an Orphic glance back into the sphere of religion.

Now it is important to note again that Derrida can only hope to displace the circle in this way if he does not conceive it as simply *there* throughout the *Phenomenology*, as that which is guiding the development from the outset. It is only because it is neither a simple presupposition nor a telos in the external sense that it is possible to consider what might disrupt the passage to it. Derrida acknowledges this when he writes that 'Everything that is, all time, precomprehends itself, strictly, in the circle of *Sa*, which always comes back to the circle, presupposes its beginning, and only reaches that beginning at the end' (GI 226a/252a).

⁴⁰ As Derrida writes, 'the remain(s) [...] would not fall from it at all' (GI 226a/252a).

Derrida does not go back to the stage of absolute religion. Even though the latter is still held back from *Sa* because of its 'picture thinking,' it is at the same time already on the cusp of being thought speculatively. This is why Derrida writes that 'absolute religion is not yet what it already is: *Sa*' (Gl 218a/244a). By the stage of absolute religion, it would already be 'too late' to prevent the smooth slide into absolute knowledge. As Derrida puts this, 'This barely existing limit, exceeded as soon as it is posited, is already no more what it is yet and does not even give time to think its time. This limit is what barely presents itself between absolute religion and *Sa*' (Gl 220a/246a).

Derrida has to go further back into the sphere of religion in order to locate the non-origin of the *reste*. As Critchley notes, he does so while still remaining within the circle of *Sa*. This circle, as Critchley points out, is not only that of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, a circle formed through the meeting of its end and its beginning. Insofar as each new sphere of the *Phenomenology* constitutes a reconceptualisation of the beginning and its subsequent development, there are also many other circles formed within the wider circle. One of these consists in the loop between *Sa* and the earliest stage of the sphere of religion, the religion of light: 'the first moment of religion (immediate consciousness and sense-certainty) counts three moments whose first (the first moment of the first moment) is also, like *Sa*, at the other end, absence of figure, irrepresentable moment. The figure withdraws [*se dérobe*] at the end and origin of religion' (Gl 237a/264a). It is in this 'origin' that Derrida finds a certain non-sense 'prior' to sense, which allows him to enact a 'bad reading' of Hegel's text.

Indeed, Derrida claims that it is only through such a reading that a 'way out' of the circle is to be found. As he writes, 'If one thinks what *logos* means (to say), if one fills with thought the words of the phenomenology of spirit and of the logic, for example, there is no means of getting out of the absolute circle' (Gl 227a/253a). It is only by finding

a point in Hegel's text that be read against what Hegel 'means to say', and against meaning in general, that the circle can be broken.⁴¹ Importantly, Derrida notes that it will be impossible to know whether such a reading 'works': such a reading, being neither finite nor infinite⁴² 'has not even taken place [*elle n'a même pas lieu*]. One must let it fall [...] as a margin or epigraph' (GI 232a/259a). In part, I take Derrida to mean here that what he is attempting to draw attention to is precisely not 'something' that can come clearly into the light and thereby provide a straightforwardly 'convincing objection' to the pretensions of *Sa*. With his 'bad reading' he is rather attempting to locate that which could well be passed over in silence or read otherwise—that which does not have the *power* to demand attention. His reading here is therefore very close to his reading of Levinas' 'perhaps' [*peut-être*] in his 'At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am.'⁴³

⁴¹ Beyond the present context, Derrida is also suggesting here that the Hegel column as a whole constitutes such a 'bad reading,' one which involves immobilising Hegel's text in representation and cutting it up into 'ensembles of morsels that no longer proceed from the whole and that will never form altogether one' (GI 227a/254a).

⁴² Derrida's remarks at this point in the text might lead one to question the simplicity of Martin Hägglund's reading of differance as infinite finitude (cf. Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 3). Cf. also Derrida's remark in *Grammatology* that 'Differance is also something other than finitude' (G 68/99).

⁴³ In Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007).

3.4 Das Lichtwesen

Derrida now turns to the first moment of ‘natural religion,’ *das Lichtwesen*.⁴⁴ It is in this figure of thought that Derrida locates a perhaps ‘exemplary’ form of ‘pure’ difference, whose entanglement with opposition he nevertheless carefully examines. Critchley observes that these pages of *Glas* constitute ‘the core of Derrida’s reading and the clearest deployment of its thesis’⁴⁵ and my reading of this section will be indebted to his. But in order not to disavow this debt, I shall also have to disagree with Critchley concerning the ‘horizon’ of Derrida’s reading and therefore its broader significance with respect to the proximity and distance between Derrida and Hegel. In short, I shall suggest that where Critchley sees Derrida as indicating the limits of Hegelian metaphysics through a Heideggerian attempt to think being as such, Derrida is rather suggesting that while Heidegger indicates the ‘way out’ of the Hegelian circle, he does not follow this path far enough.

Let us first quote at length those remarks of Hegel’s concerning the *Lichtwesen* on which Derrida’s reading is based:

This being which is filled with the concept of spirit is, then, the ‘*shape*’ of the *simple* relation of spirit to itself, or the ‘*shape*’ of ‘shapelessness.’ In virtue of this

⁴⁴ Translated by Miller as ‘God as Light.’ Here I shall use Hegel’s German term, as it maintains the connection to the concept of essence that the *Lichtwesen* also displaces.

⁴⁵ Critchley, p. 215.

determination, this 'shape' is the pure, all-embracing and all-pervading *essential light* of sunrise, which preserves itself in its formless substantiality. Its otherness is the equally simple negative, *darkness*. The movements of its own externalization, its creations in the unresisting element of its otherness, are torrents of light [*Lichtgüsse*]; in their simplicity, they are at the same time the genesis of its being-for-self and the return from the existence [of its moments], streams of fire destructive of [all] structured form. The [moment] of difference which it gives itself does, it is true, proliferate unchecked in the substance of existence and shapes itself to the forms of nature; yet the essential simplicity of its thought moves aimlessly about in it without stability or intelligence, enlarges its bounds to the measureless, and its beauty, heightened to splendour, is dissolved in its sublimity.

The content developed by this pure *being*, or the activity of its perceiving, is, therefore, an essenceless by-play in this substance which merely *ascends*, without *descending* into its depths to become a subject and through the self to consolidate its distinct moments. The determinations of this substance are only attributes which do not attain to self-subsistence, but remain merely names of the many-named One' (Ph 419/506).

Now although it is clear from Hegel's remark that the torrents of light are 'at the same time' the genesis of a being-for-self, or as Derrida puts it, are 'already destined to work in the service of essence and sense' (Gl 238a/266a), Derrida's 'strategy' here consists in driving an infinitesimally small wedge into this 'at the same time,' a wedge which is an *other* 'at the same time' and which serves to guard the *reste* of time. Derrida lingers on that form of difference displayed by the *Lichtwesen's Ausstrahlung* that is *not yet*

difference as dialectical contradiction. Let us draw out from Derrida's reading the respects in which this may be so.⁴⁶

Firstly, Derrida picks up on the important point that the light here is, 'without shadow, noon without contrary, without resistance, without obstacle' (Gl 238a/265a). The effusion, like the brother-sister relation, takes place in a 'not yet' that is 'prior' to the determination of difference as opposition. At this point, the relation between lightness and darkness is one of indifference, such that the streams of light pour out against a dark background, but without relation to it.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ As we do so, it will be important to keep in mind that the *Lichtwesen* figures both 'the purest pure and the worst worst [*le pur du pur, le pire du pire*]' (Gl 240a/267a). Indeed, when Derrida later comes to think it in terms of the gift, the resonance of the German '*Gift*' in the French '*don*' is never far from Derrida's mind. The *Lichtwesen* figures, as we shall see, both that which gives to thinking and that which arrests or poisons thinking. The sun that the *Abendland* claims to preserve in its heart is, Derrida thus suggests, not simply the source of life and clarity but also of destruction and blindness. But this of course does not mean that the two are the same—that Derrida would in any way posit an equivalence between the one possibility of the *Lichtwesen* and the other. Here it might be helpful to draw on the figure of the 'disjointedness of time' from Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, which is broached there as both the condition of justice as such and a sign of the worst injustice or corruption. This in no way means the two are equivalent; Derrida's point is rather that *justly* addressing the latter form of disjointedness will not be a matter of attempting to set time back on its hinges, but of fostering the other form of disjointedness that consists in an openness toward the other (Cf. S 22-23/44-45).

⁴⁷ With respect to this 'original' indifference between the two principles of light and darkness, Derrida might be read as indicating a proximity between the figure of the *Lichtwesen* in Hegel and Schelling's notion of an '*Ungrund*' (Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006)).

Secondly, Derrida reads this divine light as a pure outpouring and *play*: 'pure and figureless, this light burns all. It burns itself in the all-burning {*le brûle-tout*} it is, leaves, of itself or anything, no trace, no mark, no sign of passage. Pure consuming destruction, pure effusion of light' (Gl 238a/265a). Here Derrida seems to hint at an interpretation of why the *Lichtwesen* should ascend unceasingly. For the streams of light would seem to manifest the structure of the trace that we met in chapter 3. It is in their very appearance that they efface themselves, as they are replaced by further streams which likewise efface *themselves*. This is then where Derrida locates the other 'at the same time' within Hegel's account, an 'at the same time' with a radically different sense to that of *Sa*: a simultaneity of appearance and disappearance which is not yet the unity of light and shadow, but rather their indifference. It is this indifference which explains why there is as yet no contradiction, but an immediate passing over of light into darkness.

Derrida devotes particular attention to this 'essenceless by-play (*Beiherspielen*)' of these streams of light, which, as Hegel states, 'have no self-subsistence.' The manner of their effusion amounts to a continual displacement or evacuation of sense, since it does not leave time for the moments to become determinate. As Derrida puts this: 'The word itself (*Beiherspielen*) plays the example (*Beispiel*) beside the essence. Here the example plays *beside* the essence so much, holds itself so diverted from {*à l'écart de*} the essence, that it has no essence: pure example, without essence, without law' (Gl 238a/266a).⁴⁸ On Derrida's reading, there is then as yet no sense to this play of light: it is only a shimmering or dazzling that continually eludes any attempt to grasp it.

⁴⁸ In using the term 'play' to describe an 'example' that negates itself as such by eluding any category through which it might be comprehended, Derrida surely has, among other things, Kant's analytic of the beautiful in mind here. We might view this implicit reference as an attempt to indicate an aspect of

Derrida also attends to the manner in which this ceaseless outpouring or flickering of the torrents of light might be understood as *not yet* the constitution of the *Lichtwesen's* being-for-self. This, I would suggest, is again due to the logic of the trace governing the play of light: the vanishing of the torrents into darkness *at the same time* as they appear and their continual replacement by new torrents does not allow for the continuity of time that would be necessary for self-constitution. This rapid succession of isolated instants thus does not yet give way to the gradual descent of the sun into the *Abendland*—for what Hegel calls the *Lichtwesen's* descent into its depths to become a subject. As Derrida writes: 'here the sun does not set—or else it sets immediately, does not know any going down, any route that leads back to self, any season, any season in the sense of cycle, just a pure season, in the sense of the seminal effusion without return' (GI 239a/266a). Here there are no patches of shade—no unity of light and darkness—in which a self might pause to recollect and inwardise (*erinnern*) itself from out of its otherness and prove to be that which mediates its determinations. Spirit therefore relates to itself here 'without mediation or determination': 'The pure play of difference is nothing, does not even *relate* to its own blaze {*incendie*}' (GI 239a/266a). It is in this process, then, that Derrida locates in Hegel's text a form of 'pure' difference that is not yet the 'absolute difference' that is equal to identity, but rather *indifference*: 'Letting itself get carried away, pure difference is different from itself, therefore indifferent' (GI 239a/266a).

In place of a being that is for-itself or a subject there is only, as Hegel writes, the 'many-named One.' Yet Derrida hints at a contradiction in Hegel's description, for if the one is *essentially* many-named—if there is no 'true name' of the one—then it is 'not one.'

Kant that Hegel will have repressed in his attempted sublation of the Kantian distinction between the finite and the infinite.

Drawing on *Specters of Marx*, we might say rather that it is '*plus d'un*': both more than one in that it is essentially multiple, but also less than one in that it does not add up to one totalisable whole (S XX/18). In Derrida's words, it is 'a One at once infinitely multiple and absolutely different, different from self, a One without self, the other without self that means (to say) nothing, whose language is absolutely empty' (GI 239a/266a).

Now as was mentioned above, Critchley takes Derrida to be seeking in Hegel a possibility of thinking being 'prior to its determination with regard to particular beings'⁴⁹ and he draws on the above passage on the 'One' to support this reading. To my mind, however, this is clearly not the path Derrida is following here. It is of course true that Hegel speaks of the *Lichtwesen* above as 'pure being.' Yet I take Derrida here to be driving a wedge between Hegel's attribution of the term 'being' to the *Lichtwesen* and the description that is given of it. Rather than going 'back' to the level of pure being before its determination as particular beings, Derrida is rather going even further 'back,' to a 'prehistory' of being. He is suggesting that that which effaces itself in its very appearance lies between being and nothing, in a space of undecidability that displaces opposition—even the opposition between being and beings—and that is 'not yet' a unity. He explicitly states, for instance, that the 'limitless play' of light 'does not yet have any onto-theological horizon: fire artist *without being*' (GI 238a/266a).

A few pages before this discussion, but still in relation to the *Lichtwesen*, Derrida writes that 'There is a "mystery" there, but the "mystical" [*mystique*"] does not result from some dissembling (*Verborgenheit*) or from some intimate secret (*Geheimnis*) of knowledge. The mystical is the revelation' (GI 234a/261a). Here Derrida is clearly not concerned with a Heideggerian unconcealment that is at the same time a concealment; here there is nothing to be concealed since there is 'nothing' to be revealed in this

⁴⁹ Critchley, p. 217.

encounter with a 'signifier without signified (GI 239a/266a). It is the revelation, or rather revelation *itself* that is in question. The latter is not experienced as a coming into presence, a 'clearing' which would also be an appropriation, nor as the inheritance of a historical destiny. It is neither being that is in question nor, moreover, *thinking*: at issue is rather that which deranges or dazzles thinking, that which effaces the experience of presence before it arises, preventing any possibility of appropriation or *Erinnerung*.

What Critchley's reading overlooks is precisely Derrida's attempt to problematise a certain Heideggerian nostalgia for an originally 'pure' thinking of being, even if for Heidegger this origin is immediately covered over (cf. P 54/73-74). Indeed, in reading Derrida's remarks on the 'many-named One,' it is difficult not to think of the end of his lecture, 'Différance.' In this text, it is precisely at the point at which Derrida is attempting to distinguish his 'position' from that of Heidegger that he writes: 'There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this without *nostalgia*, that is, outside of the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought' (M 27/29).

3.5 Das Abendlicht

While Derrida is concerned with locating a potentially radical difference in Hegel's text, he is also careful to explore how it is that this difference comes to be restricted—that is, how the 'seminal effusion' is, in Hegel's words, 'at the same time the genesis of [a] being for self.' Derrida now asks how it is that this chaotic all-burning comes to be determined as its own other, or how the continual 'now' that is at the same time the effacement of the 'now' comes to gain the stability necessary for it to 'open history.' Indeed, he directly addresses Hegel's claim that this 'reeling, unconstrained life *must* determine itself as

being-for-self and endow its vanishing shapes with an enduring subsistence' (Ph 420/506-7, my emphasis).⁵⁰

At this point we are again brought back to Thompson's claim that Derrida has never given a conclusive argument as to why difference as diverse multiplicity *cannot* pass over into opposition and contradiction. These pages of *Glas*, I think, make especially clear why this is not and could not have been Derrida's aim. As I read Derrida here, he is not attempting to show what *must* stop or block this transition. At a certain level, and as we shall see in more detail, Derrida does not even deny that a certain restriction of difference is unavoidable, nor that it has always already taken place. For Derrida, then, it is neither a question of stubbornly remaining (in the simple sense) with a supposedly original, absolutely indifferent diversity, nor of 'returning' to a supposed origin. In the following, we shall see how Derrida acknowledges a certain *necessary possibility* of the restriction of the *Lichtwesen's* difference; yet such a restriction is only a 'moment' within an outpouring which immediately carries it off again.

Derrida frames the question of the passing over of the *Lichtwesen* into being-for-self in terms of the guarding of a trace. How can this all burning, he asks, 'guard the trace of itself and breach/broach a history where it preserves itself in losing itself [*se conserve en se perdant*]?' (Gl 240a/267a). Before considering Derrida's response, it is important to note that the 'how' in his question might resonate in at least two, not necessarily separable ways: 1. What is it within such a difference that in itself might tend toward its

⁵⁰ Here Derrida might be read as failing to take up Hegel's explicit account of this transition, namely: 'The *immediate being* in which it stands in antithesis to its consciousness is itself the *negative power* which dissolves its distinctions' (Ph 420/507). Nevertheless, Derrida can also be seen as offering an explanation of *why* the *Lichtwesen* should emerge as this 'negative power' or being-for-self at all.

restriction? 2. How does speculative dialectics restrict it? Derrida's response is the following:

Here is experienced the implacable force of sense, of mediation, of the hard-working negative. In order to be what it is, purity of play, of difference, of consuming destruction, the all-burning must [*doit*] pass into its contrary: guard itself, guard its own movement of loss, appear as what it is in its very disappearance. As soon as it appears, as soon as the fire shows itself, it remains, it keeps hold of itself, loses itself as fire. Pure difference, different from (it)self, ceases to be what it is in order to remain what it is. That is the origin of history, the beginning of the going down {*déclin*}, the setting of the sun, the passage to occidental subjectivity. Fire becomes for-(it)self and is lost; yet worse {*pire*} since better (Gl 240a/267-8).

In Derrida's response we might separate three levels of explanation. Firstly, there is the (external) teleological level, which responds to the question: *in order for a trace of the fire to be retained*, how must it be determined? This level already supposes the desire to retain such a trace and does not therefore explain why, 'in itself,' the fire should guard a trace of itself. Secondly, there is the ontological level, according to which *if the fire is to be what it is*, it must take on a relative stability and so keep itself by denying itself as that which precisely resists and eludes determination: it must contradict itself. This again would presuppose a desire for the trace to be retained, and in addition that there is already a horizon of the fire's *truth*. It does not yet explain why the *Lichtwesen* itself should open this horizon. Now in invoking these two levels, Derrida would seem to suggest that it is in part a desire for presence that underlies Hegel's statement that the fire 'must' determine itself as being-for-self. To this extent, he is again pointing to a repressive Hegelian gesture. The importance of these levels of argumentation should not

be underestimated. Nevertheless, at a third level of explanation, Derrida would seem to acknowledge that the fire, in itself, 'must' become determinate, if only 'momentarily.'

This third level might be called phenomenologico-ontological. It provides the underlying ground of the ontological explanation, for it shows the fire itself to provide the condition of possibility of its determination as its other. It shows, in other words, how the fire by itself opens the possibility of a history of being. This level is introduced where Derrida writes: 'as soon as it *appears* [...] it [...] loses itself as fire.' By taking on a form, even the most fleeting one, it itself creates and enters into the ontological horizon of presence or self-presence.⁵¹ Nevertheless, because of the trace structure of the 'torrents of fire,' this determination is, in Derrida's eyes, immediately carried off again: the necessary possibility of contradiction here is also the 'impossibility' of either maintaining or sublating the contradiction, as we shall see in the following and final section.

3.6 The Gift

Having analysed its basis, Derrida continues to follow the process whereby the *Lichtwesen* comes to take on determinate form. This leads him to a reading of Hegel's statement that the 'pure light disperses its simplicity into an infinity of forms, and offers itself up as a sacrifice [*Opfer*] to being-for-self, so that from its substance the individual may take an enduring existence for itself' (Ph 420/507, trans. modified). In quoting this sentence,

⁵¹ When, a few pages earlier, Derrida states his 'thesis' concerning the determination of difference in Hegel, I take it that he therefore does so not in order *simply* to oppose himself to Hegel. The thesis runs: 'As soon as difference determines itself, it determines itself as opposition; it manifests itself to be sure, but its manifestation is at the same time (that is the time of the same as the effacement of the time-remain(s) in the self (*Selbst*)) the reduction of difference, of the remain(s), of the gap {*écart*}' (Gl 235a/263a).

Derrida follows Jean Hyppolite's translation of the German '*Opfer*' as '*holocauste*,' a term which he states here 'is more appropriate to the text than the word of Hegel himself' (Gl 241a/269a). It is of course important to tread carefully here: on the one hand, Derrida is referring to a holocaust in the sense of a burnt offering. This is why he associates this sacrifice with the figure of the gift from this point on. Yet here one cannot but also be struck by the twentieth-century resonance of the term. Insofar as it is this resonance that Derrida is alluding to, his remark might be taken to pertain to what it is for thinking to remain attentive to that which overwhelms or poisons (*vergiftet*) thinking. It would then be precisely when the holocaust is determined *as* 'the holocaust,' when it takes on a more stable sense and is subject to a certain codification, that its disruptive force on 'productive' thinking is repressed.

Bearing this resonance of the term continually 'in mind' we might now return to the more explicit level of Derrida's discussion of the holocaust in the sense of the gift or the burnt offering. The fire of the *Lichtwesen*, as we have seen, is for Derrida precisely that which resists or eludes determination. When it is then determined, in the space of its appearance, *as fire*, then this is at the same time its loss as *fire* (in this sense the holocaust of fire is a unique form of holocaust in that it is not the burning of some *thing*, but the burning and burning up of burning itself). The all-burning, Derrida writes, thus 'offers itself *as* a holocaust [*s'offre en holocauste* (my emphasis)] to the for-itself,' a 'holocaust of play itself' which is the 'origin of logic' (Gl 242a/268a).

At stake in this 'holocaust of the holocaust,' and even, Derrida suggests here, in the Hegel column of *Gl* as a whole (Gl 241-2a/269a), is the gift and its relation to ontology. As Derrida writes, 'Without the holocaust the dialectical movement and the history of Being could not open themselves, engage themselves in the annulus of their anniversary, could not annul themselves in producing the solar course from Orient to

Occident' (Gl 242a/269a). Derrida even goes as far as to say that the gift, the sacrifice, the holocaust, 'cannot not give birth to' ontology (Gl 242a/269a). We can see again here that it is not simply a question, for Derrida, of attempting to 'oppose' this transition. It is rather a question of indicating how, even though it cannot not give birth to ontology, the gift still exceeds and is not exhausted by ontology, and thus how it will always already have displaced ontology. But this can only become evident if an *other* way of receiving the gift is elaborated. Let us then first consider how Derrida conceives Hegel's appropriation of the gift before addressing his elaboration of this other form of reception.

On Derrida's reading, the Hegelian reception of the gift is governed by the privileging of a horizon of truth as presence. Now although the fire itself engenders this horizon through its very appearance, it is only if one *remains* with this moment of appearance that fire becomes *fixed* as a contradiction and that the economic calculation becomes necessary according to which, as Derrida writes, 'you must [...] keep it in order to lose it (truly), or lose it to keep it (truly)' (Gl 241a/269a). Now for Hegel of course, this does not really amount to a loss and this process is not one in which repression takes place, precisely because the horizon or the 'element' of presence and manifestation is privileged from the outset (in the manner we observed in the 'Ethical World of the *Phenomenology*), such that fire 'must' be determined in view of its appearance and thus as its 'own other.' From a Hegelian perspective it therefore makes no sense to say that anything is lost through the fire's reification in the next stages of natural religion as plant life or as the pyramid. Through these transitions, fire only shows itself to be what it will have been in truth. Derrida thus notes that, for Hegel, 'The sacrifice, the offer, or the gift do not destroy the all-burning that destroys itself in them; they make it reach the for-(it)self, they monumentalize it' (Gl 240a/268a). It is in this way that the gift acquires a determinate sense and thereby becomes amenable to conceptual thought. For Derrida,

however, this is an example of speculative dialectics' pretention to 'take as given' what has in fact already been determined by a certain regard or reflection:

The gift *is not*; the holocaust *is not*; if at least *there is some such [il y en a]*. But as soon as it burns (the blaze is not a being), it must, burning itself, burn its action {*operation*} of burning and begin to be [...] The speculative is the reflection (*speculum*) of the holocaust's holocaust, the blaze reflected and cooled by the glass, the ice [*glace*], of the mirror (Gl 240a/270a).

The speculative reflection is at the same time the incorporation of the gift into what Derrida conceives as a restricted economy. Because the gift has become determinate, its value has thereby already become determinable. As Derrida puts this, 'From the moment this constraint, this constriction of the "must" comes to press the mad energy of a gift, what this constriction provokes is perforce a countergift, an exchange, in the space of the debt' (Gl 243a/270a). The path to absolute knowing can be conceived as the *Abarbeitung* of this debt, such that ultimately the debt is no longer recognised as having been a debt at all, but rather as that which absolute knowing will have given to *itself*. What begins here as a simple determination of the gift therefore ends with its most comprehensive annulment, which for Derrida constitutes speculative ingratitude.

What, then, would be an other way of thinking and responding to the gift? Here it will be a matter of showing how the speculative logic of the gift can be seen to be inscribed within a wider 'logic' of the gift. Again, it is not a question of demonstrating the impossibility of the Hegelian logic, but of showing how it is both made possible and exceeded by this other 'logic.' Before we consider the latter, it is worth dwelling for a moment on what this alternative gift *cannot* be for Derrida. Here I shall again need to distinguish my reading from that of Critchley.

For Critchley, the gift exceeds speculative thinking because the latter is a form of metaphysics in the Heideggerian sense: it thinks 'the meaning of Being with regard to beings, as self-conscious subjectivity.'⁵² Now it is true that Derrida refers to Heidegger's text *Zeit und Sein* in describing the gift which exceeds speculative thought. Derrida writes that 'Before, if one could count here with time, before everything, before every determinable being {*étant*}, there is, there was, there will have been [*il y a, il y avait, il y aura*] the irruptive event of the gift {*don*}' (Gl 242a/269a). This leads Critchley to suggest that 'with this allusion [...] the ultimate orientation of Derrida's reading of Hegel becomes apparent,' namely that 'Derrida appears to be understanding Hegel in terms of the ontological difference between *Sein* (être) and *Seiende* (*étant*).'⁵³ If this is Derrida's diagnosis, the remedy would then be to think that which exceeds metaphysics: 'das Sein ohne das Seiende.'⁵⁴

What Critchley's reading misses, however, is the difference between Heidegger's and Derrida's respective conceptions of 'metaphysics.' For Derrida, metaphysics is not primarily the thinking of being in terms of beings, but, more generally, a thinking that is governed by the ideal of presence. To this extent, though this cannot be examined here, Heideggerian ontology would not escape a certain complicity with this metaphysical ideal.⁵⁵ As I read him, Derrida invokes Heidegger in the paragraph discussed by Critchley not in order simply to follow in his footsteps, but in order to suggest that Heidegger himself did not follow far enough the very path that he opened up. For it is in this

⁵² Critchley, p. 219.

⁵³ Critchley, p. 219.

⁵⁴ Critchley, p. 219.

⁵⁵ Cf. Derrida, P 55/75: 'I sometimes have the feeling that the Heideggerian problematic is the most "profound" and "powerful" defense of what I attempt to put into question under the rubric of the *thought of presence*.'

paragraph that Derrida also writes: 'giving can no longer be thought starting from Being {être}, but "the contrary."' He quotes Heidegger's formulation, '*es gibt Sein*' in order to remark that 'the gift of the *es gibt* gives itself to be thought before the *Sein*' and, further, that this 'displaces all that is determined under the name *Ereignis*' (Gl 242a/269a).⁵⁶

How, then, might the gift be 'thought' beyond the Hegelian economy? In *Glas*, Derrida does not elaborate on this in a *theoretical* manner in the Hegel column, since he is mainly concerned to analyse the Hegelian mechanism of repression rather than to offer a 'positive' alternative. In lieu of a reading of the Genet column, we will therefore have to suggest a response to this question based on the hints that Derrida provides and on the conclusions of chapter 3 of this study. In order to do so, we will need to return to the figureless figure of the *Lichtwesen* to see what exceeds its determination as being-for-self even in this very determination.

As we saw, the fire cannot but manifest itself. Indeed the radical difference of the *Lichtwesen* is *at the same time* the assumption of a certain determinate form. This opening of and entry into the horizon of presence is what allows the history of being to be opened. As we have seen, Derrida 'denies' none of this. Yet the speculative attention to this 'at the same time' would forget the *other* 'at the same time' we observed above: the simultaneity of appearance and effacement that is the trace. According to this other 'at the same time,' any determinate form that the fire takes on is already carried off beyond itself into another form *in its very appearance*. In focussing then on the moment of the fire's determinateness, speculative dialectics would thus forget, or repress, the

⁵⁶ Derrida's questioning of the Heideggerian '*es gibt*' is continued in his later *Given Time*, where Derrida remarks on the desire for the 'proper' within which Heidegger's thinking of the gift is elaborated. At precisely this point Derrida also alludes to a potential proximity between this Heideggerian desire and the Hegelian 'circle' considered in *Glas* (GT 21-22/36).

fire's continual displacement of any and all determination. The moment of becoming for-itself inscribed as a necessary moment in this movement is thus, according to the 'at the same time' of the trace, immediately displaced.

Speculative dialectics restricts this wider process by fixing on the moment of the fire's determination as being-for-self. It then follows the immanent development of this being-for-self through plant life, into the architectural sphere, and so on. In doing so, it represses the fact that this being-for-self is at the same time a moment of a continuing process of dissemination. In a sense, then, for Derrida the fire never goes out and continues to haunt the progressive development of being-for-self. What gives itself here is then a gift whose measure cannot be fully grasped, or that is too much to think. We might best explain the idea at work here by drawing on a figure that is etymologically connected with another name for the gift—the *cadeau*—introduced by Derrida on p. 243a/271a. As Derrida notes, *cadeau* (one of whose English translations happens to be 'present') means, via the Latin *catena*, 'chain' (GI 243a/271a).⁵⁷ A chain is of course made up of rings, which throughout *Glas* have figured, among other things, the economic closure achieved through repression as contradiction. The Hegelian chain might be seen, as Derrida indicates, as consisting of a number of such rings (each figuring a particular shape of consciousness), the first and last of which come to meet up with each other to form a 'circle of circles' (GI 245a/272a).

The question of the *reste* of time has brought us back here, through the question of the gift, to the question of the 'way out' of such a circle. As has been discussed, it cannot be a question for Derrida of simply breaking open the circle of circles, nor the smaller circles of which it is composed. It is rather a question of attending to the trace

⁵⁷ I am indebted to Henry Sussmann's reading for drawing attention to the figure of the chain in *Glas* (Sussmann, p. 277).

structure in something like the *Lichtwesen*, and to responding to it as a gift that gives to thinking but which cannot be made ultimately transparent to thought. In figurative terms, the consequence of the trace logic of the same time would be that each ring on the Hegelian chain would not be part of one single chain that closes on itself, but rather a link in a potentially infinite number of chains. The determinate meaning that each ring embodies in any individual chain would be in itself displaced in that the sense of the ring would be carried off in different directions by the other chains. As we saw Derrida remark in *Dissemination*, difference inscribes contradictions, not contradiction (D 6, n.8/12-13, n.5). Whereas each ring would inscribe a 'contradiction' in any given chain, it would also contain within itself a potentially infinite number of contradictions through its attachment to other chains. No contradiction would be in itself definitive or unproblematic, or even un-contradicted by the same ring's place in another chain. This displacement would thus make of each ring a 'remainder.'

What would it be, then, to respond to such a gift? Unlike the Hegelian attempt to take the gift as given, this other response would involve an attention precisely to what is not *given* in what seems to be given—to listen for that which is unexpected within what has been given and perhaps most importantly for what has been repressed by the *dominant* sense of what has been given. This does not rule out but rather enjoins a *critical* engagement with this dominant sense, an example being that of the repression of the mother in the self-constitution of the Christian Trinity.

Such a response refuses to 'give back' or even to 'recognise' the gift—not from ingratitude or indifference (though it inherently risks appearing as such) but because to do so would already be to have determined the value of the debt.⁵⁸ Its attempt to do justice to the inexhaustibility of the gift would be to continue to trace out its 'seminal

⁵⁸ Cf. GT 13/26.

effusion without return,' through previously unheard-of chains. Just as it does not give back, it also does not appropriate, but acts rather as a medium for the gift's continued growth. It is in this response to the gift that we can glimpse the Derridean, in contrast to the Hegelian, future perfect. For Hegel, as we have seen, what is initially taken as given ultimately proves to have been given by absolute knowing to itself, as the beginning is fully comprehended by the end. For Derrida, by contrast, there is no such appropriation of the gift, no return to the 'ultimate truth' of the beginning, but only a continual displacement of what it will have been. But this is at the same time to say that there will have been no beginning.

Supplements

The present study has been concerned with elaborating the point of Hegel and Derrida's greatest proximity and their departure from one another. This investigation could be extended by considering how Derrida enacts the deconstructive response to the gift outlined above. One way in which this might be done is by following certain figures through Derrida's column on Genet. One could read Derrida's attention to the figure of the flower as an attempt to show how its 'use' in Genet disrupts the relative stability of the plant life which, for Hegel, interiorises the *Lichtwesen*. At the most obvious level, the flower is a perhaps 'exemplary' figure of dissemination, but it is also, Derrida writes, a 'sort of sister' (Gl 245a/273a) and 'essentially *coupable*': 'To adore flowers, to kneel before them, that is possible only on the threshold of culpability' (Gl 247a/274a). Derrida plays here on the dual sense of '*coupable*' (both guilty and 'cuttable'), indicating that the flower both embodies a debt and that it can always be cut from its present context and inserted into a new one, where it will take on a different sense. As Critchley writes, 'The

plant or flower, Antigone or Genet, becomes a figure for the singular entity that receives the gift of the light, the life-giving sustenance of the sun, and in so doing, recognizes its debt, its *devoir*.⁵⁹ According to this sense or non-sense of the flower, the light of the sun, the oldest philosophical 'metaphor,' would not simply be absorbed, but would continue to be disseminated in an unpredictable manner. Furthermore, it would be necessary to consider how Derrida sees Genet's, in contrast to Hegel's, negotiation with the gift and with debt. In contrast to Hegel's construction of a system that would comprehend itself, one would have to consider how Genet figures something like Hegel's 'artificer': an artist who lets his work fall from him and live on without him, that is, also how Genet *gives* without demanding a counter-gift (GI 257a/286a). But as Derrida seems to suggest in his commentary on Hegel, here again it would not simply be a question of affirming a Genet *over* a Hegel:

On the one hand, this is the effacement, the omission of the artist: he is sufficiently disinterested to declare that his work lives by itself, animates itself without him, removes [*emporte*] his signature. But by removing it, the work keeps it, and under this modernic thematic {*thématique modernitaire*}, Hegel immediately discloses, on the other hand, the ruse or the dissembled, dissembling reverse, the hypocrisy of the other one-sidedness. In effect the artist verifies that the work, by being able thus to cut itself off and fall (to the tomb) from him, *is not his equal*, that it has not produced an essence equal to its author (kein ihm gleiches *Wesen hervorbrachte*) [...] By his withdrawal {*retrait*} the artist consequently raises himself above his remain(s) and in the same stroke {*du même coup*} detains it as a small part, a morsel of himself (GI 257a/286a).

⁵⁹ Critchley, p. 222.

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