

## HEGEL AND DERRIDA ON THE PROBLEM OF REASON AND REPRESSION IN MODERNITY

**1. Thesis.** Derrida's *general strategy of deconstruction*<sup>1</sup> seeks to subvert Hegel's philosophy at its heart: in the notion of *Aufhebung*. Central to this strategy is revealing the repression, constraint, constriction, or coercive internment of difference by the «restricted economy» which inhabits Hegel's speculation on the profitability of human nature in its domination by reason (*Vernunft*)<sup>2</sup>. Derrida's philosophy represents indubitably one of the most profound attempts to break with an all too Hegelian age, to force self-inhibition, self-deliberation again. Yet in his haste to have us hesitate, to see the *différance* suppressed in this Hegelian modernity, it may be that Derrida himself neglects a vital difference. For by reducing Hegelian dialectics to a restricting economy *involving* repression, as I will seek to show, Derrida has difficulties differentiating adequately between the *modus operandi* of repressive and productive forms of power and therewith adequately accounting for the strategic grounds governing Hegel's reallocation of forces towards a system of productive power in modernity. In this way, Derrida's deconstructive reading of Hegelian *Aufhebung* seems to involve itself in the repressive *relève* it desires to disarm by constricting a difference of terms in Hegel's discourse on power.

**2. Derrida's General Strategy of Deconstruction.** The Role of Repression. In his *Differenzschrift* of 1801, the young Hegel employed a

1. J. DERRIDA, *Positions: Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta*, in *Positions*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 41: «What interested me then, that I am attempting to pursue along other lines now, was, at the same time as a 'general economy', a kind of *general strategy of deconstruction*.»

2. IDEM, *From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve*, in *Writing and Difference*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 275: In his essay on Bataille, Derrida links Hegel's notion of *Aufhebung* to restricted economy: «The Hegelian *Aufhebung* thus belongs to restricted economy, and is thus the form of the passage from one prohibition to another, the *circulation* of prohibitions, history as the truth of the prohibition». For an insightful discussion of the relation between Hegel and Derrida, see Richard BERNSTEIN, *Reconciliation/Rupture*, in *The New Constellation*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993, pp. 293-322; see also J. FLAY, *Hegel, Derrida, and Bataille's Laughter* and, above all, the perceptive Commentary on Flay's paper by Judith BUTLER, both in William DESMOND (ed.), *Hegel and His Critics*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1989, pp. 163-173 and 174-178, respectively: Although Butler rightfully points to the potentially problematic nature of Derrida's reduction of Hegel's notion of *Aufhebung* to a «strategy of concealment and repression», in her short commentary she does not investigate Derrida's reading of Hegel in *Glas*.



novel form of immanent critique to reveal in what way the categorical presuppositions of Fichte's philosophy preclude the realization of its own postulated principle of an absolute identity of Ego (as reason) and Ego (as nature). In its systematic elaboration, as Hegel discloses, Fichte's philosophy leads not to true reconciliation, but instead to a «partial» (*teilweise*) and «forced» (*gezwungen*) identity, in which human nature is coercively interned by the forces of *Verstand*. Deconstruction resembles this Hegelian strategy of immanent critique in so far as Derrida also attempts to open institutions of identity to the difference forgotten within them. Hence, both Hegel and Derrida seek to expose the «exteriority» which a constructed identity «represses: that is, expels and, which amounts to the same, internalizes as one of its moments»<sup>3</sup>. Yet in stark contrast to Hegel, whose immanent critique is designed to also free up new strategic potential for *Vernunft* to sublimate the antagonistic difference of reason and nature into a 'truly reconciled' unity of mutually productive relations in modern society<sup>4</sup>, Derrida scorns such idealistic claims<sup>5</sup>. For it is the central aim of Derrida, whose own writings he claims are «materialist»<sup>6</sup>, to reveal the «radical alterity» of reason with its Other<sup>7</sup>. In the ineluctable play of *différance*, the «irreducible heterogeneity» of forces in modern society cannot be reconciled into any higher, homogeneous identity of Hegelian *Vernunft*. Indeed, as Derrida states, «if there were a definition of *différance*, it would be precisely the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian *relève* wherever it operates»<sup>8</sup>; «*différance* marks the critical limits of the idealizing powers of relief (*la relève*, *Aufhebung*)»<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, «to reduce *différance* to difference», as Hegel's speculative dialectics does, «is to stay far behind in

3. J. DERRIDA, *Dissemination*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 5.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 6, footnote: «The movement by which Hegel determines difference as contradiction is designed precisely to make possible the ultimate (onto-theo-teleo-logical) sublation of difference».

5. IDEM, *Positions*, p. 62: According to Derrida, deconstruction can be also understood as a «critique of idealism».

6. *Ibid.*, p. 64: Derrida explains his relation to materialism in the following fashion: «It follows that if, and in the extent to which, *matter* in the general economy designates, as you said, radical alterity (I will specify: in relation to philosophical oppositions), then what I write can be considered 'materialist' {...} Rigorously reinscribed in the general economy (Bataille) and in the double writing of which we were just speaking, the insistence on matter as the absolute exterior of opposition, the materialist insistence (in contact with that 'materialism' has represented as a force of resistance in the history of philosophy) seems to me necessary».

7. IDEM, *Dissemination*, p. 5: «Difference also designated {...} - that kind of economy, that war economy - which brings the radical otherness or the absolute exteriority of the outside into relation with the closed, agonistic, hierarchical field of philosophical oppositions».

8. IDEM, *Positions*, p. 40 ff.

9. IDEM, *Dissemination*, p. 6, footnote.



this debate»<sup>10</sup>. Instead of seeking to reconcile the conflict of contradictory forces in the 'harmonious' homogeneity of *Vernunft*, *différance* «inscribes contradiction, or rather, since it remains irreducibly differentiating and disseminating, contradictions. {...} The economic 'concept' of *différance* does not reduce all contradictions to the homogeneity of a single model»<sup>11</sup>. The effect of deconstruction is thus the very «opposite that is likely to happen when Hegel makes difference into a moment within general contradiction»<sup>12</sup>. For what emerges from this play of *différance* are «undecidables» which neither merely exist within binary oppositions, nor represent the reconciled unity or *aufgehobene* identity of opposites in the absolute knowledge of Hegelian dialectics; instead they reflect 'meaning' permeated by the différentiating logic of the «neither/nor, that is *simultaneously* either *or*»<sup>13</sup>.

Perhaps nowhere more poignantly than in his interview with J.-L. Houdebine and G. Scarpetta did Derrida outline the coordinates of his *general strategy of deconstruction*. According to Derrida, deconstruction involves a double gesture. In its first phase, the strategy of deconstruction seeks to overturn a given philosophical opposition. To admit to the necessity of this «phase of overturning» or «reversal» is for Derrida «to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with a peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis», such as nature/culture, etc., but in truth with «a violent hierarchy», in which «one of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand»<sup>14</sup>. To deconstruct an opposition means then to attempt to upset such a violent hierarchy. To neglect the necessity of this phase of overturning is to «forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition»<sup>15</sup>. As a result of such neglect, one could be misled to a discursive strategy which seeks solely to neutralize the oppositions. By merely neutralizing existing oppositions, i.e. by «immediately jumping *beyond* oppositions» and protesting «in the simple form of *neither* this *nor* that», however, one is hindered from intervening effectively in this field of ultimate conflict and subordination. For, according to Derrida, in failing to question the system of oppositions itself, the violent hierarchy it engenders can and will tend to reestablish itself<sup>16</sup>. In order to prevent such a relapse, what must follow the phase of overturning is the

10. IDEM, *Positions*, p. 101.

11. IDEM, *Dissemination*, p. 6, footnote.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 7, footnote.

13. IDEM, *Positions*, p. 43.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 41; see also IDEM, *Dissemination*, p. 6 f.; IDEM, Tympan, in *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982, p. XIX f.

15. IDEM, *Positions*, p. 41.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 42.



formulation of new «unities of simulacrum» or «undecidables», such as *pharmakon*, *hymen*, *supplement*, etc. In this second phase of deconstruction, the function of the undecidables is to do nothing less than inhibit the reconstitution of such violent hierarchies by subverting the structure of philosophical opposition. By «resisting and disorganizing it [the philosophical opposition - DCD], without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics» of the Hegelian sort<sup>17</sup>, the reestablishment of a violent hierarchy of oppositions is systematically obstructed.

Derrida's strategy of deconstruction thrives on the assumption of an irreducible heterogeneity inhabiting the classical oppositions of metaphysics, such as nature/culture, reason/nature, etc. For it is this «radical otherness» or «absolute exteriority» at play in the movement of *différance* which ultimately defies the homologizing forces of *Aufhebung* in Hegel's speculative dialectics and thereby reveals the dissymmetric, hierarchical and ultimately «repressive» nature of all institutionalized identities<sup>18</sup>. Hence, the self-presence of reason in nature can never be understood as the unmitigated actualization of nature in reason, but can be asserted only by violently suppressing the primordial movement of *différance*. In order for the strategy of deconstruction to retain its theoretical viability, it is therefore vitally dependent on exposing such mechanisms of repression employed by reason in the «envelopment» or «internment» of its Other<sup>19</sup>. In this restriction of deconstruction to the disclosure of repression and the corresponding alienation inhabiting the institutionalized identities of man, Derrida remains without doubt dedicated to traditional forms of ideology critique<sup>20</sup>. Traces of repression determine, however, not just the scope, but also the critical limits of the strategy of deconstruction. For if Derrida were to fail to track down mechanisms of repression active in constructed identities, the object of critique would vanish and the subversive force of deconstruction languish. It is this necessity governing the strategic economy of deconstruction which must concern us in the discussion of Derrida's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of ethical life in *Glas*. But before a look through *Glas* is possible, it is first necessary to make a detour through Hegel.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 43; see also J. DERRIDA, *Dissemination*, p. 6 f.

18. IDEM, *Positions*, pp. 94, 88: The motif of repression repeats itself in Derridian texts. In *Positions*, for example, Derrida discusses the necessary connection between *Aufhebung* and repression: «There is always *Aufhebung* (as there is always repression, idealization, sublimation, etc.)»; or: «Doubtless this effect is inseparable from a movement of interiorization-idealization-*relève*-sublimation, etc., and therefore from a certain repression». See also IDEM, *Dissemination*, p.5 f.; IDEM, *Glas*, Lincoln, Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1986, pp. 99, 191, 197.

19. IDEM, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. XIXf.

20. IDEM, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976, p. 143.



**3. Hegel on Repressive and Productive Power.** In his early Jena period (1801 - 1803), Hegel elaborates a philosophy of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) designed above all to provoke a paradigm shift in the strategies employed to dominate the political field of modern society. In attempt to more effectively eradicate the contingency of individual human behavior in modern society, the radically dysfunctional nature of coercion (*Zwang*) at work in the strategies of abstract legality and morality is to be superseded by the productive power of ethical life. The deviant desires of man are no longer to be futilely marginalized by a form of restricting, repressive (self-)control, but instead integrated by the mobilizing power of ethical norms (*Sitten*). Hegel initiates this paradigm shift by means of his immanent critique<sup>21</sup> of the practical philosophy of Fichte (and Kant)<sup>22</sup>. Accordingly, Hegel's discursive strategy is to reveal how the specific articulation of Fichte's philosophy precludes the «actual actualization» of its own fundamental principle, i.e. the Absolute.

According to Hegel, in the philosophy of Fichte the «identity of subject and object, in the form of Ego = Ego is the authentic principle of speculation»<sup>23</sup>. Yet in the elaboration of his system of philosophy, Fichte renders this fundamental principle, as an object of analytical reflection, to a mere formal unity,  $A = A$ . By doing so, Fichte commits the error of postulating an «absolute opposition» between reason and nature<sup>24</sup>. For whereby reason is «depotencized» to a formal unity without permeating the manifold difference of nature, nature is defined categorically according to the law of difference barring all inner unity,  $A \neq A$  or  $\text{Ego} \neq \text{Ego}$ <sup>25</sup>. In this way, nature, as  $\text{Ego} \neq \text{Ego}$ , is categorically reduced to a mechanically caused being lacking all inner purposiveness, spontaneity, and self-determining power. It is here that we find Hegel justified in speaking of a categorically fixed «non-

21. The elements of this immanent critique developed by Hegel in his early Jena period (1801-1803) are marked out in *The Difference between Schelling's and Fichte's System of Philosophy* (1801), the introductory essay of *The Critical Journal of Philosophy*, entitled Introduction: On the Essence of Philosophical Criticism Generally, and its Relationship to the Present State of Philosophy (1802), *Belief and Knowledge* (1802), *The System of Ethical Life* (1802/3), and *Natural Law* (1802/3).

22. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, New York, Univ. of Penn Press, 1975, p. 70 ff.: In *Natural Law*, Hegel discussed the practical philosophy of Kant and Fichte under the common title of a «formal science of natural law», which was systematically characterized by the notion of «infinity» and «absolute difference» between ideal and real. I will therefore handle the practical philosophy of Kant and Fichte, as Hegel himself explicitly does for instance in his *Natural Law* essay, as structurally homologous.

23. IDEM, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, Albany, S.U.N.Y. Press, 1977, p. 81 ff.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 94f.; see also IDEM, *Natural Law*, p. 70 ff.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 82.



identity» or «absolute difference» between reason and nature in the practical philosophy of Fichte (and Kant)<sup>26</sup>. Ultimately, nature is divested of all potentiality for rational, spontaneous self-emergence; scientific experience of the phenomenal world functions in adherence with the principle of mechanical causality, according to which natural objects - as effects of deterministic laws - are passively subject to a controlling cause non-identical with their inner being. Subsequently, in order for practical reason to effect auto-nomous action, it seeks to bridge this categorical gap by asserting causality over human nature. In the realm of morality this relationship is termed the «causality of freedom» (Kant and Fichte), in which in abstraction from material interests (negative freedom) the maxim of human action is constructed in strict accordance with universal law (positive freedom). In the realm of politics, on the other hand, the highest state of affairs is not simply the «one-way» causality of practical reason over material desires; instead, it is to be found in the mechanical reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) of mutually restricting forces, i.e. the heterogeneous wills of individuals amongst one another, as is paradigmatically reflected in the Kantian principle of right<sup>27</sup>. In this scheme of things, there remains an ineluctable alterity which precludes all real possibility for the strategic re-construction of individual human behavior reconciled with the functional imperatives of the social totality.

Hegel does not offer, however, merely an insightful account of the logical shortfall arising out of the practical philosophy of Fichte and Kant; he also systematically links the mechanically causal relation between these two mutually exclusive realms, i.e. reason and human nature, to the political tactic of coercion (*Zwang*). In the field of morality this mechanism of control assumes the form of «self-coercion» (*Selbst-Zwang*) and in the sphere of politics the form of external coercion, whereby «mutual coercion» represents the highest political relation in the Kantian and Fichtean conception of legality<sup>28</sup>. Due to the fact, however, that this economy of coercive power involves the legal suppression or moral «self-restriction» (*Selbst-Beschränkung*)<sup>29</sup> of human nature, the identity of reason and nature engendered by this politics of difference can reflect at best a «forced», and hence «false», «partial», «incomplete» unity<sup>30</sup>. Instead of pursuing a politics of mobilized integration in which the nature/body of the individual is made to

26. IDEM, *Natural Law*, p. 72.

27. I. KANT, *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Kant: Political Writings*, New York, Cambridge UPress, 1991; J.G. FICHTE, *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre von 1796*, in *Fichtes Werke III*, Berlin, 1971.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 134f.; J.G. FICHTE, *op. cit.* p. 86 ff.

29. For Hegel's critique of the notion of self-restriction or self-limitation, see IDEM, *The Difference*, p. 131 ff.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 115 ff.



actively affirm the universal imperatives of political reason, in the practical philosophy of Kant and Fichte nature is to be repressively restricted.

In light of the dysfunctional economy of repressive power and the corresponding inability of the strategies of abstract morality and legality to deal more decisively with the growing fragmentation of human action in modern society, Hegel saw himself forced to articulate a new conception of political rationality. Above all, this new form of political reason must have the power to reconcile the conflicting forces pervading modern society. In this context, we can witness how Hegel's immanent critique of Fichte and Kant begins to bear fruit, for it does not just disclose the incoherency of these theoretical projects; it also releases new strategic insights for the functional resolution of the political dilemmas in modern society. For if the fundamental flaw in the Kantian and Fichtean forms of morality and legality is realized to rest in their assumption of a fixed alterity of reason and nature, then one must simply abandon this premise. And it is indeed Hegel, the objective idealist, who does just this. Instead of assuming an ineluctable incommensurability, Hegel presupposes the possibility for the thoroughgoing rationalization of nature and naturalization of reason in ethical life. By raising human nature here to the highest ethical potentiality of man, Hegel systematically introduces nothing less than a revolutionary paradigm change in the political science of modern man. This apotheosis of human nature, however, has less to do with any utopian optimism or normative aims than with Hegel's political pragmatism and cold calculation of the dysfunctional consequences of the economy of repressive power. Clearly, it is first by means of this categorical re-articulation of reason as the innermost potentiality of human nature that Hegel can hope to elude the crises-ridden politics of difference and, instead, to promote the more effective eradication (*Vernichtung*) of dysfunctional heterogeneity of individual behavior in modern society<sup>31</sup>.

According to Hegel, the true eradication of such dysfunctional heterogeneity is to be achieved by relating all hitherto limited, natural being of mechanical reflection to the Absolute, i.e. the absolute identity of reason and nature. In doing so, this new form of reason (*Vernunft*) will «free» human nature «from all contingency»<sup>32</sup>. The resulting identity of reason and nature is no longer restricted by the repressed remains of intransigent, irrational human impulse, for the functionings of *Vernunft* transcend the domain of mechanical causality and, therewith, the dysfunctional economy of coercive

31. For the systematic use of the term *Vernichtung* (eradication, annihilation), see D.C. DURST, *Zur politischen Ökonomie der Sittlichkeit bei Hegel und der ästhetischen Erziehung bei Schiller*, Wien, Passagen Verlag, 1994.

32. G.W.F. HEGEL, *The Difference*, p. 113.



power manifest in the strategies of morality and legality. In a passage of fundamental import found in the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel explains more precisely the way in which this new form of reason radically supersedes mechanical causality and advocates the appropriation of human nature in a novel, productive fashion: «The causal relation is essentially sublated (*aufgehoben*), in that (*indem*) the producing is an absolute producing, the product an absolute product; that is to say, the product has no standing apart from the producing; it is not posited as something self-sustaining, as something that has standing prior to and independent of the producing, as is the case with the pure causality relation»<sup>33</sup>.

In this 'post-mechanically causal' appropriation of human nature all atomistic opposition between an active rational unity and passive natural impulse is to be surpassed in the uninhibited movement of integrated human activity. Instead of causally determining nature from a position of ultimate alterity, reason inscribes itself in nature as its innermost potential, as the «immanent real ground of the totality», by rendering human nature as a product of reason to the absolute producing of reason<sup>34</sup>.

In his *Differenzschrift* of 1801, as well as in *Natural Law and The System of Ethical Life*, both written between 1802 and 1803, Hegel draws fundamental conclusions from this determination of reason (*Vernunft*) for the articulation of his speculative strategy of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). With its uniquely altered *modus operandi*, this novel form of functional reason constitutes the coordinating apparatus of a new economy of power. The customs and norms (*Sitten*) of ethical life engendered by reason (*Vernunft*) do not coerce (*zwingen*), but instead subjugate (*be-zwingt*) the individual<sup>35</sup>. Hegel elaborates here a systematic difference between two economies of power. In contrast to the repressively (self-) restricting ((*selbst-*) *beschränkenden*) effects of moral and legal coercion (*Zwang*), ethical subjugation (*Bezwingung*) functions by means of the productive power of norms (*Sitten*). This new, 'norm-alizing' politics explicitly pursues the strategic objective of a simultaneous individualization and universalization of man in modern society, in which the dysfunctional contingency or - in Hegelian terminology - the «particularity» of the individual is to be eradicated (*vernichtet*)<sup>36</sup>. Yet in order to achieve more effectively the eradication of such particularity, the subjugating strategy of ethical normalization no longer repressively restricts,

33. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 116; IDEM, *Werke 2*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986, p. 64.

35. IDEM, *Natural Law*, pp. 93, 115.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 111. Cf. C. SCHMITT, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1985, p. 58: It was none other than Carl Schmitt who succinctly stated the strategic aim of Hegel's philosophy: «Hegelianism, like every rationalist system, negates the individual as accidental and inessential, and elevates the whole systematically into an Absolute.»



but in an act of *Aufhebung* productively mobilizes individual human nature to actively affirm the political imperatives of the ethical community. Instead of dysfunctionally marginalizing the contingent desires of the individual from a hierarchical position of coercive alterity, ethical power «penetrates» the manifold nature of man in order - from below - to immanently transform those very desires into the mobilized material of integrated action<sup>37</sup>. The act of *Aufhebung* here does not violently repress (*gewaltsam unterdrückt*), but instead activates activity, produces productivity, summons spontaneity in the nature of man. In this way, this new economy of ethical power must not articulate itself repeatedly in order to breathe life into the dead letter of the abstract law; instead, in silence it can circulate continuously and individually in the mobilized nature of modern man, below the threshold of the state apparatus in numerous arrangements spread out into the entire social body, such as in educational institutions<sup>38</sup>.

It is above all then this fundamental difference in the *modus operandi* of human control that distinguishes *Zwang* from *Bezwingung*. This new economy of productive power in ethical life forms the nucleus of a theory of political kinetics which strives to subjugate by rendering this political product, the modern subject, to «an absolute product» which, as we saw Hegel already state, is to have «no standing apart from the producing; it is not posited as something self-sustaining, as something that has standing prior to and independent of the producing»<sup>39</sup>. It can come thus as no surprise that we find Hegel asserting that the «Ethical» is «the mover of all things human»<sup>40</sup>. And because this strategy of ethical life avoids alienating interventions and instead prides itself on the promotion of the pleasurable enjoyment of the individual in its active service to the ethical totality, Hegel can assert that it simultaneously advances the well-being of the individual and the collective<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, due to the presupposition of an underlying identity of reason and human nature, Hegel's philosophy can even claim to foster in the ethical subjugation of the modern individual his own true freedom; a

37. IDEM, *Natural Law*, p. 66.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

39. IDEM, *The Difference*, p. 116.

40. IDEM, *Natural Law*, p. 58.

41. IDEM, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1977, p. 393: Hegel argues that the «distinction between duty to the individual and duty to the universal is {...} not something definitely fixed. The truth is rather that what the individual does for himself also contributes to the general good; the more he has made provision for himself, not only is there a greater *possibility* of his being of service to others, but his *actual* existence itself consists only in his being and living in contact with others. His individual enjoyment essentially has the meaning of putting what is his own at the disposal of others and of helping them to obtain *their* enjoyment. Therefore, in the fulfilment of duty to individuals and so to oneself, the duty to the universal is also fulfilled.»



freedom for which «nothing is external to it, so that for it no coercion is possible»<sup>42</sup>? Hence, Hegel is not inhibited to conclude that «the community of a person with others» in ethical life «must not be regarded as a limitation (*Beschränkung*) of the true freedom of the individual but essentially as its enlargement (*Erweiterung*)»<sup>43</sup>.

**4. Glas: Derrida on Zwingen and Bezwingen.** In his philosophy of ethical life, Hegel elaborates then what appears to be an irreducible strategic difference between the repressive character of abstract legality and morality, on the one hand, and the productive, mobilizing features of ethical life, on the other. Yet in his discussion of *Zwang* and *Bezwingung* in *Glas*, as I will attempt to show, Derrida reduces the categorical difference between these two economies of power without proper justification.

In accordance with his strategy of deconstruction, in *Glas* Derrida initiates his critical reading of Hegel's science of ethical life by locating the violent hierarchy of opposition and the consequent claim to a reconciled, *aufgehobenen* identity, which he ultimately seeks to subvert. As the alleged reconciliation of reason and nature, the notion of Spirit finds for Hegel its essence in absolute activity<sup>44</sup>. In the *Geist* of a people, reason and human nature no longer stand in a mechanically causal relation of conflictual alterity, but instead are claimed to be united in the synchronic identity of uninhibited activity. In Hegel's philosophy of ethical life (1801 - 1803), the realization of this uninhibited activity of rationalized nature/naturalized reason in the *Geist* of a people is achieved first by the paradigm shift from the coercive strategies of morality and legality to the subjugating strategy of ethical life. In order to contaminate the field of Hegelian dialectics with marks of *différance*, Derrida must thus track down the traces of reason's repression of human nature inhabiting the *aufgehobenen* identity of the individual in the ethical identity of a people. Indeed, the «stakes» of Derrida's theoretical investments here are «enormous», for without «breaking with the system of *Aufhebung* and with speculative dialectics» where «everything, what is most decisive, is played out», that is, without shaking the very foundation of Hegel's science of ethical life by revealing repression in the institutions of ethical life, the general strategy of deconstruction must restrict its own desire for dividends at a point where its speculations should yield their largest returns<sup>45</sup>.

42. IDEM, *Natural Law*, p. 89.

43. IDEM, *The Difference*, p. 145.

44. J. DERRIDA, *Glas*, p. 24.

45. IDEM, *Positions*, p. 44.



In *Glas*, Derrida counsels the reader recurrently not to hasten to identify the *aufhebende* energy or, in Hegel's own terms here, the true eradicating power (*wahrhaft vernichtende Macht*) of ethical life with a mechanism involving repression<sup>46</sup>. Yet in the end, Derrida repeatedly finds his initial inkling of the repressive nature of *Aufhebung* confirmed by his investigations. An example of this may be found in Derrida's account of Hegel's depiction of the institution of marriage, in which the unification of conjugal partners demands the repressive self-restriction of their natural desires<sup>47</sup>. According to Derrida, the *Aufhebung* of the law of infidelity into the loving and «liberating» relationship of marriage involves a «complex economic effect», in which the hitherto repressive «interdict is in a certain way lifted»<sup>48</sup>. The love present in the conjugal partners has the *aufhebenden* effect of interiorizing the interdict of infidelity, of «devouring the limit» of this abstract law<sup>49</sup>. Consequently, as Derrida explains the movement of *Aufhebung*, «in passing inside, the limit becomes infinite: so there is no longer any finite limit, no longer any limit or, what comes down to the same, there is an infinite limit. Conjugal desire is free because it is subject to an infinite law»<sup>50</sup>. Derrida is at pains to expose in what way the *Aufhebung* of finite limit no less involves the continued presence of a limit, albeit an infinite one. Yet, one could ask, what actually constitutes an infinite limit? In the eyes of Hegel at least, is not the true infinite without limit, i.e. does it not represent paradigmatically the unlimited, unrestricted, unrepressed, uninhibited activity of an individual integrated into a reconciled, communal relation?

What Derrida means by such an infinite limit can be made plain in the following way. According to Derrida, the acts of *Aufhebung* at work in Hegelian dialectics involve what he terms more generally the «re-strict-ure of repression»<sup>51</sup>. Instead of simply superseding repression, the acts of *Aufhebung* operating in Hegel's political philosophy are said to involve both a freeing from and simultaneous strengthening of repression, of the repressive limit. In the light of this «undecidable» 'concept' of the «re-strict-ure of repression», Derrida's strategy of deconstruction can claim to fulfil its critical function by revealing not only the traces of repression forgotten in

46. IDEM, *Glas*, pp. 26, 132.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 35f., 192 ff.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 35f.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 26: In this systematic context, Derrida also speaks of the «suppression of counter-pressure», as is documented in the following passage: «The process of idealization, the constitution of ideality as the milieu of thought, of the universal, of the infinite, is the suppression of the pressure. Thus *Aufhebung* is also a suppressive counterpressure, a counter-pressure, a *Hemmung*, an inhibition».



the *aufgehobenen* identities of Hegel's philosophy of ethical life, but also in posing a resistance to the reestablishment of the violent hierarchy of reason over nature by disorganizing the very system of oppositions it presupposes.

The reduction of *Aufhebung*, and thereby of the *modus operandi* of Hegel's speculative strategy of ethical life, to a mechanism *involving* repression governs also Derrida's deconstructive analysis of the categories of *Zwingen* and *Bezwingen*. In tracing Derrida's appropriation of this opposition of terms, I will attempt to show in what way the strategy of deconstruction stumbles, if but for a moment, by unjustifiably uniting *Zwingen* and *Bezwingung* in a purely posited, more primordial identity of repressive restriction and constraint. Through the eradication of the dysfunctional singularity of the subject in ethical life, according to Hegel the integrated individual is subjugated, but not coerced (*bezwungen, aber nicht gezwungen*). In his discussion of Hegel's use of these two terms, *Zwingen* and *Bezwingung*, Derrida rightly refers by italicization to the common etymological root of these two terms in *Zwingen/Zwang* (coercion); he also points to the fact that French translators are not wrong in asserting that Hegel's «play on words» between *Zwingen* and *Bezwingen* «is untranslatable»<sup>52</sup>. Yet despite the alleged untranslatability of this play, of Hegel's play, of the play of the philosopher who for Derrida categorically rejects all play<sup>53</sup>, Derrida plays with these different terms by referring both *Zwingen* and *Bezwingen* back to a more primordial unity of posited meaning. In what constitutes without doubt a most paradoxical displacement of strategic positions, a remarkable reversal of investments, here where Hegel defers to difference Derrida insists first and foremost on the *construction* of common identity: «In effect the two verbs (*Zwingen* and *Bezwingen* - DCD) have very closely related senses, all referring to what I would call a movement of *constriction*: grip, constraint, restriction; it is a question of closing up, squeezing, containing, suppressing, subjecting, compressing, repressing, subduing, reducing, forcing, subjugating, enslaving, hemming in»<sup>54</sup>.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

53. IDEM, *Writing and Difference*, pp. 260 ff.: In his essay on Bataille, Derrida writes of Hegel: «In interpreting negativity as labor, in betting for discourse, meaning, history, etc., Hegel has bet against play, against chance.»

54. IDEM, *Glas*, pp. 99, 191: Derrida reaffirms his belief that *Zwingen* and *Bezwingung* are two heterogeneous forms of an ultimately homogeneous form of repressive constraint: «Does the heterogeneity of all the restrictions, of all the counterforces of constriction (*Hemmung, Unterdrückung, Zwingen, Bezwingung, zurückdrängen, zurücksetzen*) always define species of general negativity, for of *Aufhebung*, conditions of the relief? Repression{..} could occupy several places in regard to these re-(con)strictions (...). If one asks: «*what is repression?*», «*what is the re-strict-ure of repression?*»; in other words, «*how is that re-strict-ure to be thought?*», the response is The Dialectic».



Yet by positing this original unity of *Zwang* and *Bezwingung* in constriction, constraint, restriction, suppression and repression, etc., does not Derrida derail the critical movement of deconstruction before it has even begun? To answer this crucial question we need not look far, for this *construction* seems clearly to defy Derrida's very own determination of deconstruction, when for instance in *Dissemination* he declares that «the movement of differance» is «a 'productive', conflictual movement which cannot be preceded by any identity, any unity, or any original simplicity»<sup>55</sup>. In spite of his own precautionary principles and now equipped with this original unity of *Zwang* and *Bezwingung*, Derrida proceeds to discuss Hegel's deference to difference: «But Hegel chooses to dissociate and oppose rigorously the one to the other, *zwingen* to *bezwingen*, in taking up again in part the terminology of Fichte who speaks in his *Grundlage des Naturrechts* of a *Zwangsgesetz* (coercive law). The constriction of *bezwingen* is distinguished from the simple application of an empiric constraint, erects the empiric individual into a free subject. The very top of this erection is called death: 'This negative absolute {...} is entirely raised above all *Zwang*. Death is the absolute *Bezwingung*' {...} Therefore the subject raises itself, stands above a certain type of constriction (*Zwang*): but the subject can stand thus only to suffer the absolute increase of a counterconstriction that, to chastise it absolutely, totally frees it from the prior constriction called natural, empiric, and so on, the prior constriction that is always weaker. *Bezwingung* erects a freedom in lifting the *Zwang*. Absolute - colossal in any case - increase of counterconstriction. {...} *Bezwingen*, death's infinite and thus nonconstraining constriction, produces the strict: what is called spirit, freedom, the ethical, and so on»<sup>56</sup>. And in an other central passage Derrida states: «Does the heterogeneity of all the restrictions, of all the counterforces of constriction (*Hemmung*, *Unterdrückung*, *Zwingen*, *Bezwingung*, *zurückdrängen*, *Zurücksetzung*) always define species of general negativity, forms of *Aufhebung*, conditions of the relief? Repression {...} could occupy several places in regard to these re-(con)strictions»<sup>57</sup>.

In light of the original identity of *Zwang* and *Bezwingung* Derrida posits as true at the very outset of this movement of deconstruction, it must be questioned whether there is any meaningful difference in the difference between «constriction» and a «re-stricting constriction» or counter-

55. IDEM, *Dissemination*, p. 6 ff.: The entire passage reads as follows: «The movement of differance» is «a 'productive', conflictual movement which cannot be preceded by any identity, any unity, or any original simplicity; which cannot be 'relieved' (*relevé*), resolved, or appeased by any philosophical dialectic.»

56. IDEM, *Glas*, p. 99 ff.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 191.



constriction which is both an opposition to and duplication of constriction? Indeed, Derrida's own determination of deconstruction seems to demand it. More specifically, can Derrida claim to justify the difference between the constriction of *Zwang* and the re-stricting constriction of *Bezwingen*, when both these determinations collapse immediately into the more primordially unified discursive field *involving* the movement of constriction as *restriction*, constraint, suppression and repression? At this juncture it does not seem illegitimate to assert that the «undecidable» output of this deconstructive venture, i.e. the «re-(con)striction» or re-stricting constriction of *Bezwingen*, is pre-decided already from the very start by the purely posited input of a more primordial identity of *Zwang* and *Bezwingung* in the movement of constriction as restriction, constraint, repression, etc. In light of the strategic necessity of deconstruction to disclose traces of repression in *Bezwingung*, it appears then as if Derrida has constructed here nothing less than a master *petitio principii*, a grand *circulus vitiosus* by positing this original identity of *Zwang* and *Bezwingung* in the movement of constriction as repressive restriction and constraint. Although Derrida designed *différance* to be a «kind of economy, that war economy» which «brings the radical otherness or the absolute exteriority of the outside into relation with the closed, agonistic, hierarchical field of philosophical oppositions»<sup>58</sup>, in this particular movement of deconstruction what is claimed to come from the outside is already at the very outset on the inside. In consequence, the destabilizing movement of deconstruction is reduced here to the stable exchange of one form of repression with another which, though characterized as «re-stricting» in its «constriction», is - as constriction - nonetheless from the very beginning posited by Derrida to function within the general field of *restriction*, constraint, suppression, subjection, compression, forcing, enslavement, limitation, and repression. By constricting from the very beginning the *aufhebende* force of *Bezwingung* to a form of power *involving* repression, the open(ing) operation of deconstruction thus appears here to be limited to but a barter of words within a closed field of common identity.

Of no less importance, however, is the further question whether by limiting the difference between *Zwingen* and *Bezwingen* in the constructed identity of repressive restriction and constraint Derrida can adequately account for the radically differing material effects of the heterogeneous economies of power in modern society which Hegel makes claim to in his paradigm shift from abstract legality and morality to ethical life? In addition, by limiting the *bezwingende* power of ethical life to a re-stricting of constriction or a «re-strict-ure of repression», can Derrida critically account for the specific form of alterity at work between reason and human nature in modern institutions

58. IDEM, *Dissemination*, p. 5.



of ethical identity? To continue to conceptualize the problem of ethical power in modern society solely in terms of repression, as Derrida ultimately seems to do, is without doubt to remain committed to the belief in a radical alterity of reason with its Other, (human) nature. Yet it is not simply the repressively alienating, but also the positively integrating effects of contemporary social institutions that are of concern. To be critically questioned then is not simply the origins of repressive exclusion, but also the ends of productive integration. By activating the hitherto hidden potential for spontaneous, rationally integrated activity in human nature through the ethical subjugation of man, Hegel thought that a system of free, uninhibited and mutually beneficial activity among the members of an ethical community could be established. To speak in terms of productivism, integration, and the highly contingent character of alterity<sup>59</sup> inhabiting the relationship between reason and human nature in modern society, however, is not to restrict oneself solely to a belief in reason's power to liberate nature in ethical life by releasing it from the repressive forces of *Verstand*, as Hegel once did. Instead, one may seek to critically account for the growing interdependencies resulting from the appropriation of human nature by modern institutions which no longer simply repressively marginalize, but productively integrate individuals into a system of mutually functional relations of societal reproduction<sup>60</sup>. Against this backdrop it seems that by limiting *Bezwingen* to a re-(con)striction which continues to repressively restrict and constrain, by reducing *Bezwingen* to a modality of power ultimately *involving* repression in the re-stricting of constriction or «re-strict-ure of repression», we may be confronted in this specific section of *Glas* less with the limits of Hegelian dialectics than with that of deconstruction<sup>61</sup>. In light of this possibility, perhaps it is not unjustified to reverse Derrida's own assertion and ask whether or not the *reduction* of difference to *différance* is to remain far behind in the debate<sup>62</sup>?

Symptomatic of the fact that Derrida constrains the difference between *Zwingen* and *Bezwingen* in the identity of power involving repression is lastly his discussion of Hegel's notion of education (*Erziehung*) which, as I have shown elsewhere<sup>63</sup>, systematically belongs to the strategy of ethical life. In his *Natural Law* essay, Hegel unequivocally employs the

59. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Werke* 1, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986, p. 31: The young Hegel himself offered us this insight: «Man is such a multifarious thing that everything can be made out of him» (*Der Mensch is ein so vielseitiges Ding, daß es sich alles aus ihm machen läßt*).

60. Cf. M. FOUCAULT, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 162, 58 ff.

61. J. DERRIDA, *Glas*, p. 191.

62. IDEM, *Positions*, p. 101.

63. D.C. DURST, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-186.



notion of *Bezwingen* to characterize the productive modality of power exerted on the individual through education<sup>64</sup>. Yet in his discussion of the Hegelian notion of education in his Jenaer writings, Derrida fails to take up this central notion of *Bezwingung*. Instead, in reference to Hegel's *Jenenser Realphilosophie I* (1803/4), Derrida again insists on the identification of what for Hegel constitutes a *bezwingende* practice with a de-limiting, yet ultimately violent and repressive economy of political power: «What is education? The death of the parents, the formation of the child's consciousness, the *Aufhebung* of its unconsciousness in(to) the form of ideality. 'In education the unconscious unity of the child is relieved.' There is no need to hurry to identify this idealizing relief with a 'repression' of the 'unconscious'. But the question of such a translation cannot be avoided. Education (*Erziehung*) and culture (*Bildung*) violently delimit a matter by a form containing it. This violent form is ideal»<sup>65</sup>.

Despite repeated exhortations for hesitation, and despite the earnest claim that «we will never be finished with reading and rereading Hegel»<sup>66</sup>, perhaps it must said that in *Glas*, indeed in what constitutes but a short stretch in the long passage through Hegel in *Glas*, Derrida sought to cash in too quickly on the strategic speculations of his venture against Hegel, to bring this dialogue with Hegel on the difference between *Zwingen* and *Bezwingen* to a quick close, to return home from reading, in the repressive identity of repression.

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64. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Natural Law*, p. 115.: Hegel argues that in absolute ethical life «the living being under this form of the negative is the budding of ethical life, and education is by definition the emerging progressive sublation (*Aufheben*) of the negative or subjective, for the child, as the form of the potentiality of an ethical individual, is something subjective or negative, whose development to manhood is the cessation of the form and whose education is the disciplining or the subjugating (*die Zucht oder das Bezwingen*) of the form. But the positive aspect and the essence of the child is that it is suckled at the breast of universal ethical life; it lives at first in an absolute vision of that life as alien to it, but comprehends it more and more and so passes over into the universal spirit.»

65. J. DERRIDA, *Glas*, p. 132.

66. IDEM, *Positions*, p. 77.