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The aporetic interweaving of relativity and relativism in Derrida's thinking

The connection between relativity and relativism both clarifies and is clarified by Derrida's thinking. To show this, I shall first associate each term with compatible Derridean terms. "Economy", "structure", "problem" and "the possible", related to relativity, match counterparts related to relativism, namely "aneconomy", "freeplay", "aporia" and "the impossible". Next, the conjunction suspended between these constellations will be addressed by asking whether a Derridean account of this connection would be unambiguously antinomial, dialectical, or diacritical. These "logics" are worked through to show that Derrida's thinking does not "fall from the sky" but remains in critical dialogue with the philosophical tradition. Derrida, however, uncovers the workings of another "logic" that acknowledges an inescapable paradox in the conjunction between relativity and relativism, to which one could assign the nickname "quasi-transcendental".

Die aporetiese vervlegting van relatiwiteit en relativisme in Derrida se denke

Die verband tussen relatiwiteit en relativisme verhelder en word verhelder deur Derrida se denke. Ten einde dit te demonstreer, sal ek eerstens beide terme met versoenbare Derridiaanse terme assosieer. "Ekonomie," "struktuur," "probleem," en "die moontlike," verwant aan relatiwiteit, korrespondeer met teenhangers verwant aan relativisme, naam-lik, "anekonomie," "vryspel," "aporia" en "die onmoontlike." Vervolgens sal die voegwoord wat tussen hierdie konstellasies hang, beredeneer word deur die vraag te stel of 'n Derridiaanse weergawe van hierdie verband ondubbelsinnig antinomies, dialekties of diakrities sou wees. Hierdie "logikas" word deurgewerk om aan te toon dat Derrida se denke nie bloot uit die lug val nie, maar in kritiese dialoog met die filosofiese tradisie verkeer. Derrida lê egter die werking van 'n ander "logika" bloot wat 'n onontkombare paradoks in die verbintenis tussen relatiwiteit en relativisme bevestig, en waaraan die bynaam "kwasi-transendentaal" gegee kan word.

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Faced with a conference entitled "Relativity and relativism", Derrida would, no doubt, question the sense of the conjunction suspended between these terms. This question is prefigured in his suspicions concerning the conjunction of terms in the title of a colloquium named "Deconstruction and the possibility of justice" (Derrida 1992: 3-4). In the same vein, one may ask whether the "and" between "relativity" and "relativism" implies an analogy, a distinction or an opposition (cf Derrida 1992: 3). Perhaps relativity is a degree or species of relativism, or *vice versa*. Alternatively in order to differentiate, this "and" may bring together terms that simply do not belong to the same category. Then again, perhaps it implies a binary opposition and a choice. Perhaps, given an incredulity towards absolutes, relativity saves us from relativism.

Clearly, to work within the parameters set by this conference title, one must try to make sense of the terms involved.[1] Firstly, I take it as given that "we", who are present here and now, have no choice but to think within the context of postmodernity. In other words, I assume that in trying to make sense of the connection between relativity and relativism, whatever it turns out to be, "we here" are looking for ways to proceed (in science, ethics, politics, aesthetics), after we have granted that it is impossible for situated (living, embodied) human beings to reach any absolute in any domain — be it absolute justice, an absolute conception of truth, final facts, unimpeachable principles or rules, a completed philosophical system, true beauty, pure goodness and so on. Nor, indeed, can we project any teleological program for the inventive discovery of absolutes: a program for the perfection of knowledge such as Leibniz's "universal characteristics", for example, or plans and projects for the totalisation of political, ethical, religious, and social systems (Derrida 1989: 54-5). In what follows, then, I shall try to make sense of the terms relativity and relativism, their Derridean "substitu-

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1   I should point out here, pre-empting the argument of this paper somewhat, that my wanting to say anything further — my *vouloir-dire* — depends on my ability to make sense. And, although I have just emphasised the fabricated, or invented, nature of whatever sense can be made, I will not simply be making things up as I go along. I cannot, at least not in Derrida's name, abandon myself to inventive poetics.

tions",[2] and the connection between them, within the assumption that we have awakened from the so-called "dream of absolute presence" (Derrida 1978b: 280; 1976: 12).

1. Relativity/relativism

In this situation of incredulity towards absolutes, then, "relativity" would designate a centred system in which each element acquires value relative to an elected, system-specific, constant or standard of some kind, whether this is a privileged element that regulates others within a limited system, or its governing *telos* or *arche*. This centring element or principle is something like a downgraded "transcendental signified", which in its full power designates the philosophical dream of finding not a system-specific standard, but the single, basic metaphysical principle that could regulate all elements in all systems in all contexts (Derrida 1976: 20). Having awakened from this dream, one may use the term "transcendental" only to describe the conditions that make a specific system or economy possible. Here, because of the value conferred upon them by their relation to the elected transcendental standard or "constant", otherwise diverse elements can be related to one another. For example, the relative atomic mass of any element is measured by a calculation that compares the mass of a single atom to an elected constant, namely one-twelfth of the mass of a carbon-12 atom. Relative atomic mass now provides a basis for comparing the atoms of substances as diverse as oxygen and iron. In short, the concept "relativity" suggests that there is a way of making responsible knowledge claims; one may calculate, evaluate, order, and regulate terms, insofar as each can acquire comparative value through its relation to an elected standard, and thereby to other terms, within the enclosed bounds of a specified system.

Alternatively, "relativism" designates a situation in which something singular and inconsistent has taken the place occupied by the constant, shareable standard in the above scenario. In this case, what confers relative value may be the singular judging subject, for example, or a unique group that is contingently determined by a specific,

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2   While Derrida would grant that substitution is certainly possible, the inverted commas function as a reminder of his insistence that one can never substitute perfectly; that is, without loss or gain (cf eg Derrida 1978b: 280).

historical, cultural, social and linguistic background. Here, there are as many measures of value as there are subjective positions from which relative values are conferred. There is no basis for choice among these positions either, for every preference is itself merely a similarly subjective evaluation. Further, nothing in this subject prevents contingent, often capricious, changes of mind. Relativism implies not only that nothing has an absolute (intrinsic, essential) value, but also that no system of relativity, no relational structure or context, no transcendental *telos* or *arche* can be constituted that would plausibly, for the most part, be valid from multiple different standpoints, and could, therefore, confer relatively stable, shareable values on the relevant elements.

Countless Derridean concepts and their counterparts function as "substitutes" for this contrast between "relativity" and "relativism". "Economy", "structure", "*problema*" and "the possible", for example, belong to what I shall call the "relativity" constellation, while their respective counterparts, namely "the aneconomic", "play", "*aporia*" and "the impossible" constellate around "relativism". For now, I shall simply set out these contrasts without yet addressing the logic of their conjunction.

1.1 Economic/aneconomic

No matter what the context, a negotiation of the tension between an economic account of something and its intrinsic, but subversive, aneconomic moment is thoroughgoing in Derrida's thinking. Here, however, I shall cite just one example, namely his well-known neologism *différance*, since it demonstrates this tension in one of its most general articulations.[3] Derrida coins this neologism to designate the diacritical relationality embodied in De Saussure's dictum that there are no intrinsically positive terms, since all terms are constituted only by means of a network of differential relations (De Saussure 1983: 117-8). He links *différance* to Latin rather than Greek roots, since, alongside its obvious sense, "to differ", the Latin root has an additional economic motif that he wishes to exploit, namely "to defer".[4]

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3   For more detail than I can offer here, one may read two of Derrida's essays together, namely "Différance" (Derrida 1982: 1-27) and "From restricted to general economy: a Hegelianism without reserve" (Derrida 1978a: 251-77).

4   Derrida (1982: 7-8) links *différance* to the Latin *differre* rather than the Greek *diapherein*.

Thus, what Derrida (1982: 8-9) calls "*différance as spacing*", is indicated by its obvious link to the verb "to differ". As he explains,

> ... whether it is a question of dissimilar otherness [differents] or of allergic and polemical otherness [differends], an interval, a distance, spacing, must be produced between the elements other, and be produced with a certain perseverence in repetition.

"*Différance* as spacing", however, does not indicate, beyond a certain kind of repetitiveness, any regulatory or structural limit to the play of differences. Nothing suggests itself as having the power to curb a restless, playful, disseminative drift, in which differences (and, therefore, terms) proliferate relentlessly. A purely aneconomic account of diacritical relationality, then, makes it impossible to see how one could constitute enduringly present "things" at all; accumulate knowledge as an acquisition, or institute rule-governed legal, political, economic, ethical, or religious systems.

But Derrida marks the tension between this aneconomic description of diacritical relationality and the economic account of it implied in "*différance* as temporization". Recourse to the economic, as Derrida (1978a: 255-6) puts it:

> ... conserves the stakes, remains in control of the play, limiting it and elaborating it by giving it form and meaning [... T]his economy of life restricts itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction as the reproduction of meaning (cf Derrida 1982: 19-20).

An "economic" account of diacritical relationality, then, strives to incorporate and systematise every component in a calculable network of interrelations. On such an account, nothing ought to be wasted; there should be neither incomprehensible excess nor irrecoverable loss. In other words, the risk that a component faces in the play of relational differences is merely the risk of losing a particular privileged position or identity, but not the loss of identity or meaning as such. The "negation" of an element, or its fall from privilege in a hierarchy, therefore, remains meaningful insofar as it is accommodated within the economy as an investment in the service of a better arrangement. Here, there is nothing but meaning; even what is still to come can be made to make sense as a future that is always already anticipated.

The economic aspect of *différance* indicated by its link to "deferral" implies, in Derrida's words (1982: 8):

> ... the action of putting off until later, of taking into account, of taking account of time and of the forces of an operation that implies an economical calculation, a detour, a delay, a relay, a reserve, a representation.

"*Différance* as temporization" is analogous to Freud's "reality principle, which operates in the service of pleasure" (Derrida 1982: 18-19; Freud 1955: 7-10). According to Freud, pleasure is associated with the release of libidinal energies. But at times the urge towards excessive, instant, unbridled and inappropriate release of libidinal energies threatens to destroy the psychic balance, and therefore negate pleasure. To protect the psychic system (that is, pleasure), it is therefore necessary to put such libidinal energy out of play. One must suspend or defer pleasure as a protective mechanism for the sake of achieving "proper" gratification at a more appropriate moment. Similarly, *différance* may be described as an "economic detour" operating in the service of presence. Importantly, economic decisions can be made only in the hope of their future justification. In other words, deferral occurs as a protective mechanism: something is deferred, made negative or "other", repressed and held in reserve, in order to work towards "proper" presence in the future. Implicit in the thought of economic deferral, then, is systematic closure governed by teleological hope.

1.2 Structure/play

Derrida marks out a parallel tension between two ways of understanding the relation between structure and play.[5] Firstly, in an economic account of this relation, the concept "play" is subordinated to the concept "structure" in the sense that "structure" is said to come before and condition, regulate, or limit, the relational play of elements in a system. Notably, in this account "structure" has always meant a "centred structure". In other words, what organises a structure or system is a fixed point of reference that regulates the elements in play without itself becoming part of the play. Accordingly, the concept of a centred structure requires that the centre be conceived of as a coherent point of presence, standing in its own right; that is, as a positive term, determined independently of

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5   For Derrida (1978b: 279-80), the difference occurred "when language invaded the universal problematic"; hence the insertion of "sign" between "structure" and "play" in the title of his essay.

the other elements in a system (even if such "presence" is determined as a gap; as the "presence" of an essential absence). In what we call the centre, Derrida (1978b: 279) notes,

> … repetitions, substitutions, transformations and permutations are always taken from a history […] whose origin may always be reawakened or whose end may always be anticipated in the form of presence.

Notably, then, the concept of a "centred structure" quite clearly goes hand-in-hand with the notion of "economy" as some kind of actual or projected systematic totality, whether this closure is thought of as architectonic (with a transcendental principle regulating the play of elements), genetic (with the system, even if open-ended, having an *arche* or beginning that dominates and directs what comes after), or teleological (with what closes the system being projected as a goal that directs activity towards its achievement).

On the other hand, the "event" of language, condensed in the Saussurean dictum cited above, challenges the viability of a purely economic account of the relation between structure and play. According to Derrida, this "event" requires us to shift the basis of our thinking from the notion of centred structures to that of "discourse", by which he means, "a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences". But if the centre is caught up in the play of differences, we are bound to conclude that it is this play that comes before and conditions structure. Yet a decentred, diacritical relationality, unregulated by the presence of a transcendental signified, inevitably "extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely", suggesting a purely aneconomic account of *différance* that prefers play to structure.

1.3 *Problema/aporia*

The opposition between *problema* and its counterpart *aporia* similarly "substitutes" for the relativity/relativism tension at issue here. For Derrida (1993: 11), the concept "problem", signifying "that which one poses or throws in front of oneself", has the double signification of both "projection" — "the projection of a project, of a task to accomplish" — and "protection". As Derrida notes (1993: 11-2), "problem" can signify

> … the protection created by a substitute, a prosthesis that we put forth in order to represent, replace, shelter, or dissimulate ourselves, or so

> as to hide something unavowable — like a shield […] behind which
> one guards oneself in secret or in shelter in case of danger.

In posing a problem, one implicitly accepts that a solution is possible. The problem can be worked out in the near or distant future, given the right circumstances, instruments, formulae, etc. Therefore, in posing a problem at all, one has substituted for the flux of events or meanings a prosthetic device of manageable proportions. For example, any legal system acts as "a prosthesis that we put forth in order to represent, replace, shelter, or dissimulate" justice, so as to hide the fact that justice itself is unavowable. The call for justice, in this protective gesture, becomes the "problem" of justice, which is one of applying the appropriate laws in a given situation. What our legal systems hide is the impossibility of there being justice, since, as Derrida (1992) has explained in detail, the process of ethical judgment is inescapably aporetic.

It stands to reason, therefore, that Derrida places *problema* in tension with another Greek word, namely *aporia*. For him, what is at stake in this word is the experience of what happens when we find ourselves paralysed, that is, incapable of making a decisive either/or choice before clearly antagonistic alternatives. Here, then, it is not merely that one cannot find the solution to a problem. Rather, as Derrida (1993: 12) puts it, it is

> ... because one could no longer find even a problem that would constitute itself and that one would keep in front of oneself, as a presentable object or project, as a protective representative or a prosthetic substitute.

Unlike posing a problem, which depends on this, an *aporia* strips us of any recourse to generalities, to shareable standards, formulas, values, and so on. Facing an *aporia*, we are, in Derrida's words (1993: 12),

> ... singularly exposed in our absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness, that is to say, disarmed, delivered to the other, incapable of even sheltering ourselves behind what could still protect the interiority of a secret.

Concerning justice, for example, the impossibility we face is of reconciling

> ... the act of justice that must always concern singularity, individuals, irreplaceable groups and lives, the other or myself as other, in a unique situation, with rule, norm, value or the imperative of justice which necessarily have a general form (Derrida 1992: 17).

1.4 Possible/impossible

Finally since everything that is possible may be thought of in economic terms, one may place the economic "relativity constellation" in the domain of the possible; in the sense not only of what is already apparent, but also of what can be imagined or teleologically projected. In other words, the possible is that which can become a problem or the object of a project. It is that for the sake of which one develops a programme of research or activity. On the other hand, for Derrida, as soon as one draws the encircling border that encloses "the possible" within any economy or research program, one co-constitutes its outside. What Derrida calls "the impossible", then, indicates what remains unspeakable or inconceivable within the economic as such. To extend the above example, all legal systems represent "the possible", the "element of calculation", in any juridical discourse, in relation to which Justice itself remains incorrigibly "impossible". In Derrida's words (1992: 16):

> Every time that something comes to pass or turns out well, every time that we placidly apply a good rule to a particular case, to a correctly subsumed example, according to a determinant judgment, we can be sure that law (*droit*) may find itself accounted for, but certainly not justice. Law (*droit*) is not justice.

Instead, "Justice is an experience of the impossible".[6] Indeed, Derrida argues that there is inevitably an outside to even the most strenuous attempts to incorporate absolutely everything into a systematic unity. If the outside of Kant's transcendental logic, for example, is linguistic or, more broadly, symbolic behaviour, the outside of Hegel's dialectic is indicated by the impossibility of guaranteeing that death is not meaningless.

2. The interweaving of relativity and relativism

One could list instances of such oppositional pairs *ad infinitum*. I hope, however, that the few addressed above are enough to confirm that the relativity and relativism constellations, while opposing and negating one another, seem equally imperative as ways to account for the human condition, and that it is the question of the "and" suspended between them that now imposes itself. Mimicking the pattern of questioning

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6   Cf Derrida (1992: 16-7). Derrida here offers a detailed explication of the relation between law as "the possible" and justice as "the impossible".

that opens "The force of law" (Derrida 1992: 4), one may ask whether the logic of their interconnection in Derrida's thinking is a species of relativity. Does Derrida's thinking "insure, permit, authorise the possibility of" meaning in general? Does it enable "a discourse of consequence" on meaning; that is, an economic account of the conditions of its possibility? "Certain people would agree; others differ". On the other hand, is Derrida's thinking not itself a species of relativism? May one legitimately insist that it does not permit any making of sense, or any sensible discourse on meaning in general, but instead threatens sense because it ruins its very condition of possibility? "Certain people would agree; others differ".

Derrida's own response is to challenge this style of questioning. Although he is speaking of the conjunction between "deconstruction" and "the possibility of justice" in the citation which follows (Derrida 1992: 4), his words could equally apply to the connection implied in the title of a conference called "Relativity and relativism". To the extent that he detects an either/or choice in the title, he insists that

> ... the title is rather violent, polemical, inquisitorial. We may fear that it contains some instrument of torture — that is, a manner of interrogation that is not the most just. Needless to say, from this point on I can offer no response, at least no reassuring response, to any questions put in this way ('either/or,' 'yes or no'), to either party or to either party's expectations formalized in this way.

If we are to take him at his word (and why not, since this is pointedly reiterated?),[7] Derrida's thinking cannot be understood as a species of either relativity or relativism as I have defined these terms above. Rather, since he insists that they are co-constitutive constellations, neither of which can be abandoned in favour of the other, he persistently avoids this kind of either/or choice in his thinking, and directs it instead towards the "and" that links opposing terms. In what follows, then, I shall address the logic that makes it not simply viable, but also necessary, to avoid a choice between the economic and the aneconomic, the structural and the non-structural, the problematic and the aporetic, the possible and the impossible, or, if you like, the law and justice, ethics and responsibility, institution and invention, truth and fiction, present and gift, phi-

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7   Cf eg Derrida 1973a: 128; 1976: 62; 1978b: 292-293; 1982: 19.

losophy and literature, and so on. By contrasting the quasi-transcendental logic that persists in one way or another throughout Derrida's texts, with three alternative proposals for interconnecting opposing terms, namely, the antinomial, the dialectical and the diacritical, I shall try to show in what sense Derrida makes it both viable and necessary to speak of "relativity and relativism".

2.1 Antinomial interweaving

On Kant's account in his *First Critique* (1933), as is evident *inter alia* in both prefaces, the path already travelled in metaphysical speculation had brought metaphysicians to a state of such continuous vacillation that any way forward had become impossible. Reason's very nature, characterised by what Kant called the "principle of unconditioned unity",[8] combined with a fundamental commitment to some form of representational relation between perceiving human beings and an independently determined external world, had engendered in reason a "two-fold, self-conflicting interest",[9] which had trapped reason in metaphysical antinomies that, Kant argued, metaphysicians could neither pass beyond, nor turn away from. Pure Reason's "peculiar fate" was its inability to live up to its most fundamental principle, namely complete, systematic unity. Paralysed by the impasse of irreconcilable antinomial conflicts, one might suppose that metaphysics here faced an *aporia*.

This may suggest a contemporary parallel. Derrida finds his thinking persistently haunted by what could, up to a certain point, be called antinomial antagonisms between contrasting pairs (such as those outlined above). As he explains (Derrida 1993: 16), "in terms of the law (*nomos*), contradictions or antagonisms among equally imperative laws were at stake".[10] Yet, in the end, he argues that "antinomy" and *aporia* cannot

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8 This is an alternative expression of the "principle of reason" (Kant 1933: A407, B433).

9 Reason has a two-fold interest in moving from the universal to the particular in determinative judgment and from the particular to the universal in reflective judgment. Ideally these movements should be reversible, but in Kant's situation these movements led to opposing conclusions about the nature of the world-whole, the self and God (Kant 1933: A654-658, B682-686).

10 Derrida's articulation of such antagonisms, across a broad range of issues, takes the argumentative form of dilemma, paradox or aporia, rather than that of strict

be interchanged, and insists instead on "aporia *rather than* antinomy" to describe the impasse he regularly faces in the course of his own thinking. In other words, the various antinomial impasses articulated by Kant in his *Critiques* are not quite congruent with the concept of *aporia* that Derrida unfolds in his essay *Aporias* and applies to his own situation.

The difference is this: the impasse reflected, for example, in the antinomies of Kant's *First critique* is closer to Derrida's articulation of the concept *problema*. Kant (1933: A497-568, B525-596) was convinced that one could in fact resolve these antinomial conflicts, since they were the consequence of faulty logic operating in tandem with a faulty ontology. It was these mistakes, he argued, that led philosophers into the trap of illegitimately attributing excessive powers to speculative (or theoretical) reason. In his view, therefore, one could cut a passage through this metaphysical impasse by virtue of an alternative, more correct, transcendental way of thinking.

Yet, his resolution of the four-fold antinomy of the *First critique* came at a price — a gap between reason's theoretical/speculative and pure domains, and therefore between what can be a possible object of speculative knowledge and what, for speculative reasons, remains in the field of the impossible. Kant saw the theoretical domain (*a priori* knowledge of "what is") as an island in a great ocean of undecidability. The limits he placed on reason in its speculative capacity leaves us in a position in which the ultimate nature, origin, and future of the world and the self remain undecidable, theoretically speaking. Moreover, if human freedom and the idea of a supreme being are not logically unthinkable, they are not by that token made actual (another undecidable). He insisted,

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contrary or contradictory oppositions, within which either/or choices make sense. Sinclair (1966: 83) formalises a dilemma as follows: If p, then q, and if not-p then r [where both q and r, one should add, are equally unsatisfactory]; but either p or not-p; ∴ either q or r [hence the double-bind of having to choose between equally unsatisfactory alternatives]. This is a slightly more elaborate form of what Blackburn (1994: 105) calls the simplest form of a dilemma, which is an argument of the form: If p, then q [namely a particular unsatisfactory outcome], if not-p then q [that is, precisely the same unsatisfactory outcome], so in any event q. In the domain of dilemma, paradox or aporia, then, either/or choices cannot function properly, for the alternatives, inclusively, either remain equally unsatisfactory or in the end amount to precisely the same unsatisfactory outcome.

moreover, that speculative reason could only make the undecidable de-cidable on pain of illusion. For Kant, in sum, this unbridgeable gap in reason places the ideas "world-whole", "self", and "God" beyond the reach of reason's speculative powers.

However, Kant (1933: A804-819, B832-847) did try to attenuate this "scandal to philosophy". Having divided reason into the limited domain of theoretical knowledge (the domain of "what is", governed by mechanical causality) and the domain of pure practical action (ethical knowledge of what ought to be done, not for some purpose, but for its own sake, governed by spontaneous causality in which human freedom transcends natural determinism), he tried to interweave these two realms into a unified whole of organically interdependent parts through the figure of teleological causality.

Derrida, by contrast, grants Kant's "transcendental turn", and the gap it constitutes from the speculative point of view between what is possible and what is impossible, but remains suspicious of Kant's efforts to construct a teleological bridge between mechanical and spontane-ous causality. From this position, therefore, he still finds his thinking tied up in aporetic predicaments, since inescapable paradoxes persist after one has, via the "transcendental turn", circumvented the logical and on-tological errors Kant detected. One has to grant, for example, that there cannot be change without continuity, justice without law, invention without convention, and so on, yet it is, paradoxically, precisely conti-nuity, law and convention that undermine change, justice and invention. In short, unlike Kant's antinomial conflicts which are resolvable, not indeed through either/or logic, but by way of an alternative philoso-phical path, the antagonisms that haunt Derrida's thinking remain irresolvable, and present instead "an interminable experience" that is not simply antinomial, but incorrigibly aporetic.

2.2 Dialectical interweaving

If such antagonisms, for Derrida, are not linked in resolvable antino-mial relations, still less can they be linked and resolved through the kind of dialectical synthesis proposed by Hegel, which rejects Kant's "transcendental turn" outright. While Hegel alludes to Kant through-out his writings, his most direct criticism appears in the sections per-taining to critical philosophy in his *Faith and knowledge* (1977), *Lesser*

logic (1991) and *Lectures on the history of philosophy* (1955). In outline, Hegel credits Kant with an all-pervading philosophical principle of synthesis, but criticises Kant particularly for the way in which he deals with the antinomies via his transcendental turn (and its correlative phenomenal/noumenal distinction), which, unhappily, according to Hegel, constitutes human consciousness as structurally lacking, and doomed merely to desire what it is constitutionally unable to achieve; namely a speculative grasp of the unconditioned or, in other terms, absolute self-knowledge. In his view, the gap left in reason by Kant's "transcendental turn", improperly mediated by an unsatisfactory teleological bridge, blocks the true dialectical mediation of one with all in the encompassing unity of absolute knowledge. Instead, he insists that a true synthesis, as opposed to an architectonic synthesis (where mutually opposing domains remain inescapably separate, and require some or other bridging device), requires the work of dialectical negation.

Like Gasché (1986: 93-100), one can use the figure of *symploke* (interweaving, synthesis) to make sense of what Hegel, after Plato, understood by the dialectical interweaving of opposites through the work of negation. For Plato, the desired interwoven unity of a soul or community is achievable precisely because opposites negate each other, which means that they can be linked dialectically, or in active harmony, with one moderating the other. Plato's true statesman acts as a sovereign weaver (that is, as a philosopher), who constitutes the city-state by plaiting together warring opposites in souls and communities. Such a statesman has to know the right blend of clashing virtues that, for example, make for courage rather than arrogant recklessness or weak caution. But this means that relations that are not "proper" dialectical oppositions, *ie* relations that are capricious or contingent and therefore lack "proper" meaning, are excluded from the scope of the *symploke*.

Implicitly, Hegel (1977b: 10-1) takes *symploke* to be the figure *par excellence* of the philosophical enterprise, although he gives it a teleological aspect. For him, such interweaving of mutually negating opposites (for the sake of constituting an ultimately unified, harmoniously mediated whole) is the very principle governing world history. The dialectical struggle to achieve this *telos* occurs as the cyclical repetition of "diremption" (the splitting of a unity into opposing, but interdependent, terms) and *Aufhebung*, *ie* the mutual negation of oppo-

sing terms, and the negation of this initial negation, whose consequence is a "higher" unity that immediately generates a new "diremption". In Hegel's view, an originally absolutely internal, self-contained "Spirit" undergoes an originary alienation whereby it is externalised as the dark matter of the world. The teleological movement of world history is directed, through an intricate and elaborate series of dialectical linkages, towards the circular return of Spirit to Spirit through the detour of matter, self-awareness on its Ulyssean journey. Instead of just being the unity of all with all, the spirit now knows itself as this unity.

As Hegel was well aware, the success of his "true synthesis", that is, his speculative dialectics as the quintessential philosophical economy, depended on overcoming or circumventing the obstacle of Kant's "transcendental turn"; for if one grants it, the dialectical movement towards absolute knowledge comes to a premature standstill. To avoid this, Hegel has to dismiss Kant, but without dismissing transcendental philosophy outright, since "Kant" has already "happened" as a historical event, which means that Kant's thought "must have been" a necessary moment in the dialectical unfolding of Spirit and must, therefore, be incorporated, without remainder, into the system of Spirit's dialectical development. Conveniently, the movement of the dialectic requires the logical moment of subjective idealism, out of whose extremes emerges the motive power for the dialectic that ends in absolute idealism. Hegel accordingly tries to resolve the historical exigency of finding a place for Kant in the dialectic by bending Kant's critical philosophy into the shape of subjective idealism. Gainsaying Kant's own arguments (since, from the standpoint of absolute knowledge, Hegel must know Kant better than he knew himself), he tries to reduce transcendental philosophy to a covert subjective idealism.

It is a tall order, however, to set a transcendental philosopher up as a closet subjective idealist. Failing this, it remains impossible to resolve the deeper *aporia* left by Kant's resolution of the fourfold antinomy in his *First critique*. If Derrida has reason to criticise Kant, the reduction of theoretical knowledge to a species-dependent perspective is not one of them. But if he grants Kant's gap between the theoretical realm of "concepts," and the "ideas" that exceed its bounds ("the impossible" from the point of view of theoretical reason), then it should be clear that his thinking cannot be congruent with the dialectical interweaving of op-

posites through the work of mutual negation that Hegel proposed as the logic of all being.

As with Plato, it is only by repressing contingent and capricious interconnections that Hegel can privilege dialectical mediation as the only viable principle for interweaving elements into a unified whole. Derrida, by contrast, is not willing to effect this reduction, although he is equally unwilling to resign philosophical interweaving entirely to the unregulated play of such connections. In other words, for Derrida, the philosophical task becomes one of interweaving economic interconnections, with unpredictable or non-systematic linkages. However, in answer to the teleological movement of Hegel's dialectical interweaving, he insists that system and non-system (the relativity and relativism constellations), while indeed contradicting each other as reciprocally negating opposites, nevertheless constitute two necessities that do not simply mediate one another in a progressive movement towards the elevated condition of a higher synthesis.

2.3 Heidegger and the principle of reason

If Derrida takes issue with Kant for trying to bridge a gap by bringing "the impossible" under the regulation of a rationally grounded *telos*, he resists Hegel's dialectical thinking for similar reasons, namely that he too is an economic thinker who ultimately refuses to acknowledge the necessity and force of "the impossible". Both thinkers, still working in the blinding light of the Principle of Reason, find an asymmetric, incomplete architectonic or system intolerable. In the wake of Heidegger's appraisal, however, there is good reason for suspicion concerning this "principle of all principles" (Heidegger 1991).

Heidegger (1991: 61) argues that faith in the principle of reason has directed the movement of western philosophy towards extreme impoverishment, whereby the truth of being (which is its restlessness, or its tendency to withdraw from presence) is progressively suppressed for the sake of static or abiding configurations of present beings. Indeed, many traditional philosophers dreamed of arresting philosophical thinking, leaving to others in the future only the amusements of teaching, applying and elaborating their systems, without grounds for challenging the foundational first principles. Heidegger, by contrast, aims to rescue the future of thinking from the prospect of merely pre-programmed repe-

tition by questioning the very coherence, and therefore the legitimacy, of the principle of reason.

He notes that this principle seems self-evident to modern minds (Heidegger 1991: 4). The insistence that "nothing is without reason", suggests a natural dissatisfaction until reason has reached the "unconditioned" in a regressive quest for conditions. But pressed harder, this "self-evidence" becomes more and more enigmatic, until finally an *aporia* emerges (Heidegger 1991: 11). The principle that requires an adequate reason for everything must by the same token offer an adequate reason for itself. But this, Heidegger (1991: 8-12) points out, is precisely what cannot be done; one cannot offer an adequate explanation for why there must be a principle of reason. If we apply the principle of reason to itself, we are cast into the obscurity of an abyss, in which the foundation of all foundations itself lacks foundation. In other words, the principle of reason, when turned upon itself, becomes, paradoxically, a little irrational. Moreover, if this enigma is its truth, then for Heidegger (1991: 129), what we call "the truth" can no longer be conceivable as self-evidence or systematic clarification.

Listening for the enigma that sounds in the principle of reason, Heidegger (1991: 39-40, 91) suggests, we come to the awareness of a constant double movement. On the one hand, there is the active articulation or configuration of the being of beings, associated with research, where, in accordance with the principle of reason, one tirelessly seeks the fundamental reasons for what is given. On the other hand, there is a passive, receptive movement of give-and-take, whereby ever-restless being gives what it gives (like the rose), and those who are surprised by the gift receive it without the power of knowing its "why" or anticipating its "when". In this case, the recipient steps back from the question "why?" and is content with appreciative contemplation.

2.4 Diacritical interconnection

Following in Heidegger's wake, Derrida articulates the logic of just such a double movement, which connects an economic attitude towards things, promoting active, research-orientated questioning, with an an-economic attitude encouraging a more passive, contemplative celebration of what comes our way by chance, or takes us by surprise. I have already suggested that the logic of this interconnection is neither simply antino-

mial nor dialectical. Before elaborating on how it may be characterised, however, it is necessary to consider a third form of linkage, derived *inter alia*, from De Saussure's work on semiotics. Again Derrida's thinking draws on, but is not fully consonant with what one may call a "diacritical" form of interconnection. De Saussure's work on semiotic systems, of which language is a perhaps privileged example,[11] presupposes Kant's "transcendental turn". He accepts that the character of the world as perceived by human beings depends upon how we interpret the materially given using the *a priori* configuration of sensory and intellectual powers that makes us human rather than, for example, feline or bovine. But we have it from multiple sources that understanding the constitution of human experience is not only a matter of knowing the details of cognitive and sensory processes, since signifying activity, which Kant leaves out of his account, is not simply cognition quantitatively enlarged, but a qualitatively different, prior condition for cognition.[12]

On Cassirer's (1969: 24) account, for example, symbolisation forms a third system in human beings between Kant's two-fold, mediated systems of passive reception and active cognition. Between receptive stimulus and cognitive response there is a delay, a complex, intervening process of symbolisation, which makes all the difference between pre-programmed organic reactions and distinctly human responses. For

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11   According to Saussure (1983: 68): "Signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others [pantomime, symbols, e.g. the scales as a symbol of justice] the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the master-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system".

12   Kant might have criticised contemporaries for beginning not with the primordially given (synthesised perceptual experience), but with second-level theoretical constructs (atomistic sense-impressions or metaphysical systems). But his own starting point similarly fails to meet this demand, since the primordially given is the symbolically infused space and time of action in the life-world, and not merely yet another second-level theoretical construction, this time the equally abstract synthesised manifold of homogeneous and measurable spatio-temporal relations, governed by the theoretical constructs of Euclid and Newton. Moreover, for Kant, cognitive activity took place before it became necessary to symbolise it for the sake of communication. In short, Kant begins with a fabricated construct that presupposes the very symbolic activity that he considers to be secondary.

Cassirer this delay of symbolic activity is a function of our linguistic power, which must exist before abstract relational thinking and reflection, as the condition of their possibility. In other words, an "artificial medium" is interposed between reception and active response, which so densely shrouds our powers of judgment in the rich variety of symbolic forms of our own making, that we cannot see or know anything of ourselves or our physical reality except as mediated by them. Language, therefore, as the signifying system *par excellence*, must be viewed as inherent to the cognitive processes by which we interpret sense-data in order to constitute intelligible objects, and not as merely representing its effects after the fact.[13]

De Saussure (1983: 65-7) similarly denies that "ready-made ideas exist before words" and that language, therefore, is merely a self-contained system of material marks that represents or doubles a purely cognitively constituted phenomenal world (that is, a world supposedly made intelligible by thought alone, independently of and prior to language). He grants that at whatever level it operates, signification is always the association of two terms, namely the indicative or signifying term (the mark, sound, signal, symbol, or word) and the indicated or signified term (the thing, referent, concept, idea, meaning, sense). However, in his account of the signifying process, he insists upon the inescapable unity of signifier and signified in the sign. There is never a sign in the absence of this unity. In his words:

> I call the combination of a concept [signified] and a sound-image [signifier] a sign, but in current usage the term generally designates only a sound-image, a word, for example [*arbor*, etc]. One tends to forget that arbor is called a sign only because it carries the concept

13 Of course, what one calls "language" operates at different levels, marked for example in the difference between emotional "language" (significant sounds that denote alarm, anger, mirth etc), which has no delay, and propositional language; or again, in the difference between signals, symbols and signs. Any concrete, individual signal, or even a complex system of signals, is associated with a specific thing or event in a fixed and unique way. The decisive step that leads from using signals to using symbols and signs occurs with the realisation that all things can be represented *in absentia*, using, for example, a name. Finally, the step from symbol to sign occurs with the awareness that not every name is a proper name, which means that associations are not necessarily restricted to particular cases, but can be general, arbitrary and artificially constructed.

'tree,' with the result that the idea of the sensory part [the signifier] implies the idea of the whole (De Saussure 1983: 67).

Accordingly, this association of terms cannot be simply a matter of supplying a material marker for a pre-existing meaning. Rather the meaning is constituted in the act of association. De Saussure (1983: 67-73) proposes two fundamental principles of association. The principle of arbitrariness dominates the intra-sign, paradigmatic associations among and between signifiers and signifieds. A concept can be linked to any succession of sounds, as demonstrated by the multiplicity of associated signifiers in different languages. This associative link, then, has no rational basis, for there is no reason for preferring one such succession to another. The principle of linearity dominates the inter-sign, syntagmatic associations. The signifying elements (for example, letters, words, phrases and sentences in a written text) are presented in linear succession; "they form a chain", whereby signs take on and change significance as a result of "different oppositions to what precedes and what follows" (De Saussure 1983: 70).

Importantly, then, meaningful terms arise and are maintained as the effect of an articulated (joined) network of differential interrelationships. Here, meaning becomes a function of arbitrary paradigmatic associations between signifiers and signifieds, combined with the place a sign occupies relative to others in a chain. Moreover, whatever the forces of change are, whether they are "phonetic changes undergone by the signifier, or perhaps changes in meaning which affect the signified concept", and whether they occur "in isolation or in combination, they always result in a shift in the relationship between the signified and the signifier." It is this shift in relationship that constitutes an altered signification (De Saussure 1983: 74). To say, in sum, that meaning is constituted diacritically, is to say that it is constituted by the relations of difference that operate both at the paradigmatic, metaphorical, vertical level of the "code" (of that which stands in the place of another), as well as at the syntagmatic, material, horizontal level of "articulation" or joining.

De Saussure's text prefigures two ways of responding to this model of diacritical relationality, for he notes a rather paradoxical situation in which the arbitrariness of the association between signifier and signified is the condition of both the immutability and the mutability of the

sign. In other words, to tie all of this back to the principal theme of this paper, De Saussure's model of diacritical relationality has been taken as the basis for positions on both sides of the relativity/relativism opposition at issue here.

On the one hand, De Saussure's model seems to support a radical relativism. If the connection between signifier and signified is arbitrary, there is no reason why one should not make abrupt and wholesale changes in associations between signifiers and signifieds. As De Saussure (1983: 75) puts it:

> Language is radically powerless to defend itself against the forces which from one moment to the next are shifting the relationship between the signified and the signifier. This is one of the consequences of the arbitrary nature of the sign.

In the referential models of language which he sought to supplant, arbitrariness attaches itself to the relation between name and referent, which means a shift in signifier should be of no great import, for the meaning would remain intact no matter what signifier was used. But in De Saussure's model, a shift in signifier changes the signified too, since the meaning is in the relationship. In this case, there is no guarantee that signifieds, meanings or concepts will remain intact from one context to the next, and one seems to have no choice but to be swept along by a relativistic, aneconomic, revolutionary freeplay.

On the other hand, since there clearly is a certain stability or immutability in the relation between signifier and signified, many thinkers have tried to take the Saussurean model in the opposite direction, towards structuralism. De Saussure's text lends equal support to this view, since he argues that language is resistant to change and that meanings remain durable, not because of some natural or rational bond between words and external referents, nor only for the various pragmatic reasons that engender conservatism and a generalised inertia concerning changes in meaning. Instead, he argues that language resists change in principle, and precisely because of the arbitrariness of the association between signifier and signified. Having established that the arbitrariness of the connection between signifier and signified ensures that it is the differential relations among terms that constitute them, he argues that such differential relations occur only as a complex network, one aspect of which is "the past." In other words, what fundamentally restricts the freeplay of associations,

without arresting the movement by which meanings shift, is the equally fundamental principle of linearity. Besides co-terminous associative relations, linear relations of antecedence and anticipation also determine a term. This is the case both syntagmatically, for example in a sentence, and paradigmatically, in the sense that a term cannot but retain the traces of its heritage and the expectations it engenders. What a term has meant historically, then, co-constitutes its present sense, whether or not this present sense is determined as a perfect repetition of what it has always been, an alteration of some kind *vis-à-vis* this heritage, or even a radical break from it. Whatever the case, what has gone before is always already a constituent of the sense of a present term. For De Saussure, this impossibility of escaping convention — the necessity of taking it into account — ensures that language remains in principle resistant to change.

3. Derrida's quasi-transcendental logic

On the one hand, it seems, one may commandeer De Saussure's model of diacritical relationality, and its arguments for the immutability of the sign, to support the claim that knowledge or science depends on being able to interweave diacritical relations into a structure or system, regulated by a network of conventions, that would organise all meaningful relations into a single, overarching system. On the other hand, read a little differently, De Saussure's model seems to support the contention that the search for any kind of linkage that could form a system is a pseudo-problem, generated by philosophy's prejudicial dream of unity, which is best given up altogether for the sake of getting on with the piecemeal pragmatics of coping with the capricious, contingent, unregulated relations of everyday life. Derrida's response, as one may expect, is complex: while he accepts De Saussure's diacritical model of signification, he refuses to make the choice it suggests between mutability and immutability.

The basis for this refusal is a paradox or incoherence that unsettles (without being able to dismiss) the re-conception of the concept "sign" on which De Saussure's diacritical model of language is based. Instead of "sign" designating the material mark that represents a predetermined referent, De Saussure shows "sign" to be the concept that always unifies mark and referent, or in his revision, signifier and signified, such that one implies the other, just as one side of a sheet of paper implies the

other. As mentioned earlier, this unity, along with the arbitrary nature of the connections between all signifiers and signifieds, means that it is impossible to prevent a certain slippage, not only between mark and referent (which does not matter), but also in the signified concept itself (since any shift in the signifier is automatically a shift in the signified). By extension, it is impossible to prevent a certain sliding of meaning in all concepts.

But, Derrida (1978b: 280) argues, this is precisely what cannot happen. In his words,

> [...] as soon as one seeks to demonstrate in this way that there is no transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or play of signification henceforth has no limit, one must reject even the concept and word 'sign' itself — which is precisely what cannot be done.

That is, if we hope to defend the idea that De Saussure's diacritical model of language unsettles the so-called "metaphysics of presence", the concept "sign", which lies at its basis as the condition of the possibility of such sliding, cannot itself slide. Instead, one requires "sign" to have the fixed sense "sign-of", which indicates the unity of signifier and signified as well as the arbitrary nature of their connection. A fixed signification, then, is paradoxically the very condition of the possibility of unregulated diacritical relationality.

Importantly, what Derrida keeps discovering, in text after text, is that this kind of anomaly is not unique. Instead, it is reiterated across many different contexts. In a precisely parallel sense, the thought of the purely aneconomic, that is, a wholly unregulated, anchorless freeplay of differences, is self-annulling, since the "play of differences" itself implies and requires that very constitution and preservation of different terms that it simultaneously threatens. But to constitute and preserve present terms, then, it becomes necessary to put *différance* as spacing out of play, to suspend it in favour of *différance* as temporalisation, by subjecting the play of differences to calculated economic or structural decisions about where to draw the lines, and on what basis. There is, then, an incoherence, or double bind, at the heart of the aneconomic concept of "play": for there to be a play of differences at all, rather than formless chaos, such play must first be put out of play. But "play" that is made possible only on the basis of economy or structure (a centre, standard, constant, or transcendental condition), cannot be "play" in any strict sense of the term.

Similarly, one may question the coherence of the concept "aporia" — at least insofar as it is supposed to designate, in contrast to the problematic (that for which there is a recognisable path), a unique situation in which we are "singularly exposed in our absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness". The very recognition of the unique as such is only possible on the basis of its difference from the conventional paths already travelled. But if the singular, unique or novel, so called, is only constituted as such in a differential relation with that which is recognisable, such recognition, while necessary to the constitution of a singular situation, also always already violates its utter singularity.

The same goes, finally, for "the impossible". It is only on condition that there is a "possible", in whatever sense it manifests (imaginary, conceptual, objective, or otherwise), that an "impossible" becomes conceivable as the beyond that remains inconceivable within any phenomenal system. But this means that an experience of the impossible only becomes possible as the ruin or suspension of the possible, in which case it is no longer the impossible itself. To return to a favourite example, as the "experience of the impossible", justice is only possible as the suspension of law, in which case it is no longer justice, since one requires law to do justice (Derrida 1992: 16).

From these difficulties, circularities, and paradoxes, one cannot but conclude that there is something incoherent about the concepts that constitute "the relativism constellation". If, therefore, the incoherence at its heart makes relativism as such impossible, one might consider rejecting it altogether in favour of its counterpart. Yet, as Derrida has argued, the concept of the "centre", which lies at the basis of the relativity constellation (economy, structure, problem, possibility), also engenders a paradox. While included within a relational system as a regulator, the centre, which would have to be independently determined, supposedly also remains external to it. In short, by regulating the play of elements without itself playing, the fixed, and independently determined centre of a relational system remains, paradoxically, a point of stability outside it. As Derrida (1978b: 279) puts it:

> The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of play.

While Derrida here grants that "the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself", the point of contention, he insists, is the bias in favour of "presence" evident in a purely economic conception of the centre. This valorisation of "presence", he notes, is unmasked as a bias once language has "entered into the universal problematic". In other words, having granted that no terms can ever be determined independently of the relations of difference within a system, if one must still speak of a "centre", one can no longer think of it as a point of presence determined independently of the play of elements. In Derrida's (1978b: 280) words,

> [...] it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus, but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.

In turn, this means that one can no longer insist that the "centre" does not play. As Derrida notes, empirically speaking, the history of the concept "structure," as the substitution of one centre for another, was disrupted by the unsettling recognition that the concept "structure" has a history.[14]

In sum, just as Heidegger finds an incoherence at the very heart of the Principle of Reason, namely that the ground of all grounds cannot itself be grounded, so there is an incoherence that unsettles the concepts that constitute the relativity constellation, for the fixity that is required to come before and condition a differential play of permutations both must and cannot avoid playing. Evidently, whichever way one turns, even philosophy's most cherished concepts cannot resolve their internal incoherence. These concepts, in other words, cannot unify themselves. Instead they remain spread out over equally imperative, but conflicting or mutually negating, senses, which cannot be reconciled by subordination or prioritisation, for example, or resolved by reducing one sense to another.

The human condition, then, suspended between "the possible", as constituted and ordered by systemic relations, and "the impossible",

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14 That is, the history of the substitutions for one another of "*eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth" (Derrida, 1978b: 279-80).

as the playground of restless Being, remains an irresolvable predicament or double bind: if one cannot presuppose a constant in the traditional sense of a present centre or a set of transcendental conditions, one cannot explain why there is system, repetition, or predictability at all. But if one does presuppose such a constant, one cannot explain why there can be novelty, invention, or chance, since all would be reduced to systematic calculability. Since, in fact, system and novelty, repetition and change, predictability and chance all exist, and simultaneously, our quasi-transcendental task as thinkers, to parody Kant, is to understand how this is possible. Thus, drawing on and challenging the transcendental pattern of thinking engendered by Kant, Derrida describes the anamnesic task of thinking as one of working back in analysis from a given "thing" to the quasi-constant that is necessary to make it possible, while just as necessarily making it impossible, at least strictly speaking, in its purity, or as an absolute.

For Derrida, the concept "sign" is just such a quasi-constant, as is the concept "centre", which, as Derrida (1978b: 279) puts it, "closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible". These, in sum, will turn out to be the kinds of quasi-constant that "substitute" for the constant truth that there is no truth; that is, they will always take the form of paradoxical, self-annihilating, quasi-transcendental conditions. Put another way, what organises/disorganises a structure is no longer a fixed and coherent point of reference, nor a freeplay of differences, but something inescapably incoherent; namely, an auto-deconstructive economic/aneconomic happening for which Derrida has an open-ended series of nicknames, the best known of which is *différance*. Notably, then, unlike traditional philosophy, which has always striven to overcome incoherence, Derrida insists that we require a logic that openly acknowledges the paradoxical status of such quasi-constants.

In conclusion I think that one can safely say that every one of Derrida's texts, in one way or another, answers the question of the point of grasping this logic both constatively and performatively, and that it is really only by working through his performance of quasi-transcendental "analysis" in each case that one can appreciate its value for addressing specific concerns across the various contexts of ethics, politics, aesthetics, semiotics, and so on. For this labour, there is no adequate substitute. Speaking very generally, Derrida insists that one ought to take economy

seriously. For him, the incoherence at the basis of the constitution of economic or relational systems is not reason enough to abandon the task of actively inventing them. One should not, therefore, abdicate responsibility for economising, taking decisions, instituting things, and drawing boundaries, in the name of utter relativism, since this, in any event, remains equally impossible. Nor should one advocate passivity in the hope of avoiding the necessary violence of practical action. Thus, if Heidegger, working against the dominance of the principle of reason in philosophy, may have privileged the receptive, poetic, contemplative side of the double movement he uncovers, Derrida, by contrast, insists on the irreducible necessity of human activity in constituting a meaningful "life-world." In ethical terms, for example, one cannot simply abdicate responsibility for making a decision in the face of an *aporia* (the only situation in which, strictly speaking, a decision becomes necessary, and therefore an ethical experience becomes possible), even if it means that one must invent a path, thereby reducing the *aporia* to something recognisable, namely a problem, and in that sense doing violence to the singularity of the situation, and, in effect, ruining one's chances of calling the decision ethical. For Derrida, it is not such a bad thing for a person to recognise the impossibility of ever living up to the dream of genuine ethicality, as long as this "lack" is not given as grounds for abdication, but for persistent "love" directed towards "the impossible".

But Derrida simultaneously shows that one may make a decision, find an answer, construct a system, only on condition that one represses what does not belong to the possible solution or system, that is, what cannot be systematised. Husserl's phenomenological science, for example, presupposes an initial decision "which subordinates a reflection on the sign to logic" (Derrida 1973b: 7). In other words, the condition of the possibility of any system is the violation of what cannot be systematised, but the very fact that there are non-systematic elements that have to be suppressed or done away with means that it is impossible for any system or solution to be absolute, all-encompassing, or final.

Therefore, even if, as Derrida (1978a: 252, 255-61) suggests, economy cannot abide laughter, he warns that the aneconomic will nevertheless not fail to show itself in the "return of the repressed", in the symptomatic laughter that rings out whenever one takes an economy too seriously. If all economising co-constitutes its outside, an inevitable errance,

stemming from the incomprehensible excess on the outside of every system, will always resist and interrupt the teleological work of economising. In other words, since the economic "putting out of play" can only ever be the temporary suspension of *différance*, economic closure itself generates the possibility of the aneconomic; that is, of chance events, unspeakable and unpredictable within the economy. If one must, therefore, act to institute what is possible in the play of the world by stabilising it, one is also acted upon by the aneconomic play of differences, which sways an economy off course, transgresses its borders, and compels one time and again to reinvent its boundaries and project its aims anew. The play of the world, which goes on relentlessly, regardless of our decisions, will inevitably ruin anything dreamed of as possible, making institution as absolute, total or final without reason, and quite impossible — which is also a good thing.

Put differently, we cannot establish and master securely limited economies, precisely because we are limited beings: because we must face the genuine possibility that death is a loss that cannot be rehabilitated in the form of an investment. One cannot eradicate this "aneconomic" moment, which, in Derrida's words, points to "the experience of the sacred, to the heedless sacrifice of presence and meaning", and has to do with the risk that death is "mute and nonproductive". In other words, without abdicating our efforts to make sense, to be just, or to make ethical decisions, human beings must face the impossibility of facing the radical "alterity" of that which resists these efforts.

In the interweaving of these two movements, namely, active constitution and the passion of "going through" the ordeal of the impossible, which ruins all that is constituted, Derridean "logic" acknowledges the necessity and inevitability of the aporetic connection between what I have here called the relativity and relativism constellations, and impresses upon one the ethical value of learning to live with this. But there is no formula or method for facing the interminable incoherence of the human condition. While one may trace out a discernable logic of auto-deconstruction throughout Derrida's treatment of multiple issues, "the same" logic must nevertheless be repeated differently in each new context; each time it must be re-thought, re-negotiated or re-applied inventively. Moreover, the outcome of this re-invention is always unpredictable (it could be poison or it could be cure, but the

cure will be poison, and the poison cure, in some sense too), for Derrida cannot control the element of errance, chance, or luck inherent in his texts and therefore in their interpretation, which is to say, their re-invention.

In conclusion, the importance of Derridean logic, I think, comes down to responsibility. By uncovering the *aporias* that inevitably arise whenever we try to convert ethical, political, theoretical, or aesthetic issues into problems, Derrida gives those who come after him a "logic" to work with which offers a suitably complex and sophisticated way of "making sense" of the incorrigible persistence of interpretative differences across the spectrum of human practices. But at the same time, his gift does not take the responsibility for thinking and decision-making out of another's hands, for the logic he offers can never be reduced to the mere application of a pre-determined method. Instead, it is precisely the *aporias*, which announce the impossibility of justice, meaning, ethics, and so on (conceived in terms of a pre-programmed set of *a priori* rules or guidelines), that make a genuine experience of justice, ethics, or meaning possible, since it is the lack inherent in thought-numbing rules that calls one to engage seriously in the never-ending, difficult, but liberating task of thinking and re-thinking what makes for an *ethos*, what responsibility enjoins, what obligation desires.

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