# 4. The Fact of the Other or Encountering the Infinite

*'Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin'.*
*Paul Celan, Lob der Ferne*[174]

## 4.1. Beyond Reason's Totality: Deconstruction's Ethical Imperative

In the last chapter of the *Groundwork*, 'On the Extreme Boundary of all Practical Philosophy', Kant insists that reason shall not attempt to seek an explanation of its practicality in any exterior force: the question of what motivates its legislative activity belongs outside the scope of practical philosophy, and determining this scope is of utmost importance:

> … so that reason may not, on the one hand, to the detriment of morals search about in the world of sense for the supreme motive and a comprehensible but empirical interest, and that it may not, on the other hand, impotently flap its wings without moving from the spot in the space, which is empty for it, of transcendent concepts called the intelligible world and so lose itself among phantoms.[175]

In this passage, Kant appears as a kind of enlightened exorcist: he ostracises any exterior shadows that would pose a threat to the integrity of his moral architectonic to the (non-) lieu of non-philosophy, the space of the intellectually intact, the *ghostly*. He is thus able to secure the putative closure of his moral system, thanks to which the internal relations between the key concepts that constitute it do not owe their articulation to any external element irreducible to the totality of the system itself. The enthronement of reason as the absolute field within

---

174  Paul Celan, 'Lob der Ferne', in *Mohn und Gedächtnis: Gedichte* (Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1994), 29.

175  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:462.

which philosophical investigation takes place exemplifies what we may call *logocentrism*[176] and is expressed through a desire for a mastery of the (philosophical) limit, 'a desire to command one's frontiers and thereby regulate the traffic that moves in and out of one's territory',[177] maintaining, therefore, a robust distinction between the inside and the outside, philosophy and non-philosophy.

Delving into the philosophical tradition of logocentrism, from Plato to Rousseau and Kant, would undoubtedly elucidate the intellectual dimensions of this significant symptom of Western thought; we lack, however, the capacity for such an investigation. What we would rather bring into focus is how this desire for mastery of the limit operates within the Kantian practical field and what it actually accomplishes. As our preceding analysis has shown, Kant intends to construct a firm moral standpoint from which agents can orchestrate their coexistence by solidly defining their duties. Such definition is possible for Kant only through a philosophical gesture of taming the plurality of the manifold of desires into the unity of reason, of reducing the alterity of the involved subjects to the sameness of their rational nature. Such is the command uttered by the moral law: only those desires are normatively valid that can be transformed into reasons rationally acceptable to the agents to whom they are addressed, precisely because they are in equilibrium with the universal status shared by both the addresser and the addressee – their *dignity*, which stems from their capacity to act as the *unconditional*, initiating link of the causal chain, a capacity

---

176 In her preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Spivak defines logocentrism as 'the belief that the first and last things are the Logos, the Word …, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full self-consciousness'. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* xviii. Derrida argues within *Grammatology* that logocentrism is inseparable from phonocentrism to the extent that the Western philosophical tradition privileges voice as providing immediate access to thought; such a seeming coincidence of speech and meaning ultimately secures the subject's self-presence. By contrast, writing, as Rousseau calls it, appears as a mere 'supplement' to speech: an external, derivative aid that also risks corrupting the supposed natural immediacy of the spoken word.

177 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 74.

that can be itself traced back to their consciousness of the moral law as a fact of reason. The voice of reason within each agent is what endows her with her inalienable transcendental standing, her *sovereignty*, i.e., her authority to demand a minimum of respect by self-determining her will. Reason constitutes the centre from the heart of which a sequence of concepts arises: unconditionality, sovereignty, symmetry, and the moral values spiralling around them. Anything deviating from this centre is not worthy of the name of philosophy; it is, in the words of Derrida, a 'debauchery',[178] *a luring off the straight path, to the phantoms, to the non-lieu beyond.*

The deconstructive approach of the Kantian discourse we have taken up so far has tried precisely to locate within Kant's text – following Derrida's working paradigm – 'a non-site or a non-philosophical site',[179] from which to interrogate the stability of his architectonic: such is the disruptive function we have attributed to the fact of reason. As an attempt to attain a point of exteriority to logocentrism,[180] deconstruction may be understood, as Critchley highlights, 'as the desire to keep open a dimension of alterity which can neither be reduced, comprehended, nor, strictly speaking, even *thought* by philosophy'. In his words, 'in question is an other to philosophy that has never been and cannot become philosophy's other, but an other within which philosophy becomes inscribed'.[181] In our words, what is at stake is a questioning and bastardising of the sharp bipolar distinction between the spaces of philosophy and non-philosophy, as established by Kant.

How are we to understand the spirit breathing within this deconstructive desire? Shall we approach it as a subtle sophistical rhetoric, a playful fluidisation of solid structures, a light-hearted hide-and-seek from the strict logocentric demands, or a love for the ineffable? If we

---

178  Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford University Press, 2005), 19–20.

179  Jacques Derrida, 'Deconstruction and the Other', in Richard Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (Fordham University Press, 2004), 140. Cited in Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 29.

180  Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 161–162.

181  Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 29.

adopt the Kantian vocabulary, such a perception of deconstruction would classify it as a hypothetical imperative, a means towards the end of a narcissistic intellectual pleasure. Was this the motive behind the present work? Emmanuel Levinas begins his seminal work *Totality and Infinity* acknowledging that 'it is of highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality'.[182] What urged us towards this deconstructive reading of Kant was precisely a certain suspicion that we might indeed be duped by morality; that, in other words, the strict logocentric deontology and the binary hierarchical oppositions it produces form a tyrannical intellectual machinery which, in presuming to endow subjectivity with a place under the moral sun, sacrifices her singularity by reducing it to the mere relation to an impersonal law. Our suspicions intensified throughout our roaming into the central Kantian concepts: as we tried to display in several moments of our analysis (especially in the subchapter 'Impact of the Moral Law'), the object of respect in ourselves and the other person is just the idea of the moral law, an idea that Kant fails to justify, trapping (inter)subjectivity under the overarching dome of an impersonal, groundless force. In the wonderful articulation of Iris Murdoch, the sole object of respect seems to be '*universal reason in our breasts*',[183] an axis that tames heterogeneity and provides a measure by which humanity in our face can be calculated and thematised. This is a point particularly emphasised by Levinas in his critique against idealism: contrary to what Kant proclaims as the incalculable character of the dignity of humanity, Levinas insists that, within idealism, 'the Other and the I function as elements of an ideal calculus',[184] as interchangeable moments in a system that subsumes our singularity under a noumenal totality.

In light of the above, the motive of our deconstructive gesture becomes clearer: our response to the vocation of the unnameable, our

---

182   Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 21.

183   Iris Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter Conrad (Penguin Books, 1999), 215. Cited in Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 131.

184   Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 216.

response to an alterity that can neither be excluded from nor digested within logocentric conceptuality – a tension explicit in our analysis of the fact of reason doctrine – comes as an unconditional categorical imperative to defend subjectivity and morality, a defence that can only take place through the transcendence of transcendental idealism's totalising discourse. Where does this transcendence, this breaking out of the rational form lead us? To the non-lieu of the face of the Other person, to an encounter with the radical alterity of the Other, which, in being irreducible to a common mediating genus (such as the Kantian rational nature), in overflowing the intentionality of objectifying thought, is expressed by the term *Infinite*.[185] In radicalising the valuable Darwallian insights demonstrated in the previous chapter, we will attempt to show – employing insights from the work of Levinas and Derrida[186] – how subjectivity can be vindicated only in the framework of a non-allergic relation to the Other, a traumatic exposure to an unconditional responsibility that obsesses the self prior to and beyond her autonomy and sovereignty. The first step towards carving this heteronomous, unmediated summons of the self by the Other consists in denuding the self of any transcendental predicates that would predetermine and, hence, neutralise this relation, in exposing the pre-subjective fabric

---

185  Ibid., 24–30.

186  The 'ethics of alterity' front that Levinas and Derrida seem to form in this text against and beyond Kantian logocentrism should not mislead us into thinking that the work of the two thinkers is identical. What gives us the right to synthesise moments of their work is that both Levinas and Derrida, despite their differences in idiom or philosophical origins, emphasise the disturbing presence of an element of alterity within every identity. Critchley has convincingly argued that Derrida's deconstructive problematic has developed significantly vis-à-vis the question of ethics in the Levinasian work, an ethical demarcation of deconstruction that constitutes the spirit of this study as well (see Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 9–13). Borrowing Critchley's words, we do not want to 'Derridianise' Levinas nor turn Derrida into a Levinasian; we cannot silence the fact, however, that Levinas comes considerably closer to Derrida in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* – written after Derrida's deconstructive reading of *Totality and Infinity* in 'Violence and Metaphysics' – whereas Derrida constructs on central moments of the Levinasian ethical discourse after his so-called 'ethical turn'. For an illuminating study of this intellectual exchange, see Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 107–187.

that enables subjectification through the encounter with the Other. To perform this step, we will explore the Levinasian concept of *separation*.

## 4.2. The First Person: Separation

How shall we approach the *separation* of the self, a concept so crucial to understanding her encounter with the Infinite? To better grasp it, we need to underline, once again, what is at stake: Levinas attempts to articulate a relation between the self and the Other in which the two terms will not approach each other as mere individuations of a common genus or an overarching totalising force like Reason or Being. Ethics, on Levinas' account, is the 'royal road' of the relation with the radical alterity of the Other'[187]– an alterity which resists the closure of totalising schemes. The self and the other must, hence, remain asymmetrical, transcendent to one another, without common frontiers, *strangers*.[188] Let's not underestimate the strangeness of the Other, a point on which Levinas insists: it is not a strangeness naïve or temporary – until the self retrieves her cognitive control and domestic-ates it through the intentionality of her consciousness, elucidating and taming its disturbing aspects. It is not the strangeness of an object of desire which at first excites the lacking self, only to surrender later to her lusts and fade away. The interface with the Other does not begin centripetally, from a lack of the individual soul (as for instance Lacanian psychoanalysis would read it), a move that would absorb her alterity within the machinery of the self's imperialistic desire. This is why Levinas is very careful to sketch an image of the self as closed upon herself, without any dialectical or ethical reference to the Other stem-ming from overarching logical structures or an unfolding of the self's desire. Exteriority must come as an absolute Event, and the concept that Levinas employs to articulate this ambiguous double possibility – of an inwardness that can be exposed to an exteriority, of an exteriority that does not emerge dialectically from inwardness – is *separation*.

---

187   Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 29.
188   Ibid., 39.

In the beginning there was *enjoyment* (*jouissance*). Levinas pays particular attention to explicitly parting ways with the Heideggerian perception of the subject as *thrown* (geworfen) into the world, anguishing and striving for the preservation of her Being, a perception which in the end subordinates the relation with someone who is an existent (the ethical relation) to a relation with the impersonal Being of existents.[189] In the beginning we are beings gratified, 'citizens of paradise',[190] passively receiving the grace of the natural elements. The sun that warms us, the water that quenches our thirst, the air we breathe, the soup we eat – these are not 'means of life', their existence is not exhausted in the utilitarian schematism that delineates them as nothing more than tools or implements for the survival of an impersonal Being that absorbs personality in its unfolding.[191] We do not live *through* the sun, through the air and the water, but *with* them, *enjoying* the touch of the rays, the rustle of the wind, the abundance of the flowing water. Life, Levinas claims, 'is not the naked will to be, an ontological Sorge', but love of life, a relation with contents 'more dear than Being': eating, sleeping, warming oneself in the sun.[192]

In this state of anarchic enjoyment, independent of any order of a priori conditions giving it meaning, the ipseity of the ego arises, which consists in the particularity of her happiness or enjoyment.[193] As Levinas emphasises, 'in enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude … Not against the Others … but entirely deaf to the Other, outside all communication and all refusal to communicate – without ears, like a hungry stomach'.[194] Immersed in the subtle shades of her enjoyment, the ego withdraws into herself, into the singularity of her psychism and corporeality, into the secrecy of her interiority, unbound by genera or

---

189  Ibid., 45.
190  Ibid., 144.
191  Ibid., 110.
192  Ibid., 112.
193  Ibid., 115.
194  Ibid., 134.

any kind of thematising forms: this is what the radicality of separation consists in.

The egoistic happiness of enjoyment that takes place through the passive reception of the elemental flows – the sun, the water, the wind – carries with it, however, a certain sense of disquietude: the burn that the sun may cause, the cold of the wind, the vehemence of the water, create in the vulnerable ego a need for self-protection.[195] Faced with the threat posed to her existence – a threat that is, per se, a modality of enjoyment and does not undermine its independence of ontological care – the person undertakes the duty to stand in the world and tame the menace of the elements by organising her *dwelling*.

What does this organisation involve? It involves the construction of a *habitation*, within the four walls of which the ego can find a refuge and set into motion her economic existence.[196] As Levinas underlines, the ego's recollection within her dwelling constitutes a suspension of immediate enjoyment in favour of a greater attention to oneself and one's possibilities.[197] The suspension of the uncertain future that the elements of nature embody for human existence is called *labour*;[198] the labouring body of the subject, her hands that shape the material centripetally, in accordance with human needs, eradicates the danger of the environment and, in this sense, postpones the threat of death that looms over.[199] To be a body, to be a labouring body, means, on the one hand, to be threatened by the muffled rustling of the elements and, on the other hand, to undertake the duty to stand, to master them, and prolong life.[200] This ambiguity of the body, this passage from the insecurity of life to 'the perpetual postponement of the expiration in which life risks foundering', to the harbouring of a secure present (through the representation and control of the elemental flows) and the pursuit of its harmonious unfolding within the temporal flow – the

---

195   Ibid., 143–144.
196   Ibid., 152–154.
197   Ibid., 156–157.
198   Ibid., 158–159.
199   Ibid., 165.
200   Ibid., 164.

future – opens, according to Levinas, the very dimensions of *time* and *consciousness*.[201]

## 4.3. The Second Person: Infinite Responsibility

To live in enjoyment, to dwell, to work – all these are nothing but aspects of the separated being: her inwardness, her secret – non-thematisable from a totalising third-person perspective – psychism. In the transition, however, from the former to the latter – from the passive reception of the elements to the active bodily standing in the world – the separated existence already finds herself in the field of *sociality*. The act of delimiting a part of this world and closing it off in order to construct my habitation, the possession of things through labour, the standing and roaming of my body within this territory, all inevitably entail my encounter with the face of the Other: her habitation, her body that enjoys and suffers, her roaming.[202] How shall I perceive her mysterious presence that potentially disturbs my freedom to roam in the world and appropriate its resources? How shall I treat the stranger who, in film noir fashion, knocks on my door in the middle of the night? Is there anything that differentiates her from the elements of nature which are sculpted centripetally according to the ego's needs? Shall I treat her as a means of enjoyment or self-preservation? Shall I delimit her in the form of an alter ego, pacifying her alterity, treating her as I would treat myself? *What should I do?*

This question, the question of responsibility – or, to be more precise, the question of the measure of responsibility – traverses this text from its very beginning. From the introduction onwards, we have tried to emphasise that subjectivity begins in time with an *aporia*: the aporia of how to translate her responsibility into duties, how to act. The very articulation of the question – as the initiation of an internal deliberation – implies a primacy of the self: a certain sovereignty, the autonomy

---

201  Ibid., 165.
202  Ibid., 146.

to determine one's duties with respect to the encounter with the Other without necessarily stepping out of oneself, the authority to become the author of the moral law (regardless of its content or form) and sclerotise the presence of the Other person and the responsibility it evokes under its schema. Like a wave hitting the rock again and again, we stumble upon the same impasse: an autoposited subject who cannot truly relate to anything other than herself, since the moral medium of relating to the Other arises seemingly from the internal operations of her moral consciousness, from an internal reflective freedom. Even if Levinas intends separation to be nothing but the fabric that enables the subjectification through the encounter with the Other person, the fabric seems too thick or too formulated to allow a genuine, unmediated encounter. Since the dimension of time opens within the stage of separation (the moment the ego postpones death, seeking to actively preserve her corporeal being by representing the world and shaping it in accordance with her needs), and since the dimension of time is guarded by the panopticon of the ego's consciousness which seeks to disclose the *truth* of her Being (in order to preserve it) as it unfolds within the temporal flow through a *synchronisation* (by recuperating its past aspects and projecting the future ones),[203] if the encounter with the Other person takes place within the scope of the temporal flow, then her presence – and the responsibility it evokes – will be immobilised as an object of the ego's intentionality. Responsibility towards her thus collapses into one more expression of *egology* – an instance of what we have called *imperialism of the Same.*

This is the dead end to which the question '*What should I do?*' seems to point: the annihilation of the Other's alterity before the self's reflective authority, the former's objectification under the panopticon gaze of the latter's consciousness. A more detailed examination, however, might actually bring us out of the impasse. The reflective freedom to specify one's duties seems to rest on a prior, non-negotiable responsibility, an *unconditional* fact: what is at stake is not whether

---

203 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 26–30.

one ought to act, but how she ought to act. This query, posed by our consciousness in the present, presupposes that, at some point in the past, a responsibility was undertaken by the self. If this responsibility was undertaken at a past moment within the temporal flow – namely, a moment once present before its succession – then it would constitute an object of the ego's consciousness, exemplifying the ego's spontaneity in thematising the world and interpersonal relationships. Responsibility then would not be an unconditional fact – the ego could repudiate it at will, enjoying a naïve freedom without duties. If we trust, however, the intuitive force of the question '*What should I do?*' when we imagine or actually experience the encounter with the Other person, responsibility constitutes the source, but never its object: it cannot be disputed or repudiated. And, if we take this proposition seriously, we are confronted with a scandal for the autonomous self: an eerie responsibility seems to be *always already* invaginated into our present existence, a responsibility which we never chose autonomously within the unfolding of the temporal flow, a responsibility which, in other words, was not, is not, and will never be an object of our consciousness since it befalls its intentionality from the outside, not partaking in the temporal flow, not being part of the human essence as it stretches out in time, not being, thus, thematisable. To signify such a responsibility, one would have to think the impossible: a lapse of time which cannot be recuperated by memory and consciousness, a time *out of joint*, to use the words of Hamlet as often quoted by Derrida in *Specters of Marx*.[204]

In one of the most important works on ethics within the 20th century, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas undertakes the radical task of dislocating time and thereby deposing the rational self as the origin, the *arche* of ethics. To vindicate ethics, to free responsibility from the realm of ontology and the corresponding imperialism of consciousness, to make the encounter with the exteriority of the Other possible, Levinas suggests that 'in the temporalization of time, in which, thanks to retention, memory and history, nothing is lost, everything

---

204   Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Routledge, 2006), l.

is presented or represented …, there must be signaled a lapse of time that does not return, a diachrony refractory to all synchronisation, a transcending diachrony'.[205] The diachrony Levinas has in mind is precisely 'the refusal of conjunction', a dimension of time non-total-isable by the synthetic activity of consciousness and, in this sense, *Infinite*.[206] It consists in a past immemorial, unrepresentable, which 'cannot be recuperated by reminiscence not because of its remoteness, but because of its radical incommensurability with the present'.[207] This *transcending diachrony*, this non-lieu sculpted by Levinas, untouchable by consciousness and its intentionality, consists in the *responsibility for the radical alterity of the Other.*

Perhaps this is a rather narrative, almost epic, way of speaking. Levinas surrenders at times to expressive hyperbole,[208] because he needs to express through the limited means of (ontological) language an experience that is transcendent to the realm of ontology and reason, because he must put into words what he regards as 'the very task of philosophy':[209] the *unsayable*, a hither side of time and consciousness, a debt contracted before any freedom, the unresolvable paradox of responsibility. I am 'chosen without assuming the choice',[210] obliged and ordered towards the face of the Other without this obligation having begun in me, as though an order 'slipped into my consciousness like a thief'.[211] Responsibility is the bond to this imperative order; the response to a *heteronomous* summons to stand and recognise not the form, but the force of the *face* (visage) of my neighbour – her radical alterity that consists in her separated incarnate existence, her non-thematisable, singular needs. Responsibility, as the modality of my

---

205  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 9.

206  Ibid., 11.

207  Ibid.

208  For an illuminating discussion of how Levinas uses language to speak the un-speakable, see Theodore de Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence: Studies in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (J. C. Gieben, 1997), 56–82 and Michael L. Morgan, *Discovering Levinas* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 300–335.

209  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 7.

210  Ibid., 56.

211  Ibid., 13.

relation to the call of the frail Other – a call Levinas names 'Saying' (le Dire) – embodies the constitutive moment of subjectivity. To be a subject means to be from the very beginning through the Other and for the Other, committed to responding to a summons that overflows my existence. To be a subject is to be answerable, persecuted, always in a state of dramatic exposure to the pre-originary Saying of the Other: '*Me voici*!', I am here to respond to your needs (or, to be more precise in terms of translation, '*here is me*' to respond to your needs). As the wisdom of the French expression reveals, in responsibility for another, 'subjectivity is only this unlimited passivity of an accusative which does not issue out of a declension it would have undergone starting with the nominative'.[212] Everything is from the start in the accusative, in accusation and persecution, such is the exceptional unconditionality of the self: a 'Yes' saying to Otherness not stemming from an a priori spontaneity, an ultra-transcendental exposure preceding and enabling the a priori conditions of existence.

Retroactively, the difficult concept of separation, on which Levinas insists in *Totality and Infinity*, is elucidated in a deeper, more convincing way. It is only through separation, through denuding the ego of any transcendental totalising predicates, that Levinas enables the unmediated face-to-face encounter and the subjectification through the responsibility[213] this encounter evokes: as Levinas explains, 'responsibility in fact is not a simple attribute of subjectivity, as if the latter already existed in itself, before the ethical relationship'.[214] It is only through *being for the Other* that I am constituted as a subject. What remains

---

212  Ibid., 112.

213  Derrida stresses, in an interview, the significance of separation as the condition of the social bond in the sense that it is only through separation that we can think of the paradox of a *relation without relation*: an ethical relation, in other words, in which the parties cannot invoke any prior ontological, moral, or logical kinship that brings them together, thereby annulling their alterity. Jacques Derrida, 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy,* ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (Routledge, 1999), 71.

214  Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Duquesne University Press, 1985), 96.

unclear is how those two counterbalancing moves – immersion in egoism's interiority and emergence into subjectivity through the touch of exteriority – intertwine. Doesn't the former necessarily precede the latter, leading to a first subjective shiver without the mediation of exteriority? Doesn't my body, my possessions, my house – the articulations of my separated existence – stand without the summons of the Other, which follows? The only way to avoid the inconsistency is by committing to Levinas' idea of transcending diachrony: within my harboured inwardness, there is always already a scar of exteriority; my inwardness is at the same time closed and open.[215] This is what Levinas means when he claims that '… a separated being fixed in its identity… contains in itself what it can neither contain nor receive solely by virtue of its own identity'.[216] If we recall the film noir setting on the basis of which we worked in our introduction, the Other is already inside my house before knocking on its door; my body is bound to her summons before I am even bound to it.[217] Even if my consciousness tries to recuperate the moment this order was articulated, there is an obedience before the order has been comprehended, as though I find myself obedient to the law before it has even been pronounced. The face of the Other and its ghostly presence inside me can never be tamed under a phenomenal form: 'this way of passing, disturbing the present without allowing itself to be invested by the *αρχή* of consciousness, striating with its furrows the clarity of the ostensible, is what we have called a *trace*'.[218]

---

215  Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 148–149.

216  Ibid., 27.

217  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 76.

218  Ibid., 100. The perception of the face as a 'trace' constitutes, according to many scholars, a development in the thought of Levinas from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*. In the former, Levinas, in attempting to designate the absolute transcendence and independence of ethics from ontology (or any kind of totalising discourse), identifies the face of the Other as an absolute exteriority. In *Otherwise than Being*, the strict dualisms appearing in *Totality and Infinity* (Being against existent, interiority against exteriority, self against Other) are transformed into a dynamic entanglement according to which the exteriority of the Other, coming from a diachronic past, is necessarily imprinted as a trace in the present of the self's interiority, being, and rational structure. On the development of the Levinasian perception of the face, see Bernhard Waldenfels, 'Levinas and the face

If the inspiration of this text has so far been driven by the duty to vindicate the ethical responsibility towards the alterity of the Other, it still remains vague what this alterity consists in. Shall we, for instance, following Jean-Luc Marion's stimulating question, assume that the face of the Other can ultimately be traced back to an appeal made by God[219] – a view that would subsume the Other's singularity under the veil of an abstract metaphysical entity? In a discussion with Jean Wahl (among others), Levinas insists that it is only in the experience of responsibility for the Other person, an experience that elevates the subject to an ethical height beyond her ego, that God is revealed. Our ethical encounter with the Other is not the incarnation of our encounter with the Word of God; on the contrary, there can be a discourse about God only if one

---

of the other', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63–81. This change of tone within the Levinasian oeuvre has been largely attributed to the deconstructive reading of *Totality and Infinity* by Derrida in 'Violence and Metaphysics', where he claims that the ethical overcoming of ontology attempted by Levinas (and the binarisms it implies) is itself dependent on the totalising discourses it sought to overcome, namely Husserlian phenomenology, Heideggerian ontology, and Hegelian dialectic. See Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79–153. On the attribution of Levinas' development to Derrida's deconstructive reading, see Ronald Paul Blum, 'Deconstruction and Creation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 46, no. 2 (1985): 293–306. Whereas the themes of the trace and of the diachronic past are not central in *Totality and Infinity*, we can see in many passages that the exteriority of the Other is already inscribed within the separated identity, prior to the opening of time and consciousness, an idea that prepares the ground for the later development of his thought. Levinas, for instance, claims that 'the passage from instantaneous enjoyment to the fabrication of things refers to habitation, to economy, which presupposes the welcoming of the Other'. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 146. The observation that these themes are already present in the thought of Levinas is compatible with our perception of separation (a concept mainly used in *Totality and Infinity*) as the pre-subjective material on which the exteriority of the Other is always already imprinted, leading to the emergence of subjectivity.

219 Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Voice without Name: Homage to Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (Fordham University Press, 2000), 227–228.

begins from the 'here and now' of the face-to-face relation.[220] How shall we sketch this 'here and now', the worldly appearance of the Other that elicits my responsibility in an immediate way? According to Levinas, the alterity of the Other consists in her unrepeatable earthly standing: a standing of 'flesh and blood',[221] her separated embodiment and the physical agony this embodiment entails – an agony irreducible to an impersonal Being, which would subordinate ethics to ontology. The face of the Other is 'pure vulnerability' and 'exposure unto death',[222] a vulnerability at once cryptic and non-thematisable, yielding a tragic and unshareable individuality. The suffering of the Other is a setting apart, a tragedy of solitude beyond the community of the common, a radical singularity that awakens the ego's responsibility by engraving her interiority, her enjoyment, her own individual suffering.[223] Levinas puts it succinctly: 'the "one-for-the-Other" has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood'.[224]

The *Saying* of the vulnerable Other penetrates the very heart of the 'for-oneself' that beats in enjoyment, in the life that is complacent in itself. The interruption of the self's solitary existence is so deep that the *for-oneself* is transfigured into a *despite-oneself*.[225] The language that Levinas employs to describe the subject's Infinite responsibility for the suffering of the Other becomes dramatic, with a tension betraying that responsibility overflows the scholarly consciousness struggling to immobilise it under conceptual schemas. Responsibility for the Other, according to Levinas, goes beyond and even against the preservation of

---

220  Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Robert Bernasconi, and Simon Critchley (Indiana University Press, 1996), 29. The same idea appears in Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78–79.

221  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 74, 77.

222  Emmanuel Levinas, 'Diachrony and Representation', in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (Columbia University Press, 1998), 167.

223  Particularly illuminating is the analysis of the Other's corporeal alterity developed by Kevin Houser, 'Facing the Space of Reasons', *Levinas Studies* 11, no. 1 (2016): 123–128. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lev.2016.0019.

224  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 74.

225  Ibid., 51.

the subject's being: to be a subject is to be persecuted by the vocation of the Other, obsessed by her suffering, placed under an inescapable, traumatic ethical thraldom. The (diachronic) moment my neighbour knocks on my door, I ought to let her in, exposing myself to an unconditional hospitality that knows no limits: to the point of the absolute expropriation of my dwelling, to the point my dwelling becomes hers. The moment I encounter the suffering body of the Other, I ought to take upon myself her suffering and make it mine, to the point of denuding myself of my skin, to the point of 'hemorrhage' and 'sharing one's bread with the famished'.[226] To be a self means to be ready to sacrifice myself in the face of my neighbour's suffering; this is the humanism Levinas defends, a humanism of absolute disinterestedness, an ultra-ethics addressing a demand of *holiness.*[227]

The knot around which subjectivity is woven, responsibility – this an-archic passion in the heart of the self – implies a subject never at rest in her existence, breathless, unable to coincide with herself, never standing in the sovereign nominative of an 'I', never finding shelter in the inalienable normative ground of a status (like Kantian dignity) or identity. The Infinite that glows in the face of the Other obsesses the self to the point that she is responsible even for the persecutions she undergoes at the hands of the Other, responsible even for the Other's responsibility! Constituting herself in the very movement whereby responsibility for the Other falls upon her, subjectivity advances to the point of *substitution*:[228] answering in the Other's place, even to the point of expiating for her. This might sound like a scandalous, inhuman conception. Nevertheless, we shall not read it outside its theoretical context: Levinas insists that our humanism lies precisely in

---

226  Ibid., 74.

227  In his affectionate *Adieu* to Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida remembers one of his conversations with him in rue Michel-Ange, when Levinas confessed: 'You know, one often speaks of ethics to describe what I do, but what really interests me in the end is not ethics, not ethics alone, but the holy, the holiness of the holy'. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford University Press, 1999), 4.

228  Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 100.

an unconditional ethical vigilance, in living 'as if one were not a being among beings',[229] in absolute disinterestedness – *otherwise than being or beyond essence*. In breaking out of one's own being, in releasing oneself from the ontological bonds, one experiences the most human of *freedoms*:[230] the Infinite freedom inspired by the alterity of the Other within the self's identity (what Levinas calls 'psyche'),[231] this malady of identity which is always in motion, rupturing the outline of selfhood, never coinciding with itself, as Paul Celan's wonderful lyric captures: 'Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin'.

If the suffering of the Other evokes my Infinite responsibility, what about my suffering? Shouldn't it, too, be endowed with a normative standing equal to the Other's suffering? Isn't, in other words, the Other also responsible in my regard? Attempting to formulate a symmetrical relation of reciprocity with the Other (as, for instance, Darwall's second-person standpoint suggests) would imply that the subject rises to a transcendent height from which she can attain a panoramic overview of her face-to-face encounter with the Other. From there she could establish a paradoxical commonality of the uncommon: both my suffering and that of the Other are singular and incomparable and, in this sense, they are common in their singularity. Taking up this third-person perspective would be equivalent to immobilising interpersonal relations under a totalising glance, to thematising them, perceiving them as mere moments in a system – precisely the totality that Levinas wants to rupture. The Other's suffering obsesses me with an unprecedented immediacy, in an urgent 'here and now' that overflows my noetic horizons, leaving me no space to thematise. Of course, I am an Other to

---

229 Ibid.

230 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 115. Kevin Houser emphasises this crucial aspect of freedom as freedom from oneself. See Kevin Houser, 'Levinas and the Second-Personal Structure of Free Will', in *Levinas and Analytic Philosophy*, 143. Derrida defines free decision in a similar way, as a leap from one's consciousness, towards the summons of the Other. See Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (Verso, 2020), 68–69.

231 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 67–72.

the Other, transcendent to her, but this is not something I can claim; it is entirely her affair to recognise my vulnerability. As Levinas stresses:

> … I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair. It is precisely insofar as the relationship between the Other and me is not reciprocal that I am subject to the Other; and I am 'subject' essentially in this sense. It is I who support all. You know that sentence in Dostoyevsky: '*We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than the others*'.[232]

The debt is Infinite: 'the more I answer, the more I am responsible'; the more I approach the neighbour that knocks on my door, the further away I am.[233] That is the glory, the glory and the pain of the Infinite, which breaks apart any thematising form that attempts to schematise it.

## 4.4. The Third Person: From the Saying to the Said

Refractory to thematisation and representation, not shapable into an object of intentionality, the alterity of the neighbour calls for the irreplaceable singularity that lies in me: I carry the burden of the world on my shoulders, I have to substitute everyone, yet no one can substitute me – a non-interchangeability that constitutes the supreme dignity of my subjective (non-) identity. In the transcending diachrony of the Other's Saying, the subject is overwhelmed with an Infinite responsibility, placed under an inescapable state of ethical obsession, a 'passivity more passive than all passivity'.[234] At the non-moment the Other knocks on my door – even if her intentions are evil, as in the example of Reverend Powell employed at the beginning of the text – I ought to open it, to unconditionally offer my body, my possessions, my dwelling, to the point of absolute expropriation: to the point of wounding, of bleeding, to the point of an unreserved self-sacrifice. In the immediacy of the exposure to the Other, the subject has neither the time nor the space to reflect, to measure the Infinite, to call into ques-

---

232  Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 98.
233  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 93.
234  Ibid., 14.

tion, to stand outside the tidal wave and ask 'What should I do?': the Other's suffering obsesses me, exceeds any activity, keeps me hostage.

By the (out of joint) time, however, the Other summons me by knocking on my door, I can already discern within her eyes the *third party*: 'the Other than my neighbor, but also another neighbor and neighbor of the Other'.[235] The expression of the Other mirrors the whole of humanity which looks at me:[236] all those Others who, in their absolutely unique, incomparable suffering, evoke my Infinite responsibility. According to Levinas, the third party introduces a contradiction in the Saying, which, articulated in the face-to-face relation with the Other, went in one direction: if I encountered only the face of the Other, then my responsibility would take the non-form of the obsession we described earlier. Given, however, that I owe everything – or more than everything – to more than one person, to all those radical alterities surrounding my existence, to all those singularities crying out for justice, I must suspend the obsession I endure from the Other in order to be able to offer my house, my possessions, my existence, to all of them. This is precisely the moment where the question 'What should I do?' is articulated: the moment at which I need to reflect, measure, calculate, to *compare the incomparable ones*[237] in order to determine my duties towards them in a just and sound way – in a way that brings their unique suffering into a state of reflective equilibrium. It is the moment when the passive heteronomy of the Saying must necessarily lead to an intelligible system within which the asymmetrical terms are synchronised – what Levinas calls the *Said* (le Dit).[238] The moment of the Said is the moment of *justice*.[239]

The moment of justice can be characterised as the 'Kantian moment' within the ethics of alterity discourse. It is the moment reason comes into the foreground in an attempt to secure the coexistence of asymmetrical terms, the coherence of the one and the other des-

---

235   Ibid., 157.
236   Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.
237   Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 158.
238   Ibid., 153–175.
239   Ibid., 150.

pite their radical alterity, their unity within a system. My an-archic responsibility towards every alterity surrounding me must be limited by a certain *arche*, a principle, a regulative ideal which guides us by synchronising, re-presenting, establishing a common ground between the radical singularities – by *universalising*. In constituting the ground-work of a common space, the relation with the third party works as an 'incessant correction of the asymmetry'[240] detected in the responsibility towards the Other. It constitutes a *betrayal* of the anarchic obsession, but also a new relation with it: singularities are fixed into a common symmetrical status, acquire reciprocal rights and duties based on this status, become equal. The moral community is constructed, according to Levinas, in the image and likeness of a 'fraternity',[241] a social space of plurality in which the participants acquire rights and are able to rationally demand respect from one another only because they must retain a minimum of personal integrity to continue offering their being, their body, their dwelling, to their neighbours. In other words? The only reason I have the authority to become the author of the moral law, to demand a minimum of respect, to rationally demand to be treated as equal, is the *fact of the Other*: the voice of the Other within me *commanding me to command*.[242] Autonomy, dignity, sovereignty – the old enlightened semantics we examined in the second chapter – become possible only on the condition of an irreducible heteronomy, an inspiration by the Other's presence within me, what Levinas calls *psyche*.

The betrayal of the pre-original Saying and its formulation within the Said – a coherent system of symmetrical interpersonal relations – in no way constitutes, according to Levinas, 'a degradation of obsession, a degeneration of the for-the-other, a neutralization of the glory of the

---

240   Ibid., 158.
241   Ibid., 159. This is a point at which Levinas and Derrida explicitly part ways insofar as Derrida attempts to deconstruct the Greek, Jewish, and Islamic privileging of the figure of the brother in ethics as the expression of a masculine authority that excludes the feminine from the political sphere. See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 277–281 and *Rogues*, 58.
242   Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

Infinite, a degeneration that would be produced in the measure that for empirical reasons the initial duo would become a trio'.[243] A certain point might need some further clarification: the entrance of the third party is not just a random fact alienating the purity of the Infinite, forcing us to dirty our hands in organising the political community. The third party is *always already* there, which means that there is no immediacy of responsibility without questioning, there is no Saying without Said. From the first moment I stand in this world, from the moment the dimension of time opens, I am connected through a bond of responsibility to all Others, each of whom demands from me infinitely, forcing me to reflect, to measure, to synchronise the diachronic responsibility burdening me. This is what leads Critchley to assume that, for Levinas, 'ethics is ethical only for the sake of politics',[244] in the sense that the pre-original responsibility towards the Other is, first of all, inevitably engraved as a *trace* within the political community and, more importantly, must be taken seriously for the sake of its just organisation.

On the one hand, hence, 'the contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of the two': what moves justice is a forgetting of egoism, 'the equality of all is borne by my inequality, the surplus of my duties over my rights'.[245] The very rationality of reason, what inspires it to legislate – what makes it in other words practical – is responsibility for the Other,[246] a responsibility that is not reducible to reason's structures, but nonetheless dwells within them. On the other hand, if the Infinite responsibility remained ethereal, without being incorporated and systematised, it would remain a mere *marivaudage*: an elegant, sophisticated discourse without any actual practicality. Ethics

---

243  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 159. Identifying with the Levinasian perception of the third party's entry, Derrida describes it as a 'perjury' (parjure) to the face-to-face anarchic responsibility – a perjury that, however, is not accidental and secondary, but is 'as originary as the experience of the face'. Derrida, *Adieu*, 33.
244  Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction*, 223.
245  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 159.
246  Ibid., 160.

can be ethical only when rationally invested, whereas reason can be truly rational only when ethically inspired. No Saying without Said, no Said without Saying, and this is precisely the point at which we face the paradoxical *quasi-transcendental* structure of the ethics of alterity: whereas reason's practicality is conditioned on the pre-original responsibility for the Other residing within its structure as a trace, responsibility itself is conditioned on rationality in order to be justly allocated within the political community.

Let us summarise the development of our thought so far: our deconstructive engagement with the Kantian logocentric architectonic was inspired by a desire to defend subjectivity and a certain suspicion that the Kantian moral system suppresses subjective singularity. Identifying the fact of reason as a blind spot, we demonstrated that the Kantian architectonic is internally haunted by an element beyond reason, an element whose repression led to a failed justification of morality and a suspension of the validity of the concepts comprising the system. Employing the valuable insights of Darwall's second-person standpoint, we assumed that the element Kant repressed was an interpersonal encounter, analytically prior to the formation of the moral law. The circularity of Darwall's argument led us to a radicalisation of the encounter, a radicalisation mirrored in the work of Levinas and Derrida. Retroactively, we come to develop the hypothesis that what blocks the closure of the Kantian practical architectonic through the rational justification of the moral law is precisely the repressed, non-thematisable trace of the pre-reflective responsibility for the Other, residing always already within the law of universality and the rational self producing it. In other words, the transcendental *fact of Reason* – the law of universality as a product of Reason's activity – can only be vindicated if reinterpreted as veiling what resists thematisation: the self's spectral, pre-reflective openness to the summons of the Other – what we have called *fact of the Other* – standing as universality's ultra-transcendental condition. It is the Saying that is antecedent to the Said, it is the vocation of the Other that leads to the formation of the system. But what makes us think, as the title of the text suggests,

that the Saying lies still within the Said as a trace after the latter's production?

## 4.5. Auto-co-immunity or The Seed of Folly within Reason

In the penultimate chapter of *Rogues* ('Teleology and Architectonic: The Neutralization of the Event'), Derrida speaks to us about an internal whisper resounding within him: 'Perhaps it would be a matter of saving the honor of reason'.[247] This study does not have such high aspirations – that would be presumptuous. What we have tried to do, with or without success, is to show through the lens of the ethics of alterity that the fact inspiring the very practicality of reason does not lie within reason: responsibility is not a rational predicate, it comes from a non-lieu prior to and beyond rational activity, constituting the motivating force behind the formation of practical ideas and concepts. The first moment of ethics consists in the pre-originary obsession of the self by the Other – but it is not the last: the anarchic touch with the exteriority of the Other must be rationally synchronised within a system in which the demands of the multiple Others comprising the community will resonate in harmony. The rational process of the self's traumatic exposure to the multiple Others is an inevitable moment for the articulation of her responsibility towards the community. Yet, should we suppose that it is the final? Should we think that the singularity of the Others is absorbed into the engine of a system, that the trace of the Infinite in their faces fades away, that their anarchical suffering is once and for all sclerotised into a form, a strict universal arche? This would mean that the secret (Geheimnis) of the diachronic, traumatic relation to the face of the Other served as nothing but a mere justification of principles and was then forgotten, incorporated in the self as though in a successful work of mourning, becoming familiar (heimlich). This would mean that the Saying would perfectly coincide

---

247  Derrida, *Rogues*, 118.

with the Said, that, in following the principles of the latter, one would entirely satisfy the demands articulated by the former.

Such a coincidence between the Saying and the Said would undoubtedly constitute an object of desire for our consciousness, which would thereby be able to shelter itself against the heterogeneity and intensity of the multiple demands, to find a place of rest within a fixed rational norm. The solution to the aporia 'What should I do?' would be merely a matter of specifying a formal principle according to the data of each concrete case – something that, of course, raises methodological and interpretive challenges, but still, as Derrida emphasises, 're-legates' ethical decision-making to the 'simple mechanistic deployment of a theorem'.[248] Why does Derrida use the verb 'relegate' to describe the supposed harmony of employing a universal principle in ethical decision-making? If singularities are indeed successfully incorporated into a system, why should the use of a principle to accommodate their demands be considered a 'relegation'? The response can be traced back to a simple etymological analysis of the term 'aporia': in Greek, aporia consists in a lack of resources (α + πόρος), in experiencing a certain impossibility of living up to the demands. Following this etymological insight, we can assume that the aporia of responsibility, the *'What-should-I-do?'* pulsating within us, consists in an experience of the impossible, of the radical insufficiency of principles to serve as the absolute horizon within which decision-making takes place.

The reason behind this insufficiency is already faintly discernible: in the words of Levinas, within the heart of reason, within the commonness of the community, within the activity of formal thematisation, we can detect an incomprehensible 'seed of folly'.[249] This 'madness' or 'an-archy' within our coexistence consists in the fact that, despite our contemporaneousness, the trace of the Infinite in the face of each Other around us does not cease to glow. Despite the common principles that guide us, despite the enlightened values such as autonomy, dignity, and

---

248  Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis (The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 24.
249  Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 142.

equality that serve as a compass orchestrating our reciprocal duties, the suffering of the Other carved in the expression of her face can never be formulated or wholly alleviated: the face of the Other constitutes the only ideatum that surpasses its idea, exceeding the plastic form that tries to measure it.[250] This is the insurmountable aporia of being with the Other(s), of being for the Other(s): 'tout autre est tout autre',[251] every other is wholly other, and the instant I respond to the demands of one of them, I necessarily sacrifice all the Others. The instant I equate them through the application of a universal principle, I am being unjust to everyone. At the same time, I am the most moral and most immoral, for my debt is Infinite, for the more I attempt to come to terms with it, the more I sense the radical impossibility of its fulfilment.

The unresolvable aporia of responsibility, even within the framework of the moral community, seems to haunt us as a paralysing force. Why should I even attempt to be moral, knowing that, however hard I try, I will have failed to fulfil my duty? Doesn't this lead the subject to a state of bad conscience or psychic disinvestment from her obligations? There are two interrelated points that distance us from this conception: first of all, as Derrida admits, the reservations raised earlier concerning universal regulative ideas should not be interpreted as an unconditional rejection.[252] 'For lack of anything better', regulative ideals, principles, universal laws, remain a last resort with a 'certain dignity', insofar as they do not become a mere 'alibi'.[253] What would it mean for them to risk becoming an alibi? Derrida and Levinas are particularly attentive to what the latter calls 'drowsiness of the mind':[254] an absolute reliance on ideals sculpted by reason. Such a reliance becomes an alibi when it epitomises a forgetting of the Other's transcendent suffering. It is from this perspective that Derrida criticises the Kantian *good will* – the one acting not merely in conformity with the law (in accordance with duty), but from respect for the law (out of duty); not only because

---

250  Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 49–51.
251  Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 68.
252  Derrida, *Rogues*, 83.
253  Ibid.
254  Emmanuel Levinas, 'Philosophy and Awakening', in *Entre Nous*, 83.

it appears inscribed within an a-moral economy of exchange – to the extent that acting out of duty implies the existence of a *debt* to be paid back – but, perhaps more interestingly, because such good will implies the blind subordination of action to a known norm or programme.[255] 'Pure morality', according to Derrida, 'must exceed all calculation, conscious or unconscious, of restitution or reappropriation',[256] and this is precisely where the second encouraging moment lies: to avoid drowning in herself and in the schemata produced by her rational faculty, the subject must retain a certain undecidability, hesitation or *epoché* with respect to rational principles, keeping her ears and eyes open to face every Other with a 'fresh judgement', whether this judgement reinvents, improves, or simply conforms to the existing principle.[257] The force of the Other's demand is precisely what prevents the subject from being paralysed within her internal rational boundaries; it keeps her vigilant, always on the move, ready to abandon her body, her home, her being in order to make space for the Other and her suffering.

What we have attempted to demonstrate through our analysis so far is that communities are (or should be) interrupted by an internal scission, a non-coincidence with themselves. If responsibility for the Other is the element around which a community's principles are centred – the axis around which the symmetrical normative status of the agents is woven – it is precisely this secret, non-immobilisable centre that destabilises the very principles it produces, unravelling symmetry, poisoning internally the solidity of the community's identity in an *autoimmune* fashion. We may therefore speak of communities as,

---

255 Giovanna Borradori, 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides – A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 133

256 Jacques Derrida, 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"', trans. David Wood, in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Blackwell, 1992), 26.

257 Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (Routledge, 1992), 22–29.

in Derrida's words, *'auto-co-immunities*',[258] sensitive to the whisper of the secret lying in their foundations, open to the exception, to the very dismantling of the universal principles that sustain them. The categorical imperative resounding within us as subjects of those communities – an imperative allergic to forms – can be articulated as follows: keep *tracing*, keep your eyes and ears open to the suffering of the Other, do not rest on Kantian transcendental certainties, let reason be inspired by the Other's Saying, keep spiralling between the impossibilities of the Infinite and the possibilities of rationality, allow the former to infect the latter and vice versa in a constant process of negotiation between the enigma of alterity and its non-totalisable rational thematisation. This mutual infection is what we will attempt to trace in the last chapter, unveiling a) the way the language of the ethics of alterity is infected by fundamental Kantian concepts, and b) the way it invigorates them.

---

258  See Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (Routledge, 2002), 87 and *Rogues*, 35.