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**THE LIBERATION OF NEGATIVITY.  
ADORNO AND DERRIDA ON HEGEL**

**Abstract**

This text concerns the way Hegel is read in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Adorno and Derrida are two main examples which can be used in order to draw a picture of the debt contemporary philosophy has to Hegel. The main point is that contemporary philosophy gains from Hegel the idea of *negativity* (seen by Hegel as dialectics) and what becomes now the main task of thinking is the way this negativity can be seen in an on-going movement, without a speculative closure. The concepts of *negative dialectics* and that of *difference* are meant to express this form of pure negativity. In the end, I make references to the critique of ideology which can be understood in connection with this form of post-modern thinking.

**Key words:** Negativity, metaphysical enclosure, ideology, Hegel, Adorno, Derrida

**The problem: to think alongside Hegel...**

J. L. Nancy starts one of his books by saying: “Hegel est le penseur inaugural du monde contemporain”<sup>1</sup>. The meaning of the statement is not one aiming at a direct connection between speculative philosophy and analytical philosophies, for instance. To raise the question in these terms is, first of all... non-Hegelian. What Nancy wants to say is that Hegel opens an area of reflection which will not and cannot be abandoned, since it belongs to a native regime of the world and of meaning: the field of negative. The way in which Hegel makes this field happen, and not the solution he offers, remains fundamental themes of contemporary philosophy. The experience of the world is, at first, one of separation and anxiety, either of becoming as dissolution or of separation as ignorance, danger or, in the field of history, cruelty. The conscience of this world is also a marked one, by separation and alienation: “la conscience est la conscience d’un mahleur constitutif”<sup>2</sup>. Traditional metaphysics solves the problem by making up for this world of negativity with one of empty

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<sup>1</sup> J. L. Nancy, *Hegel. L’inquietude du negatif*, Hachette, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 5

affirmative, with a field of eternal substance and of a Good without relation to time which redeems the wanderings of world. The criticism that Hegel brings to metaphysics is used in order to show the lack of consistency of this solution. Opposing to the negativity of the world an affirmative and empty abstract as the one of metaphysics, not only eludes the problem, but it deepens it: the very affirmative degrades itself and bears with it the trace of opposition in which he enters. The absolute comes out, just like the master out of his confrontation with the slave, defeated in the “recognition” that the negativity and dissolution of the world gives it. Hegelian solution marks, at a first view, the coming out of metaphysics: she assumes precisely taking upon herself the negative, the exercise of “lingering” into it, its transformation into an experience of subjectivity: “Mais ce monde a besoin de verite, non de consolation”<sup>3</sup>. The request of seeing absolute as substance and subject is on the center of the *introduction to Phenomenology of Spirit* and rewrites the theme of negativity as a theme of becoming subjectivity. At this point lays the stake of some of the “contemporary” interpretations of Hegel: releasing the negative from the phantoms of metaphysics, Hegel closes it again into dialectics’ circularity of absolute subject. The negative, taken upon as experience of the subject, lies under the mark of its identity with itself. The criticism that Hegel makes to metaphysics is, as M. Theunissen put it, also metaphysics: “Et c’est ainsi, dans l’inquietitude de l’immanence, que l’esprit du monde devient. Il ne se cherche pas (comme s’il etait pour soi un but exterieure), et il ne se trouve pas non plus (comme s’il etait un chose ici ou la) mai sil s’effectue: il est l’inquietitude vivante de sa propre effectivite concrete”<sup>4</sup>. The danger for the effectiveness of spirit not to become itself substantial or for its final moment of development, of absolute knowledge, not to become “a closure that closes” covers the entire Hegelianism. Subjectivity knows how to be, as Hegel himself admits, sly. Authors like T. W. Adorno or J. Derrida aim, in their analysis, at this aspect and can be read as attempts not to fall into the trap.

I want to discuss the way in which Hegel is, at these authors, still present and the way in which the theme of negativity is discussed starting with Hegel, but always trying to take a distance away from him. “The metaphysical criticism of metaphysics” that Hegel undertakes is exposed as high treason of the world and, sometimes, as a violent form for enclosing it between the frames of a subject which is, in fact, reproducing itself.

### **Adorno: Negativity after Auschwitz**

Adorno’s reference to Hegel is connected to the fact that after Auschwitz, after the show of totalized cruelty and which spreads without making any discrimination, “We cannot say that the immutable is truth and the mobile, transitory is

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 6

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9

appearance”<sup>5</sup>. The Nazi experience brings to the fore a reality unrecognized by philosophy, but which, then, imposes itself with necessity to thinking: “the pure identity of death”, the genocide as “absolute integrity”, impossible to describe in classical categories of dialectics placed in the service of theodicy. Victims, just like executioners, cannot survive cruelty: „The guilt of a life which purely as a fact will strangle other life, according to statistics that take out an overwhelming number of killed with a minimal number of rescued, as if this were provided in the theory of probabilities – this guilt is irreconcilable with living. (...) This, nothing else, is what compels us to philosophize”<sup>6</sup>. A dialectics which is not circular, a form of negativity which cannot be bought back by any statement, becomes thus a fundamental theme for philosophy. Pure negativity, instead of the compensatory transcendence of metaphysics, describes how the world is and ingratiates itself forever in the structure of conscience<sup>7</sup>.

A new dialectics, *negative dialectics*, comes to answer for this pure negativity: on the one hand, it releases in this way the absolute from the constraints of negative from which it comes, although like this it projects it in an indetermination; on the other hand, it liberates the negative from the statement that encloses it, so that it can be sent back to the *prime substance*, always located in the power of the second one. Against a philosophy of the founding subject and substantialized thought<sup>8</sup>, typical for modernity and its metaphysics, Adorno begins with the issue of subjectivity in order to demonstrate, based on the principle of “logical consistency”, their uncertainty. For the subject to be, in a genuine way, stated, it is necessary for it not to convert into absolute. Dialogue with Hegel becomes necessary.

What is, in Hegel’s case, the first problem, is the intention of conceptually “covering” the entire reality, to rediscover the concept in the contingent realities which, through their nature, are irreducible to “acts” of thinking. In the *introduction to Negative Dialectics*, Adorno begins with a simple argument: “To think is to identify”<sup>9</sup>. The argument, with an old origin in the suggestion of active intellect from medieval philosophy, seen as the possibility of thinking through its adherence to the form of work, makes dialectics obedient to the totalizing principle of identity: it transforms difference in contradiction, namely it sees it as a relative nonidentity. The issue however is the following: “The matters of the true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel, agreeing with tradition, expressed his

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<sup>5</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Continuum, London, New York, 2005, p. 361

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 364

<sup>7</sup> See B. O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectics. Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality*, MIT Press, London, Massachusetts, 2004, pp. 15-45. The text will be used *in extenso* as part of this particular analysis.

<sup>8</sup> See for this the introduction (1966) to *Negative Dialectics*

<sup>9</sup> Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 5

disinterest”<sup>10</sup>. With the criticism made to Enlightenment, Hegel takes thought out of her formal regime and directs it towards things. In this consists, as a matter of fact, also the criticism that he makes to modernity, with the divisions that passes her through and with its metaphysics’ impossibility to reunite them.<sup>11</sup> Thus loses, however, an area of reality, namely the singular and the contingent, “main substance” which is subject of cruelty. All these are part of “the lazy existence” that philosophy, when it does not resume it to the quality of moment of absolute spirit, she lets it fall into oblivion. The bringing back in attention of the singular, experienced by Bergson or Husserl, is doomed to failure because, in both cases, the subjectivity as “center” that validates and imposes upon the real a perspective works as an indisputable premise. Adorno’s conclusion is: philosophy reaches a paradox because of the fact that it is qualified as “dialectics” before dialectics is effective, between the free singularities of the world. Dialectics is not a necessity of the real, but of the spirit that measures itself in an unequal magnifying glass with the real. Philosophy has, for Adorno, the duty to expose this paradox and the concept’s utopia that pretends to “understand” the real without making it identical to itself. Hence, the detailed task, that B. O’Connor presents in his paper<sup>12</sup>, of conceiving Hegelian dialectics outside the idea of progress and of showing, in fact, that the idea of mediation as fundamental element of the “metaphysics” of German idealism can be understood as mutual indetermination of subject and object, as interaction of subject with a world never fully conceptualized, and not as total transparency of the real in spirit. In a game more, Adorno mentions at this point Kant: concepts without intuitions, without a non-conceptual content, are empty. Similarly, negative dialectics, in fact, has as purpose an opposite one from the Hegelian one: “To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics”<sup>13</sup>. Hegel himself, in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*<sup>14</sup>, speaks at a certain point about *signification* and sees it as the concept-representation relationship, and not as activity of the concept alone. Hegelian intuition is however abandoned: the problem of truth starts from signification, but it does not limit itself to it. The concept liberates itself and looks at representation as the moment of its own dialectics, and its mediation is done from the perspective of a whole that recognizes the difference only from the perspective of an identity that can only belong to the spirit, never to the object.

Adorno’s reference to Hegel is, therefore, a dual one. He recognizes at the author of *Phenomenology of Spirit* the role of dialectics, as being that of forming

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 8

<sup>11</sup> See Hegel, *Faith and Science in Philosophical Studies*, Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, but also J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. 12 Lectures*, ALL Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, chapters 1-3

<sup>12</sup> See note 7

<sup>13</sup> Adorno, op. cit., p. 12

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1995, p. 19

“that critical moment of thought that deepens our experience of the object”<sup>15</sup>. Experience, for Adorno, has the classical structure of subject-object relation. Conscience, as object, is formed in this relationship. But she cannot be conceived in terms of identity, but of interaction<sup>16</sup>. Dialectics does not have, for Adorno, a master. She answers for a transcendental condition of experience, that of “informing” the world through concept (the spontaneity of the intellect, that Kant recognizes as a premise of experience) and, correlative, of “adjusting” the direction of this spontaneity only in relation with the object, but not previous to it.

Subduing, as a consequence, to criticism the systematic form of philosophy, Adorno also denies the relativism that abandoning idealism could bring along. Describing dialectics to the experience is transcendental, where relativism – specific to, as the author confirms, to the conscience of bourgeois individualism – is connected precisely to the condition of thinking that requires to be exceeded. The model of experience and the liberation of negativity from its affirmative spectrum are ways of making possible a critical measure of thinking, one in which neither the object, like in the case of empiricism, nor the subject, like in the case of Hegelian idealism, can lie. Their correlation form the way in which truth is always built in an assumed gesture of thinking.

An example can be made and, although it sustains Adorno’s theoretical measure regarding the “criticism” he makes towards Hegelian metaphysics, it opens the discussion to the field of ethics. It concerns the chapter from *Negative Dialectics* on the philosophy of history in Hegel. What is an issue in the philosophy of history is that “the reflexive concept *world spirit* is disinterested in the living, although the whole whose primacy it expresses needs the living as much as they need it to exist”<sup>17</sup>. The fact that the spirit of the world, as a whole, becomes independent, presents itself through reflection in opposition with the negativity of the contingent reports from which it originates. But, Adorno responds, history does not bring wars. Individuals do. The experience of the world is actually the pure experience of the negativity that I was talking about, not of her affirmative meaning. The Hegelian position is, first of all, a theological one: “In the concept of the world spirit, the principle of divine omnipotence was secularized into the principle that posits unity...”<sup>18</sup>. The Hegelian thinking through the gesture, denounced by Marx, of “mystification” becomes ideology. Adorno only mentions the Marxist criticism so that he can then speak, in what he is concerned, about the construction of the ego in relation to the other, construction dominated by the presence of spirit as an anticipation to their reconciliation. What seems to be a common place for the

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<sup>15</sup> B. O’Connor, op. cit., p. 34

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>17</sup> Adorno, op. cit., p. 304

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 305

interpretations for “young Hegelians”<sup>19</sup> is taken over by Adorno: the Hegelian panlogism justifies domination. But, proves the author of *Negative Dialectics*, the Hegelian unity is, in itself, antagonistic. The cunning of rationality turns against itself and, thus, rationality manages to trick herself: “The irrationality of the particularly realized ratio within the social totality is not extraneous to the ratio, not solely duet o its application. Rather, it is immanent to it”<sup>20</sup>. The individual, as an agent of a history that apparently is made beyond him, persists and demands thinking inside him. The paradox of bourgeois thinking, to which I will refer below and that Hegel tries to make “logical”, is that the individual, to survive history, creates the social and thus the premises of his own domination.

Hegelian dialectics asks to be, at the same time, kept and abandoned. The particular cannot be defined and cannot get consistency otherwise that through universal. This is the meaning that Adorno takes over from Hegel. To show, however, how particular *moves* towards universal, how he lets himself, in a dialectics manner, absorbed by it, means transforming dialectics in her opposite and to put it in the service of a metaphysical of violence. The universe is, as I was trying to show above, the pole of a tension and not of a totalizing movement. What happens in the case of Hegelian dialectics and is the center of Adorno’s criticism is the mixture of categories such as logical, epistemological, theological and social ones that establishes equivalences between *unity*, *universality*, *affirmation* and *identity*, transforms dialectics in a conceptual scheme and forgets, as a matter of fact, her inaugural role, that of critically “describing” the world and its contingent. Hegel, in conclusion<sup>21</sup>, undermines and falsifies history when he puts it in opposition to nature and he confers it on to the metaphysical area of absolute spirit. He thinks history always accompanied by the thought of the non-existent one and thus he can only speak about the decadence of a reality that is not equal with its principle. Nihilism is the direct consequence of Hegelianism and thus Hegelian dialectics also allows surpassing herself. Too strong, the spell (Adorno) of the spirit shows its own lie.

Adorno’s ethical project, synthesized in an aphoristically form in *Minima moralia*, comes to bring foreword, in fact, the dialectics master-slave from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “In the three parts of the book I start every time with the private life, in the narrowest possible sense, of the intellectual in emigration”<sup>22</sup>. The critical theory finds, in Hegelian posterity, another expression than that of the revolutionary potential, gathered by the individual and released in a violent manner: that of the reflection that is not in a “home” of spirit and which, thus, builds it, starting from its singularity and from the acceptance of finite condition as essential.

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<sup>19</sup> See also J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, chapter III

<sup>20</sup> Adorno, op. cit., p. 317

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 358-360

<sup>22</sup> Adorno, *Minima moralia*, ART, Bucharest, 2007, p. 24

A second illustration of Adorno's criticism, that opens the way for rethinking negativity, is his concept of enlightenment. Some considerations in what the paper *Dialectic of Enlightenment*<sup>23</sup> is regarded may enter as conclusions for this part of the paper.

Enlightenment has as purpose, writes down Adorno from the very beginning, the liberation of man from fear and the re-establishment of his sovereignty over the world. The means by which Enlightenment is done is still debatable and leads to its own dissolution: "The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy"<sup>24</sup>. Xenophan, Bacon, Leibniz or Feuerbach are marks in this respect. The original purpose of Enlightenment comes thus with a price: the transformation of nature into mere objectivity, which lies in the power of an instrumental rationality that manipulates things and thus it exerts its power over them<sup>25</sup>. Far from being just a name given to several centuries of Western history and finding its prototype in Odysseus's cunning, Enlightenment names, fundamentally, that condition of the dominant rationality that dictates, for the purpose of domination, separation, the limit between her and thing, between concept and intuition, with the aim of imposing the first one on the latter. This is where the problem of Enlightenment is, in Adorno's point of view: it separates so that it can unify; it anticipates a result that does not occur but agonizing; it does not know, in other words, how to express itself otherwise but through negation: "it is knowledge obtained in the denunciation of illusion"<sup>26</sup>. Hegel's determined negation is a genuine instrument of Enlightenment, even if it is used to show the inconsistency of its metaphysical position. In this way, however, rationality and the world enter in a relationship already described by Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*: that of master-slave. The result of dialectics is the withdrawal of the master from the book; the one that wins is actually the slave, who will gain world recognition, which he works for. The failure of the master is, from Adorno's point of view, equal with the failure of dominant rationality. Adorno and Horkheimer's considerations are not descriptive, but critical. Their purpose is to elucidate the mechanisms of domination, particularly the form of domination specific for the century, that of mass culture. And the meaning of the statement in the dialectics movement, the "placement" of identity is seen, in the paper to which I refer, in its cultural "construction", as a gesture of Enlightenment to liberate man from its "servitude" towards the world and to transform him into its master; all forms of domination may find their origin in this primordial gesture that "negative dialectics" and the criticism of conceptual identity come to put it in question.

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<sup>23</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, London, New York, 1997

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>25</sup> See Heidegger, *The Time of the Image of the World*, Paideia, Bucharest, 1998

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 23

### Derrida: Hegel and the Sovereign Writing

Derrida makes frequent reports to Hegel. From *Glas* to the consistent chapters from *Marges...* and *Écriture et différence*, Hegel is present as a major stake of Deconstruction. What interests here is mainly the way in which it is discussed the recovery of negativity, in other words its liberation from the totalizing statement of the *Aufhebung* and the way in which this negativity is seen at a semiological level, as form of signification.

The way in which Derrida speaks about Hegel is not one that could be “formalized” in a method of interpretation. The exercise of deconstruction does not work progressively, does not lead beyond Hegel, but, with an already doubtful metaphor, on the other side of him: “Hegel is, therefore, the closest and, at the same time, the furthest possible from a modern conception of text and writing: there is nothing that precedes utterly the textual generality. (...) But Hegel makes this generalization saturating the text with the meaning, equalizing it teleological with its conceptual content, canceling any absolute dehiscence between writing and intention of expressing, deleting a certain event of the cut between anticipation and summing up: head movement (tete)”<sup>27</sup>. Presence to self of the concept and affirmative dialectics through which this is produced determines, at the level of signification, a priority between “semantic precipitation” (always the already of the spirit) and “semantic delay” (the not yet of the spirit), saturating the writing with the meaning and so, with the addition of definition. The self existence of *introduction* to *Phenomenology of Spirit* is questionable. How can it be understood, from the point of view of speculative philosophy, for which the difference between form and content is just the moment of coming back to self of the spirit? What is, from a speculative point of view, the introduction? Is not it precisely in this “point of view” that lies, moreover, also its inconsistency? These are questions from which is this analysis able to begin. Hegel denies, at the beginning of *Phenomenology...* the philosophical value of the introduction, so that he can recognize it then, only through the redescription of science as process that includes and suppresses, dialectical, the exterior, and the introduction is being justified exactly as self of the system it introduces. But, Derrida continues, “we are in an unequal chiasmus. How can we not recognize in the reasons for which Hegel disqualifies the introduction (formal exteriority, significant hasting, the textuality liberated from the authority of sense or concept, and so on) the very exigencies of writing, as we can read it here?”<sup>28</sup>. Hegel recognizes the space of writing and, in a subsequent motion, he closes it in the identity of concept. Deconstruction does not go beyond Hegel, as I was saying: she liberates what in Hegel can put up for discussion the dominant figures of its speech.

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<sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 1997, p. 22

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32



The discussion that I suggest is resumed to two texts: it is about *From Restricted Economy to General Economy. An Unreservedly Hegelianism*, from *Writing and Difference*<sup>29</sup> and *Les Puits et la Pyramide* from *Marges de la philosophie*<sup>30</sup>.

In the first text, Derrida reads Hegel starting from Bataille. To be more specific, from the way in which Bataille “laughs” at Hegel after taking him seriously. Bataille’s strategy is to read Hegel “all the way”: not to talk outside him, with other words than his. But Hegel’s words can, imperceptibly, modify meaning and get to say something else than the author of *Phenomenology of Spirit* would like. Interpreting Hegel is a rewriting of him, starting from where his own text becomes insecure. Hegel, as Kant, discovers negativity<sup>31</sup>, but in the form of trying to give a meaning to its “labor”. The logic is “the interpretation” that Hegel gives to negativity, and words like *Erinnerung*, *Aufhebung*, *Begriff* are relevant for its power. The interpretative task of post-Hegelians is: “So we must follow through, without reservations, till rendering him justice against himself and pulling out its discovery from under the empire of the way too *scrupulous* interpretation that he gave”<sup>32</sup>. What Bataille does, proves Derrida, is to liberate “primary” figures of the Hegelian discourse, those that “enter” the meaning and that, then, are hidden by meaning. “Reinterpretation is a simulated repetition of the Hegelian discourse. Throughout this interpretation, a barely perceptible movement separates all the articulations and jags all the soldering points of the imitated speech”<sup>33</sup>. The specification, maybe one of the clearest specifications of the specific strategy of the Deconstructive theory, is then exemplified by Derrida starting with the texts of Bataille, like *Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice*, *The Cursed Part* or *Inner Experience*. There is room here only for drawing some reference points. In the first text<sup>34</sup>, Bataille starts with Kojève’s reading, for whom dialectics philosophy is a philosophy of death, in other words, of negativity – and, from the point of view of the commentator of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in this way, of atheism. But, at a certain point, among the “figures” of death that Hegel only mentions, so that he can then move on, is that of sacrifice. Sacrifice dislocates the opposition between naive attitude and that of the Wise, of absolute knowledge, in that it invests the first with attributes arising from the “show” of sacrifice: the ritualization, not the thinking of sacrifice, is the one that sets free a form of “happy anxiety” in front of death – of negativity – that is specific to man. In sacrifice, man is sovereign, it is “played” its last stake and the radical difference towards its animal nature – the same difference that Hegel solves by means of speculative philosophy

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<sup>29</sup> Derrida, *Writing and difference*, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, pp. 339-378

<sup>30</sup> Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, Publishing House de Minuit, Paris, 1985

<sup>31</sup> Derrida, *Writing...*, p. 350

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Bataille, *Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice*, in *Etudes hegeliennes. Etre et penser*, Publishing House de la Baconniere, Neuchatel, 1955, pp. 21-43

with dialectics outdistance of natural in the reflexivity of spirit. But, shows Bataille, Hegelian solution is contradictory and throws man into servitude. As long as sacrifice is “thought”, in a discursive manner, it loses the power to offer sovereignty: “En effet, ce qui est souverain, par definition ne sert pas. Mais le simple discours doit répondre à la question que pose la pensée discursive touchant le sens que chaque chose doit avoir sur le plan d’ utilité”<sup>35</sup>. It is, of course, debatable Bataille’s interpretation, at least because Hegelian rationality may receive a theological interpretation or even a hermeneutical one that releases her from the uncertainties of an instrumental function. What remains, however, from Bataille is the strategy of reading Hegel starting from a secondary place, invested with signification and which brings up for discussion the rest of the discourse or even the discourse itself. Negativity releases itself under the figure of sacrifice, not of its speculative redemption. And so, the interpreter does Hegel, against himself, justice.

Returning to Derrida, Bataille counts in *Writing and Difference* mainly on the way he knows how to “diminish” the sense of Hegelian writing to its horizon of meaning, in other words, to the general writing as guidance from ignorance to knowledge and from nonsense to sense<sup>36</sup>. “The slavish writing”, placed in the service of sense and presence, is “exceed” by the “sovereign writing” of silence and sense as “mark”<sup>37</sup>. Sovereign writing “will be called writing because it exceeds logos (sense, domination, presence and so on). In this writing – the one that Bataille was looking for – the same concepts, apparently unchanged in their own self, will suffer a sense alteration or, better said, will be affected, even if they seem unmoved by the loss of sense towards which they slide and they alter beyond limit”<sup>38</sup>. The deconstruction of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is one of the privileged routes towards indicating some important figures of negativity, identified at the language level. On this type of negativity I shall stop, starting from the already mentioned analysis, which Derrida makes to the Hegelian semiology.

Derrida starts from the place that Hegelian semiology occupies throughout the system. To be more specific, it is about the placement in the chapter on *psychology* from *Philosophy of Spirit*: “C” est pourquoi il était indispensable de faire apparaître plus haut l’ articulation architectonique entre la psychologie et la semiologie. On comprend mieux alors le sens de l’ arbitraire: la production de signes arbitraires manifeste la liberté de l’ esprit”<sup>39</sup>. Semiology, in the Hegelian sense of the term, deals with how is a concept attached to an intuition, the two poles thus becoming signified and signifier. The relationship between concept and intuition is not, however, an abstract report between different. The defining discontinuity of the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 40

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, op. cit., p. 336

<sup>37</sup> See, for this word, Derrida, *Linguistics and Grammatology*, from *For a Theory of Text*, Univers Publishing House, 1980, pp. 73-79

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, ed. cit., p. 360

<sup>39</sup> Hegel, *Le puits et la pyramide*, ed. cit., p. 99

sign between signified and signifier (what also makes the difference between *sign* and *symbol*) is generated not by a possible separation between opposites, but by the fact that the work of concept is to *go beyond* (*Aufhebung*) the spatiality of intuition and to mark the moment when the spirit realizes its freedom. Production of the sign means, from the spirit's point of view, negating spatiality and, together with it, the natural of intuition. But, continues Derrida, for Hegel, going beyond space is actually temporality. The sign requires thinking from the perspective of the process of temporalization. "Ce qu'aura voulu dire l'espace, c'est le temps"<sup>40</sup>. Hegelian consequences that result from these considerations are obvious: on the one hand, linking the sign concept to that of truth. Sign stands for signified, which is the concept and which forms, in its dialectics movement, the truth of spirit. On the other hand, subordinating writing – to phonetism. Subordination figurative writing systems – to the alphabetic ones. What Nietzsche will later suspect in the case of the whole Western metaphysics (its complicity with language) is already brought forward by Hegel, in paragraph 459 of the *Encyclopedia*: logical instinct informs structures, grammatical categories, in that the meaning of the latter is given by the dialectics of the spirit that gets to know its truth: "La dialectique speculative ne se laisse separer ni de logos ni, simultanement, d'un logos qui ne se pense et ne se presente jamais comme tel que dans sa complicité historique avec la voix et l'écriture phonétique. La grammaire du logos (se confonde, n.n.) avec le système de la métaphysique"<sup>41</sup>. The abstract freedom of sign, which had already passed the "servility" to the nature of symbol, is also passed by the concrete freedom of concept, identical with the being in its speculative development.

The metaphysical gesture of the *Aufhebung* establishes the report between signified and signifier in the sense of diminishing the sign to a non-sign (the logical, the truth of spirit) and in that of the inside-outside report, where exteriority is just an effect, dialectics reducible, of a non-semiotics interiority. Hegel sets and cancels at the same time sign's possibility, simultaneous with the inability of thinking, as such, exteriority, difference, writing.

The "liberation" of these instances and, implicitly, taking out semiology from under the domination of logocentrism and of metaphysics happens through the "deconstruction" of Hegelian *Aufhebung*: "On plie l'*Aufhebung* – la relève – a s'écrire autrement. Peut-être, tout simplement, a s'écrire. Mieux, a tenir compte de sa consommation d'écriture"<sup>42</sup>. Overbidding the moment of temporalization, that we saw constituent to sign, Derrida goes beyond its metaphysical enslavement, for releasing the figure, difficult to define or specify, of its *differance* as "place" (*chora*) where meaning occurs. In *La differance*, Derrida notices at a certain point that Hegel uses, in *Logic* of Jena, the collocation *differente Beziehung* with the meaning,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 103

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 122

<sup>42</sup> Derrida, *La differance*, in *Marges...*, ed. cit., p. 21

somewhat surprisingly, of *rappont differenciant* (Derrida, quoting Koyre, the editor of the Hegelian text), with an active and temporal significance: present is a differentiating report, in the sense of a negative singularity which excludes multiplicity and is thus completely determined<sup>43</sup>. Thus rediscovered, in one of the important points of the Hegelian text, the issue of pure negativity of *differance* makes it possible, simultaneously, the text of the German philosopher, as well as its own deconstruction. When it comes, further, to specify or illustrate *differance*, authors such as Nietzsche or Heidegger become important: “Nous pourrions donc appeler *differance* cette discorde active, en mouvement, des forces differentes et de differences de forces que Nietzsche oppose a tout le systeme de la grammaire metaphysique...”<sup>44</sup> It is not the purpose of this paper to talk about *differance*; what I aim at is just to indicate the way that leads from the Hegelian idea of speculative identity to figures of free negativity, irreducible. *Differance*, in Derrida, opens the space of writing and of differences that have significance as effect. The text of *Grammatology*<sup>45</sup> may be invoked here.

One of the important stakes of grammatology is to restore the problem of writing as original, in report with the classical paradigm of linguistics, that not only privileges phonology, but it also sees it as being the fundamental epistemological model. Removing writing from its derivative regime, of *sign of the sign* (Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel) could open, Derrida believes, the field of historicity and thus a “science of the possibility of science”<sup>46</sup> that will no longer be conceived after the form of *logic*, but that of *grammar* (from *grammatike*, which in Greek also nominates graphic characters). Saussurian linguistics is analyzed from this perspective, specifically from the strictly representational function that it gives to the graphic sign. Derrida deconstructs the classical linguistic system starting with the principle of arbitrary sign: “All of these send, beyond nature/culture opposition, to an opposition which intervenes between physis and nomos, physis and techne, whose last function is to derive historicity; and, paradoxically, to fail recognizing its rights to history, production, establishing and so on, but only in the arbitrary form and on a naturalism background”<sup>47</sup>. The problem sends thus to the metaphysical gesture of establishing a primordial opposition and of placing it to the origin of meaning: that between interiority and exteriority. The exteriority of writing is arbitrary, it finds a meaning only from the perspective of an interiority that transcends it and which is invested with value, from an ontological point of view, as well as from a hermeneutical one. Hegelian *Aufhebung* is one of the ways of establishing this fundamental opposition. The complicity between logocentric metaphysics and linguistics, as it is formed on

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 14

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>45</sup> Enough fragments may be found in Derrida, *Linguistics and Grammatology*, ed. cit.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 50

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 57

the model of phonetics, is simultaneously displaced, dislocated and rewritten starting with the reaffirming of the primacy of writing and of an original way of establishing the relationship between signified and signifier: that of the *established trace*. The deconstruction of transcendental signified, together with the deconstruction of the presence that is implied by the affirmation of this signified as origin, non-semiotics, of semiotics, occur, at a first moment, through Peirce's infinite semiosis, and then through the redescription of linguistic scenario starting from grammatology, undertaken by Derrida. The *trace* is the one that actually describes, clearly, the un-founding of the sign, fundamental thesis of linguistics which involves, when it has its "justice done", "a synthesis where *other* absolute announces itself as such – with no simplicity, no identity or continuity – in what it is not"<sup>48</sup>. The same structure, of dissimulating the personal and of presenting "the other", specific for the trace<sup>49</sup>, dislocates, at the same time, the idea of *presence* brought with itself by the metaphysics of presence, which starts from an origin – either theological, or ontological – of being, thus hiding the being itself, in its historicity and difference. The negative liberated like this, as a trace that, in its movement, "calls" *differance*, forms the point from where the un-motivation of the sign and so the unnatural connection, arbitrary between signified and signifier, can be understood. An interesting specification may be found in a commentary<sup>50</sup> of J.D. Caputo, regarding the relationship between Meister Eckhart's mysticism and Derrida's deconstruction. The *differance* does not offer a solution to the discourse of negative theology, it does not represent an *object* of it: "The role of *differance* is to establish the conditions within which discourse functions. It founds (and un-founds, undermines) languages, vocabularies, showing how they are both possible and impossible, that is, incapable of a closure which would give them self-sufficiency and a feeling of success in nailing things down"<sup>51</sup>. *Differance* is the one that shows how any theological discourse is being watched by the possibility of atheism, since, referring to an absolute presence, gives birth to the oppositions that close the problem. The solution is not that of "calling" God throughout difference, but by trying the limit of the theological discourse outside of a metaphysics of presence, insured by the invocation of *differance* as game of signification and of discourse itself.

The question that opens *Glas*, "what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?"<sup>52</sup>, sends thus not beyond the Hegelian text, in an opposition to the metaphysics and its logocentrism, but in the depth of *Phenomenology of Spirit*,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 78

<sup>49</sup> The concept, of Freudian origin, nominates the way in which events are registered in memory: not as presences or as its remains, but as a reference system that activates each other. (See explanatory note at Ibid., p. 451)

<sup>50</sup> J.D. Caputo, *Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart*, in H.J. Silverman (ed.), *Derrida and Deconstruction*, Routledge, New York and London, 1989, pp. 24-39

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 28

<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *Glas*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1986, p. 1

where, hidden at the surface by speculative identity, lies a form of negativity and of the altered constituent of meaning.

### **Conclusion**

What is it, in this context, left of “the metaphysical criticism of metaphysics”? M. Theunissen’s statement sends to a project of reforming the metaphysical project even with its means, in other words, to a radicalization of subjectivity, which goes beyond its abstract location and the limitation of reason to a formal-instrumental condition and opens modernity to a hermeneutical project, however unfinished. Habermas was already drawing attention in this respect.

The readings above, of Adorno and Derrida, have as purpose at a first view “the liberation of negativity” from under the domination of speculative identity. What is thus obtained, in another sense, is the liberation of the Hegelian text from a form of ideology that affects it and generates “Hegelianisms”. The assumed exercise of reading, through which the text dislocates its dominant figures, actually deconstructs, throughout return, also a certain canonic image of the author of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a lazy interpretation that is deposited, is canonized and offers a certain shape to philosophy itself.

S. Zizek, in *Tarrying with the Negative. Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*<sup>53</sup>, starts with the image-myth of Romanian revolution, that of the flag with the broken emblem waving, to say that, at a point, the position of the critic intellectual and masses’ enthusiasm concur: in the deconstruction of any “Master – Signifier” in power: “Keeping a distance in relation to the Master – Signifier characterizes the fundamental attitude of philosophy”<sup>54</sup>. The original philosophical gesture, wonder, is in fact the specific attitude of philosophy of going beyond given, to its conditions of possibility. Zizek investigates this possibility starting with transcendentalist classical scenarios, of Kant, Derrida (seen actually as a transcendental philosopher by R. Gasche) up to the extents that belong to Lacan’s psychoanalysis. Chapter 4 of Zizek’s paper is entitled *The Hegelian “Logic of Essence” as Theory of Ideology*. Zizek begins with Kant, which he psychoanalytically interprets: “self consciousness is based exactly on non-transparency of subject to self: Kantian transcendental perception (self consciousness of pure ego) is possible only as far as I am intangible to myself in the noumenal dimension”<sup>55</sup>. Difference, decentredness are thus constituents to subject, and precisely this constitutive difference is brought forward in question by the “philosophical illusion” of complete transparency of subject postulated by Hegel.

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<sup>53</sup> S. Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative. Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*, ALL Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 125

The price that he has to pay for this transparency is huge. The most important is the speculative justification of an ideological gesture: postulating presuppositions. For example, in the *logic of essence*, the relationship between postulated reflection, the external one and the determinative one that “synthesizes” the first two describes how the subject, in the virtue of a “retroactive performance”<sup>56</sup>, insures the necessity of the road that he covered or the inner foundation of its external conditions that causes it. From here, explains Žižek, we can understand how the conspiracy theory<sup>57</sup> works: investing retroactively with signification a fact whose consequences are traumatic. The corruption of Nixon’s administration, Vietnam’s traumatic experience and so on make so as the question “who was behind killing Kennedy?”. Politically translated, the gesture is one that “closes” ideologically: “circle is closed when the new social pact is established in its necessity and made *the possibility* disappear, the open, irresolute process which it generated”<sup>58</sup>.

Hegelian logic of essence, thus read, contains the premises of ideological position. Speculative totalizing anticipates and, at the same time, retroactively invests. Hegelianism, as any ideological form of thinking, mutilates its parent. From its perspective, Hegel is a thinker who announces the end. Or, in other words, students no longer read Hegel because others, already, told them what it can be found in him. The deconstruction of speculative identity does not generate another Hegelianism: it does not place *difference* instead of *affirmation*, nor *trace* instead of *origin*. What is realized with attempts as those of Adorno or Derrida, can be said from the perspective of Žižek’s considerations, regards rather Hegelianism than Hegel himself: it is about searching in the text the places that closes it, mono-orient it and make possible the subsequent “ianisms”.

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<sup>56</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 146-147

<sup>57</sup> See pp. 154-155

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 222-223