

## 6. Conclusion

*'Nothing is built on stone. All is built on sand,  
but we must build as if the sand were stone.'*  
Jorge Luis Borges,  
*Fragments of an Apocryphal Gospel*<sup>323</sup>

Conclusion. The title of the chapter declares that the text is coming to an end and we cannot help but wonder: what does it mean to conclude a text? What is it like – what should it be like – to bring a text to its end? A certain rigour is demanded, a certain decisiveness, a certain self-assuredness: the writer must articulate her thesis, develop her argument coherently, and make a point that can withstand criticism – a point, in other words, clear, enlightened, and enlightening, one that will convince the reader of its solidity. Of course, it all depends on the promises the writer gave, on the questions that traverse her text and that she undertook to pose already in the introduction, promising to provide a solution to a certain theoretical or practical problem. The conclusion seems to be nothing but the keeping of a promise: the text comes full circle, seeking closure, claiming to have responded to the challenges it set from the introduction onwards by forming a rigid, argumentative architectonic – a homogeneous totality whose internal elements are systematically interconnected. All in all, to write a conclusion is to perform an act of mastery: the ideas were tamed and successfully communicated from writer to reader, convincing the latter of their validity from a perspective both addresser and addressee share, their rationality, which enables them to engage in communicat-

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323 Jorge Luis Borges, 'Fragments of an Apocryphal Gospel' ['Περικοπέες ενός απόκρυφου Ευαγγελίου'], in *Poems [Ποιήματα]*, trans. Dimitris Kalokyris (Patakis, 2014), 127.

ive interaction. If a text consists in such a communicative interaction, conclusion appears as the seal of its success.

The question traversing the whole of this text, providing its heart-beat, is the question of responsibility: ‘What should I do?’ It was identified from the beginning not simply as a supplement to an already formulated subjective basis, but as its very material, as the axis around which subjectivity spirals, endowing her with her unique standing. What urged us towards the deconstructive reading of the Kantian fact of reason was an unconditional desire to vindicate subjectivity and morality, to expose that subjectivity is something more than the voice of reason echoing within her. Those were the questions and the intentions that constituted the horizon of this thesis. And now it is time to conclude: to review our argumentative line, to be decisive, to provide a clear response concerning the measure of responsibility, especially to the extent that this measure is determinative of the subjective knot’s texture. Admittedly, the present of our conclusion finds us in a state of hesitation, of suspension of judgement, of epoché. If, throughout the text we sought to show that subjectivity constitutes the *only ideatum that surpasses its idea*, if responsibility for the Other cannot be pinned down within the structures of a symbolic system, how can we master the limits of this text, given that the text per se is haunted by a trace of Otherness resisting thematisation, that a remainder of responsibility, non-absorbable by the argumentative sequence, prevents its closure – the coincidence of the beginning with its end, the utterance of a definite response to the questions posed? How are we to face this conclusion without conclusion? Shall we consider the text’s non-coincidence with itself a failure, a failure to make a point, a failure to settle things by saying something substantial about subjectivity and her responsibility?

The hyper-aporetic idiom of the ethics of alterity has often been marked as an object of criticism of Levinas and Derrida, in the sense that they both do not seem to provide satisfactory (that is, definite) solutions to the question of responsibility.<sup>324</sup> Doesn’t surpassing the

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324 See Stelios Virvidakis, ‘Deconstruction and undeconstructible concepts of moral philosophy’ [‘Αποδόμηση και μη αποδομήσιμες έννοιες της ηθικής φιλοσοφίας’],

Kantian transcendental certainties and abandoning the unconditionality of the categorical imperative create a sense of uncertainty which looms over the way we interact in the here and now of our everyday life? Doesn't the putative autoimmunity haunting the identity of the subject essentially traumatise her status, hurt her self-determination, sketch an image of subjectivity as morally homeless, wavering eternally between Good and Evil without any actual guiding thread on what to decide? Doesn't the practical impossibility of retreating into an inviolable sphere expose the subject to the danger of what is 'to come' ('à venir'), to an inability to find shelter against the Other whose demand cannot be weighed through the employment of sound normative criteria? What if the person knocking on our door is Reverend Powell, the demonic preacher from the *Night of the Hunter*, whose summons is more than capable of leading us astray? Aren't our communities doomed to be transformed into environments of an unresolvable moral ambiguity if every regulative ideal we put forward remains deconstructable under the gaze of the Other? *Perhaps*.

*Perhaps*. The response seems highly troubling, as if echoing a certain indifference towards the here and now of our everyday life, as if deconstruction consisted in a nuanced marivaudage, in a process of blurring the limits for the sake of a narcissistic enjoyment. Such a reading of 'perhaps' would justifiably make us think that the ethics of deconstruction leads to nothing but a destruction of the fundamental norms enabling and guiding our intersubjectivity. In this thesis, however, we have striven to designate the exact opposite: that responsibility for the Other is excessive, that it is not reduced to the impersonal structures of reason, that the Other person is not just a mirroring of ourselves, that she is a stranger, a total stranger, whose strangeness must not be repressed for the sake of a coherent discourse, a stable axiomatic of values, a definite conclusion in regard to what we should do. The price we have to pay for unveiling the ultra-transcendental responsibility destabilising moral principles might indeed be moral

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in *The political and ethical thought of Jacques Derrida* [*Η πολιτική και ηθική σκέψη του Jacques Derrida*], ed. Gerasimos Kakolyris (Plethron, 2015), 294–295.

ambiguity, the echo of ‘perhaps’. Yet this is a risk, a philosophical risk, a personal risk, a political risk, that we will have to take: to think in terms of difference rather than in terms of an imperialistic sameness, to attempt to construct our principles on the groundless ground of what breaks out of its form, to be constantly ready to etch lines of escape when those principles become repressive, to transgress them and restore them over and over again. The non-form of the Other’s demand makes the articulation of a conclusive principle impossible, but this does not need to paralyse our reflexes. Jorge Luis Borges’ words resound in our ears as a cryptic categorical principle, as a conclusion without conclusion: *It is our duty to build upon sand, as if it were stone*. It is our duty to dare to construct upon the formless, to decide without drowning the Event of the decision in pre-articulated norms, to decide, however, without being discouraged or castrated by the formless material of our construction. May we treat this as the concluding principle of this thesis?

It is time to conclude. To conclude without conclusion, to defer (and differ, as in *différance*) conclusion, by opening subjectivity, intersubjectivity, community to what is *to come*: to a future that will not be just a reduplication of the present, to a future radically incommensurable with it, precisely because it embodies this trace of the diachronic past of responsibility. How shall we approach this strange future? It is the unexpected arrival of the Other whose summons cannot be immobilised under our conceptual glance, an arrival that haunts our present, for we are always already – from an immemorial past<sup>325</sup> – responsible to welcome her, sharpening our ethical reflexes in the here and now. This is the challenge, the spectral challenge posed by the ethics of alterity discourse: to keep the autoimmune community alive, to be constantly open to the unexpected arrival of the stranger, to retain a *difficult freedom*, a freedom itself freed from the shackles of consciousness and sovereignty, a freedom to face the singular Other without pre-mediating principles. Isn’t it a fine risk to take?

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325 In this sense, Derrida underlines that the ‘to come’ is ‘more ancient than the present, older than the past present’. See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 37–38.