

Université de Montréal

*Of the Question: Derrida and the Deconstruction of Philosophy*

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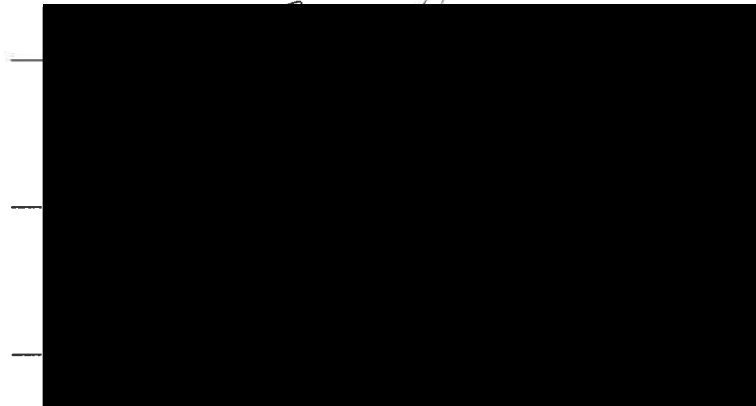
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*Of the Question: Derrida and the Deconstruction of Philosophy*

présenté par :

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## *Of the Question: Derrida and the Deconstruction of Philosophy*

Résumé: La question de la question est un concept clé de la déconstruction de la philosophie entant que cette dernière est identifiée comme la forme-question de la pensée par Derrida. La question nomme la condition de possibilité et d'impossibilité du projet philosophique et du sens en général. La question de la question fait surgir une impérative épistémologique qui complique la possibilité même de l'auto-légitimation conceptuelle de la philosophie. Cette aporie est la condition indécidable de la finitude de l'institution philosophique dans laquelle Derrida suscite, par le déplacement de l'originalité de la question, une analytique quasi-transcendantale de la question de sa possibilité : le *oui, oui* ou la double affirmation de l'autre.

Mots clés : déconstruction, Derrida, philosophie, quasi-transcendantal, question

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Abstract: The question of the question is an essential philosopheme in the deconstruction of philosophy. Derrida identifies philosophy as the questioning-form. The question names the conditions of possibility and impossibility of the philosophical project and of meaning in general. The question of the question reveals an epistemological imperative that complicates the possibility of conceptual self-legitimation in philosophy. This aporia is the undecideable condition of the finitude of the philosophical institution in which Derrida sustains, through his displacement of the question, a quasi-transcendental analytic of the question and its possibility: *oui, oui*, the double affirmation of the other.

Key words : deconstruction, Derrida, philosophy, quasi-transcendental, question

## Dedication

To the memory of Professor William Readings, first supervisor of this *mémoire* that was  
about violence, whose tragic death put an end to a brilliant career;

To Jacques Derrida for a life so well thought;

To Professor James Leach, who first sent me down these paths of thought;

To Professor Iain Macdonald, who had the courage to take up a new *mémoire* and my  
burden;

To Professor Claude Lévesque, who assisted with the first;

To Dr. Abdelmajid M'Seffar and Katharine Fedden, my parents, who encouraged me to  
think and made that important.

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## Introduction: The Question

The *question* is one of Jacques Derrida's more important yet obscure philosophemes. The experience of questioning and the questioning form are essential to philosophy. Their treatment by Derrida serves as a marker for the conceptual challenges that deconstruction poses to the philosophical institution as a questioning form of thought. The complex conceptual matrix of the question provides an opportunity to understand deconstruction's delimitation of philosophy: a delimitation that describes the horizon of philosophical possibility and the limits of the philosophical identity.<sup>1</sup> It is Derrida's careful and deliberate solicitation of both his own work and philosophy's history and institutions that provides a critical moment for considering the theoretical necessity, the conditions, and the opportunities of and for questioning. Within this critical moment, Derrida is effecting a *displacement* of the question that describes a general system of philosophical thought open to an *undecidable* resource that sets the system in motion.<sup>2</sup>

The systems and structures of the question pass through two major moments of the *question of the question* in Derrida's own work. Starting with the *poetics of the question* in

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida describes the traditional function of *delimitation* based on the Kantian relation of philosophy and right. The Kantian analogy on the relation between institution and philosophy works in the metaphysical tradition because it is both a powerful conceptual system and a project of 'delimitation' ("pensée de la limite comme *position* de la limite, fondation ou légitimation du jugement au regard de ces limites") that empowers the philosophical right and concept of right. This delimitation, the scene of legitimation, is 'structurally and indissociably juridico-politico-philosophical' and conditions the *quid juris* question as a philosophical competence. Jacques Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1990, p. 89. This pretence and competence are complicated, at page 33, by the very question of the *horizon of philosophy* as the double bind of (auto-) deconstruction that recognizes that the liberty projected in philosophy *should not* have a horizontal identity. "[La présupposition de l'identité horizontale] n'est pas, cela ne devrait pas en droit être le cas de la philosophie, dès lors qu'il n'y a pas d'horizontalité philosophique."

<sup>2</sup> "[Comme] *déplacement* et comme déplacement d'une *question*, un certain système ouvert quelque part à quelque ressource indécidable qui lui donne son jeu." Jacques Derrida, "Implications : entretien avec Henri Ronse", *Positions*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972, p. 11.

*Violence et métaphysique* (1967)<sup>3</sup>, the question is displaced in a *total repetition* of philosophy where the question names the history and structure of philosophy as the *questioning form*. Derrida explores the philosophical questioning form as model of metaphysical knowledge by confronting this model with the ethical and logical contradictions raised by the radical alterity of the other (Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of alterity). Within this confrontation, Derrida recognises that the radical contribution of phenomenology is to formalize the transcendental necessity of the question and to provide a means of describing the differential relationship between same and other. For Derrida, the effort to understand what makes the question possible provides the possibility of evoking the future of thought beyond metaphysics.

There is not only a history of the question. There is a "question of the question". The *question of the question* names a (transcendental) reflection on the questioning form, on its possibility and its history. It represents the "correspondence" of the questioning act with itself, both formally and thematically. This correspondence conditions philosophical identity and its own justificatory processes.

The privileged status of the question for philosophy is clearly and intentionally displaced in *De l'esprit : Heidegger et la question* (1987)<sup>4</sup>. This text provides a preliminary deconstruction of the phenomenology of the question. The question of the question reveals a more originary possibility and resource of thought, the double affirmation of

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique : essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Levinas*, in *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, pp. 117-228. An earlier version appeared in 1964. Cf. Robert Bernasconi, "The Trace of Levinas in Derrida", *Derrida and Différance*, eds. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988, pp. 12-30 for the context of the essay and the complicated relation between Levinas and Derrida.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit : Heidegger et la question*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987, pp. 184.

a Yes/Yes, that describes the structural necessity and complication of language's engagement. That language, modeled as writing, is an irreducible condition of the question (and experience in general), the consequences of which must be thought through, now constitutes the explicit condition for the deconstruction of the question that is effected by soliciting philosophy's fundamental assumptions about the possibility of the question. Because the question is so fundamental to philosophy, its deconstruction anticipates the deconstruction of a certain metaphysical epoch of philosophy itself, of which Martin Heidegger is the exemplary agent.

The development of the question of the question by Derrida, in *Don droit à la philosophie* (1990), resumes the matrix of deconstruction where the originary differentiation of the double affirmation makes possible the question, a determination of the question of the question, and a certain reading of the history of philosophy. Assumed in the very identity and institution of philosophy, the question supports the institutional presuppositions of philosophy as the possibility presupposed by the *question of philosophy* ("What is philosophy?"). However, the *aporia* of the institution and self-identity of philosophy described by deconstruction traces the undecidable and paradoxical condition that resists and destabilizes the institutional presuppositions that are supposed to found the philosophical project.

The status of the question changes as Derrida tries to re-think the other, language, and history at the limits of the metaphysical interpretation of the question of the question. This change in thinking marks an important transition in the *adventure of the question* from a phenomenology of the question through the undecidable condition of its

general system that inspires deconstruction. The locus of this movement is the question, or rather what makes it possible, the *possibility of the question*. This movement is confirmed by *Nombre de oui*:

Non que la réponse ici importe moins que la question. C'est la question qui importe moins qu'un certain *oui*, celui qui résonne en elle pour venir toujours supposer par elle, un *oui* qui affirme avant elle, en deçà ou au-delà de toute question possible.<sup>5</sup>

Derrida's approach reveals that the originality of the question depends on an instituting response to the call of the other – the Yes/Yes. This call, already foreshadowed in *Violence et métaphysique*, is articulated precisely at the moment that the question is itself put into question as a response to a call or a promise. The originality of the call that displaces the phenomenological privilege of the question is at the centre of *De l'esprit* and is then formalized in *Du droit à la philosophie* in the concept of a *right to (the subject of) philosophy*.

Derrida's treatment of the historical structure of the question of the question in philosophy allows him to propose a future or 'beyond philosophy' inspired by the *adventure of the question*. This adventure names the history and experience of the question as well as their promissory structure. It is this structure that underlies the displacement of the question in terms of what is held in store in the question: its possibility. This structure allows us to understand the ontological necessity of questioning within philosophy, but also the undecidable condition of thought and questioning in general. This condition sets up philosophy's deconstruction and is the

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Nombre de oui*, in *Psyché, Invention de l'autre*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987, p. 641-642.

resource for deconstruction's sense of justice and responsibility upon which is established the democratic function of the question (retained despite its displacement).

In order to situate the displacement or deconstruction of the question, this dissertation proposes to analyze the inter-development and status of these terms for Derrida: the question, the question of the question, the possibility of the question and the double affirmation. The thought of the question passes from the concrete questioning act within philosophy through a reflection on questioning in general to the very origin and possibility of the fundamental experience of difference, the Yes/Yes. This displacement of the question constitutes a clear way of understanding his conceptualization of philosophy and its deconstruction. Deconstruction does not establish a real temporal originality to this development. Rather, the yes already effaces itself as it calls for a response that is the question without which it cannot be and yet is its very condition of (im)possibility.

Recently, Matthew Calarco has reminded us that Jean-Luc Nancy's reading of *Violence et métaphysique* in *La voix libre de l'homme*<sup>6</sup> already "allows us to discern a subtle shift in Derrida's work from an emphasis on the *question* to a thought of a *call*."<sup>7</sup> I will demonstrate that this shift is clear and systematic and that Nancy's reading of Derrida's displacement of the question as a question of ethics risks missing the quasi-transcendental focus of Derrida's argument as a critique of the philosophical system.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, "La voix libre de l'homme", eds. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Les fins de l'homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981, pp. 163-182.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Calarco, "Reading Derrida's own conscience: From the question to the call", *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 30: 3, 2004, p. 284. This essay recalls the importance of Jean-Luc Nancy's work for understanding *Violence et métaphysique*.

## Part 1. The Question of the Question

Within the philosophical community, at its foundation and at its limits, Derrida identifies a *tradition of the question*. This tradition recognizes the fundamental necessity of questioning for philosophy and thematized questioning as such. In *Violence et métaphysique*, Husserl and Heidegger exemplify this tradition for Derrida. It is from within this philosophical and metaphysical tradition that a *community of the question* may emerge to take thought to the limits of philosophy by posing the conditions of possibility of the question in thought and language. The question simultaneously names the complex historical interest in questioning (in its languages, modes, histories, and institutions) and in the phenomenological structure of a question and questioning in general, itself confirmed by a history of the question and by questioning acts in general.

In *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, Leonard Lawlor situates Derrida himself in a current of French philosophical discourse of the 1960's that is essentially an "experience of the question" born of a German phenomenological inheritance.<sup>8</sup> Lawlor describes this system of thought as a question of being essentially determined by the limits and conditions of questioning: "When Heidegger re-opens the question of being, he defines being itself as a question: the question of being is the being of the question."<sup>9</sup> The role of the question in the Introduction of *Being and Time* (1927) exposes a fundamental experience of questioning in thought ("all inquiry about something is somehow a questioning of something") articulated by Martin Heidegger

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<sup>8</sup> Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

as the *question of the meaning of Being* as “the fundamental question” that “must be made transparent, and in an appropriate way.”<sup>10</sup>

Derrida translates Martin Heidegger’s “*Fragen*”<sup>11</sup> as the ‘question’. It has a privileged philosophical status: the question is irreducible for the experience of Being that is given as the experience of the question.

Même si l’être doit nous être donné [...], nous ne sommes à ce point et ne savons de « nous » que cela, le pouvoir ou plutôt la possibilité de questionner, l’expérience du questionnement.<sup>12</sup>

The importance of the question, thus delimited, not only marks the ontological order of questioning and its history, within which philosophy would make its mark, but also marks a moment in the history of thought that will ultimately be radicalized in Derrida’s own reflection on the status and nature of the possibility of the question.

The significance of the question lies in its phenomenal (performative) structure: “Il n’y a de questionnement que dans l’*expérience* de la question.”<sup>13</sup> What is essential to the question is its form and structure. It is an economy and detour that must be properly ‘managed’ in the analytic of *Dasein*. This assumption is essential to philosophy as well. Philosophical discourse, analysis and evaluation in general presume a structure that is economical in the return of its discourse and answer (its ‘dialogical dialectic’). Not only is the question a formalizable methodological concern, the question is the

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962, p. 24. It is precisely this transparency that is at issue.

<sup>11</sup> The German term is either used transitively as “to question” or “questioning” or substantively and in the plural as “the questions”.

<sup>12</sup> J. Derrida, *De l’esprit*, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

irreducible performative structure and movement that thought is as such already caught up in. Whether or not already given to us, being remains an experience of its questioning. '*Dasein*' finds itself in the 'opening of the question', open to the question as the experience and call of Being that can only be responded to or 'answered' by the questioning thought which 'maintains' this opening.

This characterization of the question is enchain in a series often repeated by both Heidegger and Derrida in their own languages. This series links the question with spirit, force, responsibility, and language. Temporalization and spatialization both condition the deconstructive sense of these series. The contribution of a phenomenology of difference is the apprehension of the *differential* structure of history and the question. What is radicalized with Derrida is the way in which alterity is effected and re-inscribed in this phenomenology. The figure of the other is more insistent than Heidegger suspected. The absolutely irreducible relationship with the other (rather than Being) – that is indispensable for the question – is already conditioned by the quasi-transcendental structure of engagement. Derrida will point out the structure of a promise as the originary possibility of the question. This structure, which will have been suspected by Heidegger and hidden in *Geist* (spirit), is solicited at the heart of *De l'esprit*.

Implicit in the very act, condition and history of philosophy, 'the question' surfaces not only as a question of methodology or epistemology (who or what does one question?, what is a question?), but also as a conceptual marker that names the very possibility of questioning and of (phenomenological) experience in general.



The question is the ‘questioning form’<sup>14</sup> whose conceptual matrix describes:

- a) The *question* as the act of questioning in general;
- b) The *questioning form* as the performative structure and horizons of questioning;
- c) The *question of the question* as the correspondence of the question with ‘itself’ as a reflection within questioning about questioning; and
- d) The *possibility of the question* as that which makes questioning and the question possible.

In *Du droit à la philosophie*, the tradition and unity of the philosophical project is identified as the questioning form of thought, “la forme-question de la pensée”<sup>15</sup>. By claiming title to the question, philosophy assumes the *right* and the *capacity* to question based on a certain *necessity* of questioning, even legitimacy to questioning. The philosophical concept necessarily employs and deploys the questioning act in assuming to respond to the question or to provide theoretical models to accomplish the dialogical or dialectical process of providing a praxis or description of the world. This is the basis of its *institutional presupposition*.

As the questioning form of thought, the institution of the philosophical project is conditioned by the structure of the questioning act and its limits. Its performative moments are essential to posing the identity and meaning of the philosophical as such. The epistemological and conceptual determinations of the question and the

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<sup>14</sup> “forme questionnante”, *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> J. Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, p. 29.

formulation of responses to the question found the operation of philosophical systems.

When we question philosophy, when we look into philosophy's conditions and possibility, we are engaged in a question of questioning, as part of the *question of the question*. The need for providing justificatory or legitimating processes or foundations within a philosophical model of knowledge confirms the referential structure of the *question of the question* and conditions the juridical-ethical-political nature of philosophy. The self-referentiality essential to the meaning of the philosophical within the determination of its institutional identity is logically commanded by the structure of the question. The self-reflection posed in the *question of philosophy* ('What is philosophy?' and 'What is the philosophical?') presupposes the possibility of the question by determining the normative conditions for self-reflection and conceptualisation. The question of philosophy is thus *overtaken* by this *self-dialogue of the question*: the *correspondence of the question*.

In *Du droit à la philosophie*, the dense matrix between *droit*, philosophy, institution, and questioning revolves around the *subject* of philosophy, the right to and of philosophy, and the *quid juris* question. The *quid juris* question is fundamental to conceptual legitimation and represents the question 'by what right?'. It is assumed or presumed by philosophy as the capacity to determine the right of right and the truth of truth. Recalling Kant's tribunal of reason where philosophy is called to account, the question supports the possibility of giving reasons for reason or for justifying our philosophical propositions.

The possibility of the question is presumed in philosophy because it is essential to the possibility of accomplishing or posing the philosophical system. In other words, the possibility of answering this or that question presumes the possibility of accomplishing questioning. The presupposition of the question involves an apprehended sense of the question, its possibility. This possibility supports the institutional presupposition of the meaning and possibility of philosophy, the *question of philosophy*, and the operation of the *quid juris* question by seeming to confirm the possibility of the epistemological and metaphysical systems of the philosophical tradition. The necessity of founding or instituting a conceptual claim is essential to being able to expose and evaluate competing claims and determinations.

Philosophy itself presupposes the question. All philosophy more or less explicitly would presume and pre-determine the nature of questioning, would reflect on the question. Explicitly or not, any philosophical discourse presupposes certain conditions and (im)poses certain characteristics to questioning. What would be common to them, without erasing differences, would be the necessity of the question, the irreducible condition of questioning. No philosophy can do without it. Whether formalized or not, every philosophy presumes certain conditions of possibility (of the question), even in denial and negation of this possibility. Derrida seeks to expose this presumption and explore the structure and limits of its possibility. He demonstrates that within philosophy there is the operation of quasi-transcendental conditions that

establish the *general system* for describing these conditions and limits.<sup>16</sup> This general system describes the paradoxical and aporetic necessity and experience (the *undecideable*) that the reasons of philosophy produce at its limits. And thus, if the question in its possibility is conditioned by the *undecideable*, the philosophical project is thoroughly problematic.

The displacement of the question is formally effected through the structure of the question itself. Lawlor describes the paradoxical condition of the experience of the question in terms of the tension between the opening or liberty of the question and the need to answer or close the question.

A genuine question has two characteristics. On the one hand, a genuine question demands to be left open, even left without a response. A genuine question must be a quest; this openness is why the question can account for the universality of being. On the other hand, a genuine question demands to be closed off, even answered once and for all. A genuine question must be able to be finished; this closure is why the question can account for the determination of being. A question therefore is fundamentally differentiated between openness and closure, between irresponsibility and responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

The differentiation of the question does not provide the unitary foundation that philosophy supposes. This structure refers to the *undecideable* condition of philosophy and marks the aporetic condition of the philosophical institution that is caught in this

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<sup>16</sup> "Deconstruction is concerned [...] with determining the limits (conditions of impossibility) of the possibility of systematicity and system-formation. It amounts to a meditation on those structural features which the indispensable demand for systematicity and system-formation must unavoidably presuppose to achieve its goal, but which, because they cannot be interiorised in the system which they make possible, also limit the possibility of systematization as such. Deconstruction, from this perspective, represents a meditation on what we want to call the *general system*. The *general system* is not the universal essence of systematicity; rather, it represents the ordered cluster of possibilities which in one and the same movement constitute and deconstitute systems." Rudolphe Gasché, "Infrastructures and Systematicity", *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> L. Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, p. 1-2.

tension.<sup>18</sup> The logical difficulties or the impossibilities of the question lead to the aporia of the auto-presentation and auto-foundation of philosophy or rather to the difficulties of providing justificatory grounds for our responses and presuppositions. Deconstruction is thus a *thinking of aporia*, trying to think through the rational impossibilities posed within philosophy by the exigency and difference of the question.

Difference therefore defines the being of the question. But this difference is not all. The experience of being interrogated is the experience of powerlessness. Thus it is always the experience of death; to answer the question is to bring the interrogation to an *end*. Yet, at the very *moment* of interrogation, a *space* opens up in which it is possible to find more answers, to live. In this paradoxical space, powerlessness and power, lack and excess, life and death are doubled. Only in the experience of the double is it possible to think.<sup>19</sup>

Derrida expresses the double bind of the question as the practical impossibility of rendering reason. This double bind is maintained in the aporetic experience of closure and opening of the question: given over to the opening of the question and the liberty it engages as well as the exigency of responding despite this opening, because of this opening. The dissimulation of the paradox of the question in a unitary and coherent system involves the *presupposition* (institutional or not) of the possibility of the question. Even in the language of the question, this presupposition is absolute. The paradox and liberty of the question appears most clearly at that point (that point being an impossible origin) in the question of the question in which the originality of the *quid*

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<sup>18</sup> "L'indécidable dont on associe souvent le thème à la déconstruction, ... n'est pas seulement l'oscillation ou la tension entre deux décisions, c'est l'expérience de ce qui, étrangé, hétérogène à l'ordre du calculable et de la règle, doit cependant—c'est de devoir qu'il faut parler—se livrer à la décision impossible en tenant compte du droit et de la règle. Une décision qui ne ferait pas l'épreuve de l'indécidable ne serait pas une décision libre, elle ne serait que l'application programmable ou le déroulement d'un processus calculable." Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi : le « fondement mystique de l'autorité »*, *Cardozo Law Review*, 11: 5-6, July-August 1990, p. 962.

<sup>19</sup> L. Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, p. 2.

*juris* question and the question are extended to its own speculation and foundation (its own possibility) that is already presupposed in the discourse on philosophy. Paradoxically, this presupposition also calls for the most radical question that would turn on this possibility being put into question.

Within the history of the question and essential to its own process, is that, as Derrida says, the question “viene à spéculer, à se réfléchir, à questionner sur soi en soi.”<sup>20</sup> The question of the question names that condition, within the phenomenological structure and logic of the question (that is within the ontology and institution of questioning), where questioning involves itself. The question of the question formalizes the necessary condition for phenomenal experience and the self-reflexivity of the question. The question cannot dispense with some form of self-referentiality and methodological self-analysis (an epistemology). The assumption or the demonstration of philosophical (self)-legitimation and justification is essential to the philosophical experience. It is the philosophical condition in which the self-reflexive condition itself requires an explanation. In the question of the question is the philosophical problem of justifying and verifying our concepts in relation to our experiences.

The questions deployed around the title “Du droit à la philosophie” serve to show that the inner complication of the identity, institution, materiality, and pedagogy of philosophy depends on the assumption of the question represented in the presupposition of the possibility of the question in the question of philosophy. This

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<sup>20</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 119.

complication is produced in the way that the possibility of the question exceeds or overtakes the possibility and meaning of philosophy in the question of the question.

Ainsi, ceux qui questionnent sur la possibilité, la vie et la mort de la philosophie, sont déjà pris, surpris dans le dialogue de la question sur soi et avec soi, ils sont déjà en mémoire de philosophie. Engagés dans la correspondance de la question avec elle-même.<sup>21</sup>

The question overflows the philosophical. The question of philosophy is worked in the inheritance or general economy of the question as part of the question's own inheritance and memory.<sup>22</sup> This remembrance replicates the necessary past that is the condition of history of philosophy and corresponds to a quasi-transcendental logic based on the repetition of the metaphysical project itself. Not only is there the metaphysical insistence of the tradition that requires the repetition of philosophical conceptuality in order to delimit and displace it, but also within this conceptuality the question of the question already traces its effects in the unitary project posed by question of philosophy. The philosopher is overtaken and determined by the possibility of the question and the transcendental necessities of thought.

Deconstruction follows the tortuous path of reason and the limits of its operation. The reason for reason is predicated on a transcendental formality that produces its own dislocation.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> "Un héritage nous lègue toujours subrepticement de quoi l'interpréter. Il se surimpose *a priori* à l'interprétation que nous en produisons, c'est-à-dire toujours, dans une certaine mesure, et jusqu'à une ligne difficile à arrêter, en répétons." J. Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, p. 82 "Témoigner, ce serait témoigner de ce que nous *sommes* en tant que nous *héritons*, et, voilà le cercle, voilà la chance ou la finitude, nous héritons de cela même qui nous permet d'en témoigner." Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1993, p. 94.

[A]sking after the reason for reason itself, Heidegger and in his wake Derrida have most certainly *not* rejected truth, reason, or logic out of hand. Rather, they have remained faithful to the classical protocols of critique – the demand to render reason in the form of causes, roots, or principles – even in the face of the very real possibility that this demand may well give rise to an *in*completeness, an *in*sufficiency, on the part of reason itself. Responsibility, insofar as it does suppose reason, paradoxically both demands and renders (*im*) possible its own realization.<sup>23</sup>

The dislocation of the rational model means “that determinate claims may depend on a certain logical indecidability [or undecideability]”<sup>24</sup> with the result “that the possibility of a justified, unconditional political claim is at once put into radical doubt.”<sup>25</sup> The differential nature of deconstruction points to the conditional nature of our conceptual systems and the mediated nature of our propositions and experience.

The importance of the question of the question is that if “ethical and political responsibility presupposes reason”<sup>26</sup> the possibility and structure of the question determine the practical expression of reason. The question determines ethical and political responsibility and is conditioned by epistemological considerations in the very possibility of conceiving responsibility as such. As we shall see, the liberty of the question that is described in its general system is not an ethical gesture among others, but conditions the possibility of ethics and law as such.

The problem for philosophy is that the jurisdiction of the question of philosophy “presupposes, rather than establishes, that it *is* possible to identify the responsible,

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<sup>23</sup> Stella Gaon, “Judging justice: The strange responsibility of deconstruction”, *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 30: 1, p.105-106.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.



ethical-political act in the first place.”<sup>27</sup> The essentially philosophical privilege of establishing institutionally legitimating discourses and foundations of *droit* both as law and as right rests on the ability to render reason and names the philosophical institution and privilege.

What is right, what is in good conscience, what is morally legitimate, or what is politically just is so precisely to the extent that reason *is* or *can* be rendered. Specifically, one is responsible insofar as one renders reason in the form of giving an account, explaining to an other, or before an other, in one’s own name. This, as Derrida says, is “the most classically metaphysical definition of responsibility”.<sup>28</sup>

The rational model establishes the giving of accounts and is conditioned by the fundamental premise of the “law of non-contradiction through which it is possible to decide absolutely the distinction between this and that.”<sup>29</sup> The problem is that the model employed results in the necessary and formal contradictions in our epistemic systems that are underlined by Derrida.<sup>30</sup>

At stake is the philosophical project of providing justification and reason for its knowledge as possibility of articulating ethical and political action. There are two conditions of knowledge: that one *knows* what one is talking about and that one *can*

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Citing J. Derrida, *Force de loi*, p. 941.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> “Deconstruction must be understood, we contend, as the attempt to ‘account’, in a certain manner, for a heterogeneous variety or manifold of nonlogical contradictions and discursive inequalities of all sorts that continues to haunt and fissure even the *successful* development of philosophical arguments and their systematic exposition. What is this nonhomogenous manifold for which we claim that deconstruction provides, in a certain manner, the unifying principle, origin, or ground? These dissimilarities are to be located, first, in concept-form; second, on the level of the strategies of philosophical argumentation; and third, on the level of the textual arrangement and disposition of the different parts of a philosophical work.” R. Gasché, “Infrastructures and Systematicity”, p. 4.

know what knowledge is.<sup>31</sup> The possibility of knowledge in philosophy is based on the *principle of reason*: reason must give reason for knowledge and in its exposition. By providing a '*raison d'être*' philosophy claims to be able to establish the principles, causes and foundations of our epistemological, metaphysical and ethical propositions and institutions. In this sense philosophy is a responsive discourse that is able to delimit its questions and provide a rational or systematic theoretical explanation of the world.

Répondre à l'appel du principe de raison, c'est rendre raison, expliquer rationnellement les effets par les causes. C'est aussi fonder, justifier, rendre compte à partir du principe (*arkhè*) ou de la racine (*rizā*) [...] c'est donc répondre aux exigences aristotéliennes, celles de la métaphysique, de la philosophie première, de la recherche des « racines », des « principes » et des « causes ».<sup>32</sup>

The possibility of giving reasons and responding involves a determination, decision and authority that can determine the proper sense of philosophical determination and from its origin secure knowledge or its possibility. The metaphysical project is such an attempt at founding the philosophical institution based in the assumption of the question. The problem is that an aporetic condition opens up because of the difficulty of giving reason for our reasons: "l'impossibilité pour un principe de fondement de se fonder lui-même."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Foi et savoir suivi de Le Siècle et le Pardon*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000, p. 49. "[S]ystematicity and system-formation are fundamental philosophical exigencies. In the system, knowledge lays itself out, and thus comes to know itself. The system, as a complete and in-itself necessary order of foundation in which philosophical truths acquire their required internal coherence and unity, is a function of the philosophical desire for self-conceptualization." R. Gasché, "Infrastructures and Systematicity", p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Le principe de la raison et l'idée de l'université", *Du droit à la philosophie*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1990, p. 472.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473. This impossibility is reflected in the phenomenon of language and the problem of self-reflection because "[l]a propriété du langage [est] de toujours pouvoir sans pouvoir parler de lui-même." Jacques Derrida, *Psyché, Invention de l'autre*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987, p. 24.

The question of the question leads to the limits of reason and the constitution of meaning. How and why reason does and does not work is fundamental to philosophy. For Derrida, the philosopher is thus responsible for the effects of the impossible condition at the heart of the rational process that is supposed to establish the philosophical institution. The concepts of the *impossible* and the *undecidable* that Derrida puts into play take shape in relation to our inherited conceptual lexicon that conditions the memory upon which philosophy establishes itself in an attempt to describe the *general system* of philosophy or its conditions of possibility.<sup>34</sup> Defined at first in relation to the conceptual oppositions of metaphysics and in the derived unity of consciousness and concepts as presence, the impossible and the undecidable are formulated in terms of the metaphysical determination of being as presence as that which cannot be described within its logic and assumptions, are not present as such.

Il n'est pas d'expérience qui puisse être vécue autrement qu'au présent. Cette impossibilité absolue de vivre autrement qu'au présent, cette impossibilité éternelle définit l'impensable comme limite de la raison. La notion d'un passé dont le sens ne pourrait être pensé dans la forme d'un présent (passé) marque l'*impossible-impensable-indicible* non seulement pour une philosophie en général, mais même pour une pensée de l'être qui voudrait faire un pas hors de la philosophie. ... Dans le présent vivant, dont la notion est à la fois la plus simple et la plus difficile, toute altérité temporelle peut se constituer et apparaître comme telle : autre présent passé, autre présent futur, autres origines absolues re-vécues dans la modification intentionnelle, dans l'unité et l'actualité de mon présent vivant. Seule l'unité actuelle de mon présent vivant permet à d'autres présents (à d'autres origines absolues) d'apparaître comme telles dans ce qu'on appelle la mémoire ou l'anticipation (par exemple, mais en vérité

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<sup>34</sup> "Now, deconstruction has been explicitly construed by Derrida as an attempt to shake and reinscribe philosophy's endeavor to account for itself by knowledge's systematic and system-forming self-exposition. When we said that deconstruction accounts for a plurality of discursive and other discrepancies that breach the accomplished philosophical discourse, we implied that these discrepancies limit in an essential way the totality and the system in which this discourse seeks its self-legitimation. The possibility of self-justification through totalization and system-formation is limited by these discrepancies, because that very possibility carves itself out in the non-unitary system of these discrepancies. In short, totalization and system-formation are dependent upon them." R. Gasché, "Infrastructures and Systematicity", p. 6.

dans le mouvement constant de la temporalisation). Mais seule l'altérité des présents passés et futurs permet l'identité absolue du présent vivant comme identité à soi de la non-identité. ... Ce mouvement de la libération de l'altérité absolue dans le même absolu est le mouvement de la temporalisation dans sa forme universelle le plus absolument inconditionnée : le présent vivant. ... La présence comme violence est le sens de la finitude, le sens du sens comme histoire.<sup>35</sup>

The finitude of philosophy and the possibility of conceiving this aporia of its institution means that, as a finite experience, discourse or epoch, philosophy is not all of thought or that more is still to come.<sup>36</sup> Philosophy is not total (*pas-tout*), even if it gives itself right to everything and every subject. It is this finitude and history that liberate the question, philosophical adventure and the beyond of philosophy: the *à-venir* of thought or what is to come and yet to come without already being anticipated within philosophy and its articulation of the question because the future involves a certain absence of horizon and of presence as such.

Derrida is not saying that there can be no meaning or philosophical articulation or that questioning cannot produce meaningful propositions.

Deconstruction is not a form of textual vandalism designed to prove that meaning is impossible. [...] If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not meaning but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signification over another.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 194-195.

<sup>36</sup> "[They] do not destroy the possibility of philosophizing, significantly limit that possibility. As a result, all philosophy in the aftermath of deconstruction will have to live with this new type of finitude that is brought to light by deconstruction, and which is the result not of a constitutive human weakness, but of structural qualities owing to the discursive nature of the philosophical enterprise." R. Gasché, "Infrastructures and Systematicity", p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Johnson, "Translator's Introduction", in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. xiv.

The originality of the question is that the question forms the (paradoxical) horizon of philosophy. Early on, the question structures the very possibility of thought as an *adventure of the question*, which marks the tracing of the question of the question that locates the difference between thought and philosophy and the quasi-transcendental promise of the question. Deconstruction's adventure of the question involves, early on, a *total repetition* of the philosophical tradition through a delimitation of the question and a reflection on the archaeological foundation of metaphysics where the originality of the question will stumble on the problem of language. Language will instead be the *quasi-transcendental* possibility of history, more 'original' than the question as the possibility of the question. The difference of the other and the double affirmation of spirit will displace the privilege accorded the question. However, the 'democratic' function of the question – its liberty – will be retained in the responsibility of the promise and call of the other.

## Part 2. The Death Throes of Philosophy

The death throes of philosophy set the stage for Jacques Derrida's reflections on violence and questioning in *Violence et métaphysique*. While these reflections may not have been entirely philosophical, they were intimately founded in the finitude of philosophy determined as metaphysics.<sup>38</sup> In order to describe the general system of philosophy by pointing out its limits and (im)possibilities, this philosophical interrogation of philosophy is possible only on the basis of a questioning act and on a philosophical 'identification' (an institution, logos, tradition and field). Beyond this interrogation (a total repetition as we shall see), the project of deconstruction remains a solicitation of thought beyond the regional limitations of philosophy, in order to bring thought to reflect even more precisely on its own process and beyond philosophy's systematic foreclosures of the adventure of the question.

In *Violence et métaphysique*, Derrida provides for a deconstruction of metaphysics by confronting phenomenology with the experience of the other as figure of a radicalized form of empiricism and as the condition for any ethical possibility. At the nexus of this confrontation, the finitude of philosophy is determined in the experience of the question and in its relation to alterity. Derrida takes seriously the ethical challenge that

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<sup>38</sup> It is not that Derrida is advocating the death and destruction of philosophy. Derrida allows no such pretension: "I try to keep myself to the limit. I say limit and not death, for I do not at all believe in what today is so easily called the death of philosophy." (J. Derrida, "Implications", p. 6). Since there is no "outside philosophy" ("Il n'y a pas d'hors philosophie." Jacques Derrida, *Antinomies de la discipline philosophique*, in *Du droit à la philosophie*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1990, p. 515), philosophy is in a certain (historical and conceptual) sense irreducible. This irreducibility is contained in the relation between ordinary and philosophic language, the return or haunting of philosophy by metaphysics, and the historical position and decision of philosophy. However, that philosophy is historical and finite also means that philosophy as a determined part of history and a specific field can lead to other things. It remains possible to get beyond philosophy. For within philosophy already there is the hope of a future — an *other thinking*.

Levinas' demand for the philosophical formulation of absolute respect for the infinitely Other poses for a conceptual system. However, he also demonstrates that the transcendental formality of the question for thought and the powerful operation and economy of the same, which produces the very conceptual possibility of acting ethically or with reason, cannot articulate as such the ethical heteronomy and infinite diversity that Levinas proposes.<sup>39</sup>

The death throes of philosophy name the experience of finitude essential to philosophy and the aporetic condition of its own institution. This experience is described and evoked in the introduction to *Violence et métaphysique* in the language and mystery of the 'agony' of philosophy. It describes a *poetics of the question* that envisages the rupturing of the philosophical community in the compassion of the question that already traces its own unquestioned possibility in the self-reflexive condition of the question of the question before the concept of 'deconstruction' has materialised as such for Derrida.<sup>40</sup> This poetics is the opening of a reflection on the condition of philosophy's own conceptualisation and restrictions where Derrida tries to think the non-philosophical at the heart of the philosophical.

Derrida follows the contours of the philosophical system in terms of the history of the question to name the impossible task of philosophy: the meaning and experience of its

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<sup>39</sup> "Il s'agit d'un fait que nous n'aurons pas les moyens d'interpréter au-delà de ses conditions de possibilités générales, de son *a priori* [...] Cette proposition est d'essence universelle et on peut la produire *a priori*. Comment passe-t-on ensuite de cet *a priori* à la détermination des faits empiriques, c'est là une question à laquelle on ne peut ici répondre en général. D'abord parce que, par définition, il n'y a pas de réponse générale à une question de cette forme." Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967, p. 158-159.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Bernasconi, "Deconstruction and the Possibility of Ethics", *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 124. This text is useful for situating Heidegger in the context of *Violence et métaphysique*.

own subject (finitude). The possibility of the question and the question of the *undecidable* are the scene of philosophy's own mortality.

Que la philosophie soit morte hier, depuis Hegel ou Marx, Nietzsche ou Heidegger – et la philosophie devrait encore errer vers le sens de sa mort – ou qu'elle ait toujours vécu de se savoir moribonde, ce qui s'avoue en silence dans l'ombre portée par la parole même qui *déclara* la *philosophia perennis*; qu'elle soit morte *un jour*, dans l'histoire, ou qu'elle ait toujours vécu d'agonie et d'ouvrir violemment l'histoire en enlevant sa possibilité contre la non-philosophie, son fond advers, son passé ou son fait, sa mort et sa ressource; que par delà cette mort ou cette mortalité de la philosophie; peut-être même grâce à elles, la pensée ait un avenir ou même, on le dit aujourd'hui, soit tout entière à venir depuis ce qui se réservait encore dans la philosophie; plus étrangement encore, que l'avenir lui-même ait ainsi un avenir, ce sont là des questions qui ne sont pas en puissance de réponse. Ce sont, par naissance et pour une fois au moins, des problèmes qui sont posés à la philosophie comme problèmes qu'elle ne peut résoudre.<sup>41</sup>

The finitude of philosophy, its history, its conceptual system, the excessive logic of its meaning and self-identity, are a logical condition of its existence. It represents the possibility of the formulation and determination of the nature of philosophy and the non-identity at the heart of its economy. The undecidable nature of the meaning or 'ends' of philosophy is found in the very opposition of philosophy and what it is not. The *undecidable* conditions this conceptuality and undermines the purity and transparency of the logic of present identity and meaning essential to the philosophical models of knowledge.<sup>42</sup> The agony of philosophy describes the problem inherent to

<sup>41</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 117-118.

<sup>42</sup> "Philosophy is an indecidable as the *pharmakon* is both remedy and poison, as communication is a message and an action, as difference is differing and deferral, as spacing is spatial and temporal, as the sign is meaning and expression, as trace is the present mark and the designate absence, and so forth. Jacques Derrida has gone to lengths to demonstrate that the indecidable is neither conjunction nor disjunction, neither the unity of a duality nor the duality of a unity. The indecidable affirms and negates, brings together and separates, posits connection and disconnection, establishes a difference without decidability. The indecidable is left with the indecision." Hugh J. Silverman, "Philosophy Has Its Reasons...", *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 23.



the binary conceptual logic that Derrida identifies with the metaphysical system and explains why he insists on thinking the aporetic situations or effects of the irresolvable problems posed to philosophical thought and against which philosophy deploys its synthetic concepts in an attempt to found itself.

This poetics of the question, rather than a mysticism, a messianism or an eschatology even if it appears to point to the mystical, messianic or eschatological, represents a discourse on the question (and its possibility) that in the liberty and quasi-transcendental structure of the question begins to find a necessary responsibility implicit in the question and in the question of philosophy. This responsibility will be cautiously described as a meta-questioning that holds philosophical discourse to the consequences of its aporetic condition liberating the question as a democratic function while simultaneously displacing the question as the original and sufficient focus of philosophical discourse. It attempts to account for the aporetic condition of philosophy by showing that the other, alterity, and difference, are already part of the constitution of meaning, system, and identity; and thus that this condition requires a more complex conceptual strategy than either phenomenology or an ethics of alterity can provide.

For Derrida, the effects of philosophy's own formidable *hyper-symbolic* structure or operation cannot contain the conflictual movement of the institution of the concept (and the world it describes) nor absolutely resolve this relationship with the *undecidable* as the experience of the impossible philosophical interrogation of its own meaning and conditions of possibility.

The locus of irresolvable problems that are put to philosophy (from within its own experience), the question of philosophy and its aporetic experience involve the unquestionable or irresolvable as fundamental conditions of the question. At the limit of the question is the impossible problematic of its own finitude, its own possibility, that exceeds philosophy. “Peut-être même ces questions ne sont-elles pas *philosophiques*, ne sont-elles plus *de la philosophie*.”<sup>43</sup> Derrida often repeats this conjecture, approaching this philosophical condition with a ‘perhaps’, a strategy that holds to the undecidable at play in questioning.

Implicit in the very claim and institution of philosophy and explicit in the discourses of philosophical crisis, return or overcoming, the agony of philosophy describes the transcendental necessity of finitude in the concept and possibility of philosophy. The possibility of philosophical identity requires repetition in its institution and as a condition of its pedagogical destiny. Thus the philosophical condition of *history*, where history and the question are opened in the difference between philosophy and what it is not, is determined at the limits of philosophical experience. Conceptualised as such and yet not coextensive with its concept, the question of philosophy presupposes the question and yet cannot objectify it without excluding or stabilizing the alterity and liberty of the question.

How to think the conditions of possibility of philosophy if they escape or resist rational or logical models? Commenting on the “impossibilité de répondre aux

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<sup>43</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 118. Here then is the aporia that names the impossible.

questions que la philosophie s'adresse dans sa fin et depuis sa fin", Nancy confirms the impossibility of philosophically proving its own necessity without already posing the foundation of this self- or auto-legitimation.<sup>44</sup> "In other words, it is an insistence on philosophy's finitude, its inability to answer the question of its own *arche* and *telos*"<sup>45</sup> that requires a conceptual system to deal with incalculable elements and effects.

Deconstruction is never pure and is caught in the paradox I have attempted to outline. It participates in the very structures and language of the philosophical whose critique deconstruction is already engaged in by pursuing the limits of the philosophical. As Derrida puts it:

J'essaie de me tenir à la *limite* du discours philosophique. ... Limite, donc, à partir de laquelle la philosophie est devenue possible, s'est définie comme *épistémè*, fonctionnant à l'intérieur d'un système de contraintes fondamentales, d'oppositions conceptuelles hors desquelles elle devient impraticable.<sup>46</sup>

The movement of this critique is made possible by its participation in this enclosure and by the "clôture" of this metaphysical tradition that despite a complex marshalling of interdictions, forces, truths, limitations, and violences remains as yet opened and whose identity cannot sustain the positing or explaining of its own transcendental condition.

« Déconstruire » la philosophie ce serait ainsi penser la généalogie structurée de ses concepts de la manière la plus fidèle, la plus intérieure, mais en même temps depuis un certain dehors par elle inqualifiable,

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<sup>44</sup> J.L. Nancy, "La voix libre de l'homme", p. 168.

<sup>45</sup> M. Calarco, "Reading Derrida's own conscience: From the question to the call", p. 287.

<sup>46</sup> J. Derrida, "Implications", p. 14.

innommable, déterminer ce que cette histoire a pu dissimuler ou interdire, se faisant histoire par cette répression quelque part intéressée.<sup>47</sup>

No absolute exteriority<sup>48</sup> or transcendence is being posited as such. Rather, the exteriority of deconstruction consists in retracing the conditions of possibility of philosophy and the formal production of the tradition's impossible situation.

L'intérêt de la déconstruction, de sa force et de son désir si elle en a, c'est une certaine expérience de l'impossible: c'est-à-dire [...] *de l'autre*, l'expérience de l'autre comme invention de l'impossible, en d'autres termes comme la seule invention possible.<sup>49</sup>

This interest aims to follow the deconstruction of philosophy from within its "logique oppositionnelle" through "l'indécidabilité" of our conceptual systems that produces the instability of the metaphysical project.

L'oscillation infiniment rapide entre performatif et constatif, langage et métalangage, fiction et non-fiction, auto- et hétéro-référence, etc., ne produit pas seulement une instabilité essentielle. Cette instabilité constitue l'événement même, disons, l'œuvre, dont l'invention perturbe normalement, si on peut dire, les normes, les statuts et les règles.<sup>50</sup>

That the question (of philosophy) would lead to questions that are not philosophical or proper to philosophy means that the structure and tradition of the conceptual system of philosophy precludes and dissimulates its foundation and its unquestion-like resources. The undecideability of the logical model is formally produced within the

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> The sense of exteriority is deployed in *Du droit à la philosophie* as the unquestionable (as opposed to the non-question) foundation of philosophy. There will always be something of the '*unanswerable question*' within the question. No absolute exteriority exists because of the nature of contamination and the undecidable difference between the philosophical and non-philosophical, because of the very hermeticism of the question that already contains the impossible in the possibility of the question. It thus also complicates the possibility of posing the epochal determination of philosophy as such.

<sup>49</sup> J. Derrida, *Psyché*, p. 26.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24-25.

model and thus requires philosophy to either establish or to presuppose a rational system of legitimation for resolving this undecideability. The economy of the *same*, as locus of identification and meaning, tries to produce its *ipseity* through the effacement of incalculable alterity that otherwise disrupts the stable conceptual relations essential to a metaphysics of presence. In *Violence et métaphysique*, philosophical discourse in general is essentially an economy of the same that is condemned by Levinas because it cannot accept or account for or describe alterity other than by reducing its difference and heteronomy to the presence and certitude of distinguished and determined phenomena for the *same*. However, the meaning and possibility of the philosophical exceeds the formal capacity or system of philosophy to describe its own conditions (even if this is its pretence). There is an irreducible experience of aporia that determines the *impossible*.

[L]'impossible comme seule possibilité et comme condition de possibilité. C'est la persistance, en vérité le retour inéluctable d'une sorte d'aporie ou, si vous préférez, d'antinomie au cœur de la nomie, qui est à la source de tous les processus auto-immunitaires.<sup>51</sup>

At the heart of the same and the conceptual systems it can pose is an antonymic, agonistic, and differential (im)possibility that is the trace of the other and general condition of the possibility of the general philosophical system.

These reflections 'take place' within the *difference of philosophy*.<sup>52</sup> Deconstruction moves in this difference or antinomy (that cannot be programmed) between philosophy as

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<sup>51</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Voyous*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003, p. 74.

<sup>52</sup> The *difference of the question* is the difference between the question and its possibility and history (although they are one), the trace of the question. This difference between the possibility of questioning and the history of questioning becomes philosophy's difference through philosophy's assumption of

opening to the radical question of questioning (where philosophy may no longer be philosophy) and philosophy as the operation of western metaphysics (although this metaphysics is not all of philosophy, it returns to philosophy in its very language and memory);

Différence entre la philosophie comme pouvoir ou aventure *de* la question elle-même et la philosophie comme événement ou tournant déterminés *dans* l'aventure.<sup>53</sup>

The strange dialectical relationship between these two experiences of philosophy is the dialectical difference between the adventure of the question in whose name deconstruction expresses the (epistemological) responsibility or imperative that exceeds the normative limits of philosophy and the philosophical tradition within which and against which deconstruction operates, while yet recognising the historical and conceptual power of metaphysical discourse.<sup>54</sup>

In *Du droit à la philosophie*, Derrida points to three ways in which philosophical space is organized, depending on how the relationship to law (*droit*) and the possibility of the question are articulated by and within philosophy<sup>55</sup>: 1. The tradition and unity of philosophical identity that is projected in the question of philosophy either formulated on the basis of the originality of the question or through the functional presupposition

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the question as part of the correspondence of the question with itself and its history. Deconstruction would be the inspiration of assuming the question in its radicality – its solicitation of this difference – by pursuing the question of the question to its unquestion-like resource.

<sup>53</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> More than Hegelian dialectic because the dialectic structure is itself constituted in difference and conditioned by *différance*. There is no ultimate signification or spirit, but only the structure of possibility and impossibility whose operation cannot be mastered in the relief of the dialectical system. What is at stake is the very possibility of the traditional dialectic. "Derrida's reply to Hegel consists in the denial that difference can ever be reappropriated without remainder into totality." Alan Brudner, "Ideality of Difference", *Cardozo Law Review*, Vol. 11: 1133, p. 1193.

<sup>55</sup> J. Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, p. 27-28.

of the possibility of questioning. 2. The *community of the question* evoked in *Violence et métaphysique* and instituted on the basis of the question of the question at the limits of the question of philosophy. 3. Thought as a right to philosophy without a philosophical presupposition, a *community of thought* about the *subject* of philosophy and what it holds in store in the possibility of the question.

Between *Violence et métaphysique* and *Du droit à la philosophie* three spacings have taken shape and represent the conceptual strategies of deconstruction for thinking the question of the question in its undecideability and for demarcating the philosophical project from the process of thinking through the undecideable without simple opposition. The topological analogy of philosophy serves 1. to locate the difficult question of philosophy and its economy, 2. to describe the its limits and *a priori* formality, and 3. to project the possibility and conditions for moving beyond its constrictions. These are three moments or perspectives employed in the deconstruction of the question.

First there is the tradition of the question and the philosophical project that is at stake in *Violence et métaphysique*. The right to philosophy, presupposed by philosophy, itself presupposes the question in the memory and task of the question of philosophy. The identity of philosophy and reason as such supposes the possibility of a conceptual structure for providing an account and description of this identity as well as the possibility of the present identities and objects to which it corresponds. The phenomenological site of the unity and synthesis of thought is the (self)-same. The *same* is the irreducible site of philosophical discourse: this site and system of the self-

same in which identity and its rationality can be produced and articulated (the construction of identity, totality and ipseity). The same designates an enclosure of identification although it is itself not identical. It is an economic conservatism of self-presence that aims to reduce or repress the circulation of alterity or difference under its principles of identity and non-contradiction. The *same*, as the economy of the question and the meaning of philosophy, is so powerful because it already presupposes alterity. Philosophical domination, which is the repeated domination of the question within a certain logos and system, excludes its aporetic possibility in founding its authority. Thus any thinking otherwise must already play within the same, with the language of the Greeks that corresponds to the conceptual limits of the system. This presupposition takes the strategic form of control and repression of alterity (even if there is the gesture to understand or appreciate the other or the different for what it is and is the source of Levinas' condemnation of philosophical knowledge in its reduction of the other). This process is the auto-immune response of a thought to its own foundation and the irruption of the utterly surprising – other words for the process by which a system represses the aporia and impossibility of its own founding and the trace of the other. The self-presence of identity and its conceptual priority over non-identity ensures the apparent legitimacy of this hyper-symbolic condition.

The second moment is that of the *community of the question* invoked in *Violence et métaphysique*. This participation in a community about the *possibility* of the question does not immediately implicate an identification of philosophy. The community is instituted on the basis of the aporia of the question of philosophy “What is



philosophy?”, that has its own memory and task based in the problem of language, of the question seeking its own language. This community will find within the question of philosophy the affirmations and displacements of *De l'esprit*.

Out of the impossibility of responding to the questions posed to philosophy by its death arises an obligation and a community. This community *sans* community, a community without essence or commonality, bound together only by the existence of questions without answers.<sup>56</sup>

It seems to me that this second moment is in fact the locus of the strategy employed by Derrida in the deconstruction of the question around which the solidity and ideality of the same (first space) and deconstruction's impossible opening to the other (third space) take shape. As the fulcrum of the philosophical differentiation, the community of the question is based on the undecideable and thus the possibility of potentially pure questions arising from the question of the question and the question of philosophy. The liminal strategy Derrida invokes can best be articulated around the initiality that the community invokes as its privilege.

And then there is the practice of a right to philosophy that has neither of the fundamental institutional presuppositions of philosophy: neither essence (response to the question of philosophy) nor the functional originality of the question of philosophy; thus, finally, a *community of thought* that seeks the meaning and play of the originality of the Yes/Yes of the other enfolded in the question. Without being philosophical, this space still maintains the right to the *subject* of philosophy and espouses a heavy responsibility or quasi-meta-questioning. It is not a practice of the

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<sup>56</sup> M. Calarco, “Reading Derrida's own conscience: From the question to the call”, p. 287.

other but an attempt to think the other by means of sustaining the economy of philosophical reflection around the possibility of inventing or instituting the other.

What is at stake in this organisation and strategy is to engage the presuppositions that institute philosophy. When the institution of philosophy is confronted with its own meaning and its own foundation, its language and rationality are exceeded. There is something of the 'un-philosophical' in the institutional reality of philosophy. The question of philosophy does and does not belong to philosophy.<sup>57</sup> And thus deconstruction holds to the undecidable at the heart of the same that reveals the trace of the other and keeps from deciding between opening and closing the question and the question of philosophy by putting into play the supplement of the system, that excess expressed in the irresolvable and undecidable.

The problem of the meaning of the philosophical touches the very possibility of philosophy, or rather the question, and exceeds philosophy's capacity to simply respond to the question. The question "qu'est-ce que le philosophique?" belongs and does not belong to philosophy. While philosophy gives itself the privilege of the question, of the question "what is...?", the question of its own self-identity and institution exceeds the capacities of philosophy because of its founding movement and law described by the institutional presupposition. While the question of institutions is claimed as philosophy's own question, the meaning of its own institution and the system of instituting exceeds its formal capacity to do so. The fundamental problem for philosophy is that it gives itself authority and title over

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<sup>57</sup> J. Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, p. 19.

everything and yet cannot master all, particularly its own conditions of meaning and legitimation. (The meaning of this excedence is the originality of the affirmation that also makes possible the question and thus philosophy's own institution.) The philosophical privilege described (that the questioning form and the question of meaning, (what is...?), belongs as such to philosophy) is accorded by philosophy to itself, is assumed and instituted by philosophy as its institutional presupposition.

There are two dominant philosophical and traditional figures that respond to the question put to philosophy on its self-identity and correspond to an opposition of *essence* and *function*.<sup>58</sup> In the question, “question *au sujet de* la philosophie (Qu'est-ce que c'est? Qu'est-ce qu'elle fait? Qu'est-ce qu'on fait d'elle ou avec elle?)”, these two figures presuppose each other. The pragmatic nominalism of *function* gives itself in advance the essence of philosophy or its rules while the originary position of *essence* presupposes an original event or history that resembles an act of language and recalls an instituting performative. To accomplish a philosophical system, philosophy formalises its possibility either in its genetic foundation whose immediacy assures the development of the system itself or in the necessity and legitimacy of its own process.

If another type of questioning, another thinking, is possible it must first formalize and understand the necessity and fatality of this mutual presupposition between essence and function. The specificity and disciplines of the philosophical identity are also paradoxical and in the work of their institution are confronted with the aporetic experience of their own institution and *ex-appropriation* towards the other in their very

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

constitution. It is here that Derrida can describe the experience of deconstruction as an experience of the auto-deconstruction of philosophy. The experience of the unphilosophical in the question of philosophy exposes the undecidable circularity at the foundation of the system. In providing justificatory reason, philosophy already assumes either its genetic possibility or its dialectical process.

The experience of deconstruction underlines this particular problem for philosophy that is the question of its own meaning when philosophy above all disciplines remains inter- and multidisciplinary given to the meaning of institution itself.

Ce qu'on a appelé la « déconstruction », c'est aussi l'*exposition* de cette identité institutionnelle de la discipline philosophique : ce qu'elle a d'irréductible doit être exposé comme tel, c'est-à-dire montré, gardé, revendiqué mais dans cela même qui l'ouvre et l'ex-proprie au moment où le propre de sa propriété s'éloigne de lui-même – d'abord dans la moindre de ses questions à son propre sujet. La philosophie, l'identité philosophique, c'est aussi le nom d'une expérience qui, dans l'identification en général, commence par s'exposer : autrement dit à s'expatrier. Avoir lieu là où elle n'a pas lieu, là où le lieu n'est ni naturel ni originaire ni donné.<sup>59</sup>

The topological dimension of the institution stems from the necessity of a symbolic place of legitimation. "Aucune institution ne se passe d'un lieu symbolique de légitimation."<sup>60</sup> The history of philosophical institutions is caught in the structure of institutionalization and foundation. The historical signifies that neither their origins nor their solidity are natural and thus that these mediated, differential identities are not stable. "Les processus de leur stabilisation sont toujours relatifs, menacés, essentiellement précaires." There is a fragility of their foundation, the basis of their

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

deconstructability (“cette « déconstructabilité » (théorique et pratique), c’est contre elle que l’institution s’institut”) and whose trace its institution reveals symptomatically.<sup>61</sup>

The sense of the philosophical is problematic because its name enfolds an excessive and inexhaustible space riven by the law of this presupposition (and its absence) and because the distinction and unity of the philosophical project is not clear itself: “la ligne de partage [entre le philosophique et le non-philosophique] n’est pas donnée... Elle s’annonce comme l’expérience d’une responsabilité paradoxale...”<sup>62</sup> The question of philosophy already exceeds philosophy and the question of institution because of the difficulty of adequately describing the foundational justifications for its own system. For Derrida, the rational aporia engages the philosopher transcendently or formally (the problem of the general system) and practically (how to think the other). This paradoxical responsibility engages the thinker as they are pulled to act and to think, to close and to leave open, to decide with undecideability in mind.

How to think the aporetic and supplementary foundation of philosophy, and how to do so responsibly, are questions at the heart of deconstruction. Their development passes through the originality of the question, to its possibility: from the presupposition of philosophy and the original unity of the question as its self-identity to the impossible experience of the right to philosophy, its auto-legitimizing foundation.

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

What is at stake at this point of the analysis is the first steps in *Violence et métaphysique*, which, already evoking a community of the question and the unanswerable questions of philosophy, expose the meaning or the function of philosophy within an experience of the question and establishes the quasi-transcendental necessity of this experience. In this opening of the question that also projects the closure of philosophy, the aporetic philosophical consequences of this exposition will lead to the formalism of “deconstruction” that opens the philosophical space by deploying the difference of the question. The strategies of thought that are formalized in *Du droit à la philosophie* allow us to idealize the communities produced in the matrix of the question. This difference (as the possibility of the question and its philosophical determinations) is “pensée comme telle”. For this to be so “ce sera à condition d’en requérir sans cesse l’origine [de la tradition philosophique] et de faire rigoureusement effort pour se tenir au plus proche d’elle-même.”<sup>63</sup> This repetition following, in a certain way Husserl and Heidegger, is a “répétition totale”. The motifs and motives of this repetition of the *origin* of the tradition systematically involve the problems of genesis, foundation and structure.

‘We’ are caught in a hermeneutics of the question, which both liberates and encloses. The philosopher is overtaken by the tradition of philosophy<sup>64</sup>, in a circle of philosophy by which philosophical discourse, whether traditional or destructive of that tradition, is overtaken and enclosed.

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<sup>63</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 120.

<sup>64</sup> By tradition of philosophy, Derrida means “la conceptualité fondamentale issue de l’aventure gréco-européenne”, *ibid.*, p. 121.

Ce cercle est unique et il décrit la forme du rapport entre l'histoire de la métaphysique et la destruction de l'histoire de la métaphysique : *il n'y a aucun sens* à se passer des concepts de la métaphysique pour ébranler la métaphysique; nous ne disposons d'aucun langage – d'aucune syntaxe et d'aucun lexique – qui soit étranger à cette histoire; nous ne pouvons énoncer aucune proposition destructrice qui n'ait déjà dû se glisser dans la forme, dans la logique et les postulations implicites de cela même qu'elle voudrait contester.<sup>65</sup>

Whether or not a discourse, any discourse, aims to continue, repeat, destroy or surpass metaphysics, the tradition of philosophies of presence and our Greek origins, it will already have been overtaken by that tradition, will and can only move as yet within its language, condition of its history. (However, this language is itself, despite appearances and repression, a differential system based on *writing* and thus remains open to displacement. Bearing the trace of the other, it offers the impossible coming of the other within its own possibility. It is to this that deconstruction is attuned.) The hope of deconstruction lies in the exploitation of difference, to understand the difference of philosophy, yet vigilant against the return of metaphysics or any logos: “La métaphysique revient toujours.”<sup>66</sup> In this sense, a repetition is required not only to identify metaphysics as such but in providing the possibility of exposing the difference that philosophies are and dissimulate. It is in this sense that we must continue to read philosophy in certain way, exploiting the displacement of these differences within philosophy by examining the aporetic structure of thought and language with the aim of soliciting and displacing our inherited lexicon.

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<sup>65</sup> J. Derrida, *La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines*, in *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, p. 412.

<sup>66</sup> J. Derrida, *De l'esprit*, p. 66.

The motifs of the “recours à la tradition” of philosophy (which is in no way traditional and is the total repetition of its origin or genesis) lead to a realization of the “source *grecque*” of philosophy, where are found “les concepts fondateurs de la philosophie” which systematically orient our conceptual schemes.<sup>67</sup> The intersection of Heidegger and Husserl in the Greek element indicates the irreducible framework for any philosophical venture, recognizing that the metaphysical circle in which any discourse is overtaken or takes place is not a relativism or historicism. In describing the “unique source de l’unique philosophie” they are describing the necessities that any philosophy must (at least) take into account. It is “la seule direction possible pour toute ressource philosophique en général.”<sup>68</sup> This direction requires a total repetition of philosophical genesis and systematicity as a reflection and interrogation of the question that will no longer simply presuppose its possibility.

This necessity is all the more urgent because of the globalization of Greek logos (metaphysics) and with it the orders of institutions (such as politics, economics, and government) in which it has (potentially) always been complicit. Levinas’ condemnation of philosophical hegemony and its reductive attempts at systematic totalization is aimed at the legalistic and juridical complicity that philosophy provides to very real political totalitarianism and violence in providing the means for the rationalisation of authority. There is globalization and enclosure of ‘our world’ through the unique source of philosophy named in the intersection of Heidegger and Husserl that amplifies the urgency of the total repetition proposed by Derrida.

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<sup>67</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 120.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.



Au moment où la conceptualité fondamentale issue de l'aventure gréco-européenne est en train de s'emparer de l'humanité entière, ces trois motifs prédéterminent donc la totalité du logos et de la situation historico-philosophique mondiale. Aucune philosophie ne saurait les ébranler sans commencer par s'y soumettre ou sans finir par se détruire elle-même comme langage philosophique.<sup>69</sup>

The decision and strategy employed by Derrida is to multiply the choices between succumbing and destroying by maintaining an undecided position at the limits of philosophy. It is in the name of a future always yet to come and as a questioning of philosophy and of something new happening in philosophy that deconstruction questions. It is with the *hope* of something new as the only possible liberation, as the unpredictable advent of the other within the same and as its dislocation and solicitation that Derrida writes. And this can only come with a confrontation with our Greek origins, within which we find ourselves enclosed. This is the sense of a deconstruction of philosophy.

We are consigned to the effects and systematicity of our philosophical origin and Derrida says we know this with an uncomfortable certainty.

[Nous] nous savons donc confiés à la sécurité de l'élément grec, en un savoir et en une confiance qui ne seraient ni des habitudes ni des comforts, mais nous permettraient au contraire de penser tout danger et de vivre toute inquiétude ou toute détresse.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* This globalization, a geo-political domination, called for an alert critique in 1964. Its urgency only increases with time, particularly in *Spectres de Marx*, where the globalization has been concretized in the geo-political hegemony of neo-liberal capitalist democracy. In later works this hegemony is called *mondolatinaization* (J. Derrida, *Foi et savoir*, p. 23). The three motifs that predetermine this totality are 1. the primacy of the greek origin, 2. the reduction of metaphysics, and 3. the coordination of the ethical with a more original function.

<sup>70</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 121-122.

This certainty arises from the conditions required for philosophy in general. The origin of language is named here without ever being present or transparent as the (quasi-transcendental) possibility of discourse and thought. “Le savoir et la sécurité dont nous parlons ne sont donc pas dans le monde : bien plutôt la possibilité de notre langage et l’assise de notre monde.”<sup>71</sup> This possibility is the impossible we have only begun to evoke: another origin and decision as the general system of the question in language. This impossibility, which is not of the order of fiction or another world, is named in the ‘experience’ of *différance*, trace, ‘archi-writing’, or ‘archi-violence’. It is another origin as the possibility of origination and existence, which is not simply and presently included in the movements it conditions and which cannot be objectified as such. At stake is the transcendental condition of thought. When Levinas tries to advocate for an ethics, he can only do so in terms of transcendental phenomenology. Derrida is not repudiating Levinas’ desire, but rather arguing that the phenomenological condition must be thought otherwise in the paradoxical moments and processes that arise from the differential condition of experience and meaning in general and within which we can up to a point meaningfully articulate the relation between self and other. The differential production of the same and other is revealed in the resistance of the other to the concept. “L’infiniment autre ne se relie pas dans un concept” which in the work of the same must be reduced and anticipated in the economic horizon of the same. “Le concept suppose une anticipation, un horizon où l’altérité s’amortit en s’annonçant, et de se laisser prévoir.” Because the other resists the projected horizon of identity, for a horizon “est toujours horizon du même”, and because the same resists the other by posing this opposition as fundamental to its

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 122.

conceptual economy, Derrida evokes the uncertain possibility of thinking between the opposition of same and other, posing their differential relation and separation as the possibility “de libérer sa pensée et son langage.”<sup>72</sup>

Because the concept (“matière du langage”) is “toujours *donné à l’autre*”, the concept “ne peut se fermer sur l’autre, le comprendre” in its reduction as object. “Le langage ne peut donc totaliser sa propre possibilité et *comprendre* en soi sa propre origine.”<sup>73</sup> The unforeseeable difference of the other is fundamental to the constitution of the same (the same requires the encounter with the other, the trace of the infinitely-other, in order to constitute time and identity in the mediated movement of identification).

[Cette] rencontre de l’imprévisible *lui-même* est-elle la seule ouverture possible du temps, le seul avenir pur, la seule dépense pure *au-delà* de l’histoire comme économie. Mais cet avenir, cet au-delà n’est pas un autre temps, un lendemain de l’histoire. Il est *présent* au cœur de l’expérience. Présent non d’une présence totale mais de la *trace*. L’expérience elle-même est donc eschatologique, par origine et de part en part, avant tout dogme, toute conversion, tout article de foi ou de philosophie.<sup>74</sup>

As we have seen, the sense of this eschatological condition is fundamental to the philosophical experience. In order to describe this aporia and understand its effect, Derrida takes serious<sup>75</sup> the writing model as the conceptual system best suited for dealing with the production of conceptual oppositions, the “opérations conceptuelles que la dissymétrie classique du même et de l’autre libère en se laissant renverser”<sup>75</sup> and the logical problems resulting from them.

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

On ne peut penser la trace instituée sans penser la rétention de la différence dans une structure de renvoi où la différence apparaît *comme telle* et permet ainsi une certaine liberté de variation entre les termes pleins. L'absence d'une *autre* ici-maintenant, d'un autre présent transcendantal, d'une *autre* origine du monde apparaissant comme telle, se présentant comme absence irréductible dans la présence de la trace, ce n'est pas une formule métaphysique substituée à un concept scientifique de l'écriture. Cette formule, outre qu'elle est la contestation de *la* métaphysique elle-même, décrit la structure impliquée par l'« arbitraire du signe », dès lors qu'on en pense la possibilité en-deçà de l'opposition dérivée entre nature et convention, symbole et signe, etc. Ces oppositions n'ont de sens que depuis la possibilité de la trace. L'« immotivation » du signe requiert une synthèse dans laquelle le tout autre s'annonce comme tel – sans aucune simplicité, aucune identité, aucune ressemblance ou continuité – dans ce qui n'est pas lui.<sup>76</sup>

The *trace* appears in the question of the question as the unquestionable origin of the question itself in *De l'esprit*. The trace or affirmative originality that produces the possibility of the question will be affirmed as the 'unquestionable', and was indicated as the 'unanswerable' questions of philosophy in *Violence et métaphysique*. There was a need to think through the resources and originality of the Greek Heidegger to bring thought to the liminal experience of deconstruction and open up the very resource of the question, which would make way for the double affirmation, for the aporetic structure of the question itself, made possible only by something more original than the question itself – the trace or the 'retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears as such', what will be called later the operation of the auto-immunity of the same, a logic of 'auto-immune indemnification'.

Il y reste toujours une trace, une trace de l'autre : la trace essaie alors de nommer l'enchevêtrement de l'autre dans le même qui constitue le même depuis son origine autre. Il n'y a donc pas de texte *même* sans interprétation mais l'interprétation de l'autre interdit tout même, ou encore le même du texte n'est dû qu'à la répétition non identique de l'interprétation qui emporte le même au-delà de lui-même.

<sup>76</sup> J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, p. 68-69.

L'interprétation n'est pas l'autre du texte, ni le même, elle est la différence du texte avec soi-même. ... Cette différence, cette trace empêche la réduction au sens même, au même du sens, défend la résorption des différences et des différences d'horizons...<sup>77</sup>

The 'logic' of deconstruction, its manifestation within this epoch of the question, follows an itinerary of the question almost assuming the question of philosophy. This itinerary bears the irresistible trace of difference and the responsibility invoked by the question that is more original than the question. The itinerary cannot be separated from the Greek-European philosophy of presence, from "quelque chose qui *n'a pas pu se présenter* dans l'histoire de la philosophie, qui n'est d'ailleurs *présent nulle part*, puisqu'il s'agit, dans toute cette affaire, de mettre en question cette détermination majeure du sens de l'être comme *présence*, détermination en laquelle Heidegger a su reconnaître le destin de la philosophie."<sup>78</sup> It is precisely this determination that is at stake in the agony of philosophy and that requires the systematic iteration of the question or its experience.

[A] *travers* le discours philosophique auquel il est impossible de s'arracher totalement, tenter une percée vers son au-delà, on n'a de chance d'y parvenir *dans le langage* (Levinas reconnaît qu'il n'y a pas de pensée avant le langage et hors de lui) qu'à poser *formellement* et *thématiquement* le problème des rapports entre l'appartenance et la percée, le problème de la clôture.<sup>79</sup>

The Greek origin is historical and determines philosophy as logos projecting beforehand the closure of its rationality in the unity and identity of the same. It thus submits alterity to the constitution of that self-presence in the reduction of differences and the problems that alterity already poses.

<sup>77</sup> Vincent Houillon, *L'adresse de la question. L'improbable débat Gadamer-Derrida*, Paris: Alter, No. 8, 2000, p. 117.

<sup>78</sup> J. Derrida, "Implications", p. 15.

<sup>79</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 163.

La Grèce n'est pas un territoire neutre, provisoire, hors frontière. L'histoire dans laquelle se produit le logos grec ne peut être l'accident heureux livrant un terrain d'entente à ceux qui entendent la prophétie eschatologique et à ceux qui ne l'entendent point. Elle ne peut être *dehors* et *accident* pour aucune pensée. Le miracle grec, n'est pas ceci ou cela, telle ou telle réussite étonnante; c'est l'impossibilité à jamais, pour aucune pensée, de traiter ses sages, ..., comme des « sages du dehors ». En ayant proféré *l'epekeina tes onsiias*, en ayant reconnu son deuxième mot (par exemple, dans *le Sophiste*) que l'altérité devait circuler à l'origine du sens, en accueillant l'altérité en général au cœur du logos, la pensée grecque de l'être s'est protégée à jamais contre toute convocation absolument *surprenante*.<sup>80</sup>

In *Violence et métaphysique*, Levinas' "radical empiricism"<sup>81</sup> of radical alterity names an extreme attempt at undoing philosophical metaphysics in the demand for ethics, a gesture that reveals itself as still metaphysical by posing the infinite separation of the other as condition for ethical acknowledgement.

En faisant du rapport à l'infiniment autre l'origine du langage, du sens et de la différence, sans rapport au même, Levinas se résout donc à trahir son intention dans son discours philosophique. Celui-ci n'est entendu et n'enseigne qu'en laissant d'abord circuler en lui le même et l'être. Schéma classique, compliqué ici par une métaphysique du dialogue et de l'enseignement, d'une démonstration qui contredit le démontré par la rigueur et la vérité même de son enchaînement. Cercle mille fois dénoncé du scepticisme, de l'historicisme, du psychologisme, du relativisme, etc. Mais le vrai nom de cette inclination de la pensée devant l'Autre, de cette acceptation résolue plus profonde que la « logique » du discours philosophique, le vrai nom de cette *résignation* du concept, des *a priori* et des horizons transcendants du langage, c'est l'*empirisme*. Celui-ci au fond n'a jamais commis qu'une faute : la faute philosophique de se présenter comme une philosophie. Et il faut reconnaître la profondeur de l'intention empiriste sous la naïveté de certaines de ses expressions historiques. Elle est le *rêve* d'une pensée purement *hétérologique* en sa source. Pensée *pure* de la différence *pure*. L'empirisme est son nom philosophique, sa prétention ou sa modestie métaphysiques. Nous disons le *rêve* parce qu'il s'évanouit *au jour* et dès le lever du langage.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>81</sup> This radical empiricism is the position taken "en radicalisant le thème de l'extériorité infinie de l'autre." *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

For Levinas, the primacy of phenomena cannot and should not be subjected or reduced by the apriori or conceptual system of the self-same. The condition for all knowledge in his empiricism is the pure experience of diversity prior to its synthetic constitution in conscience or understanding. The concept is to recognise and respond to the diversity and non-identity of the other without preconceiving it and thus violating it. However, such a conceptual attack on the operation of the same cannot sustain its own pretensions. The point is, for Derrida, to think empiricism and metaphysics together as two extremes so as to maintain his critique along the edges of the constitution of the philosophical economy with the hope of maintaining the opening of this economy to the advent or event of the other.

Nous ne dénonçons pas ici une incohérence de langage ou une contradiction de système. Nous nous interrogeons sur le sens d'une nécessité : celle de s'installer dans la conceptualité traditionnelle pour la détruire.<sup>83</sup>

Towards the Other: this radical thought would name at the end of *Violence et métaphysique* a Jewish inspiration that resonates with a Greek repetition that in their antagonism and identities direct us to a philosophical difference and community that may permit another thinking, another experience of Jewish-Greek identity which may itself lead to the impossible responsibility and engagement dreamed of by deconstruction. The nature of the institutional or metaphysical presupposition that is elaborated in *Du droit à la philosophie* was announced at the conclusion of *Violence et métaphysique*. Levinas' discourse on the Other is confronted with the contradictory presupposition of the foundation of philosophy, where *philosophical discourse is understood*

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164-165.

*and instructs by permitting the circulation of the same and Being* in neutralizing the other. The nature of philosophy, of the philosophical, contains the irremediable circularity and complexity of the right to philosophy and the right of philosophy.

The structure of language is invoked in both works to locate the ‘necessity’ of the Greek source (metaphysics) and the paradoxical question of philosophy. It is the economy of the question as the problem of the rupturing foundation of the philosophical that circulates all the themes and questions that Derrida identifies with philosophy. The question of philosophy names the inability to justify what by nature philosophy gives itself the right to do – justifying itself and determining the very meaning of meaning and justification – and yet also names what philosophy must do. Deconstruction is inscribed in this tension.

Levinas’ radicalized empiricism, a philosophical discourse identified as non-philosophical by the tradition, serves to solicit the Greek origin and language and thus dislocate the entire philosophical tradition.

Mais l’empirisme a toujours été déterminé par la philosophie, de Platon à Husserl, comme *non-philosophie* : prétention philosophique de la non-philosophie, incapacité de se justifier, de se porter secours comme parole. Mais cette incapacité, lorsqu’elle est assumée avec résolution, conteste la résolution et la cohérence du logos (la philosophie) en sa racine au lieu de se laisser questionner par lui. Rien ne peut donc *solliciter* aussi profondément le logos grec – la philosophie – que cette irruption du tout-autre, rien ne peut autant le réveiller à son origine comme à sa mortalité, à son autre.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.



It is the economy of same and other that is at the heart of the question of the question for Derrida. The question itself serves to name the economy of the same and its secondary and historical determinations. The philosophical as an experience or writing of language comes closer to naming the deconstructive exercise that holds to the undecideable relation of philosophy and nonphilosophy as to the difference of same and other: *différance*.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189-190.

### Part 3. The Quasi-Transcendental Formality of the Question

Derrida's philosophical articulation of deconstruction is conditioned and produced by the formality of questioning in general: the *question*, signifying the questioning form and the possibility of any particular question in general, is already exceeded by the impossible purity and priority of the *a priori* transcendental formality of the questioning act. I wish to locate more precisely in *Violence et métaphysique* the production of this *quasi-transcendental* formality in the question of the question and what it means to a deconstruction of philosophy.

Derrida acknowledges the importance of the transcendental formality of the structure and operation of the logical *a priori* conditions for describing the conceptual system of philosophy while recognizing that no such transcendental condition *in fact exists*. The development of the concept of the *quasi-transcendental* description in deconstruction is an attempt to think the conditions of possibility of the questioning-form and the necessary logical and formal structure that our language engages us in.

The quasi-transcendental system privileges difference as the possibility of thinking the production of the experience and concepts of the self, same, and meaning, and as the impossibility of simply and absolutely posing a transcendental reality or the thing in itself. Rather our unitary concepts are derived. The fundamental system and hierarchy of conceptual oppositions and models inherent to metaphysics *must* be thought on the basis of their general system that is not a transcendental reality somehow separate from the material and empirical condition of language. The quasi-transcendental is thought on the basis of transcendental phenomenology without its presence, without a

transcendental subject, and with the process of differentiation that the writing system describes in the materiality of language which provides the basis for the ideality of our concepts (and to which deconstruction corresponds as 'a strategy of writing').<sup>86</sup> The critique of metaphysics points to the construction and production of the organized "champ conflictuel et hiérarchisé qui ne se laisse ni réduire à l'unité, ni dériver d'une simplicité première, ni relever ou intérioriser dialectiquement dans un troisième terme".<sup>87</sup>

The problem for Nancy is that philosophy cannot formally produce the philosophical knowledge of this condition or the necessity of closing itself off: "la philosophie en effet ne pourra pas donner le *savoir* d'un *devoir* de mettre fin à son savoir."<sup>88</sup> But Derrida is not simply posing an eschatological project, but rather the formal obligation arising from the undecidable structure of the question: "le titre de la déconstruction" marks "en quoi celle-ci fait obligation de *penser* autrement les institutions de la philosophie et l'expérience du droit à la philosophie"<sup>89</sup>.

The historicity of philosophy is thought on the basis of *différance*<sup>90</sup> that is traced in the philosophical paradox and heteronomy of the question that seems to mark, in *Violence*

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<sup>86</sup> Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>88</sup> J.-L. Nancy, "La voix libre de l'homme", p. 167.

<sup>89</sup> J. Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, p. 29.

<sup>90</sup> This differential dialectic is developed in *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*, Paris: PUF, 1990, pp. 289. This early text (written in 1954) is interesting because it provided the groundwork for the thought of *différance* before Derrida came to use this 'term'. In this text the relationship between history and philosophy is worked out as a question of the origination of philosophy. *Différance* is a neologism that articulates deconstruction's recognition of the importance of the operation of writing and systems of writing for understanding time and experience.

Ce qui s'écrit *différance*, ce sera donc le mouvement de jeu qui « produit », par ce qui n'est pas simplement une activité, ces différences, ces effets de différence. Cela ne veut pas dire que la *différance* qui produit les différences soit avant elles, dans un présent simple et

*et métaphysique*, the (un)deconstructible limit and condition for any question in general, for the philosophical adventure, for thought in all its moments and modalities. It is the indestructible resource of the affirmation of the questioning form that inspires the liberty of deconstruction as a question not already answered or constricted within its articulation (the liberty of the question). As a questioning, the question is itself beyond all totalization; and is not a question about any thing or specificity in particular (for example as Heidegger would determine it as the question of Being), although it contains or embraces those questions as the economy, form and structure of questioning in general: the questioning form; while simultaneously exposing itself to the necessity of closing the question as the possibility of accounting for our actions.

History is violently opened in the life and death of philosophy. Deconstruction tries to think this opening and to reflect on the agony of philosophy, where philosophy violently opens history by pursuing and determining the question, by opposing itself from what it is not (non-philosophy) over which it yet makes claims. History is opened in this opposition in which there will always be something of the *unanswerable question* or undecideable within the question where this undecideability or experience

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en soi immo­di­fié, in-dif­fé­rent. La *différence* est l'« origine » non-pleine, non-simple, l'origine structurée et diffé­rante des diffé­rences. Le nom d'« origine » ne lui convient donc plus. Jacques Derrida, *Différance*, in *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972, p. 12.

Neither simply word nor concept, it has been continually elaborated within the movement of Derrida's work. C.f. *Différance* in *Marges de la philosophie*, pp. 1-29. Derrida's concepts of time and history are thought as such within *différance*, on the basis of quasi-transcendental historicity not already based on presence. Their *a prioristic conditionality* is an indefinite passage through violence, as the unstable and aporetic experience of the trace of *différance*. "Origine de l'expérience de l'espace et du temps, cette écriture de la différence, ce tissu de la trace permet à la différence entre l'espace et le temps de s'articuler, d'apparaître comme telle dans l'unité d'une expérience (d'un « même » vécu à partir d'un « même » corps propre." J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, p. 96. Difference is condition of possibility (permits the appearance of the same) and yet conditions its impossibility as the impurity and heteronomy that constitutes and exceeds the same.

of impossibility is conditioned and produced simultaneously with the possibility of concepts in the effect and trace of difference.

From this follows the indefiniteness of the question, its injunction: the question *must* remain open. That the question will always be contaminated (its purity deferred and differing) as history and in history<sup>91</sup> and in the way the thinker is anticipated in language provides the possibility of speaking, of liberty. This opening of the question is confronted by the closure that language also projects; a process conditioned by both the quasi-transcendental structure of thought and the historical inheritance and lexicon that already constrains the question.

In *Violence et métaphysique*, two identities are confronted: the presence of the same as the economy of the question in philosophy and the infinite alterity of the Other. Their purity and self-contained determination cannot be posed individually because their meaning and determination are already conditioned in their relation. The inability of the same to respect the infinite difference of the other is first an archi-violence or differential system that indicates that the same and other can only have derived meaning and institution in their relation before posing discrete identity and objectivity as such.

« Différance » désignait aussi, dans le même champ problématique, cette économie—*de guerre*—qui met en rapport l'altérité radicale ou l'extériorité

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<sup>91</sup> The *adventure of the question* can only unfold *within* history. Philosophy as determined and historical modes occurs *within* this adventure which itself can only have sense, can only be recalled or remembered within historical determination (under the mode of becoming). The adventure itself is nothing without a history or historical process even when it ultimately conditions that process.

absolue du dehors avec le champ clos, agonistique et hiérarchisant des oppositions philosophiques, des « différents » ou de la « différence ».<sup>92</sup>

The production of meaning and the system of phenomenal description depends on the dynamic system of difference that does not found the absolute distinctions necessary for a transcendental logic and rationality.

[Différance] : mouvement « productif » et conflictuel qu'aucune identité, aucune unité, aucune simplicité originaire ne saurait relever, résoudre ou apaiser, et qui désorganise « pratiquement », textuellement, l'opposition ou la différence (la distinction statistique) des différents.<sup>93</sup>

For Derrida, there is thus a need or an imperative produced in the logic of philosophy. It corresponds to the possibility of experience and discourse. It founds the need or obligation of deconstruction in the discipline of the question that mandates the responsibility to maintain the question in its undecideability and to think through the consequences of this epistemological imperative of the question. How else to render reason and provide a description of (the possibility of) responsibility as such?

Nancy considers *Violence et métaphysique* to be essentially a problem of explaining this *must*, the *il faut*, as a question of ethics where the imperative of the imperative is the focus, for Nancy, of the final duty of deconstruction.

Toutes réserves faites sur la nature et sur la modalité d'un tel savoir, *il faut* que nous « sachions » ce qu'il en est de notre non-savoir éthique. Il le faut au moins pour *en finir* avec la demande de la détresse. Or *il faut* vraiment en finir : cet « il faut » est injustifiable, il anticipe tout ce qu'il faudrait « savoir ». Mais il est incontournable.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination*, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12-13.

<sup>94</sup> J.-L. Nancy, "La voix libre de l'homme", p. 165.

The paradox is produced in the “devoir philosophique traditionnel de questionner sur le devoir”<sup>95</sup>, in the space of the *non-savoir* proper to philosophical obligation, its general system. The obligation and *must* of the question seems to correspond to a “supra-, para- ou infra-logique”<sup>96</sup> obligation that superposes an imperative of the imperative: “un « il faut » à tous nos « il faut ». Il faut, dans la plus grande généralité, entendre doublement.”<sup>97</sup>

While the philosophical impossibility of formally producing and presenting this necessity conditions deconstruction, Derrida employs the strategy of the question to establish the paradoxical responsibility of deconstruction in the dialectical double bind of the total repetition of philosophy in dealing with this aporia through the production of contextual descriptions and responses at the limits of reason and philosophical knowledge:

Il faut l'entendre ainsi et autrement. Autrement, c'est-à-dire dans l'ouverture d'une question inouïe n'ouvrant ni sur un savoir ni sur un non-savoir comme savoir à venir. Dans l'ouverture de cette question, *nous ne savons plus*. Ce qui ne veut pas dire que nous ne savons rien, mais que nous sommes au-delà du savoir absolu (et de son système éthique, esthétique ou religieux) vers ce à partir de quoi sa clôture s'annonce et se décide.<sup>98</sup>

The consequences for philosophy are the complication of foundation and (self)-legitimation essential to the ethical and rational philosophical presupposition, even to the possibility of posing the difference between ontology, epistemology and ethics.

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>98</sup> J. Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, Paris: PUF, 1967, p. 115.

The quasi-transcendental *must* of the question describes the production of the general system of reflection upon which philosophical justifications and ethical propositions can be legitimated. The *il faut des il faut* points to the condition of possibility of any discourse whatever its secondary determinations.

The impossibility of responding to the ends of philosophy, and of deciding this agony, is “évidemment liée” for Nancy “par structure et par nature à l’impossibilité de prouver qu’*il faut* la fin, ou les fins de la philosophie.”<sup>99</sup> For him, the final duty (*devoir final*) is not simply the infinite philosophical questioning as the repetition and hermeneutics of dialogical and dialectical reason, but founds a questioning of questioning. “Le « questionner » ne fait pas à lui seul une éthique de la pensée, car la question est elle-même en question.” This guarding of the question corresponds to the pre-ethical command and imperative of keeping the question.

Le commandement – et le commencement, l’*archie* – de l’éthique n’a de sens qu’à ne pas *répondre*, à ne pas assigner le sens et la valeur, mais au contraire à ouvrir, à re-ouvrir la question – la question, précisément, de la fin ou des fins du sens.<sup>100</sup>

While the eschatological questions at the ends of philosophy are produced in the question of the question, Derrida is describing the general system of questioning rather than articulating a final duty. The discipline of the question is “tradition réalisée de la question demeurée question.”<sup>101</sup> The authority of questioning in general and the validity of philosophical discourse are only possible on the maintenance and integrity of questioning. The pretence of philosophy as the capacity to question properly is also

<sup>99</sup> J.-L. Nancy, “La voix libre de l’homme”, p. 169.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170-171.

<sup>101</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 119.



the locus of the responsibility invoked in deconstruction. There is a philosophical responsibility to question properly that leads to an 'unprecedented' and aporetic or impossible responsibility of deconstruction. This responsibility is related to the impossibility of the question in terms of questioning as condition of possibility and the corresponding impossibility of answering and closing the question of the question. It does not simply mark the eschatological orientation of deconstruction, but also the opening to alterity that is also deconstruction's initiality and inventiveness. Thus I prefer to describe a responsibility not as first or last, but rather as conditioned by the undecidable.

Any determined question (could there in fact be any other?) presupposes the question of questioning, presupposes the possibility of the pure question as its condition (a memory). However, such a question is not present, will never have been.

La question est ainsi toujours enfermée, elle n'apparaît jamais immédiatement comme telle, mais seulement à travers l'hermétisme d'une proposition où la réponse a déjà commencé à la déterminer.<sup>102</sup>

There is no questioning in this world and in language which does not presume and enclose (dissimulate) the pure question as the general system of the question. The irreducibility of language (as writing) conditions this hermetism: to speak the question already involves an over-determination of the question, already constrains its formulation and response, already decides. The hermeneutical effort that Derrida describes is mandated by the question of the question and is tied to the enclosure of the (pure) question, where the language and system of response or answer have

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

already 'contaminated' the question, already conditioned the question and the question of the question, have already carried it away. The hermeneutical structure doubles the hyper-symbolic operation of philosophy and the economy of the same.

The question itself can only be thought on the basis of a difference, of a play of differences, of *différance* that requires a hermeneutical and dialectical description: "Sa pureté ne fait jamais que s'annoncer ou se rappeler à travers la différence d'un travail herméneutique."<sup>103</sup> Without difference there could not be history, philosophy, or questioning. And this difference can only be as *différance*: the play of differences differing and deferred and the source of the excessive responsibility and discipline of the question.

La différence est la différencialité des différences signifiantes. Dans le système des différences qu'est la langue, tout élément du système n'a d'identité que dans sa différence par rapport aux autres éléments, chaque élément étant marqué par tous ceux qu'il n'est pas, en en portant la *trace* qui en déconstruit sa propre constitution élémentaire. Il n'a pas de pureté qui ne soit déjà entamée par la dispersion.<sup>104</sup>

The *différance* of the question, that other origin, is the deferral of *the* question in the here and now as the possibility of any question in general and the difference of their history. This deferral names the undecidable condition and effect of the general system of the question. And thus, there will never have been a or the pure question as such. In this ideality of purity, lies the pure memory as a structure of possibility of the general system. The dynamic of the *différance* of the question is what constitutes the question in its differences; that is the question is constituted in the articulation of

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* Purity is not a regulating idea or ideality. It is purity as the impossible experience of the question's origin/genesis in the affirmation/call that constitutes the possibility of the question.

<sup>104</sup> V. Houillon, *L'adresse de la question. L'improbable débat Gadamer-Derrida*, p. 117.

different questioning forms and in the deferral of the decideability of the question and its system as such through the detour of questions in the history of its general system. The production of meaning in the syntax of our philosophical systems is necessarily submitted to a certain undecidable resource that as Derrida says sets these systems in motion.

The possibility and construction of sense, of meaning and of truth is at stake in this hermeneutics. By delimiting the effect and condition of metaphysical closure of the question and its quasi-transcendental operation, Derrida is insisting on the undecidable determinations of our conceptual systems.

Il ne s'agit pas dans la déconstruction d'une simple négation ou d'un refus du sens mais du mouvement même de réinscription du sens dans ce qu'il était sensé dépasser, outrepasser ou relever au sens de l'*Aufhebung* hégélienne... Dans l'interprétation métaphysique, le sens est conçu comme ce qui met fin aux signifiants, leur signifiant ainsi leur renvoi ou leur congé dans la relève du sens, signifié transcendantal, produit par la différenciation signifiante dans laquelle Derrida réinscrit le sens. Compris comme le signifié dernier ou comme le dernier à signifier, le sens met fin au mouvement signifiant et produit la réduction de la différence dans la présence. Pour Derrida, il ne s'agit pas de détruire le sens mais « plutôt de déterminer la possibilité du sens à partir d'une organisation 'formelle' qui en elle-même n'a pas de sens, ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'elle soit le non-sens ou l'absurdité angoissante rôdant autour de l'humanisme métaphysique. »<sup>105</sup>

The problem as we have seen is in the constitution and history of meaning conditioned by the agonistic nature of philosophy that is itself undecidable and irresolvable as such.

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111 also citing Jacques Derrida, "Les fins de l'homme", *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972, p. 161.

Derrida montre l'histoire de la signification ou la *signification* comme une histoire comprise entre une présence originelle et sa réappropriation circulaire dans une présence finale : l'histoire étant toujours l'« histoire du sens », l'histoire de la perte du sens en voie de réappropriation dialogique (dialectique) et de présentation (phénoménologique et métaphysique). La métaphysique installe le sens et sa théorie du signe réduit au signifié dans la réduction des signifiants à partir de l'étant présent et en vue de la présence, suivant la visée finale du sens réapproprié, accordé au *télos* de cette réappropriation.<sup>106</sup>

What is at stake is the nature of our language and the reappropriation of meaning in our transcendental reflection. The philosophical tradition inscribes meaning as the plenitude of a (re)constituted sense, “commandée et encadrée par une *archéologie et une téléologie du sens*, de la présence du sens propre.”<sup>107</sup> The metaphysics of presence is projected as a phenomenological exposition of the dialectic of the same. As such there is repetition at the heart of sense and meaning. This repetition indicates a difference and alterity at the heart of the constitution of meaning and conceptuality.

Donc la pure idéalité du sens entendue avec « notre oreille intérieure » est suspendue à cette possibilité essentielle de répétition. Cette répétition est la marque remarquante du signe qui n'est signe qu'à se répéter. L'énoncé n'existe que par la possibilité de répétition dans l'altérité que Derrida nomme *l'itérabilité*. À cause de cette itérabilité la présence présente du sens est d'emblée hantée par la répétition. La répétition originaire plonge la présence dans la *hantise*. Dès qu'il y a signe la différence entre présentation et représentation, entre originaire et secondaire, entre vie et mort commence à s'estomper. Ainsi l'idéalité du sens – sa pure présence à soi – exige la répétition qui elle-même ne laisse pas intacte cette pureté idéale et entame déjà l'immunité du sens. Sans cette idéalité, la subordination du sens à la vérité serait impossible, et pour maintenir une pureté de toute parole, je dois lui reconnaître une capacité originaire de répétition au-delà de ma mort. Cette puissance de répétition marque la finitude de tout auteur et de tout lecteur. Cette mortalité essentielle ouvre l'écrit à l'altérité générale de sa destination et du même coup interdit toute arrivée totale à une telle destination.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> V. Houillon, *L'adresse de la question. L'improbable débat Gadamer-Derrida*, p. 112.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

The agony of philosophy is already determined by repetition as the possibility of articulating this agony. The instability of the repetition of the differential condition of the constitution of an identity to be repeated is conceptualized as *iteration* which brings together the project of simple repetition in logos and the effect of difference as the unpredictable and disruptive effect of alterity in the economy of the same that would otherwise assure this logos (what elsewhere Derrida has called the *invention of the other*.)<sup>109</sup>

The rationality of the undecidable or impossible, its logical necessity, stems also from this hermeneutics, which, with the language of philosophy, also writes the difference of philosophy in its institution and tradition. The articulation of this deconstructibility of the philosophical question and the self-destitution of the question stem from the comprehensibility of this difference. This difference (of the question and philosophy), with its incomprehensible consequences, is conceived as such by Derrida.

In *Violence et métaphysique*, the question is confirmed. Its beginnings are known and have been experienced. The confirmation is a condition of the formal structure of the origination of the question. This beginning of the question (its possibility) is a form of certainty (a formal knowledge) about 'another absolute origin' (*différance*, the impossible) which secures the past of the question and thus its origin by establishing the general system as the quasi-transcendental horizon of the question. The hermeneutical structure of our experience of the effects of the general system of the

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<sup>109</sup> J. Derrida, *Psyché, Invention de l'autre*.

question in the question of philosophy allows us to pose the quasi-transcendental concepts in deconstruction and establish the discipline and necessity Derrida invokes.

If the question has already begun, “l'impossible a *déjà* eu lieu”. The *impossible* is an essential condition of possibility of the question whose trace marks the institution of philosophy. This impossibility, expressed in the history of the question, is the supplementary originality of a “*mémoire pure de la question pure*”. This differential condition represented by the impossible is ‘not in the world’ as presence and as we have seen represents the antinomic condition of the same and names the performative constitution of questioning for thought that does not fit into the metaphysical description of Being. Not in the world as empirical fact or present determination, the quasi-transcendental is not a separate or transcendental reality and as such is impossible and has occurred as condition of possibility of reason and experience. The experience of the question is related to the impossible as that which makes possible the order of the possible. “Le savoir et la sécurité dont nous parlons ne sont donc pas dans le monde : bien plutôt la possibilité de notre langage et l'assise de notre monde.”<sup>110</sup> And that which cannot be included as origin in the history of philosophy cannot simply become its object, is not entirely philosophical or of philosophy. It remains ‘undecidable’ or produces those undecidable effects that conditions philosophical reflection.

The *impossible* is determined by the totality of life and experience and what can be questioned as the possibility of absolute difference where the figure of the other is the

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<sup>110</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 122.

possibility of disruption, exteriority or even nothingness (the worst violence). The formality of the 'impossible' is first marked in terms of what cannot be answered or decided from within the language of the question and Being. The metaphysical model of knowledge and meaning precludes the paradoxical nature of the question of the question in order to produce its system and legitimation. The conceptual matrix of possible and impossible and the projection of the conceptual limits and values of the philosophical system (its own closure) are posed on the basis of the possibility of these foundational conceptual distinctions. The impossible has occurred because it is the condition for the historical movement of questioning by which the possible is determined and conceptualized. (A logic of *différance*, a *différential* dialectic.)

L'impossible selon la totalité du questionné, selon la totalité de l'étant, des objets et des déterminations, l'impossible selon l'histoire des faits a eu lieu : il y a une histoire de la question, une mémoire pure de la question pure qui autorise peut-être en sa possibilité tout héritage et toute mémoire pure en général et comme telle.<sup>111</sup>

The impossible according to 'what is', what can be, the question has occurred, is occurring. The condition of possibility can only be reconstructed hermeneutically, even though it is posed conceptually.

The evidence for this occurrence of the impossible is the history of the question that is itself the trace of the impossible. There is a formal relationship between the impossible and the that-which-is-possible in which the terms are not inscribed in simple opposition. Rather the impossible is, as past present that has never been, a condition of the question. This condition remains active as the effective memory of

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118

questioning or rather as the general system of the question presupposed by any question as its quasi-transcendental structure and condition.<sup>112</sup>

This impossible occurrence secures the origin and history (the past) of the question: it founds or conditions the question. This legitimation or instituting is the transcendental necessity described in the circle and aporia of the question of the question. The question, any possible question, encloses the difficult or impossible form of the question as that, which as question, questions even its language or its own possibility. Paradoxically, the questioning-form at its heart and at the limits of its self-identity, when confronted with the question of its own reality and meaning, stumbles on what it is not, on a foundation (written in language) that is not simply of the question and remains or retains the effect and condition of the unquestionable and the non-question in its foundation. (A similar structure is delimited for philosophy in the question of philosophy.) There is an essential undecidability at the heart of the question to which Derrida holds. It is in this sense that deconstruction admits of the necessity to conceptually calculate with the incalculable, to deal with a certain logical incoherence at the heart of our rational processes and the responsibility that it engages.

This alterity, or rather *différance*, which structures the fundamental economy of the question, and thus also the institution and identity of the *same*, is paradoxically traced

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<sup>112</sup> The horizon of the possible in its deconstructibility already includes the impossible. The impossible is not only a conceptual necessity for the determination of the possible. The impossible is a *différentiating* topos of and within the possible, as trace. This means that the horizon of the possible is already shaken and that the conceptuality of the *à-venir* already, from afar and in the beginning, conditions the possible. (We will see the structure of the always already more clearly in *De l'esprit*.)



as the undecideability of the question (conditioned by the impossible – not as originary present event but as the play of *différance*) and as impossible condition of meaning because more than the question, the impossible conditions the experience of the question in language. The possibility of the question as pure question is impossible (in language) and can no longer be thought as an ideality or infinite regulating Idea. The transcendental conceptual operation of the question can no longer remain present to itself and its differential condition names the *quasi-transcendental* structure solicited in phenomenology.

Il y va ici, comme pour la venue de tout événement digne de ce nom, d'une venue imprévisible de l'autre, d'une hétéronomie, de la loi venue de l'autre, de la responsabilité et de la décision de l'autre – de l'autre en moi plus grand et plus ancien que moi. [...]

Cet im-possible n'est pas privatif. Ce n'est pas l'inaccessible, ce n'est pas ce que je peux renvoyer indéfiniment : cela s'annonce à moi, cela fond sur moi, cela me précède et me saisit *ici maintenant*, de façon non virtualisable, en acte et en puissance. Cela vient sur moi de haut, sous la forme d'une injonction qui n'attend pas à l'horizon, que je ne vois pas venir, qui ne me laisse pas en paix et ne m'autorise jamais à remettre à plus tard. Cette urgence ne se laisse pas *idéaler*, pas plus que l'autre en tant qu'autre. Cette im-possible n'est donc pas une *idée* (régulatrice) ou un *idéal* (régulateur). C'est ce qu'il y a de plus indéniablement *réel*. Et sensible. Comme l'autre. Comme la *différance* irréductible et non réappropriable de l'autre.<sup>113</sup>

The difference between the question and the not question (is this an answer or decision?) is not pure and can only be hermeneutically reconstructed. 'We' are already engaged and framed by the general system and historical process. The purity of the question does not represent an ideal question as the messianic origin of questioning which would be the pure questioning form, and has no prescribed answer or response (content), although it is not a 'pure' performative. Neither is it an eschatology that

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<sup>113</sup> J. Derrida, *Voyous*, p. 123.

completely evacuates meaning or our concepts. It is not distinct from language. It is not an ideality of the questioning form; and yet it is. In the question, there is a purity in the sense of that in following the question, in its liberty and necessity, there is the effect-dream of a fundamental questioning moment and initiality that would put everything into question, which formally produces an impossibility. The transcendental condition of possibility of the question is to question including itself (by right and by title) that reaches a point of circular<sup>114</sup> incoherence. This transcendental paradox and condition of the question is the pure question and indicates a logical imperative, also of the nature of the impossible and grounded in the aporia of the question and the finitude of philosophy. The transcendental condition is already 'sensible' and this historical and empirical condition necessitates the conceptualization of a quasi-transcendental condition of thought as the possibility of a community of the question.

The power and authority of a pure memory of the pure question extends to the general structure of experience or 'all inheritance and all pure memory' by describing a logical necessity and general system. The originality of the pure memory of the pure question reflects the importance of the question in the concept of history.

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<sup>114</sup> The circularity of the impossible institution of the question is that the impossible is determined by experience (by what ontically is possible within experience), by a history of the question. The impossible is determined to have already occurred because of this history. But the question, known to have already begun, is grounded by the impossible, what will be called another absolute origin or 'not of this world'. This grounding is a strange certainty about the possible that secures and repeats the origin or genesis of the question. And yet it is this past, the history of the question, which determines the knowledge and occurrence of the impossible. An analysis of the intuitive assumption in Kant or Hegel could show how this circularity is stabilized in the metaphysical closure of the regulative reason or conscience.

The always already condition in which the question becomes what it is in language represents a quasi-transcendental operation that describes the finitude and possibility of thought.

La question a déjà commencé, nous le savons et cette étrange certitude concernant une *autre* origine absolue, une autre décision absolue, s'assurant du passé de la question, libère un enseignement incommensurable : la discipline de la question.<sup>115</sup>

We are instructed by a certainty, which secures the past and thus the (im)possibility of the question, in a discipline of the question. (The question is already supported by an 'always already' positivity whose sense also comes negatively by the possibility of no question at all.) How are we certain? The occurrence of thought (in language) and the possibility of questioning at all are evidence for the originary performativity of questioning. In question is the transcendental necessity and phenomenological evidence of this impossibility that are 'irreducible'. Notice that this certainty about 'another absolute origin'<sup>116</sup>, another absolute decision' secures the past (*passé*) of the question. This securing is a liberation (of an incomparable instruction) whose ground is not familiar or stable. It must not be stable: any stabilizing discourse would obfuscate the very sense of liberty explored by Derrida (in the experience of aporia, incommensurable rationality, and justice).<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 118.

<sup>116</sup> "L'origine avant l'origine, plutôt encore que le commencement." J. Derrida, *De l'esprit*, p. 131.

<sup>117</sup> "Le danger pour une tâche de déconstruction, ce serait plutôt la *possibilité*, et de devenir un ensemble disponible de procédures réglées, de pratiques méthodiques, de chemins accessibles." J. Derrida, *Psyché, Invention de l'autre*, p. 26-27. The description of the general system is not meant to provide such a program. It indicates the general process of thinking, but the act of questioning must already be specific and indicated in its contexts.

What is at stake within a deconstruction is the attempt to “déconstruire des réponses philosophiques qui consistent à *totaliser*, à combler l’espace de la question ou à en nier la possibilité, à fuir cela même qu’elle aura permis d’entrevoir.”<sup>118</sup> The responsibility of deconstruction is engaged in the contestation of the denial or completion of the question and in the necessary demands of the quasi-transcendental system. Philosophical responses that would totalize or deny the nature of the question and its structure do not correspond with a discipline of the question. This metaphysical gesture of totalizing philosophical responses flees the question of the question and the impossible implications of its possibility. In effect, the ‘necessity’ of the question is ‘what it has permitted us to see’: the possibility of the question, its own conditions and, in *De l’esprit*, the Yes/Yes.

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<sup>118</sup> J. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 59.

#### Part 4. The Responsibility of the Question for the Question

The condition of the question is (its) liberation: the possibility and performativity of the questioning act. And yet, the possibility of *liberty* is (itself) the undecideability and possibility of the question. In *Violence et métaphysique*, the direct implication of liberty and the question seemed original. However, in *De l'esprit*, liberty itself will be the originary condition of affirmation where liberty is coordinated with the affirmation of language (the freedom of speech) in attempting to account for the responsibility and imperative injunction (the call to performative) of the question of the question.<sup>119</sup>

The hermeneutics of the history of the question liberates an incomparable instruction: the *discipline of the question* whose inheritance is the question of the quasi-transcendental production of the question, the pure question as possibility of the question in general. The discipline is already given over to the (quasi-transcendental) inheritance of this memory that is a performative and differential possibility of thought and language.

À travers (à travers, c'est-à-dire qu'il faut *déjà* savoir lire) cette discipline qui n'est même pas encore la tradition déjà inconcevable du négatif (de la détermination négative) et qui est bien plus antérieure à l'ironie, à la maïeutique, à l'*epoché* et au doute, une injonction s'annonce : la question doit être gardée. Comme question. La liberté *de la question* (double génitif) doit être dite et abritée. Demeure fondée, tradition réalisée de la question demeurée question. Si ce commandement a une signification éthique, ce n'est pas d'appartenir au *domaine* de l'éthique, mais d'autoriser – ultérieurement – toute loi éthique en général. Il n'est pas de loi qui ne se

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<sup>119</sup> "Cette indécidabilité accordée, comme la liberté même, ... elle figure la seule possibilité radicale de décider et de faire advenir (performativement) ou plutôt de laisser advenir (méta-performativement), donc de penser ce qui vient et « qui » vient, l'arrivance de qui arrive. Elle ouvre donc déjà, pour quiconque, une expérience de la liberté, toute ambiguë et inquiétante, menacée et menaçante qu'elle reste en son « peut-être », avec une responsabilité nécessairement excessive dont nul ne saurait s'exonérer." J. Derrida, *Voyous*, p. 133.

dise, il n'est pas de commandement qui ne s'adresse à une liberté de parole.<sup>120</sup>

The impossible authority and necessity, traced and inscribed in the possibility of the question, 'produces' this responsibility and founds liberty, or at least the possibility of liberty. The double bind multiplies its repercussions. The double genitive is essential to understanding the negotiation posed in deconstruction between the absolute requirement to do justice in thought to thought and the other, and yet the need to put into question the very authority of this exigency and its possibility. The liberty of the question and the question of liberty are commanded and as such condition the possibility of commandment as its structure and in its empirical expression, address, and determination. This injunction is produced in the general system and also corresponds to its undecideability. As such, it conditions the possibility of reason, rule, and responsibility as the quasi-transcendental process of law (law of law) that poses and limits freedom (of speech). The imperative commands thought itself, though it does not have the transparent rule of law, as the responsibility of thought for the question as the possibility of liberty.

The history of the question and the aporetic condition of its possibility liberate the instruction of the discipline of the question. The discipline liberates an imperative or injunction that the question must be maintained (or rather sustained) as a question as it is in its 'purity'. This purity is, as we have seen, not an Idea but the opening to the possibility of the question. The liberty of the question must be protected (and protects). It announces the *quid juris* question and the impossibility of the pure

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<sup>120</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 118-119.

question as such: to be always able to speak purely and directly of the question and thus to close the question.

The philosophical concept of ethical-political responsibility is based on the possibility of “knowing what is legitimately ‘good’ and what we ought to do.”<sup>121</sup> The principal of reason conditions responsibility and thus can produce the undecideable condition of responsibility Derrida formalizes. In terms of the relation of theory and praxis, philosophy poses the relation of decision and action to reason and the possibility of giving reason and justification for praxis as the possibility of responsibility, rules and law. However, for Derrida, responsibility is tied to the injunction that the liberty (of the question) must be sustained and is established in the epistemological imperative of the reason of reason that also names the law of the law in terms of the general system of thought. This responsibility is coordinated with the experience of the community of the question in the aporia of this liberty, where the possibility of the question is not already presupposed and determined.

Communauté de la question, donc, en cette fragile instance où la question n’est pas encore assez déterminée pour que l’hypocrisie d’une réponse se soit déjà invitée sous le masque de la question, pour que sa voix se soit déjà laissé articuler en fraude dans la syntaxe même de la question. Communauté de la décision, de l’initiative, de l’initialité absolue, mais menacée, où la question n’a pas encore trouvé le langage qu’elle a décidé de chercher, ne s’est pas encore en lui rassurée sur sa propre possibilité. Communauté de la question sur la possibilité de la question. C’est peu – ce n’est presque rien – mais là se réfugient et se résument aujourd’hui une dignité et un devoir inentamables de décision. Une inentamable responsabilité.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> S. Gaon, *Judging justice*, p. 100.

<sup>122</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 118.

The liberty of the question corresponds to the injunction of the discipline of the question as the freedom to question, to comprehend, to speak. It is the possibility of the question and its general system.<sup>123</sup> As such it names the paradox of justice we have seen in the *quid juris* question. Justice is posed at the limits of this paradox: in the problem of the reason of reason, in the problem of providing justification or just decisions, in the problem of the act of responsibility and law, in the problem of authority and institution, and in the problem that the general system of reason also renders the relation between theory and praxis undecideable.

La justice est une expérience de l'impossible. [...] Le droit est l'élément de calcul, et il est juste qu'il y a du droit, mais la justice est incalculable, elle exige qu'on calcule avec de l'incalculable; et les expériences aporétiques sont des expériences aussi improbables que nécessaires de la justice, c'est-à-dire de moments où la décision entre le juste et l'injuste n'est jamais assurée par une règle.<sup>124</sup>

Justice as incalculability and aporia names the excedence of the question. The responsibility for this excedence is a response to the undecidability of the question and its possibility that is the source of political and moral freedom (to question) within a (philosophical) system. In the remains of philosophy, this responsibility is born as a logical or epistemological imperative that the question be what it is, a question; but is conditioned by the possibility of the question in language. Spoken as liberty, this responsibility becomes a decisive interrogation of the question and must trace the affirmation and promise of language in an affirmation and response to the other. This

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<sup>123</sup> While not withdrawing from the 'infinite legitimacy of questioning', Nancy does insist that "the duty of maintaining the question" should not be conflated "with certain Heideggerian or Aristotelian versions of the duty of thought (... *theōria* as *praxis*) where duty is understood as infinite questioning. The duty of deconstruction is ... more modestly to maintain this question *as* question. To maintain the question of philosophy's end *as* a question is to protect the freedom of the question and the question's freedom *for thought from philosophy*." M. Calarco, "Reading Derrida's own conscience: From the question to the call", p. 287.

<sup>124</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi*, p. 946.



is what *De l'esprit* makes explicit through the displacement of the question; although this displacement still retains the responsibility of the question and its democratic function as 'meta-questioning' without posing a 'meta-language' as such.

The concepts of justice and law or right are already deployed in *Violence et métaphysique* to become more insistent to describe the consequences of this meta-questioning as a logical and responsible thought of the question, its discipline and liberty. These terms take shape in the *unbreachable responsibility* conditioned by the history of the question and posed in the question of how to do justice to the other or to the experience of the other. The possibility of this responsibility is not simply ethical, but is found in the economy and difference of our phenomenal experiences described by the general system.

Deconstruction remains faithful to a choice, a decision and a responsibility, from within the possibility of the question, that recognizes a discipline of the question remaining a question which teaches a 'revolutionary' instruction that is the guarded liberation and liberty of the question. The liberty of questioning is not secured in a foundation even if this liberty is a "demeure fondée, tradition réalisée de la question demeurée question."<sup>125</sup> This foundation remains the possibility of the question. However, this possibility already transports this liberty away from itself – and the question. The liberty of the question leads Derrida to the epistemological imperative that leads to the questioning of the question itself, its own possibility. It is an epistemological liberation that, in the same movement, questions the possibility of

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<sup>125</sup> J. Derrida, *Violence et métaphysique*, p. 119.

liberty. The aporia produced or experienced in this questioning is the condition of responsibility; “l’aporie étant condition de possibilité et d’impossibilité de la responsabilité.”<sup>126</sup>

For Calarco the shift from the question to the call involves an imperative or command to which this shift corresponds. The question raised in *Violence et métaphysique* about ethics and the possibility of ethics involves asking “after the non-ethical condition of ethics, where ethics might come from, or what gives rise to ethics.”<sup>127</sup> For Nancy, the problem of closure is posed in the question of the end of philosophy. Developing the question of the “non-ethical, non-philosophical space”, Derrida risks, in attempting “to describe these conditions in philosophical terms”, “bringing this non-ethical reserve within the bounds of the closure of philosophy and betraying its non-ethical alterity.”<sup>128</sup> There is for Nancy a problem or double bind for Derrida: between “the traditional question of obligation” and “a thought of the call that precedes ethics and metaphysical conscience [...] of the pre-ethical call or imperative that originates the ethical gesture of deconstruction.”<sup>129</sup> Nancy confronts Derrida with his own reflection as a question about what we can know or say about the non-ethical reserve. Derrida’s point is that even if “une « responsabilité » ou une « décision » ne sauraient être fondées ou justifiés par un *savoir en tant que tel*,”<sup>130</sup> this condition needs to be reflected in our theoretical elaborations and in the evaluation of given decisions, determinations and actions, particularly in evaluating different ways of evaluating between systems of

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<sup>126</sup> J. Derrida, *Voyous*, p. 76. This experience of aporia should also trace the fundamental aporia of democracy which is produced in the antinomy of its constituting elements: liberty and equality.

<sup>127</sup> M. Calarco, “Reading Derrida’s own conscience: From the question to the call”, p. 285.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>130</sup> J. Derrida, *Voyous*, p. 199.

evaluation. This structure does admit that there is no theoretical rule for action as such or that there can be no unconditional foundation for a praxis; however this explains the paradox and concept of responsibility that fundamentally requires performativity within thought and acknowledges the epistemic confusion between the performative and constative dimensions of our actions and propositions.

That justice entails an 'unbreachable responsibility' is an essential theme in deconstruction. In *Violence et métaphysique*, the question of the question or the finitude of philosophy leads to this responsibility realized in a 'community of the question about the possibility of the question' where responsibility as such bears its trace in the remnants of the question as the quasi-transcendental 'dignity and duty of decision' of the community of the question. The quasi-transcendental decision has already occurred as condition of decisions in general, as the possibility of questioning and deciding within an undecidable economic process. The possibility of the question poses the possibility of being and deciding, but as a paradoxical one that engages our own duty and decision: to decide with undecideability and thus to sustain the question without rule or guide other than the performative structure and history of our thinking and discourse and the impossible horizon of the other.

The complication and inter-implication of the question and justice reveal a choice and historical conditioning that deconstruction develops when it approaches the history of the question. This choice 'must' be of the order of an unbreachable responsibility, a discipline of the question and a respect for the other. Justice names the possibility of the question and the question of its undecideability (and thus may itself be of the

order of the undecideable) and it would in general 'speak' beyond the self-same and present in its general system and demand. Justice as the possibility (and question) of the question is posed at the very limits of philosophical language and meaning, at the very limits of the history of the question, where justice or possibility may no longer even be question-like, or philosophical.

Si elle est possible et si on doit la prendre au sérieux, la possibilité de la question, qui n'est peut-être plus une question et que nous appelons ici la *justice*, doit parler au-delà de la vie présente, de la vie comme *ma* vie ou *notre* vie. *En général*.<sup>131</sup>

Derrida makes explicit the internal complication of the question, of the questioning form, as a problematization of *justice*. The possibility of the question, a call or duty that may no longer even be a question, is justice. To delve into the finitude of philosophy, overtaken by the question of the question, means to question or to presuppose the possibility of the question. Deconstruction already distinguishes itself from philosophy by its questioning of this presupposition as the responsible engagement of the possibility of the question and its undecideability. Thus Derrida can say "la déconstruction est la justice"<sup>132</sup> as a question of doing justice to the undecideable condition of thought, as the condition of possibility for conceiving the ethical-political relation to alterity and as the basis for its critical strategy.

Once it is recognized that deconstruction is what happens when the very criteria of rationality, of the decision, or of logic are turned back upon themselves (as the principle of reason itself 'behoves us to do'), then it also becomes clear that 'post'-modern philosophy might be best understood as a radicalization of reason as self-critique. To undertake a radical self-critique of reason is to demonstrate that the full and sufficient rendering of reason is logically impossible, because one can turn the

<sup>131</sup> J. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 16.

<sup>132</sup> J. Derrida, *Force de loi*, p. 944.

principle governing the decision back onto itself, and so can open up the decision to its own constitutive undecidability. And, most importantly, the outcome of this move is the recognition that a moment of idealization, a metaphysical promise of a completeness to come, if you will, is an inescapable dimension of the insistence that one can act, or be, responsible. Something, in short, must be unjustifiably posited as coming, not withstanding its (im)possibility, in order for ethical or political responsibility to get off the ground. Insofar as deconstructive reading serves to illuminate such potential moments of ideology within critical theories themselves, deconstruction does qualify as a kind of critique of critique – but surely it is not one that could typically be called rational *or* irrational, responsible *or* irresponsible, *per se*.<sup>133</sup>

Nancy considers *Violence et métaphysique* as essentially the question of “*ethicity*” that corresponds to a “non-ethical imperative, the non-discursive obligation or ‘*il faut*’, that sets deconstruction under way.”<sup>134</sup> Nancy shows that the Kantian categorical imperative is, rather than the autonomous reason of moral consciousness, what determines man; “where freedom is understood as a *subjection* or placing of the human *under* moral laws, the imperative inscribes itself as something received and divides the self from within.”<sup>135</sup> Such a realization means that difference and a certain undecideability already marks the constitution of identity and responsibility. Nancy “insists on this alterity and spacing within the ‘self’ that receives the call, an otherness and heteronomy that is proper to the self before its even being a self.”<sup>136</sup> The complication of the subject conditions an apocalyptic tone and distress of the end of philosophy where the “finitude and originary alterity” of the imperative “allows for an understanding of *Dasein* not as a being whose primary mode of being is that of *questioning*..., but rather as a being who is *called*, ordered to-be-there.”<sup>137</sup>

<sup>133</sup> S. Gaon, *Judging justice*, p. 107.

<sup>134</sup> M. Calarco, “Reading Derrida’s own conscience: From the question to the call”, p. 289.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289-290.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

For Calarco this is the motif of a 'Come' (*Viens*) in deconstruction "as an-other response to the call that reaches philosophy at its end."<sup>138</sup> "The moral law is *received as a command*, arising from a site beyond knowledge" where "our inability to grasp or comprehend the dictates of practical reason through the means of theoretical reason does nothing to prevent these commands from being received as binding, as obligations."<sup>139</sup> There is a double bind between the philosophical obligation for reason and rigour confronted with its inheritance as command and imperative that already determines us. In the context of the apocalyptic question of the ends of man, the *a priori* transcendental condition of the question complicates the possibility of any transcendental command as such.

The quasi-transcendental addresses the absence of the transcendental in its general system as the absence of an ultimate signification as a means of resolving the undecideability of the system by posing the rule of law and reason. This irresolvable, differential dynamic as the possibility of the question and the opening of a paradoxical responsibility in thought displaces the question as Derrida asks further into the paradox of this possibility and quasi-transcendental.

This interest in this paradox is criticized because it seems to eliminate the possibility of posing any responsibility or to decide as such. This misses the critical and philosophical concerns of deconstruction and what for Derrida is a situation that philosophy must compose with because it is produced in the possibility of the

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

question itself. How to decide, how to act? There is no simple program or determination of law or reason as such to allow deconstruction or philosophy to establish a total theoretical or practical system. And yet there is decision, has been decision. It is precisely the difficulty of such a philosophical system or foundation that really creates the opportunity for responsibility in the exercise of our critical faculties in rendering justice and understanding that the effect of the general system, the undecidable, also necessitates a certain initiality in each and every ethical, political or philosophical act and decision which means that all decisions and articulations, already over-determined in their quasi-transcendental and historical heritage, also require the conditional and mediated performativity of decision and reflection. It also means that there is an unpredictable effect in this process of the undecidable that must be managed.

The force of law, like the auto-immune indemnification of philosophical institutions, describes the differential structure of justification, institution and law. This force of law situates the problematic relation of theory and praxis precisely by showing that such rules are conditioned by the general system and that authority and its institutions are performative, providing justification only after its own institution or founding.<sup>140</sup> The conservation of this force means that this performative founding must be sustained, repeated. The economy of the same is such a process that elides the performative nature of its institution to establish its constative and unitary meaning

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<sup>140</sup> This is an essential argument from Derrida's *Force de loi*, where he describes the mystical authority of law. It concerns the foundation of law: "ce paradoxe... le fondement de la loi – la loi de la loi, l'institution, l'origine de la constitution – est un événement « performatif » qui ne peut appartenir à l'ensemble qu'il fonde, inaugure ou justifie. Tel événement est injustifiable dans la logique de ce qu'il aura ouvert. Il est la décision de l'autre dans la l'indécidable. ... « fondement mystique de l'autorité »." J. Derrida, *Foi et savoir*, p. 32.

and rule. The subject, the law, is supposed to have constative, stable identity, but is produced in the repetition of its performative institution. In this vein, Derrida insists that our conditional evaluations should look at the margins of our philosophical systems to understand how difference, the other, is being situated, itself the means for elaborating our philosophical elaborations.



## Part 5. Of Spirit: Upstaging the Question

*De l'esprit* assumes to show how *Geist* (spirit) is essential and pivotal to Martin Heidegger's discourse. What is at stake in Derrida's discussion of spirit "la vérité de la vérité pour Heidegger" which "appartient à l'au-delà et à la possibilité de toute question, à l'inquestionnable même de toute question."<sup>141</sup>

The ground of this *beyond* had already been prepared in *Violence et métaphysique* in the community of the question. *De l'esprit* proposes that what guarantees the question (as a derivative experience) is the penultimate Yes and always already double affirmation. This assertion on the part of Derrida announces also a 'turning' or change in his own work – perhaps, even, the possibility of realizing thought beyond philosophy. The fragile community of the question (as the second philosophical spacing) is decomposed around the possibility of the question. As we shall see, this displacement of the question provides for the opportunity of deconstruction as a strategy of thought opened to the call of or in the affirmation of the other.

The philosophical condition of the question and its status are put into question in *De l'esprit*. "J'aurais alors voulu comprendre jusqu'à quel point ce privilège du questionnement restait lui-même à l'abri."<sup>142</sup> Derrida will attempt to dislodge this protection and philosophical privileging. To do so he must look into the possibility of the question. And this he finds in Heidegger's treatment of *Geist*. "Or j'essaierai de

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<sup>141</sup> J. Derrida, *De l'esprit*, p. 24. The truth of the truth, as the beyond and possibility of the question, will be taken up as the *quid juris* question in *Du droit à la philosophie*.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

montrer, *Geist* est peut-être le nom que Heidegger donne, au-delà de toute autre nom, à cette possibilité inquestionnée de la question.”<sup>143</sup>

While Heidegger may never have thematized *spirit*, Derrida seems to find that this ‘avoidance’ reveals the wellspring of deconstruction as well as that of the question. “Plus qu’une valeur, l’esprit semble désigner, au-delà d’une déconstruction, la ressource même de toute déconstruction et la possibilité de toute évaluation.”<sup>144</sup>

Early on in *Being and Time*, Heidegger proscribed the use and thought of *Geist*. It was a category to be avoided in the existential analytic of *Dasein*. As long as it could be linked within a deconstructible series of subjectal concepts, spirit must be avoided. However, Heidegger returns to spirit (particularly interesting is his reappropriation of ‘spirit’ in the 1930’s). This return or feigned avoidance is legitimated by the pretence of a liberation of the sense of “*Geist*”. This critical liberation must distinguish the sense of spirit and remove spirit from the onto-theological determinations of “la vie” and “la structure intentionnelle” through a deconstruction (*Destruktion*) of spirit.<sup>145</sup>

This *Destruktion* is “properly” carried out in the opening of the question, in the “ouverture à la question de l’être.”<sup>146</sup> While first recognizing the importance of the question within this *Destruktion*, Derrida will go on to argue that the question is itself consumed in the spirit of deconstruction. The privilege and the status of the question

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25-26.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42. Derrida, I think, repeats this pretension in his use of ‘religious’ metaphors and structures as he develops his own piety of thought.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

can be challenged through the analysis of Heidegger's spirit and the originality of the affirmation that the assumption of the question obscures.

The fundamental assumption of philosophy (as exemplified by phenomenology) involves the originality and formality of the question. If we (*Dasein*, initially) only know ourselves in the question (*Fragen*), the problem lies in the sense of this departure for an analytic; in other words, there is a problematic circularity to the 'being-able-to-question'. "Le point de départ dans l'analytique existentielle se légitime d'abord et seulement depuis la possibilité, la structure et les modifications réglées du *Fragen*."<sup>147</sup>

The analytic takes as its starting point "*l'expérience de la question*, la possibilité du *Fragen*."<sup>148</sup> The possibility of questioning, which is revealed in the irreducible experience of questioning rather than in a particular question or tradition of questioning, guarantees the possibility of enquiry, analysis, and thought.

The condition for (self)-knowledge and phenomenality in general remains not this or that question, but the experience and possibility of questioning. For Heidegger it is the opening to the question of Being that determines us as the experience and possibility of questioning. Yet while Heidegger seems to retain the mission and spirit of questioning, Derrida argues that there is an 'unquestionable' possibility of and beyond the question. This unquestionable resource 'before' the question displaces the privileged and protected status and foundation granted to it by Heidegger. The originality of an affirmation in language is the condition of possibility of the question. The play and antagonism of 'yes' and 'no' which found the 'vacillation' of the question

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

and response are derivative of an affirmative difference. 'Yes' is the general possibility and economy of finitude, being, and deconstruction. (One may, however, also question the privilege and protection granted by Derrida to the originality of a double affirmation withdrawn from the contamination of the question.)

[Nous] devons reconnaître un passage entre cette *affirmation* et une certaine pensée du consentement, de l'engagement en forme de réponse, d'acquiescement responsable, d'accord ou de confiance (*Zusage*), une sorte de parole donnée en retour. Avant toute question et pour rendre possible la question.<sup>149</sup>

In *De l'esprit*, Derrida differentiates himself from Heidegger in their relation to the question by effecting a deconstruction of the question and by describing the trajectory of a thought that reaches beyond the question in the affirmation and ashes of spirit (and spirit not only inherited from Heidegger). Indeed, if what is at stake is the 'correct point of departure', rather than the question, it is spirit as other origin. Spirit, then, is the value with which Derrida will upstage both Heidegger's and philosophy's foundation: the question or rather the possibility of the question.

Mais il [Heidegger] n'a *presque* jamais cessé, me semble-t-il, d'identifier le plus haut et le meilleur de la pensée avec la question, avec la décision, l'appel ou la garde de la question, cette « piété » de la pensée. Cette décision, cet appel ou cette garde, est-ce déjà la question? Est-ce encore la question?<sup>150</sup>

The change in Derrida's point of view is through and through a question of language. The mitigation of the other conditions the question through language. The irreducible structure and significance of language condition Derrida's entire analysis. There must be a call from the other, the affirmation of other, and return, before the question can

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55-56.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24-25.

appear as such. Decision is decisive here. In *Violence et métaphysique*, the community of the question was founded in decision. Decision marks the paradoxical space of the response as well as the call in terms of the position of thought to that which makes it possible. Already there is an affirmation, decision, or call to which the community of the question tries to correspond. Already we have seen how responsibility has been (de)constructed for this community and simultaneously must be assumed (as yet to come). This shift in tone or terms marks the development of Derrida's articulation of the quasi-transcendental condition of thought. Decision names the quasi-transcendental possibility of possibility and the decision by the community of thought to pursue this possibility. The quasi-transcendental decision is posed; the question has begun, without assurance. Heidegger already indicated this in the question of the question in *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?*<sup>151</sup>. For him, the question of the question, the experience of questioning, had to be reflected in terms of nothingness (*le rien*) that determines from afar (in the question of why there is something rather than nothing?) the very possibility of thought and its *ex-appropriation*, previous to negation as the possibility of negation and determination. The decision that the originality of the question poses is posed against nothing(ness). It is this affirmation that is at the root of the possibility of the question, a threatened uncertain condition of possibility.

To reveal the dynamics of Heidegger's *Destruktion* of spirit, Derrida links the question of the question to the question of technology and to Heidegger's discourses on animality and epochality. Their problematic interrelation may best be interwoven in the 'liberation' of spirit. This liberation or deconstruction proposes to reveal what is

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<sup>151</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique*, ed. Michel Haar, *Les Cahiers de l'Herne : Martin Heidegger*, Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 1983, pp. 47-58.

'yet to come' in the 'unthought' (*impensé*) of Heidegger's contributions. The status of the question in Heidegger's discourse points to an original difference that is also a condition of the contamination of the analytic categories he deploys in his questions of technology, animality, and epochality.<sup>152</sup> Derrida is interested in the knotting of these four conceptual matrices within phenomenology and how their deconstruction around the value of spirit displaces the basis of phenomenology and the history of philosophy: the originality of the experience of the question. The *question* that is delimited in *De l'esprit* is the privileged originality of the question:

[La] question de la question, au privilège apparemment absolu et longtemps non questionné du *Fragen*, de la forme, de l'essence et de la dignité essentiellement questionnante, en dernière instance, de la pensée ou du chemin de pensée.<sup>153</sup>

The path of thought would be determined within the experience of the question. The question would be an originary condition of phenomenality and would give form to the possibility of thought and discourse because we are first and only determined from the opening of the question (of Being). The fundamental necessity and coherence of this questioning condition are problematised by Heidegger's concept of time. "[Le] temps forme l'horizon transcendantal de l'analytique existentielle, de la question du sens de l'être et de toute question qui s'y rapporte dans ce contexte."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter II, pp. 21-30.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

When Heidegger analyses the process of temporalization he does so under the figure of spirit.<sup>155</sup> Under this same figure he will also signify an enflamed 'self-affirmation' (*auto-affirmation*) that is previous to the question: before any question and as condition of possibility of the question itself. Derrida tracks the various appearances and significations of spirit in Heidegger's thinking. As he does so he reveals the way in which the question is relieved of its privileged and protected status.

Heidegger's *Rectoral Address* of 1933 renewed the historical meaning of spirit as the flame of self-affirmation. Spirit would call the national spirit of the German nation in a time of self-affirmation of will and force to better bring forth the truth of Being. This very problematic configuration also conditions the question. If the question allows 'us' to know and progress, then the question is itself enchained in a national project. The spirit of self-affirmation determines the question, "comme volonté, volonté de savoir et volonté de l'essence."<sup>156</sup> The passion of spirit re-suscitates the question in light of a sense of self-affirmation and self-presentation. What is at stake is the originality of the question; "ou plus précisément sur l'introduction de la question, sur ce qui introduit, induit et conduit au-dedans de la question."<sup>157</sup>

The originality of the question is tied to the liberty of the question.

Il n'y a de question que dans l'expérience de la question. Les questions ne sont pas des choses, comme l'eau, la pierre, les souliers, les vêtements ou les livres. Le *Hineinführen* dans la question ne conduit pas, – n'induit pas

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<sup>155</sup> "L'esprit est essentiellement temporalisation." It covers a *différance*: "cet esprit qui n'est autre que le temps. Il revient en somme au temps, au mouvement de la temporalisation, il se laisse affecter en lui-même." *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

*quelque chose*, il guide, il conduit vers l'expérience, l'éveil ou la production de la question. Mais comme rien ne doit dicter la question, ni la précéder dans sa *liberté*, le *Führen* est déjà questionnant. Il prévient, il est un prévenir déjà questionnant de la question (*ein fragendes Vorgehen*), un pré-questionnement, *ein Vor-fragen*. Si rien ne précède ainsi la question dans sa liberté, ni même l'introduction au questionnement, alors l'esprit de la conduction spirituelle (*geistige Führung*) ... se laisse interpréter, de part en part, comme possibilité du questionnement. Il répond et correspond à cette possibilité. À moins que celle-ci déjà ne lui réponde ou corresponde, dans les liens et obligations, voire les alliances d'une telle correspondance, comme dans l'exercice de cette co-responsabilité. Ce discours sur la liberté de l'esprit.<sup>158</sup>

Notice the reappearance of the double genitive of liberty and the question composed in the community of the question. There responsibility is the knot of this genitive that enjoins thought to "the imperative [that] inscribes itself as something received and divides the self from within."<sup>159</sup> The re-inscription of the relation of questioning and freedom in spirit, in the call also means that the call cannot be thought as such: the affirmation itself is differentiated even if this difference is not that of yes and no.

The possibility of questioning is revived in the induction and self-affirmation of spirit which resolves the problematic circularity of the question.

Dès lors que rien ne la précède, la duction spirituelle reste elle-même inconduite, elle rompt ainsi le cercle de la réflexion vide qui menaçait la question de l'être dans sa forme fondamentale : « Pourquoi y a-t-il de l'étant et non pas rien? » ... La machine réflexive risquait de la faire tourner à l'infini dans la question de la question : pourquoi le pourquoi?<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69-70.

<sup>159</sup> M. Calarco, "Reading Derrida's own conscience: From the question to the call", p. 289. I lift this phrase out its particularly Kantian context.

<sup>160</sup> J. Derrida, *De l'esprit*, p. 70.



The circularity of the problem of the origination and genesis of philosophy is ‘arrested’ or relieved in the supplement, not simply of the difference and phenomenon of the question, but in the spirit of the question, in the leap into question that characterizes the phenomenality of Being (whether *Dasein* or not).

Heidegger parle plutôt d’un saut (*Sprung*) de la question. Le saut fait surgir, il libère le surgissement originaire (*Ursprung*) sans qu’on ait à introduire à la question depuis autre chose qu’une conduction *déjà* questionnante : *et c’est l’esprit même*. Celui-ci éveille, il s’éveille plutôt – plutôt – depuis le *Vor-fragen* de la *Führung*. Rien ne prévient cette puissance d’éveil, dans sa liberté et sa résolution (*Entschlossenheit*). Ce qui vient *avant* et *devant*, ce qui prévient et questionne avant tout (*vor*), c’est l’esprit, la liberté de l’esprit.<sup>161</sup>

The deconstruction of spirit dislocates the transcendental formality of the question. The originality of the question is dependent on the temporalization of language and the structure of a promise. A certain form of affirmation in language precedes the engagement of the question without having the role of a stabilizing or regulative idea.

What is at stake is to think a structure of affirmation and promise that would permit the possibility of the question, “qui, ouvrant toute parole, rend possible la question même et donc la précède sans lui appartenir : la dissymétrie d’une affirmation, d’un *oui* avant toute opposition du *oui* et du *non*.”<sup>162</sup> There is, before the question, before phenomenological engagement, the originary affirmation of language.

L’appel de l’être, toute question y répond déjà, la promesse a déjà eu lieu partout où vient le langage. Celui-ci toujours, *avant toute question*, et dans

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147. I am also interested in the dissymmetry of this yes (an affirmation before opposition) and wonder if this *différance* should not also be thought as the difference *du rien du tout*?

la question même, revient à de la promesse. Ce serait aussi une promesse  
*de l'esprit.*<sup>163</sup>

This promise is a possibility and not assured or fulfilled as such. The structure of the promise of spirit founds the possibility of the question, is presupposed by the question. The quasi-transcendental necessity of language, the fact of language, displaces the originality of the question. To stay with the example of the existential analytic, *Dasein* first comes to know itself in the opening of the question. However, because there is no thought of Being without language<sup>164</sup>, the question is itself predicated on the promise of language, on the call of Being. It would seem that the question is awakened, induced, by the call of Being. The question could only make sense on the basis of responding to a call of Being: this is the spirit of language that animates the question in and for *Dasein*.

Language provides the condition of (im)possibility of the question in *De l'esprit*. As Derrida follows the itinerary of spirit in Heidegger, he deconstructs the question in the shadow of its memory, the pure memory of the pure question.

[La question de la question] vacille à cet instant où elle n'est plus une question. Non qu'elle se soustraie à la légitimité infinie du questionnement mais elle verse dans la mémoire d'un langage, d'une expérience du langage plus « vieille » qu'elle, toujours antérieure et présupposée, assez vieille pour n'avoir jamais été présente dans une « expérience » ou un « acte de langage » – au sens courant de ces mots.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> “Et on ne pense pas hors d'une langue.” *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

The question is not abandoned. However, it is coordinated with a previous and necessary condition, that of language, which cannot be sublimated in the self-presence of philosophy.

Schématisons. Au moment où nous posons l'ultime question, c'est-à-dire quand nous interrogeons (*Anfragen*) la possibilité de toute question, à savoir la parole, il faut bien que nous soyons *déjà* dans l'élément de la parole. Il faut que la parole parle déjà pour nous... Celle-ci est *déjà*, d'avance (*im voraus*) au moment où toute question peut surgir à son sujet. Par quoi elle excède la question.<sup>166</sup>

Language exceeds. The supplement of language is the supplement of the writing of the question. Before the question, then, there is the originality of the yes and the structure of a promise. There are two fundamental changes that take place in *De l'esprit*, developments that will engage the responsibility of Derrida. First, the question of language leads to the deconstruction of the originality and formality of the apprehending form of the question. Second, imitating Heidegger, the apprehension of the question must be first of all a 'piety of thought'. The question is a passive condition before it can take place. This passivity is at the heart of its language and the promissory structure that enables questioning as such.

The always already necessity of language marks the deconstruction of the originality of the question. The question will always already be solicited within language. The promissory structure is Heidegger's *Zusage* which characterizes a "promesse, cette réponse qui se produit *a priori* en forme d'acquiescement, cet engagement de la parole envers la parole et à la parole..."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147-148.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

The priority of language is predicated on the need for articulation of thought in language, of a system of writing. Simply put, for there to be questioning, there must already be language. Therein is the 'passivity' and piety of thought, as the structure of writing, which means that questioning is already ex-appropriated in language, through language.

Whatever relation to the question a discourse may have, it is predicated on the excedence of language. This engagement has the structure of a promise and acquiescence.

Cette avance est, avant tout contrat, une sorte de promesse ou d'alliance originaire à laquelle nous devons avoir en quelque sorte déjà acquiescé, déjà dit *oui*, donné un gage, quelles que soient la négativité ou la problématicité du discours qui peut s'ensuivre.<sup>168</sup>

We must already be in the written element of language. It is this that permits the important changes in Derrida's appreciation of the question and the deconstruction of philosophy.

The quest of the question – the force of the analytic – gives way to the originality of its calling. Whereas the idiom of the question was initially that of authority<sup>169</sup> and foundation as the very possibility of coming to the meaning of Being, a passivity and piety now marks this idiom.

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<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> "... *devant la loi* inflexible du questionnement le plus radical..." *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Après avoir rappelé que, dans l'histoire de notre pensée, le questionnement aura été le trait (*Zug*) qui donne sa mesure à la pensée parce que celle-ci fut d'abord fondatrice, toujours en quête du fondamental et du radical, Heidegger revient sur l'un de ses énoncés antérieurs. Non pour le mettre en question, justement, encore moins pour le contredire, mais pour le réinscrire dans un mouvement qui le déborde : « À la fin d'une conférence intitulée *La question de la technique*, il fut dit il y a quelque temps : 'Car le questionnement (*das Fragen*) est la piété (*Frömmigkeit*) de la pensée' ». Pieux (*fromm*) est ici entendu dans le sens ancien de « docile » (*fügsam*), à savoir docile à ce que la pensée a à penser.<sup>170</sup>

This change of tone or stance is read back into Heidegger's thought. The listening-to-the-call-of-Being that now marks the *Zusage* would not only require a re-reading of phenomenology, but locates it deconstruction.

[La] pensée d'une affirmation antérieure à toute question et plus propre à la pensée que toute question doit avoir une incidence illimitée – non localisable, sans circonscription possible – sur la *quasi*-totalité de son chemin de pensée antérieur.<sup>171</sup>

The significance of the call of the call on thinking is that the thought of the question will require more than just a revision of its meaning and status after the total repetition of philosophy proposed in *Violence et métaphysique*. In fact, Derrida recognizes a new order of thinking produced in the deconstruction of the question oriented on the promissory operation of language. There is not simply a new 'analytic' whose point of departure is the anticipatory engagement of language.

Ce bouleversement rétrospectif peut paraître dicter un nouvel *ordre*. On dirait par exemple : maintenant il faut tout recommencer en prenant pour point de départ de l'en-gage de la *Zusage* afin de construire un tout autre discours, ouvrir un tout autre chemin de pensée, ... qui dormait encore dans le privilège de la question.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* Although it is not absolutely clear that Heidegger was not tracing this problem in his later work.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

The dislocation caused by the emphasis of the *Zusage*, and in Derrida the always already engagement of the promissory condition of language, should not be recuperated in the ‘continuation’ of a *path* of thought. Rather, the radicality of this deconstruction of the question needs to be affirmed in the way it opens itself to the play of the other and in the dignity and duty of language’s responsibility posed as the double bind of decision.

Heidegger recognizes a condition of responsibility that is the response and the field of the question. His elaboration of its history and originality – leads precisely to the unthought of this originality: to the doubly spiritual conduction that opens the possibility of the question and thought beyond the question to the impossible responsibility and passivity of this conduction. Out of Heidegger’s ‘piety’, which is still caught in a piety or imperative of the question or questioning,<sup>173</sup> Derrida will engage the passive and impossible responsibility of a promissory structure of language and difference.

If the unquestioned configuration of *Geist* is “la force elle-même en sa manifestation la plus extra-ordinaire” and “semble se soustraire à toute destruction ou déconstruction, comme s’il n’appartenait pas à une histoire de l’ontologie – et ce sera bien lui le

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147. I leave open the question of how far apart Heidegger and Derrida really are on the question of the call. Jacques Derrida suggests in *Politique de l’amitié*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994, at p. 378 that the difference is how Heidegger still maintains the coherence of the “rassemblement qui précisément concentre et configure”. Cf. on this point V. Houillon, *L’adresse de la question. L’improbable débat Gadamer-Derrida*, p. 120-122.

problème”<sup>174</sup>, it is thought in terms of a the *graphic of iterability*, the writing of *différance*, or the (*im*)puissance of the institution. These experiences, which are formulated more explicitly in *Du droit à la philosophie*, are indicated in the force of spirit.

The force of spirit is thought by Heidegger in the themes of destitution (*Entmachtung*) and the “assombrissement du monde” which “destitue l’esprit en le privant de son pouvoir ou de sa force (*Macht*).”<sup>175</sup> The double bind of the force of spirit, force as spirit, is replicated in the problem of philosophy’s institution.

The destitution of spirit in Heidegger (which is not a discourse on crisis, but on the opening to the call of Being) means “l’esprit *c’est* une force et *ce n’est pas* une force, il a et il n’a pas de pouvoir.” Force and spirit are not quite the same.

S’il [esprit] était la force elle-même, il ne la perdrait pas, il n’y aurait pas d’*Entmachtung*. Mais s’il ne l’était pas, cette force ou ce pouvoir, l’*Entmachtung* ne l’affecterait pas essentiellement, elle ne serait pas *de l’esprit*. On ne peut donc dire ni l’un ni l’autre, on doit dire l’un et l’autre, ce qui dédouble chacun des concepts : le monde, la force, l’esprit. La structure de chacun de ces concepts est marquée par le rapport à son double : un rapport de hantise. D’une hantise qui ne se laisse ni analyser, ni décomposer, ni dissoudre dans la simplicité d’une perception. Et c’est parce qu’il y a du double que l’*Entmachtung* est possible. Seulement possible puisqu’un fantôme n’existe pas et ne se donne à aucune perception. Mais cette possibilité suffit pour que la destitution de l’esprit en devienne *a priori* fatale. Quand on dit de l’esprit ou du monde spirituel qu’il a et n’a pas de force – d’où la hantise et le double – s’agit-il là seulement d’énoncées contradictoires?<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> J. Derrida, *De l’esprit*, p. 18.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99-101.

This doubling or *spectrality* (developed in *Spectre de Marx*) is *a priori* fundamental, and establishes no simple exteriority because pure self-identity becomes impossible as such.

Heidegger le dit, la destitution est un mouvement *propre* à l'esprit, il procède de son dedans. Mais il faut bien que ce dedans enveloppe aussi la duplicité spectrale, un dehors immanent ou une extériorité intestine, une sorte de malin génie qui s'introduit dans le monologue de l'esprit pour le hanter. Il le ventriloque et le voue ainsi à une sorte de désidentification auto-persécutrice.<sup>177</sup>

Self-identity (spiritual or otherwise) is only possible in an active process of institution and identity; it is always performed and never simply constative. Destitution is a self-destitution, a form of *resignation* and implies *différance* in the very idea of spirit. "La destitution de l'esprit est ainsi une destitution *de soi*, une démission. Mais il faut bien qu'un autre de l'esprit, lui-même pourtant, il l'affecte et le divise."<sup>178</sup> This resignation of spirit into modes of reasoning, technique, instrument or culture contradicts the 'unifying' power of spirit – "car le *propre* de l'esprit est justement d'unir" – even and with the un-unifying force within spirit. The unification in spirit is essential to the definition of spirit: "une puissance spirituelle qui originairement unit et engage, assigne, oblige."<sup>179</sup> It *institutes*.

The unifying condition of spirit in its riven or differentiated force founds history and the future, and must thus begin to include a concept of the incalculable and the unforeseeable: "Que l'esprit fonde l'histoire et que l'envoi reste pour l'homme un avenir, le venir d'un avenir ou l'à-venir d'un venir." This *spectrality* and return involve a

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.



specific sense of historicity, a thought of “la revenance à partir d’une pensée toujours à venir du venir. La revenance même reste à venir depuis la pensée en elle du venant, du venant en son venir même.”<sup>180</sup> It indicates “une pensée non pas du cercle mais du retour ... vers le chez soi.”<sup>181</sup> Spirit returns to itself in its propriety as its only proper or possible condition. “Il appartient à l’essence de l’esprit qu’il ne soit proprement (*eigentlich*) que s’il est auprès de lui-même.”<sup>182</sup> Spirit can and does from the start depart from itself. There is an inherent “nostalgia” retained by Heidegger in spirit, essential to the essence of spirit.

Without following the entire poetic development of this haunted and riven essence of spirit, a “dé-propriation originaire”, the development of this thought of spirit is retained as a sense of *ex-appropriation* essential to deconstruction. “Dès lors, au commencement de cette expropriation-réappropriation, dans cette *ex-appropriation*, l’esprit n’est jamais chez lui.”<sup>183</sup> The originarity of spirit is thought as *différance* in this coming and going, coming as return, return as original (be)coming, “l’allée-venue révolutionnaire de cela même qui va” is a “supplément d’originarité” which “précède et excède le questionnement même.”<sup>184</sup>

These first tentative and poetic steps in Heidegger’s attempt to think the *différance* of spirit provide the language of haunting and return (*revenance*), where “le « plus tard » avant le « plus tôt »” represents “une pensée plus originaire du temps” and an “archi-

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140-141.

origine” in which the “fin semble précéder le commencement” which itself has already sublated or overtaken the end.<sup>185</sup>

These poetic resonances (for they are developed in the relation of Heidegger and poet) engage the *differential* movement of time thought by Derrida. The originality of spirit is this *différance* and describes the origination of the possibility of the question supported by this *original passivity*.

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143-144.

## Part 6. Original Passivity and the (Auto-) Deconstruction of Philosophy

What is this original passivity, this impossible and other origin that permits all possibility in general? Evoked in *Violence et métaphysique*, the double affirmation or the impossible is traced by Derrida in all his work. The deconstruction of philosophy moves beyond the possibility of a *community of the question* to a *community of thought*, which will have begun to think the aporetic limits of philosophy and the question in terms of the affirmation that their possibilities suppose.

The displacement of the question forms a system. This system is articulated in the promise of another thinking beyond philosophy, beyond any pre-supposition of the question as such:

[L]a pensée, la pratique, l'expérience d'un « droit à la philosophie » sans recours présuppositionnel ni à une essence donnée de la philosophie (réponse à la question « qu'est-ce que la philosophie? ») ni même à la possibilité prétendument originaire de la question « qu'est-ce que la philosophie? ».<sup>186</sup>

There remains the conceptual exercise of a total repetition of philosophy that produces the third relationship to philosophy; representing a community of thought that does not presuppose the question or philosophical identity, this exercise holds to the affirmation held within the possibility of the question and attempts to affirm the other in philosophical thought.

La question (et avec elle toutes les formes de la négation, de la recherché, de la critique) enveloppe en elle une affirmation, au moins le « oui », l'affirmation sans autre contenu que l'autre, précisément, auquel une

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<sup>186</sup> J. Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, p. 28.

trace est adressée, fût-ce dans la nuit. La pensée de ce « oui » *avant* la philosophie, *avant* même la question, *avant* la recherche et la critique, ne signifie aucun renoncement à la philosophie, à ce qui peut la suivre ou s'ensuivre.<sup>187</sup>

This other thinking already invoked in *Violence et métaphysique* corresponds with the question first as an affirmation of the affirmation, as a response to the responsibilities of the meaning of question and the other.

[Cette pensée peut engager le oui] dès lors que, sous la forme de devoir ou de la dette, elle se trouve déjà *engagée*, inscrite dans l'espace ouvert et fermé par ce *gage* – à l'autre donné, de l'autre reçu. Mais elle trace une forme de limite étrange entre toutes les déterminations du philosophique et une pensée déconstructrice qui est engagée *par* la philosophie sans lui appartenir, fidèle à une affirmation dont la responsabilité la place *devant* la philosophie mais aussi toujours *avant* elle, donc en deçà ou au-delà d'elle, des figures identifiables de l'identité philosophique, de la question philosophique au sujet de la philosophie, voire de la forme-question de la pensée. C'est dans cette troisième possibilité qu'est engagée la déconstruction, telle qu'elle paraît requise ou plutôt telle qu'elle paraît requérir la pensée. ... marquer [sous le titre de la déconstruction] en quoi celle-ci fait obligation de *penser* autrement les institutions philosophiques et l'expérience du droit à la philosophie.<sup>188</sup>

Derrida again operates a distinction between thought and philosophy where deconstruction thinks the meaning of philosophy in other ways with other locutions;<sup>189</sup> an 'impossible project' based on the meaning of the pre-legitimizing process and problem of the institutional presupposition exemplified by philosophy. That the institution is already inscribed in a network of legitimacy or in a process of legitimation reflects the necessary condition of the correspondence of the question of the question.

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.

Original passivity is conditioned by the time of spirit in Heidegger, where “c’est depuis une pensée plus originaire du temps qu’on s’ouvrira à une pensée plus appropriée de l’esprit.”<sup>190</sup> The effort is tied to questions of origin and opening as that which makes possible and yet is not enclosed in the structure it conditions, escaping the logic of non-contradiction obtained in metaphysics. The more originary essence of time for Heidegger must think how the end seems to precede the beginning. This originary resonates with a structure of promising of thought. “Cette promesse ne pose rien, elle ne pro-met pas, elle ne met pas en avant, elle parle.”<sup>191</sup> It says nothing, but speaks or decides the quasi-transcendental possibility of speech in its undecideability.

The paradoxical originary of time and language is thought as a *différential* of play or game of the same and other. Derrida follows Paul de Man in this play of speech, where the “jeu travaille dans la langue même.” This game is a promissory structure of language and time.

[La] langue ou la parole promet, *se* promet mais aussi elle se dédit, elle se défait ou se détraque, elle déraile ou délire, se détériore, se corrompt tout aussitôt et tout aussi essentiellement. Elle ne peut pas ne pas promettre dès qu’elle parle, elle est promesse, mais elle ne peut pas ne pas y marquer – et cela tient à la structure de la promesse, comme à l’événement qu’elle institue néanmoins.<sup>192</sup>

This promise of language, of event, of time is *before* the question and is also the condition of a faith in the passive possibility of the question. There is no ultimate signification or meaning in this promise. In fact, the promissory is a condition of possibility submitted to destinal errance:

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<sup>190</sup> J. Derrida, *De l’esprit*, p. 144.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

such messages may or may not arrive at their destination (the possibility of 'destinerrance') is the 'apocalyptic' ... structural condition of *all* writing. *All writing is apocalyptic*, in so far as the full presence of the sender and the assured destination of the receiver are no longer guaranteed.<sup>193</sup>

The double and *unheimliche* logic of critical reason is founded between its underlying act of faith (the performative of the promise) and its acts of self-repression or destruction. Reason assumes an act of faith, its own assuredness and possibility; "c'est-à-dire d'un performatif de promesse à l'œuvre jusque dans le mensonge ou le parjure et sans lequel aucune adresse à l'autre ne serait possible." Without this act of faith – *engagement* – the whole of communication and relation is impossible.

Sans l'expérience performative de cet acte de foi élémentaire, il n'y aurait ni «dien social», ni adresse à l'autre, ni aucune performativité en général : ni convention, ni institution, [...], ni loi, ni surtout, ici, cette performativité structurelle de la performance productive qui lie d'entrée de jeu le savoir de la communauté scientifique au faire, et la science à la technique.<sup>194</sup>

This is Derrida's essential argument. There is a fiduciary structure and necessity that determines the same and the possibility of reason, giving reasons, and justifying them. Since experience is dependent on the other or difference, it is produced in the difference of the general system. This was phenomenology's contribution: to formulate the means for describing relation, difference and the constitution of determinate differences. Reason and experience are already called by the other, before the other. Whether called faith, promise, the impossible or testimonial signature, there is an original passivity, an original double affirmation that conditions the possible, makes the possible possible and remains an effaced contaminating trace within it to

<sup>193</sup> M. Calarco, "Reading Derrida's own conscience: From the question to the call", p. 297.

<sup>194</sup> J. Derrida, *Foi et savoir*, p. 68.

which we must respond. What distinguishes this fiduciary structure from the philosophical act of faith is that the structure does not first describe a theory of the subject or totality, but a mechanical and autonomic necessity that conditions any such totality of identification.

The importance of the question of the question, its necessary logical and historical role, is that it forces us to look into the very possibility of the question. In so doing, in repeating the tradition and logos of philosophy, we are then able to trace the unquestionable, the resource of the question, in the contours and effects of the undecidable. More original than the question because it makes the question possible, the unquestionable is revealed, from *De l'esprit* on, to be the very passive possibility of the performative in general, of experience in general.

There is an original impossible affirmation that makes language and experience possible. An original passivity and difference that make experience possible, that produce the possibility and inter-implication of language, of self and other. This *différance* is written as the condition of language and experience. It is already language and its promise and possibility. A yes as promise and possibility that affirms, against nothing(ness), against dissolution even if it also produces it.

Qu'un *oui* soit chaque fois présupposé, non seulement par tout énoncé au sujet du *oui* mais par toute négation et par toute opposition, dialectique ou non, entre le *oui* et le *non*, voilà peut-être ce qui donne d'emblée son *infinité* irréductible et essentielle à l'affirmation.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> J. Derrida, *Nombre de oui*, p. 640.

In posing the possibility of posing conditions of possibility and in tracing within them the intimacy of the impossible, a necessity is recognised, is presupposed. The illimitation of the yes is reflected in a sort of “analytique *quasi* transcendantale ou ontologique du *oui*.”<sup>196</sup> The structure of the analysis can now be more precise. The questions it solicits concern the necessary difference of the yes: already repeating itself, its quasi-transcendental experience prescribes a thought of the same that is conditioned by the undecideable experience of writing before constitution of the same and other:

Un événement ou un avènement du *oui* qui ne serait *ni* juif *ni* chrétien, pas encore ou déjà plus seulement l’un ou l’autre, ce *ni-ni* ne nous renvoyant pas à la structure abstraite de quelque condition de possibilité ontologique ou transcendantale, mais à ce « quasi » que j’insinue depuis tout à l’heure (« quasi transcendantal » ou « quasi ontologique ») et qui accorderait l’événementialité originaire de l’événement au récit fabuleux ou à la fable inscrite dans le *oui* comme origine de toute parole (*fan*)?<sup>197</sup>

Another origin, *oui archi-originaire*, the yes is already effaced, inaudible as language:

Langage sans langage, il appartient sans appartenir à l’ensemble qu’il institue et qu’il ouvre à la fois. Il excède et trouve le langage auquel il reste pourtant immanent : comme son premier habitant, le premier à sortir de chez lui. Il *fait* être et il *laisse* être tout ce qui peut se dire. Mais on voit déjà s’annoncer, ou précisément se confirmer sa double nature intrinsèque. Il est sans être du langage, se confond sans se confondre avec son énonciation dans une langue naturelle. Car s’il est « avant » la langue, il marque l’exigence essentielle, l’engagement, la promesse de venir à la langue, dans une langue déterminée. Tel événement est requis par la force même du *oui*.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 640-641.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 643.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 644.



Thus the yes is double, already. As necessity and command or call, it is also and obtains acquiescence and affirmation itself and in return. The yes is already double affirmation.

En tant qu'il confirme [...] tout langage possible, le « sic » ou l'« amen » qu'il institue vient doubler d'un acquiescement ce *oui* archi-originnaire qui donne son premier souffle à toute énonciation. Le « premier » est déjà, toujours, une confirmation : *oui, oui*, un *oui* qui va de *oui* à *oui* ou qui vient de *oui* à *oui*. Quelque chose de cet acquiescement dit aussi une certaine quiétude cruelle...<sup>199</sup>

There is an affirmation to this affirmation, Yes/Yes, an engagement to the call of the other that precedes the question and response, an original faith and promise that make discourse, and thus conflict, intelligible or possible. It engages the same and other in the promise of language. The 'first' affirmation is the possibility and engagement traced in the affirmation and engagement with the other. This 'first' affirmation is the difference of this 'second' affirmation and *gage*.

In this second sense of affirmation and engagement, the sense of response is equally engaged. Response invokes responsibility: "Point de réponse, en effet, sans principe de responsabilité: il faut répondre à l'autre, devant l'autre et de soi."<sup>200</sup> This sense of responsibility conditions all deconstruction, all claim to truth or understanding, and invokes a faith, "*foi jurée*". The question of the question involves this question and response already conditioned by the structure of a promise and thus responsibility ("*le respect, la responsabilité de la répétition dans la gage de la décision ou de l'affirmation* (re-legere)

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 644-645.

<sup>200</sup> J. Derrida, *Foi et savoir*, p.44.

*qui se lie à elle-même pour se lier à l'autre*<sup>201</sup>). This originary 'fiduciary' link enables that which it threatens. It is an abstraction or transcendental linking which is condition of (im)possibility of all linking, binding, community, or religion. Thus, response is a condition of understanding, is also already conditioned. It also names the promissory or affirmative structure of the possibility of the question as the promise of truth: "alliance et promesse de témoigner en vérité de la vérité, c'est-à-dire de la dire, la vérité."<sup>202</sup> The structure of this promise is typically Derridean in that it is a performative. Within the logic of this promise is a past sense; that is, in the promise to tell the truth, the truth has already been stated because it is promised – it is response. "L'événement à venir a déjà eu lieu. La promesse se promet, elle s'est *déjà* promise, voilà la foi jurée, et donc la réponse."<sup>203</sup> This originary possibility determines a quasi-transcendental operation: *iteration*, "la possibilité de la répétition, qui produit autant qu'elle confirme le même."<sup>204</sup>

Derrida repeats the basic condition of the time and future of language: heritage and repetition in the economy of the same inscribes alterity and poses the experience of the absolutely other as the horizon of expectation that is itself already traced in its affirmation. There is a messianic promise that governs the time of the future as the double affirmation. This messianic condition is thus not a messianism but describes the quasi-transcendental condition of the writing of language.

D'un discours à venir – sur l'à-venir et la répétition. Axiome : nul à-venir sans quelque *itérabilité*, au moins sous la forme de l'alliance à soi et de la

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48-49.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

*confirmation* du *oui* originaire. Nul à-venir sans quelque mémoire et quelque promesse messianique, d'une messianicité plus vieille que toute religion, plus originaire que tout messianisme. Point de discours ou d'adresse à l'autre sans la possibilité d'une promesse élémentaire. ... sans la promesse d'une confirmation du *oui*... impliquera toujours la fiabilité ou la fidélité d'une foi.<sup>205</sup>

A messianic condition (a promise) of the future lies in the automatic spontaneity of engagement. The chance of this iterability supposed by this faith is mechanical and automatic. And it must risk the worst, the mark of nothing(ness), that at its limits would be the impossibility of finally repeating nothing and the end of possibility of possibility. "Et cette chance doit inclure en elle le plus grand risque, la menace même du *mal radical*." The internalisation of this menace makes faith and time more than simple assured operation (fate). Like Poe's purloined letter, which established the necessary possibility of non-circulation, the possibility and chance of nothingness makes time more than simply a program – which would annihilate the future.<sup>206</sup>

The messianic without messianism is another matrix to name this affirmation we are trying to trace. It reappears in the institution of philosophy as the (im)possibility of auto-foundation and legitimation. This auto-immune process inherent to institutionalization makes it possible to talk of an auto-deconstruction of philosophy and the multiplication of the philosophical space claimed by Derrida.

The thought of this autonomic autonomy beyond the present event is an experience of the impossible and the promise of a process within thought. Auto-foundation and

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>206</sup> The figures of the future (here places like the desert or the promised land) need to contain an incalculable element; "*sans dehors dont la carte soit prévisible et le programme calculable. ... une certaine absence d'horizon. ... l'absence conditionne l'avenir même. ... Ce qui reste à laisser venir.*" *Ibid.*, p. 16.

self-legitimation of philosophical knowledge cannot exist as such in the present in the moment of its institution, but rather is supported by a ‘network of powers and legitimating forces and interests’. The idea of absolute auto-foundation is a promise:

La promesse constitue dans certaines conditions un événement « performatif » dont la « probabilité » reste irréductible – et même si la promesse n’est jamais tenue de façon présentement certaine, assurée, démontrable.<sup>207</sup>

The affirmation of this autonomy and self-identity, its promise, is still to come (*à venir*). “Le soi, l’*autos* de l’autofondation légitimante et légitimée *reste à venir*, non pas comme une réalité *future* mais comme ce qui gardera toujours la structure essentielle d’une promesse et ne peut arriver que comme telle, comme *à venir*.”<sup>208</sup>

The effect of this heteronomic self-relation in the philosophical project conditions the status of the right to philosophy. The responsibility at its heart is traced in ‘everything’:

L’histoire, la politique (l’idée de la démocratie), le droit et la morale, la science, la philosophie et la pensée. Il s’agit bien de *savoir*, encore, mais d’abord de savoir comment, *sans renoncer aux normes classiques de l’objectivité et de la responsabilité, sans menacer l’idéal critique de la science et de la philosophie, donc sans renoncer à savoir*, on peut pousser encore cette exigence de responsabilité. Jusqu’où? Sans limite, bien sûr, car la conscience d’une *responsabilité limitée* est une « *bonne conscience* »; mais d’abord jusqu’à interroger ces normes classiques et l’autorité de cet idéal, ce qui revient à exercer son droit à une sorte de « droit de réponse », au moins sous la forme d’une « question en retour » sur ce qui lie la responsabilité à la réponse. Puis jusqu’à se demander ce qui fonde ou plutôt *engage* la valeur d’interrogation critique qu’on ne peut en séparer. Et de savoir penser d’où vient ce savoir – ce qu’on peut et ce qu’on doit en faire.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>207</sup> J. Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, p. 41.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

The aporetic contract and its responsibility represent a double bind (*double contrainte*) of philosophical engagement. The philosophical is submitted to the 'paradoxical law of the double bind': "instable, précaire et déconstructible, il se précède toujours et en appelle à une indestructible responsabilité. Indestructible parce que toujours relancée dans une surenchère inquiète qui le soustrait à tout apaisement et surtout à toute bonne conscience."<sup>210</sup> This responsibility is pivotal to deconstruction and invokes a greater responsibility of the sense of responsibility itself.

La détermination philosophique de cette responsabilité, les concepts de son axiomatique (par exemple la « volonté », la « propriété », le « sujet », l'identité d'un « moi » libre et individuel, la « personne » consciente, la présence à soi de l'intention, etc.), peut toujours être discutée, questionnée, déplacée, critiquée – et plus radicalement déconstruite –, ce sera toujours au nom d'une responsabilité plus exigeante, plus fidèle à la mémoire et à la promesse, toujours au-delà du présent. Au nom de cette responsabilité, on demandera plus encore du « droit à la philosophie », plus encore de droit à la philosophie.<sup>211</sup>

Deconstruction, which was first produced as deconstruction of metaphysical oppositions, concerns itself with the (philosophical) institutions founded on these oppositions. The fundamental impossibility of their rigour is conditioned by the undecideable and historical necessity of the agony of philosophy.

*La déconstruction est une pratique institutionnelle pour laquelle le concept d'institution reste un problème, ... son geste transformateur est autre, autre sa responsabilité, qui consiste à suivre avec la plus grande conséquence possible ce que nous appelions ... graphique de l'itérabilité.*<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35-36.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

This practice of deconstruction explains its responsibility for philosophy (its institution) and yet the exercise of deconstruction at the limits of philosophy. This contradiction is a responsibility that is not simply philosophical.

Quant à la responsabilité à laquelle je me réfère ici, elle n'est plus purement philosophique en effet, ni déterminable à partir de concepts philosophiques de la responsabilité (liberté de sujet, conscience, moi, individu, intention, décision volontaire, etc.) qui sont encore des *conditions* et donc des *limitations* de la responsabilité, parfois des limitations dans la détermination même de l'inconditionnel, de l'impératif et du catégorique.<sup>213</sup>

This responsibility exceeds the philosophical, while still engaged with it, philosophical but yet thinking "les déterminations philosophiques de la responsabilité, de l'impératif ou de l'inconditionnel, c'est-à-dire aussi leurs déterminations socio-institutionnelles."<sup>214</sup>

Beyond philosophy by means of philosophy, the deconstruction of philosophy is a thinking of the subject of philosophy in the solicitation of the question that finds in its possibility the originary liberty and responsibility of language, of the Yes/Yes, that opens thought to the other and to the à-venir of democracy.<sup>215</sup> This other thinking will

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>215</sup> "L'« avenir » ne signifie pas seulement la promesse, mais aussi que la démocratie n'existera jamais, au sens de l'existence présente : non parce qu'elle sera différée mais parce qu'elle restera toujours aporétique dans sa structure (force *sans* force, singularité incalculable *et* égalité calculable, commensurabilité *et* incommensurabilité, hétéronomie *et* autonomie, souveraineté indivisible et divisible ou partageable, nom vide, messianicité désespérée ou désespérante, etc.) Mais aussi au-delà de cette critique active et interminable, l'expression « démocratie à venir » prend en compte l'historicité absolue et intrinsèque du seul système qui accueille en lui-même, dans son concept, cette formule d'auto-immunité qu'on appelle le droit à l'autocritique et à la perfectibilité. La démocratie est le seul système, le seul paradigme constitutionnel dans lequel, en principe, on a ou on prend le droit de tout critiquer publiquement, y compris l'idée de la démocratie, son concept, son histoire et son nom. Y compris l'idée du paradigme constitutionnel et l'autorité absolue du droit. C'est donc le seul qui soit universalisable, et de là viennent sa chance et sa fragilité." J. Derrida, *Voyous*, p. 126-127.

never have given up the question.<sup>216</sup> The ‘practice’ of deconstruction is based on the democratic exigency of the question. Deconstruction is a meta-questioning, which questions the history of the question and its philosophical authority: a meta-questioning as the questioning of foundations (and their logos) in general.

Ce questionnement sur les fondements n’est ni fondamentaliste ni anti-fondamentaliste. Il ne se prive même pas, à l’occasion, de mettre en question ou d’excéder la possibilité ou l’ultime nécessité du questionnement même, de la forme questionnante de la pensée, interrogeant sans confiance ni préjugé l’histoire même de la question et son autorité philosophique.<sup>217</sup>

This authority is at once recognized and ‘confronted’ in deconstruction. “Car il y a une autorité—donc une force légitime de la forme questionnante dont on peut se demander d’où elle tire une si grande force dans notre tradition.”<sup>218</sup>

Deconstruction radicalizes this remembrance and its engagement with the question as a “méta-questionnement”<sup>219</sup>. *Force de loi* explicitly names deconstructive interrogation *meta-questioning*, while recognizing that “[aucun] discours justificateur ne peut ni ne doit assurer le rôle de métalangage”<sup>220</sup>. Meta-questioning or deconstructive interrogation is “de part en part un questionnement sur le droit et sur la justice”<sup>221</sup>. It never abandons

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<sup>216</sup> “[On] garde son droit indéfini à la question, à la critique, à la déconstruction (droits garantis, en principe, par toute démocratie : pas de déconstruction sans démocratie, pas de démocratie sans déconstruction). [...] pour marquer [...] la limite entre le conditionnel (les bordures du contexte et du concept qui enferment la pratique effective de la démocratie et l’alimentent dans le sol et le sang) et l’inconditionnel qui, dès le départ, aura inscrit une force auto-déconstructrice [auto-immunitaire] dans le motif même de la démocratie, la possibilité et le devoir pour la démocratie de se dé-limiter elle-même.” *Ibid.*, p. 130-131.

<sup>217</sup> J. Derrida, *Force de loi*, p. 930.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* The authority and legitimacy of the question are put into question in *Of Spirit*. Force is connected to the possibility of the question as spirit. It conditions the (im)potence of the philosophical institution described in *Du droit à la philosophie*.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 931.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 942.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 931.

or renounces the history of the question or the privilege presupposed by interrogative thinking.<sup>222</sup>

Meta-questioning corresponds to the excedence of the question in philosophy. This meta-questioning plays on the difference of philosophy to solicit its institution and to follow the trace and necessity of its paradoxical auto-presentation. This questioning questions philosophy's own assumption of the question. Meta-questioning pushes the question of the question to its limits and possibility. Thus meta-questioning is the impossible, but called for, attempt to 'disclose' the question – to question its possibility and privilege.

As such, it is the condition of a thought that multiplies its philosophical engagement in the structure of the question of the question deploying a complex conceptual strategy maintaining the riven and undecidable condition of the community of the question through a total repetition of the philosophy of the question towards the possibility of a community of thought in the agony of philosophy. And thus, in *Voyous*, Derrida can go as far as to say that no trace of the death of philosophy can be found in his text.

[La déconstruction] aura toujours été, et toujours reconnu être, dans l'élément même du langage qu'elle met en cause, en se débattant au cœur de débats métaphysiques eux-mêmes aux prises avec des mouvements d'auto-déconstruction. Si bien que je n'ai jamais associé le motif de la déconstruction à ceux qu'on y a souvent évoqués dans la discussion, ceux du « diagnostic », de « l'après » ou du « post », de la « mort » (mort de la philosophie, mort de la métaphysique, etc.) de l'« achèvement », du

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<sup>222</sup> J. Derrida, *Voyous*, p. 207.



« dépassement », [...], de la « fin ». *On ne trouvera trace de ce lexique dans aucun de mes textes.*<sup>223</sup> [My emphasis, KM]

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206-207.

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