

***Order as Unclosed Scene: the Alienness of Origin between Translation and Tragedy***

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“Wem nichts Menschliches fremd  
wäre, dem wäre das Menschliche  
selbst fremd” (B. Waldenfels)<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT**

Every order lies on the claim or pretension to give itself as an accomplished realm, i.e. as a closed scene which is capable to give shape, orientation and sense to the totality of elements embraced by it. Yet, from the same operation of ordering, a paradox soon arises, in that no order can avoid its contingent genealogy, that means: it cannot avoid the fact that, in enclosing and including something, it must simultaneously exclude something else, which, therefore, can always challenge and threaten its stability or total “delimitation”. In this sense, that which is excluded can be seen as an alien element, which structurally prevents order from a definite closure and thus keeps it in a permanent (historical and non-dialectisable) movement.

Now, what I would like to convey in my following reflections is that this dynamics of impossible closure of order, given to a non-appropriable alienness, is exactly the one operative in the realms of translation and tragedy, so that, once we carefully investigate these realms, we may dare to affirm that saying that orders are unclosed scenes is as much true as to say that they are constantly “in translation”, always “in tragedy”.

*0. Introduction: the slippery ground*

Dealing with translation and tragedy means moving on a same slippery ground; it means facing a peculiar *scene of closure* inhabited by a paradox: on one side, translation and tragedy claim a *closure* of sense, an appropriation of sense; on the other side, this same scene displays the impossibility of being closed, because that which sneaks into the scene is an intruder that cannot be appropriated, a disturbing element that can neither be forced nor reduced into the structured order: for this reason, it can be called an “out of (the)

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<sup>1</sup> [“To the one whom nothing human would be alien, to this same one would be alien the human itself”] B. WALDENFELS, *Verfremdung der Moderne. Phänomenologische Grenzgänge*, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2001, 8.

order”: an *alien*, a *stranger*<sup>2</sup>. In other words, addressing translation and tragedy means dealing with the inevitable alienness which inhabits every order in its innermost core.

That which is here meant by *closure* and its impossibility due to an *alien*, requires, at this point, a more detailed explanation. The most appropriate way of clarifying these “concepts” is by applying them to our two issues: translation and tragedy, including a short analysis of a third important issue, that of fiction.

### 1. *Translation: the originary<sup>3</sup> alienness*

The scene of translation can be – more or less – described as follows: on one side, there is my *own* tongue or culture which is familiar, common to me; and, on the other side, there is, opposite to mine, the *stranger*(’s) tongue/culture<sup>4</sup>. Translating means to make understandable in my *own/proper* codes what is otherwise not understandable (unfamiliar to me). Very simply described: translating a *stranger*(’s) culture means reducing it to what I can understand under my *own/proper*: and that explains also why we speak about “appropriation”. However, in this operation of translation, which reduces the *alien* to what is *familiar* to me, haven’t I missed (to “translate”) the most peculiar element of what I translate, namely: haven’t I missed the *being alien* (*alienness*) of what is *alien*, the *unfamiliarity* of what is *unfamiliar*? This element is not secondary if we take into account the fact that, maybe, the reasons of the *alien* take their strength, significance and justification exactly from that same place which appears *unfamiliar/alien* to us, and that we reduce or lose in/by the translation process. An example of the peculiarity of the *alienness* of the *alien* can be given if we analyze the process of translating stranger’s proverbs (or idiomatic expressions) which make sense only in the stranger’s tongue, which – again – take their significance from that same place that appears *stranger* (alien) to us. As soon as, by translating, we remove their *strange(r)ness* (*alienness*), we “risk” to remove them as such.

Leaving this specific example aside, a crucial question arises: how to translate cultures avoiding their reduction? The question at stake is how to deal with the *alienness of the alien* without dissolving it. “C’est cela qu’il s’agit de penser” writes Nancy “et donc de pratiquer: sinon, l’étrangeté de l’étranger

<sup>2</sup> In this essay, by *alien* and *alienness* (as well as by *stranger* and *strange(r)ness*) I am trying to convey what the German language does by *Fremde* and *Fremdheit* and French by *étranger* and *étrangeté*.

<sup>3</sup> I use “originary” in order to differentiate it from “original”, to express the shades of meaning that exist in French between “originaire”, “originel” and “original”; in German between “ursprünglich”, “originell” and “original”; in Italian between “originario” and “originale”.

<sup>4</sup> For a general understanding of the concepts of *own* and *alien*, I refer to the precious investigations of Bernhard Waldenfels. In particular the section, *Eigenes und Fremdes*, in B. WALDENFELS, *Der Stachel des Fremden*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1990, 43-79.

est résorbée avant qu'il ait franchi le seuil, il ne s'agit plus d'elle"<sup>5</sup>. The German thinker Bernhard Waldenfels, more generally, asks:

How or from where can we speak about the alien (*Fremde*) without robbing it of its alienness (*Fremdheit*)?<sup>6</sup>

Of course, in order to understand we must translate! Nevertheless, this does not prevent us from looking at translation in a different way, namely as a *response* to the *alien* and not as an overcoming of it. In other words, translation is not a final re-solution/dis-solution of the alien, where the alien element is considered as something transitory that can and must be overcome; on the contrary, translation can be approached as a process that can never fully "reach" and appropriate the *alien*. Nancy's words convey perfectly the disturbing element represented by the alien:

[...] sa venue ne cesse pas: il continue à venir, et elle ne cesse pas d'être à quelque égard une intrusion.<sup>7</sup>

On this basis, the alien element demands a "permanent work of translation"<sup>8</sup>, an effort that becomes aware of its ontological incompleteness. Instead of claiming its conformity/faithfulness to the original, and viewing the work through the alien as a temporary state – at the end of which the access to the original is to be achieved – the act of translation accepts the *origin(al) as an alien* and realizes the impossibility of regaining an immediate access to it<sup>9</sup>. The alien is no longer the intermediate state that, once overcome through "translation", enables us to close the circle, to establish a full *appropriation of sense*; rather it is what keeps the circle open and therefore requires a constant process of translating as *response*. In this sense Waldenfels writes:

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<sup>5</sup> J.-L. NANCY, *L'intrus*, Galilée, Paris 2000, 12. The same point is stressed by Waldenfels: "If the alien (*Fremde*) – which has its essence in the 'confirmable accessibility of the original inaccessible (*bewährbaren Zugänglichkeit des original Unzugänglich*)' (*Husserliana* I, 144) – were that which is simply accessible and belonging-to (*schlichtweg zugänglich und zugehörig*), it would no longer be what it is: an alien" (B. WALDENFELS, *Der Stachel*, 7). The translations from Waldenfels' texts, from German, are mine.

<sup>6</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Topographie des Fremden. Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden 1*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1997, 50.

<sup>7</sup> J.-L. NANCY, *L'intrus*, 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> See R. IVEKOVIC, *De la traduction permanente (Nous sommes en traduction) / On permanent Translation (We are in translation)*, in *Transeuropéennes*, 22, 2002, 121-143.

<sup>9</sup> For a deepening regarding the theme of the alienness in/of the origin see the work by the Italian phenomenologist F. CIARAMELLI, *La distruzione del desiderio. Il narcisismo nell'epoca del consumo di massa*, Dedalo, Bari 2000 (in particular the following sections: 87-93; 106-115).

The request/summons (*Aufforderung*) of the alien does not have a sense and does not follow any rule, rather it provokes the sense by upsetting the present sense references (*Sinnbezüge*) and by breaking the rule systems.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the only way of relating to the *alien*, accomplishing to avoid its reduction, is the *response* imposed by the appeal/disturb coming from the same *alien*. Waldenfels calls it the event of *responsivity* (Responsivität). He writes:

The alien becomes what it is in no other place than the event of responding (*Ereignis des Antwortens*); this means that it never allows to be completely and univocally defined. That which we answer to surmounts always that which we give in/as the answer (*zur Antwort*). What it is alien does not allow to be answered like a definite question or solved like a definite problem.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in Waldenfels' opinion, as *alien* must be taken

[...] that *to which* we answer (*das, worauf wir antworten*) and inevitably have to answer, therefore as request/summons (*Aufforderung*), challenge (*Herausforderung*), stimulus (*Anreiz*), call (*Anruf*), appeal/demand (*Anspruch*) [...] All looking at (*Hinsehen*) and listening to (*Hinhören*) would be an 'answering (*antwortendes*) looking at and listening to'; all speaking and acting would be a kind of 'answering' behavior.<sup>12</sup>

Viewed like a process of responding, translation can be really described as a scene of *closure* which leaves space for the *open*, a will to appropriation which undertakes the inevitable route of expropriation, a will to power which is submitted to the trial of fragility.

This statute of translation does not regard only the sphere of the *alien* "out of the" *own*, but rather a form of *alienness* involves also our *own* identity. This *alienness* manifests itself as impossibility to have immediate access to an original and pure self. In other words, what I think to be familiar and common to me, what I call my *own* culture and my *own* self, to which I identify myself and think to have immediate access, is not at all so. Instead, it is a product of a basic and constant translation: a making familiar - an appropriation (*Aneignung*) - of something which is originally *alien* and therefore that expropriates (*enteignet*) me from the possessing of myself. Discovering this *original alienness* is to become aware of the fact that a

<sup>10</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Topographie*, 52.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 109. See as well B. WALDENFELS, *Antwortregister*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1994, 269.

transparent *ownness* is only a phantom of fulfillment of desire<sup>13</sup> of possessing myself totally and not the original and actual ground where I move from. This sense of *alienness in the own* is what we can read in the Dionysiac of Nietzsche, in the *Unheimlich* of Freud, in Merleau-Ponty's description of the experience of delay in the living-present, in the posteriority of the anterior of Lévinas, in Derrida's supplement of origin, and in the whole work of Waldenfels<sup>14</sup>. This last author shows clearly that in every crucial experience in which I identify myself as my own self, the alienness is present like a goad (*Stachel*)<sup>15</sup>:

My experience of time goes back to the original experience of my birth, to an original past, a 'past which has never been present' (Merleau-Ponty), and that is never my present as I always come too late in order to be able to catch it *in flagranti* [...] Also the name that I have and I hear calling, I received it from others [...]; it has been spoken to me before I spoke to others. [...] The fright (*Erschrecken*) in front of one's own image (*Bild*), the one that comes from the mirror or from a photo and that in extreme cases can lead to suicide attempts, would be inconceivable if 'I' were simply 'I' or if I could always fully return back to myself (*zu mir selbst zurückkehren*). I encounter myself under the gaze/glance of the others (*ich begegne mir im Blick der Anderen*).<sup>16</sup>

The primacy and irreducibility of the *alien* is what the translation experiences as a scene that cannot be closed, a scene that re-proposes itself both *out* of the subject and *inside* it<sup>17</sup>, or more appropriately expressed: the alien proposes itself out of the subject - and does it always in a problematic way - only because inside the subject, in the sphere of the own, at the origin, this same alien abides<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> See F. CIARAMELLI, *La distruzione*, 55-83.

<sup>14</sup> In order to achieve a deep confrontation with this thinker, see his latest work: B. WALDENFELS, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung. Phänomenologie – Psychoanalyse – Phänomenotechnik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 2002. For a critical introduction and discussion regarding his thinking, see in German: M. FISCHER, H.-D. GONDEK, B. LIEBSCH (edited by), *Vernunft im Zeichen des Fremden. Zur Philosophie von Bernhard Waldenfels*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 2001; in English: F. DALLMAYR, *On Bernhard Waldenfels*, in *Social Research*, 56, 3, 1989, 681-712; in French: F. CIARAMELLI, *L'inquiétante étrangeté de l'origine*, in *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 96, 3, 1998, 512-524; in Italian (my article): F.G. MENGA, *La "passione della risposta. Sulla fenomenologia dell'estraneo di Bernhard Waldenfels*, in *aut aut*, 316-317, 2003, 209-237.

<sup>15</sup> See the work of B. WALDENFELS, *Der Stachel*.

<sup>16</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Topographie*, 30-31.

<sup>17</sup> See J. KRISTEVA, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Fayard, Paris 1988.

<sup>18</sup> See B. WALDENFELS, *Der Stachel*, 53. This is what Ciaramelli conveys as well: "The direct inaccessibility to the alien as alien is not the depriving modification of a more original immediate accessibility to the own. Far from presupposing the preliminary appropriation of the own, the immediate inaccessibility of the alien shakes the presumed independence of the own, its immediate imaginary coincidence with itself" (F. CIARAMELLI, *L'insospitalità dell'origine. Il fascino e la minaccia dell'"estraneo" tra fenomenologia e psicoanalisi*, in G. Borrelli and F.C. Papparo [edited by], *Nella*

The consequences of this thought could be relevant on an inter-cultural level: in fact, if there is no full experience of the own-ness at origins, if what is called own-ness is the work through and with an original alienness, what fails is the presumption of having a solid basis which one stands upon and from which one thinks to perform a translation that regards only the other's culture. By that it is not negated the existence of what is called "own culture", but it is only expressed that the access to one's own culture always involves in its deepest roots a relation to alienness. This is not difficult to demonstrate if we agree upon the fact that there is nobody's culture which can claim an isolated development for itself, namely without relating to other(s) cultures<sup>19</sup>. Of course, again and again we see examples where communities or societies strongly affirm an own pure origin in which they only would be involved. What is yet very suspicious is that each of these affirmations has been and is always accompanied by hostility towards the alien, xenophobia. Why does the absolute and privileged affirmation of one's own culture, legitimized only by the exhibition of a pure and exclusive origin - that must be consequently immediately accessible - always slip into the hate towards the *alien*? Isn't it maybe because this *xénon* (alien) is that which inhabits the original core of own-ness and therefore, by hindering a complete affirmation of the own, must be at any cost *repressed*?<sup>20</sup>

## 2. *Antigone: the tragedy of order*

The scene described above reappears, in its own way, in the context of tragedy: tragedy is the most peculiar "place" in which the irreducibility of the opened relationship between the *own* and the *alien* is displayed. There could not be a better instance than Sophocles' *Antigone* to show this. On one side, there is Creon with his *own* reasons, to which Antigone's reasons appear *strange* in a radical sense: so strange that they turn to be non-sense, non-reasons. On the other side, Antigone feels the same towards Creon. Here the scheme seen in translation reappears: as soon as an *own*-character translates

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*dispersione del vero. I filosofi: la ragione, la follia*, Filema, Napoli 1998, 237) (the translation into English of Ciaramelli's texts is mine).

<sup>19</sup> See B. WALDENFELS, *Fra le culture*, italian transl. by F.G. Menga, in *aut aut*, 313-314, 2003, 64-77.

<sup>20</sup> To this problem the intellectual effort of Rada Ivekovic is very enlightening. Concerning the issue of communities affirming their own identity against the alien, she writes: "La formation des nouvelles identités est donc produite et accompagnée par de nouveaux récits permettant l'auto-représentation, la refondation, l'homogénéisation communautaire. L'origine (à partir de l'autre) doit donc être dissimulée. [...] C'est ainsi que se construit un sujet (politique) violente. Il se donne une identité fermée, autistique, refusant l'échange et la différence [...] une identité objective [...] qui exige le sacrifice. Le sacrifice de l'autre" (R. IVEKOVIC, *L'autisme communautaire*, in *Transeuropéennes*, 9, 1996-97, 68-69). For an enriching deepening regarding this dynamic of exclusion see the beautiful essay by C. CASTORIADIS, *Réflexions sur le racisme* (1987), in *Le monde morcelé. Les carrefours du Labyrinthe III*, Éd. du Seuil, Paris 1990, 25-38.

the *alien's* reasons, it fails to translate the “place” of the alien, the place from which these reasons take their strength and significance. This “place” ends up being totally reduced; therefore it turns to be a non-place, and accordingly, the sense that sustains these reasons turns to be a non-sense. If this description has a certain legitimacy to be followed, then the tragedy of *Antigone*, like the “tragedy” of translation, is what shows the dilemma of the reduction of the *alien*. The reduction here is due to what Hegel would call the one-sidedness<sup>21</sup>: the reasons of the *own* reduce those of the *alien/other* as soon as the first one relates to the second one. There is no mediation between the *own* and the *alien*; there is no third place in which the two can find a synthesis. (The development of Hegel’s thought on tragedy is different from the one just stated; we will have a confrontation with it later. For the moment is more appropriate to leave Hegel aside and proceed with our discourse.)

According to the given description of tragedy, we are asked not to solve, and therefore dissolve, too quickly the opposite represented poles. The relationship of alienness between *Antigone* and *Creon* is exactly what makes the tragic of the tragedy; it is what constitutes the up-to-dateness of the tragedy at any time. Not giving a solution means, maybe, also that we have to resist the temptation of quickly taking the side of Antigone. Perhaps Sophocles is trying to convey that we are dealing with a *tragedy* and not with a case of “problem-solving”.

I will trace three instances that stress this tragic core of the tragedy:

A) Creon and Antigone, considered for themselves, are both right: they are trying to act following what they think is reasonable and good. Hegel’s analysis conveys this when he speaks about the opposition between two ethical principles: Creon/State, Antigone/family. From here it comes the notion of tragedy as a conflict between two “rights” or “truths” of equal significance. The tragic is created by the fact that – as J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet write – “des deux attitudes religieuses que l’*Antigone* met en conflit aucune ne saurait en elle-même être la bonne sans faire à l’autre sa place, sans reconnaître cela même qui la borne et la conteste”<sup>22</sup>. This quotation explains also why this tragedy cannot be other than tragic: similarly to what we saw happening in translation, in tragedy, starting from an *alienness* that is to perceive out of the *own*, we end up realizing that an *alienness* involves the *own* in its inner being. In the specific case of *Antigone*, Creon/State is trying to repress Antigone/family through the prohibition of sepulture, where however – and here the alien irrupts in the own – family and sepulture are constitutive of the

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<sup>21</sup> See G.F.W. HEGEL, *Aesthetik* (Part 3, III, chapter 3, iii. a) and his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (II. 3. a). Of course we cannot forget the famous pages dedicated to tragedy in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Reason*: C. c; *Spirit*: A. a and b; *Religion*: B. c) and in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (I. 2. b. 3).

<sup>22</sup> J.-P. VERNANT, P. VIDAL-NAQUET, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, t. I, La Découverte, Paris 1986, 34.

State. This leads to the following paradox: the State, in order to “promote” itself, has to repress the family-part of itself: as a matter of fact, the family’s burial right is, at the same time, the cornerstone of the State, for it represents the preservation of memory distinctive of a rule-based society. The same scene can be described on Antigone’s side: Antigone/family is trying to “repress” Creon/State, which is however an inner part of the family: in fact, we should not forget that Antigone, in order to defend the family rights by burying Polynices, has to repress (in psychoanalytical terms) the fact that Polynices, the aggressor of the city, is responsible for the death of her other brother, Eteocles, who is – and this is very important – the defender of the State. Is it only by chance that Sophocles puts into scene a family in which one brother threatens the State, the other defends it and a sister ends up somehow repressing the State-part of the family (Eteocles) in order to defend (in the name of Polynices) the same family? I believe not.

On the basis of what it has just been said, we are maybe asked not to reduce the tragedy that here takes place, not to hurry in appropriating and therefore dominating the “perturbing” scene. We should not simply say that Antigone is right and that Creon is a tyrant. As George Steiner notices:

If Creon was only or essentially a tyrant ... if he did not incarnate an ethical principle [...] he would not be worthy of Antigone’s challenge.<sup>23</sup>

It is an exercise of delay the one that tragedy is asking us to undertake, the same one that we discovered as indispensable in translation, and that we will see also “working” in fiction.

B) At this point it is necessary to say something more about the concept of one-sidedness. One-sidedness means narrowness; both Creon and Antigone do not see any kind of exception to their standpoint<sup>24</sup>: for Creon the opposition friend/enemy is shaped by a strict political category: “good” is what serves the city, “bad” is what harms the city; for Antigone the only faithfulness is the one due to the dead. As a matter of fact her simplification of faithfulness causes her to repress the faithfulness due to the wedding promise to Haemon. And this up to the extreme limit that makes her say: “O tomb, my bridal-bed” (v. 892)<sup>25</sup>. This affirmation is striking: a renunciation of the love of a living man for the love of the tomb. This remark makes Antigone’s world-view appear as narrow-minded as the one of Creon. Paul Ricoeur, whose thorough analysis

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<sup>23</sup> G. STEINER, *Antigones*, Clarendon, Oxford 1984, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Paul RICOEUR analyzes *Antigone* tragedy underlining exactly the factor of one-sidedness in both Antigone and Creon. It is very enriching to read the section *Le tragique de l'action* in *Soi-même comme un autre*, Éd. du Seuil, Paris 1990, 281-290 (in part. 284-285).

<sup>25</sup> I quote from the following English translation: SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*, in ID., *The Three Theban Plays*, engl. trans. by Robert Fagles, Penguin Books, New York 1982.



cannot avoid to notice the perturbing exclamation of Antigone, confirms our point of view:

La stratégie de simplification [...] que scelle l'unique allégeance aux morts [...] ne rend pas Antigone moins inhumaine que Créon.<sup>26</sup>

C) Leaving aside the “main characters”, it is equally important to observe the attitude of the Chorus, which is supposed to lead the plot and announce the pivotal points of the tragedy. How does the Chorus “behave”? It seems that it cannot do anything but re-launch the tragedy. Thus, no closure but iteration of the dilemma; no mediation but underlining of the tragic in the tragedy. Here are some instances:

1. In the “Ode to the Sun” (vs. 100-110) – where the sun is described as the eye that dominates, that is not supposed to be limited by the distinctive partiality of human vision – it is essential to notice how this same dominating eye is not able to propose any solution, rather it can only re-iterate the tragic. Speaking about Polynices’ action, this objective non-human eye, which views everything from above, expresses only the presence of *amphilógon* (v. 111), namely: “two-faces arguments”<sup>27</sup>. It stops itself by attesting the opposition between two one-sided arguments.

2. The same oscillation is proposed in the “Ode to Man” (vs. 332-375), where the human being itself is defined as a source of tragic disputes, and therefore impossible to be faced by a conceptual frame. Only tragedy is the adequate scene that can embrace the human being’s universe. The words of the Chorus are intense:

Numberless wonders/terrible wonders walk the world but none of them can be compared to man (*Pollà tà deinà kudén anthrópon deinóteron pélei*) (vs. 333-335).<sup>28</sup>

The Chorus uses a word which is often present in the text: *deinon*, a wonder which indicates, at the same time, a terrible wonder. Men are dominated by this *deinon*. Thus, no fixed ground but oscillation is the most appropriate form to “define” the human situation in its inner being<sup>29</sup>. And this

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<sup>26</sup> See P. RICOEUR, *Soi-même*, 285. The analysis of Ricoeur recalls the “masterpiece” of M.C. NUSSBAUM, *The fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press 1986.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*, 286 (Ricoeur refers to Nussbaum’s analysis in *The fragility*, 71).

<sup>28</sup> I have slightly modified the English translation to which I refer.

<sup>29</sup> In this sense we cannot avoid referring to the closeness between the *deinon* – as wonder which inhabits man, and which is at the same time something terrible – and the *Unheimlich* (uncanny) of Freud: something which is at the same time the most familiar (*heimisch*; *Heim* is home) and the most secret/hidden (*heimlich*); better said: the deepest inner-ness of the familiar, by turning to be the most terrible and *alien*, is that which is uncanny (*un-heim-lich*).

wonder recalls *alienness*: an instability that dominates man and that, consequently, requires a constant response from it<sup>30</sup>.

3. A last remark that stresses the “openness” of Sophocles’ tragedy is represented by the confrontation of the arguments sustained by Creon and his son, Haemon, who takes the side of Antigone. What it is very important to notice is the position of the Chorus. It considers both arguments right:

[to Creon] You’d do well, my lord, if he’s speaking to the point, to learn from him [and turning to Haemon] and you, my boy, from him. You both are talking sense (vs. 724-25).

These remarks bring us to agree with Hegel’s analysis which defines the tragic as the relationship between Creon’s and Antigone’s one-sided arguments. Nevertheless, we must not assent to the synthesis, the mediation that Hegel proposes: the overcoming-dissolution (*Aufhebung*) of tragedy. If in Hegel there is opposition and tragedy, there is such only on the basis of a presupposition: that this opposition is resolved into a mediation, in a synthesis of the Spirit. What comes into play is a third place which goes beyond the opposition and, consequently, out of the tragedy. Yet, is it possible to go out/beyond the tragedy? Is it possible to claim the existence of a third place? Hegel thinks so: his third place, which resolves/dissolves tragedy and opposition, is called the Spirit (*Geist*). The Spirit is capable of containing the opposition through a mediation/overcoming (*Aufhebung*) of it. Spirit is the Absolute.

A possible translation towards a third place “between” *own* and *alien* is given according to Hegel. Hegel’s scheme, brought to its essential elements, appears as follows: the *own* is the consciousness that perceives; the *alien* is the object “out there” which is perceived; the third place is the *Spirit* that contains both and that therefore overcomes the opposition between the two. Is this place real/*effective* - *wirklich*? A possible answer can be extrapolated from Hegel’s core-work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It must not be forgotten, as Hegel himself writes, that phenomenology of spirit is “the Science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through”<sup>31</sup>. The Spirit is somehow tied to the experience of consciousness: however, not in the sense that it is reduced to consciousness, but in the sense that the Spirit recognizes itself - as/in what it is - through a progressive enlarging of the capacity of consciousness, the only one in which it effectively can recognize itself. Thus, the Spirit manifests itself through a step-by-step growing appropriation

<sup>30</sup> B. Waldenfels considers the statute of wonder in terms of an appeal from the alien which claims for a response. See B. WALDENFELS, *Topographie*, 104. In this regard we should not forget also the great Cuban writer, A. Carpentier, who has devoted many of his pieces to the theme of wonder, the *maravilloso*: see his *Concierto barroco* and *El reino de este mundo*.

<sup>31</sup> G.W.F. HEGEL, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller, Clarendon, Oxford 1977, 21.

acquired by consciousness: better said, consciousness realizes, step by step, to be more and more the Spirit that manifests itself through consciousness. This progressive process could be defined as a growing appropriation of the *own* at the expenses of the *alien*: in fact, at every stage of the experience of consciousness (at every configuration of the Spirit) a new opposition is manifested and at the end is overcome by the Spirit. At the end, an *alien* is “naturalized”, appropriated. The result of this is a larger capacity of consciousness in recognizing the Spirit as what it is – a closer-to-what-it-is recognition of the Spirit through consciousness. The completion of this path has already appeared within the lines, consciousness will overcome every opposition and will totally recognize itself as the Spirit; or better, the Spirit, “playing itself as consciousness”, will be totally coincident to itself, and therefore the difference between consciousness and Spirit will disappear<sup>32</sup>.

Now, the effective existence of this third place can be legitimated only if a final mediation/appropriation can be displayed<sup>33</sup>: a place where the Spirit dominates without opposition or intrusion of an alien. If the Spirit could not “guarantee” (and give proof of) the effective existence of this place where it would be totally fulfilled and where no opposition would be present, that would mean that the Spirit could not be distinguished from consciousness, and its recognition through consciousness would be a mere presumption. In other words, it would not be so: that the Spirit would recognize itself through consciousness, rather it would be a mere game of consciousness playing the role of the Spirit (that, as such, reveals itself as a dream of consciousness!). Is Hegel able to show it? No, he is not. Nevertheless, the fact that he cannot acquire the fulfillment of the Spirit does not prevent him from presupposing it. And that is what is all about: Hegel jumps out of the opposition and closes the infinite *tale* of the Spirit only by presupposing an all-evident, immediate, original presence of the Spirit; in other words, only by presupposing an origin in which the Spirit is immediately present to itself without any kind of opposition<sup>34</sup>. We could say as well: for Hegel at the beginning was the *own*,

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<sup>32</sup> In Hegel’s words: “The immediate existence of the Spirit, *consciousness*, contains the two moments of knowing and the objectivity negative to knowing. Since it is in this element [of consciousness] that Spirit develops itself and explicates its moments, these moments contain that antithesis, and they all appear as shapes of consciousness. The Science of this pathway is the Science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through [...] Now, although this negative appears at first as a disparity between the ‘I’ and its object, it is just as much the disparity of the substance with itself. Thus what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject. When it has shown this completely, Spirit has made its existence identical with its essence [...] Being is then absolutely mediated; it is a substantial content which is just as immediately the property of the ‘I’, it is self-like or the Notion. With this, the Phenomenology of Spirit is concluded” (*ibidem*).

<sup>33</sup> In this sense Hegel writes: “Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself” (*ibid.*, 11).

<sup>34</sup> Once we have explained Hegel’s strategy, his words acquire a very clear sense: “[...] mediation is nothing beyond self-moving selfsameness, or is reflection into self. [...] The ‘I’, or becoming in general, this mediation, on account of its simple nature, is just immediacy in the process of becoming, and is the

the original presence of an immediate unity, without opposition, *alienness*; an all-evident truth without masks or deviating images; a perfect reality with no relation to the difference: the totality itself, the Absolute.

However, our daily experience proves Hegel's total overcoming of the opposition to be wrong. In fact, if at the beginning there was an original unity, why do we always begin by facing opposition and absence of truth, the "tragedy" of finitude? The logic by which Hegel answers (recalling a long tradition which starts with Plato) is the one of a *nostalgic* approach to origin: there was an origin in which everything was full, immediate, all-evident, but we lost it; and that explains why we always start from a structure of opposition. Nevertheless, since it is guaranteed that this all-evident, all-true origin exists, we can achieve it through a work of mediation at the end of which the immediacy of origin would be regained. In this way, Hegel attempts to *close* the scene. More exactly – of course, speaking on the basis of a successful attempt – Hegel writes:

The circle that remains self-*enclosed* and, like substance, holds its moment together, is an immediate relationship.<sup>35</sup>

Thus mediation is functional to the achievement of a last point in which totality (truth) is possible to be accessed immediately. The Italian phenomenologist Fabio Ciaramelli conveys in a poignant way that the framework in which Hegel's thought moves can be considered as a

[...] speculative pretension of the conclusive and immediate accessibility to the origin. [He adds:] The *originary* identity, although initially lost and hidden, must be nevertheless pre-supposed to the experience of division and dispersion: and that explains exactly why it constitutes the unique stake of the philosophical thought dynamic. In this way, the *originary* unity keeps being promised to the research and therefore predicts the fulfillment of the philosophical *desire* which aims to reach a theoretical transparency; transparency which is attainable only in the form of a speculative-dialectic knowledge which implies, at the end of its journey, the transparent access to the self-donation of the *originary*. It is precisely [this one, the] speculative

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immediate itself" (*ibidem*). In other words, the result of the phenomenology of the Spirit cannot be other than the beginning for the beginning is presupposed as its end: "[...] the process of becoming is rather just the return into simplicity. [...] [And here the decisive statements follow] This result is itself a simple immediacy, for it is self-conscious freedom at peace with itself, which has not set the antithesis on one side and left it lying there, but has been reconciled with it. [...] The result is the same as the beginning, only because the *beginning* is the *purpose*; in other words, the actual is the same as the Notion only because the immediate, as purpose, contains the self or pure actuality within itself. [...] The self is like that immediacy and simplicity of the beginning because it is the result, that which has returned into itself, the latter being similarly just the self. And the self is the sameness and simplicity that relates itself to itself" (*ibid.*, 12).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 (the stress in the quote is mine).

nature of the knowledge of the origin: namely its capacity to regain the vision of the *originary* identity as a source hidden by every derivative knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Resuming the steps, the structure that Hegel builds is the following: he makes a sort of distinction between *origin/beginning* and *start*, where *origin* - the place of immediacy and all-evident truth - comes first, and *start* - the place by which we “begin” (to deal with the world: its oppositions and non-evidences) - comes after. Now, through a path of work that faces opposition and alien-ation (*Ent-fremdung*), we are supposed to achieve the lost origin: the lost land becomes a promised land.

However, this is a promise that cannot be kept, since the access to an immediate origin is at anytime precluded to us. As soon as the human being comes into the world, it experiences its being temporally/historically: namely, the finitude, the opposition, the impossible immediacy to the world. Thus, the presence of unity in the origin, of accessible totality, turns out to be only a hallucination of desire (as the above reported description of Ciaramelli has already suggested): the human being, who cannot bare the angst of its finitude, death as the most radical alien, passivity to time, and therefore separation from its origin, builds an *immediately* accessible origin, which is nevertheless a hallucinatory satisfaction of desire<sup>37</sup>: an attempt to regain a perfect state, a transparent (immediate) coincidence between desire and its fulfillment. Yet, as already anticipated, as soon as we become conscious and we start dealing with the real world, we experience distance and alienation: we begin from the difference, from time, from finitude, from the impossible appropriation of the alien.

We begin from the dynamic of desire which re-proposes the structure *own/alien*: desire aims to overcome the separation in order to accomplish its fulfillment. However, can desire really be “satisfied” completely? Can we delete time and go back to the original state of perfection, immediacy between desire and its fulfillment? No. Not only can we not do it, but we realize also that this original state of perfection is a “phantom-like” projection of desire fulfillment. In other words, the projection is the way by which desire reacts to the unbearable weight of death. Death, the radical *alien* that cannot be dominated and *appropriated* by us, can be overcome only by a hallucination which establishes the primacy of eternity and the possibility of an immediate access to it. Along this perspective we can read the constructions of the speculative thought through history: from the Platonic *idea* and the *res*

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<sup>36</sup> F. CIARAMELLI, *Intuizione intellettuale e nostalgia dell'unità originaria. Una nota su alcune pagine kantiane di Hegel e Heidegger*, in G. Cantillo and R. Bonito Oliva (edited by), *Fede e sapere. La genesi del pensiero del giovane Hegel*, Guerini, Milano 1998, 333 (the stress in the quote is mine). On this issue see also B. WALDENFELS, *Vielstimmigkeit der Rede. Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden 4*, Frankfurt a. M. 1999, 67-87.

<sup>37</sup> This is one of the guiding themes of the work of F. CIARAMELLI, *La distruzione del desiderio*.

*cogitans* of Descartes up to the *Spirit* of Hegel. They all are the establishments of an eternal origin which rules the world, and from which the deviating masks of everyday experience derive and are to be considered on a lower level.

In spite of the direct access to this original presence, we saw that an origin can be given only in a supplementary form, and the reason for this is the fact that our experience can act only on a delay basis. The words of Octavio Paz hit direct the point:

Man is not coincident with the time, with the flow of reality. When I say: ‘in this instant’, the instant has already passed by.<sup>38</sup>

Here reappears the dynamic that we have already described: what we think to come after the origin is, on the contrary, what produces the origin: only through a delay an origin is constructed. Let’s recall the precise words by which Derrida introduces the structure of the supplement:

La structure *étrange* du supplément apparaît ici: une possibilité produit à retardement ce à quoi elle est dite s’ajouter.<sup>39</sup>

Hence, a possibility produces in delay that to which this possibility is said to be added. It is important to notice that Derrida speaks about this original structure in the same terms in which we have been stressing it until now: namely, as a “strange(r)” (alien).

As we saw for the translation, at the beginning/origin there is an alien which we cannot dominate and appropriate, and to which therefore we are “asked” to *respond*. And since there is no final appropriation, this response cannot be closed; on the contrary, it is the scene where the continuous relationship between *own* and *alien* takes place. In other words, the response becomes that scene where the own and the alien are what they are only in relating one to the other. In Waldenfels’ words:

What *own* and *alien* are, determines itself in the event of responding and nowhere else; that means, it never determines itself completely.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> O. PAZ, *El laberinto de la soledad*, in ID., *Obras completas*, Vol. 8, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México D. F. 1994, 189 (The translations, from Octavio Paz, from Spanish are mine).

<sup>39</sup> J. DERRIDA, *La voix et le phénomène. Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, PUF, Paris 1967, 99 (the stress in the quote is mine).

<sup>40</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Topographie*, 109.

3. *Fiction/Tale: imagination as originary mediation*

The impossibility of closing the scene is also what crosses tales. Closing the circle, in the case of fiction, means to make the tale a function of reality, as if there could be an immediate access to reality able to avoid narration and imagination. In a way we have already seen that there is no possibility such as an original and immediate access to reality which would show itself – thanks to this access – in its full truth and all-evidence, and from which the “masks” of imagination/narration would derive. Fiction is not a servant of reality, but rather is what involves a structure of supplementarity of origin: only through imagination can an origin be constituted. Only through images/narration do we have access to reality. Octavio Paz heads in this direction:

[...] the image is a desperate resort against the silence that invades us every time that we try to express the terrible experience of what surrounds us and of ourselves.<sup>41</sup>

And tied to the poetical experience, the image assumes exactly the form of the supplement of origin, for it is – according to Paz – “a naming of that which, before being named, lacks properly of existence”<sup>42</sup>. Hence, that which is said to come after (imagination/narration), *really* comes first.

Here the origin irrupts as an *alien* which cannot be appropriated and overcome; origin appears only in an original delay which we, therefore, can never recover. This unavoidable delay is exactly what hinders us from closing the circle of reality as such, from capturing it in its all-evident and immediately-displayed truth.

Now, this original delay is the space inhabited by narration/imagination which, instead of deriving from an original presence of reality (or from a given totality), turns to be the only possible access to it. Examples could be several:

1) Starting from a broader level: the *reality* (the effectiveness) of a ruled society is based on an “imagination statute”. The necessity for a society to represent itself, its need of a founding myth is not merely supplementary, rather – in Derridian terms – *originally supplementary*. Along this line of interpretation could be read not only the great Castoriadis’ thinking presented in his *L’institution imaginaire de la société*<sup>43</sup>, but also Lévi-Strauss’ idea that symbolism is not an effect of society, but rather society is an effect of symbolism<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> O. PAZ, *El arco y la lira*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México D. F. 1956, 111.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 157. This dynamic is that which Maurice Merleau-Ponty would call the “paradox of expression”. See in particular M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, Paris 1945, 445, 448-449; *Le visible et l’invisible*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, 189.

<sup>43</sup> See C. CASTORIADIS, *L’institution imaginaire de la société*, Éd. du Seuil, Paris 1975.

<sup>44</sup> See C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Introduction to M. MAUSS, Sociologie et Anthropologie*, PUF, Paris 1984.

2) Moreover, all that we know about the reality of love, hate, and ethical feelings is not immediately given to us, but it is what tradition, namely literature (imagination), displays<sup>45</sup>.

3) A mediated access through imagination is also what rules action: I can really act only because I can imagine. So Ricoeur:

[...] c'est dans l'*imaginaire* que j'essaie mon pouvoir de faire, que je prends la mesure du 'je peux'. Je ne m'impute à moi-même mon propre pouvoir, en tant que je suis l'agent de ma propre action, qu'en le dépeignant à moi-même sous les traits de variations imaginatives sur le thème du 'je pourrai', voire du 'j'aurais pu autrement, si j'avais voulu'. [...] L'essentiel au point de vue phénoménologique est que je ne prends possession de la certitude *immédiate* de mon pouvoir qu'à travers les variations imaginatives qui médiatisent cette certitude.<sup>46</sup>

4) The access to myself as a real identity is only possible through an identity which "speaks" within itself, *imagines* itself in dialogue; in other words, a narrative identity. The pages of Ricoeur on this theme are many<sup>47</sup>. We can read a very representative passage in a text he presented in a conference in Rome in 1987:

According to my final hypothesis, the comprehension that each one has of oneself is narrative: I cannot catch myself out of the time and therefore out of the narration.<sup>48</sup>

The exercise of imagination – just like translation and tragedy reading – is an exercise of delay, and by being such it is a declaration of fragility, for the subject realizes that it cannot dominate, and therefore fully appropriate, the origin. In these terms it becomes clear and meaningful what Paul Valéry says:

L'étrangeté est le vrai commencement. Au commencement était l'étrange.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> In this regard P. Ricoeur writes: "Contrairement à la tradition du *Cogito* et à la prétention du sujet de se connaître lui-même par intuition immédiate, il faut dire que nous ne nous comprenons que par le grand détour des signes d'humanité déposés dans les œuvres de culture. Que saurions-nous de l'amour et de la haine, des sentiments éthiques et, en général, de tout ce que nous appelons le *soi*, si cela n'avait été porté au langage et articulé par la littérature?" (P. RICOEUR, *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique II*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1986, 116).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 225 (the stress in the quote is mine).

<sup>47</sup> On the theme of narrative identity in P. RICOEUR see *Temps et récit III. Le temps réconté*, Éd. du Seuil, Paris 1985, 349-392; *Soi-même*, 137-198.

<sup>48</sup> I am quoting from the Italian translation: P. RICOEUR, *La componente narrativa della psicoanalisi* (1987), in "Metaxù", n. 5, 1988, 8 (the translation from Italian is mine).

<sup>49</sup> P. VALÉRY, *Cahiers 1894-1914*, édition intégrale, vol. VI, Gallimard, Paris 1997, 85.



Narration/imagination, by being the sign of an impossible immediate access to reality in its original core, does not correspond to a “naturalization” of a merely initial *alienness* of reality, but rather it is the genuine response to appeal/call from an *alien* that can never be crossed out. Thus, imagination lives under the sign of an “unstablensness”, says the Italian thinker Pier Aldo Rovatti, “tied up to the voice of the other which we narrate, which makes us narrate and to which in reality we ‘respond’”<sup>50</sup>.

Imagination stands, in its fragility, against the practice of subject’s titanism, which, by claiming a dominion upon reality through immediate accessibility, negates the preeminent statute of imagination. However, what is very curious is that even if we follow the hypothesis of titanism we cannot avoid going through a kind of imagination: the paralysis of it, its mortal expression, what we call *hallucination*. In other words, the supplement of origin rules even in the operation of its elimination/overcoming.

What we’ve just said in Nietzsche’s terms would sound:

Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power.<sup>51</sup>

It is exactly the *strange* supplement of origin which silently works in Nietzsche’s thought when describing the relationship between reality and images, facts and narration - “there are no facts, but only interpretations (*gerade Thatsachen giebt es nicht, nur Interpretationen*)”<sup>52</sup> - or when he writes:

The will to semblance, to illusion, to becoming, to changing (to objective illusion) counts here as more profound, *more original*, more metaphysical than the will to truth, reality, being (*Der Wille zum Schein, zur Illusion, zur Täuschung, zum Werden und Wechseln - zur objektiven Täuschung - gilt hier als tiefer, ursprünglicher, metaphysischer als der Wille zur Wahrheit, zur Wirklichkeit, zum Sein*).<sup>53</sup>

The issues of constant translation and inhabiting the opened scene raised by this essay are also not at all far from the experience of perspectivism proposed by Nietzsche: he speaks about a navigation, surrounded by an

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<sup>50</sup> P.A. ROVATTI, *Abitare la distanza. Per un’etica del linguaggio*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1994, 135 (the translation from Italian is mine).

<sup>51</sup> F. NIETZSCHE, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, engl. trans. by Walter Kaufmann, Viking Penguin Inc, New York 1976.

<sup>52</sup> F. NIETZSCHE, *Nachlaß 1885-1887*, in ID., *Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by G. Colli und M. Montinari, vol. 12, de Gruyter, München 1999 (new edition), 7 [60], 315 (The translation into English from the *Nachlaß* is mine).

<sup>53</sup> F. NIETZSCHE, *Nachlaß 1887-1889*, in ID., *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol.13, 17 [3], 522 (the stress in the quote is mine).

“infinite horizon”, which does not lead to a land and cannot go back to any land, and this is because there is no longer any land, any present origin<sup>54</sup>. This *no land* metaphor – which does not allow any nostalgic attitude – cannot indicate other than the statute of *alienness*: the root of our fragile being in the world.

Against this fragility and ontological delay stands every titanic attempt of immediate access to origin. Immediacy as the most exasperated form of hurry – hurry to delete time, to eternalize: e.g. to possess truth, to avoid death. As the great Cuban singer (and poet) Silvio Rodríguez poignantly sings:

Siempre vale la agonía de la prisa / aunque se llene de sillas la verdad.<sup>55</sup>

With this we conclude: we may rest, we may sit (?).

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<sup>54</sup> See F. NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, engl. trans. by W. Kaufmann, Random House, New York 1974, § 124.

<sup>55</sup> “It would always rule the agony of hurry / even if truth were filled up with chairs” (From the song: *Historia de las sillas*).

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