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ABSTRACT: The essay confronts the question of weathering by considering its excess to the conceptual dimension and relating it to what Jacques Derrida names (the) 'trace'. The study of the 'logic' of weathering/the trace is confronted with Giorgio Agamben's critique of Derrida's project. Their two different conceptions of language, of its presuppositional structure, and of its order of 'metaphysical presence' are considered, in particular by turning to Werner Hamacher's work on these and related matters.

The Weathering of the Trace

Agamben's Presupposition of Derrida

DAMIANO SACCO

The urgency of the question of the status of the trace can perhaps in no way be justified, it can only be asserted. The trace 'itself', Derrida argues, cannot be done justice to — the trace, another name for justice, cannot be justified. The urgency of the question of the trace is unfolded in this essay alongside a principal axis instituted by the following question: is it possible that the trace might be weathering away? Is it altogether possible for the trace to weather away like a *material* trace would, a trace imprinted in the mud or in the snow, a trace exposed to the elements? It is not immediately clear how one should think the weathering of the trace — to which elements would the trace be exposed? To Heidegger's earth? To his forgetting of air? To Nietzsche's fear of water? To everyone's obsession with fire? Or is it the case, instead, that the trace has in fact already withered away — that there are no more traces to be found? Notwithstanding, one should at least justify the possibility of addressing the question of the trace under the heading of weathering, at least justify the possibility of articulating the question alongside a guideline that does not immediately appear to move in the vicinities of the trace. The principal standpoint from which this reflection moves is then the one which enables the thinking of the movement of the trace together with a certain notion of weathering. When a building, a stone, or a monument are exposed to the elements,

it can be argued that a certain logic of ‘supplementarity’ is at work, a familiar kind of addition by subtraction or subtraction by addition: the monument *gains* something by being weathered — it gains a new status by something perhaps being removed or weathered off its surface, it gains something through a subtraction — and, at the same time, the monument *loses* something, its original status, through the additional supplement or sedimentation of the elements — it loses something through an addition. There is then an extent to which weathering, according to this logic of supplementarity, as the deferral of an origin that has always already been weathered, as an exposure to the elements, as an exposure to the Other, as an exposure that precedes all fantasies of self-presence, as the opening of temporality itself, but also, as will be made clear in the other contributions to this volume, as the logic of the archive — the logic of what remains alive of the dead and what is already dead of the living — as the haunting of memory, as the work of mourning, as the creation *and* erasure of physical traces — there is an extent to which the movement of the trace and this notion of weathering can be thought together.

The question at stake in this essay, however, is not that of weathering, but rather that of the weathering of the trace (objective genitive).¹ This question turns out to be problematic if approached from the current standpoint, for the weathering of the trace would stand for a weathering of weathering itself, for the trace of the trace ‘itself’. This is a well-known problem, or feature, of deconstruction: namely, the aporia that arises when one attempts to think the possibility of a transformation or weathering *of* the very opening of temporality, *of* spacing, *of* the very exposure that first makes any weathering possible. To posit that the trace is liable to any notion of transformation, modification, or weathering would be to resort, precisely, to a possibility for change for which the trace will have always been the very opening. This is a feature that is known, in Aristotle (but not in Plato), as anhypotheticity (or, before Meillassoux’s intervention, more commonly as

1 The expression ‘weathering of the trace’ has two meanings: when the genitive is taken as subjective, it attributes the performance of weathering to the trace, signalling that the trace is the source or principle of weathering; when the genitive is taken as objective, it is the trace to be subjected or exposed to weathering. This latter case will be explored as the subject matter of the essay.

elenchus): that is, the impossibility to attempt to refute (*elenchein*) a certain principle, of non-contradiction in Aristotle's case, without having of necessity to resort to it. The question of the weathering of the trace is then equivalent to that of anhypotheticity, a question of self-referentiality with which continental thought seems to keep confronting itself — by asking whether being is, whether the trace is, whether *die Sprache spricht*, whether contingency is contingent, whether plasticity is plastic, whether weathering weathers, and so forth. According to different topologies, the boundary of language — its limit — is either simple or, rather, consists of a certain fold that turns in upon itself. Deconstruction takes the following stance: there can be no trace of the trace, no deconstruction of deconstruction, no autoimmunity of autoimmunity, no hymen of the hymen, no *glas* of *glas*, no weathering of weathering. Justice, another name for deconstruction, Derrida states, is undeconstructible; the trace, as autoimmunity, is not liable to any autoimmunitary reaction, be that a permanent autoimmunitary disease or a seasonal allergy.² The aim of this essay is to confront the question of the anhypotheticity of the trace — the question of the weathering of the trace — with the claim that the trace itself would be inscribed in a certain history, not quite a temporal one, through an inscription that it has not itself written — the trace would be inscribed in a history that has come to an end. This is Agamben's claim.

I

For over forty years, from his first *Stanzas* through to *What Is Philosophy?*, Agamben has time and again engaged with the standpoint of deconstruction: an engagement that has at times been overt, at times covert, at times self-effacing, and at times, of necessity, unaware of itself. In the impossibility to render justice to this pluri-decennial confrontation, the hope is that this inevitably partial re-enactment might shed light on the question of rendering justice itself — to a text, to a reading, to justice itself. If the principle of reason is one of *reddendae*

2 For a different approach to the question of anhypotheticity, which points to the undecidability of the status of contingency, deconstruction, etc., see Damiano Sacco, 'Of *Apousia* and *Parousia*: The Correlation between Heidegger and Meillassoux', *Pli*, 30 (2019), pp. 141–63.

rationis, the anhypotheticity of justice deals precisely with the impossibility of rendering justice to justice itself. The plan is to present Agamben's claim on the status of the trace and to then outline his own proposal.

The principal claim made by Agamben is that, since Aristotle, our experience of language has been shaped by one particular *modus operandi*, to wit, the presuppositional one. Agamben argues that with Aristotle we observe the inception of a structuring guideline throughout which language will operate as a determinate apparatus (*dispositivo*): namely, one that is responsible for the 'the scission of being into a *hypokeimenon*, something lying-at-the-base (the being named or indicated of a singular existent, insofar as it is not said of a subject but is a presupposition for every discourse) and that which is said on the presupposition of it.'³ To predicate in language always means having *pre*-supposed, *a posteriori*, the existence of a substratum or hypostasis that precedes all predicates. Agamben writes:

As soon as there is language, the named thing is presupposed as the nonlinguistic or the unrelated with which language has established its relation. This presupposing power is so strong that we imagine the non-linguistic as something unsayable and unrelated, which we somehow try to grasp as such, without realizing that in this way we are simply trying to grasp the shadow of language. In this sense, the unsayable is a genuinely linguistic category, which can be conceived only by a speaking being.⁴

The trajectory of the history of Western metaphysics, a trajectory that Heidegger and Derrida read as being indexed by certain order of presence, a metaphysics of presence — this trajectory is re-interpreted by Agamben as that of the history of a certain experience of language, precisely a language that is inherently presuppositional, that cannot help but *pre*-suppose, after taking place, a prior, non-linguistic substratum that it itself constitutes retroactively. The self-presence of the signified, namely the target of Heideggerian destruction and Derridean

3 Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), pp. 131–32.

4 Giorgio Agamben, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. by Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), p. 35.

deconstruction, should be traced, according to Agamben, to the self-presence of the retroactive positing of the linguistic presupposition, the self-presence of the non-linguistic presupposition. The history of metaphysics coincides then with the history of the presuppositional experience of language: 'It is in the structure of presupposition that the interweaving of being and language, ontology and logic that constitutes Western metaphysics is articulated.'⁵ The history of metaphysics, rather than being constituted by a number of inscrutable sendings destined by a giving that will forever elude being given itself — a giving nevertheless constrained by the double binds of unconcealment and concealment (*Un-verborgenheit*), disclosure and withdrawal (*Enthüllung, Entzug*), appropriation and expropriation (*Ereignis, Enteignis*) — this history is rather to find its material inscription in the development of a science of language as well as in the uncovering of the presupposing structure that underlies the Western experience of language. An uncovering that follows the material conditions of 'centuries of humble analysis and grammatical education, through which language [*lingua, (langue)*] has been extracted from speech [*parola, (parole)*] and interiorized as knowledge.'⁶

This reading enables Agamben to ground the trajectory of the history of metaphysics — a trajectory that according to Heidegger moves along an axis indexed by the objectification (*Vergegenständlichung, Objektivierung*) and constant presence (*beständige Anwesenheit*) of the existent — on the development of a science of language that progressively uncovers the logic of presupposition, of the self-presence of the presupposed, of the institution of a subject of language, and so forth. Moreover, both the inception and the conclusion of the history of metaphysics find their own rationales: Aristotle's inception marks the beginning of the presuppositional experience of language, and, at the

5 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, p. 119.

6 Giorgio Agamben, 'La parola e il sapere', *aut aut*, 179–80 (September–December 1980), pp. 155–66 (p. 157; my translation): 'It is sufficient to reflect, even for just a moment, to realize that, while speech [*parola*], the concrete instance of discourse, is something that can be experienced immediately and concretely, language [*lingua*] is nothing but a construction of science that originates in speech. In order for something like language to even just be conceived of, in order for it to become something firmer and more real than speech, centuries, even millennia, of grammatical and logical reflection on language have been necessary.'

other end, the development of the modern science of linguistics that takes place from Bopp through to Saussure and Benveniste marks the accomplishment of this experience. Agamben writes:

This is the Copernican revolution that the thought of our time inherits from nihilism: we are the first human beings who have become completely conscious of language. For the first time, what preceding generations called God, Being, spirit, unconscious appear to us as what they are: names for language.⁷

And he continues:

The primordial character of the word is now completely revealed, and no new figure of the divine, no new historical destiny can lift itself out of language. [...] If God was the name of language, 'God is dead' can only mean that there is no longer a name for language.⁸

Crucially, this reading provides Agamben with a foothold that enables him to extend the history of metaphysics just enough to also include Derrida and the trace. Derrida's thought comes to represent, in Agamben's reading, the end of the trajectory beginning with Aristotle: the end of the presupposing experience of language. Agamben's gesture consists in claiming that the trace, in not being able to escape the presuppositional experience of language, rather brings it to its conclusion: the trace is, Agamben argues, presupposition of nothing *but* of itself — the trace is inscribed in the history of metaphysics *as self-presupposition*. The self-presence of the presupposed is forever deferred by the trace precisely because the action of presupposition comes to be shifted, at each turn, to act upon itself: the trace does not presuppose a self-present signified, but rather keeps presupposing a presupposition to each presupposition. The immediacy of the internal voice has always already presupposed the mediation of an external writing, which in turn can exist as a mediation or an externality only if it has presupposed ... and so forth, with the movement of arche-writing or trace standing

7 Giorgio Agamben, 'The Idea of Language', in Agamben, *Potentialities*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 39–47 (p. 45).

8 Ibid.

precisely for the differing and deferral operated by the process of self-presupposition. Agamben writes:

For there to be the signification of an intentionality and not of an object, it is necessary that the term signify itself, but *signify itself only insofar as it signifies*. It is thus necessary that the *intentio* neither be a referent nor, for that matter, simply refer to an object. In the semiotic scheme by which *aliquid stat pro aliquo*, A stands for B, the *intentio* cannot indicate the first *aliquid* or the second; it must, rather, above all refer to the 'standing for' itself. The aporia of Derrida's terminology is that in it, one *standing for* stands for another *standing for*, without anything like an objective referent constituting itself in its presence. But, accordingly, the very notion of sense (of 'standing for') then enters into a state of crisis. This is the particular rigour of Derrida's terminology.⁹

The trace, as self-presupposition, is then inscribed in the history of the presuppositional experience of language as its necessary completion. According to a recurrent strategy, Agamben performs a gesture that enables him to include a certain element in a system through its very exclusion, namely to include the graphic element of the trace as the negative, i.e. the inverse/reverse, of the history of onto-theology.¹⁰ Through a logic of the exception, a logic of *ex-capio*, the trace is included in the history of metaphysics precisely by its conformity, albeit by means of its negation, to the presuppositional structure of language, i.e. by excluding or disabling the retroactive presupposition of a referent. The weathering of the trace (subjective genitive) — the trace as weathering — stands according to Agamben as the completion of the history of metaphysics.¹¹

9 Ibid., p. 212, translation modified.

10 See, e.g., Agamben, *What Is Philosophy?*, pp. 19–20 or Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. by Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 38–40.

11 Agamben repeatedly grounds his assessment of the trace on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* and on its ancient commentators. Agamben argues that the articulation between *phōnē* and *logos*, between bare voice and signifying language, can take place only thanks to the function of the letter, *gramma*, both element and sign of the voice: 'Insofar as it is the *element of that of which it is a sign*, it has the privileged status of being an *index sui*, self-demonstration; like *protē ousia*, of which it constitutes the linguistic cipher, it shows itself, but only insofar as it was in the voice, that is, insofar as it always already belongs to the past. The *gramma* is thus the form of presupposition itself and nothing

II

Before attempting to render justice to this reading, before asking whether the trace can effectively be included through an exclusion or whether it has the potential of deactivating the logic of the exception, it will be necessary to provide a brief outline of Agamben's own proposal. Having delimited the domain of metaphysics by means of a certain experience of language that runs from Aristotle to Derrida, Agamben resorts to the Heideggerian need for a step-back-beyond in order to move beyond the presuppositional history of language. This step back, which according to Heidegger should prepare the springing board or the run-up space for the leap (*Satz*) beyond metaphysics, is then quite literally a step back from Aristotle, namely a certain return to Plato's theory of ideas and quest for a principle freed from all presuppositions, an *archē anypothetos*. It is then exactly in the space articulated by the two different notions of anhypotheticity that a confrontation between Derrida and Agamben is to be staged. On the one hand, anhypotheticity as the impossibility to contest a principle without having necessarily to resort to it (to argue that the trace would presuppose a more original opening would precisely mean to resort to a notion of presupposition that is a prerogative of the trace); on the other hand, anhypotheticity as the attempt to do away with the logic of presupposition *altogether*, namely to turn to an experience of language that knows nothing of presuppositions, be they simple or self-referential.

The entry point to this different notion of anhypotheticity is then the following: if the unsayable, the non-linguistic, is nothing but the

else' (Agamben, 'The Thing Itself', in Agamben, *Potentialities*, pp. 27–38 (p. 37); see also Agamben, 'Tradition of the Immemorial', in Agamben, *Potentialities*, pp. 104–15 (pp. 111, 113)). Signifying language, Agamben argues, is always articulated (*enarthros*) and *phōnē enarthros* means *phōnē engrammatos, vox quae scribi potest* (Agamben, 'Philosophy and Linguistics', in Agamben, *Potentialities*, pp. 62–76 (p. 75)): 'The letter, as the interpreter of the voice, does not itself need any other interpreter. It is the final interpreter, beyond which no *hermēneia* is possible: the limit of all interpretation' (ibid., p. 37). He can therefore conclude: 'What has reached completion is in fact not the natural history of humanity, but that most special epochal history in which the *hermēneia* of speech as a language [*lingua*] — that is, as an intentional intertwining of terms, concepts, things, and letters that takes place in the voice through the *grammata* — had destined the West' (*What is Philosophy?*, p. 23). In the following it will be shown that the trace, neither *gramma* nor *phōnē*, neither positing nor presupposing, can neither be said to be within nor to be without the history of metaphysics.

presupposition of language, the shadow that language necessarily casts in its taking place, it is on the contrary the sayable (*il dicibile*), the sayability of the sayable, that with which philosophy should concern itself:

It is not the unsayable but the sayable that constitutes the problem philosophy must at each turn confront again. The unsayable is in fact nothing else than a presupposition of language. [...] The unsayable is a genuinely linguistic category, which can be conceived only by a speaking being. [...] On the other hand, the sayable is a non-linguistic but genuinely ontological category. The elimination of the unsayable in language coincides with the exhibition of the sayable as a philosophical task.¹²

Precisely the task of exhibiting, or even exposing, the pure sayability of the sayable can, according to Agamben, be attended to by turning to Plato's theory of ideas. Neither does the idea, the 'thing itself', have a proper name nor is it homonymous with the thing: 'the "circle itself" (*autos ho kyklos*) seizes the circle not at the level of signification but in its pure having a name, in that pure sayability that alone makes discourse and knowledge possible.'¹³ The specific performance of the pronoun *autos* is that of signalling a notion of sameness that, in contrast to the notion of mere identity (*ipse* and *das Selbe* rather than *idem* or *das Gleiche*), articulates the matter of thinking since the Heideggerian intervention. A certain notion of sameness of being and thought comes then to be articulated anew in Plato's theory of ideas: the idea belongs neither to thought nor to being, neither to *langue* nor to *parole*, it does not substantialize or abstract an ideal world, but rather, as event of language, deactivates and neutralizes these oppositions by joining together the thing with its being named:

In this way, Plato problematizes the pure and irreducible givenness of language. At this point — where the name is resumed from and in its naming the thing, and the thing is resumed from and in its being named by the name — the

12 Agamben, *What Is philosophy?*, p. 35.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

world and language are in contact, that is, they are united only by an absence of representation.¹⁴

The promise of a different experience of language is to be waged on the contemplation of the event of language, on a suspension of what (*quid*) is being said to attend to the fact that (*quod*) it is being said. According to Agamben, in this shift, ‘the whole modern theory of signification is called into question.’¹⁵ This is the step back from the presuppositional experience of language that prepares for the leap beyond metaphysics:

Language, which for human beings mediates all things and all knowledge, is itself immediate. Nothing immediate can be reached by speaking beings — nothing, that is, except language itself, mediation itself. For human beings, such an *immediate mediation* constitutes the sole possibility of reaching a principle freed of every presupposition, including self-presupposition. Such an *immediate mediation* alone, in other words, allows human beings to reach that *arkhē anypotethos*, that ‘unpresupposed principle’ that Plato, in the *Republic*, presents as the *telos*, fulfilment and end of *autos ho logos*, language itself [...]. There can be no true human community on the basis of a presupposition — be it a nation, a language, or even the a priori of communication of which hermeneutics speaks. What unites human beings among themselves is not a nature, a voice, or a common imprisonment in signifying language; it is the vision of language itself and, therefore, the experience of language’s limits, its *end*. A true community can only be a community that is not presupposed.¹⁶

If the weathering of the trace, the trace as weathering, constitutes the consummation of the history of metaphysics, it is then a notion of the weather, a notion of the event of language freed of all presuppositions, that which sets forth the promise of a different experience of language.

III

The principle of justice — the anhypotheticity of justice — precludes the rendering of justice to the trace, the rendering of justice to justice.

14 Ibid., p. 65.

15 Ibid., p. 60.

16 Agamben, ‘The Idea of Language’, p. 47.

There is nevertheless a minimal gap that separates the movement of the trace from what Agamben refers to — a minimal gap that affords a rendering of justice. Every positing (*Setzung*), in taking place, points to a prior positing as to a presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) of its very taking place: namely, in the very act of positing, *it* — the positing itself — is presupposed to its own performance. The logic of positing and presupposing, the logic of reflection, finds perhaps its most natural fulfilment in being posited *itself* as one moment of the unfolding of an ideal Substance/Subject, to wit, Hegel's Spirit. Spirit, in positing its object, finds itself as the very presupposition of this positing; that is to say, Spirit finds itself — its own interiority — *in* the exteriority of the object it has itself posited. Positing, by being posited itself, presupposes itself; presupposition, in being itself posited becomes self-presupposition. Given this logic of self-presupposition — namely, given the dialectics between *Setzung* and *Voraussetzung* that locates in each positing a presupposition which comes itself to be posited — then, the movement or inscription of the trace can be said to be neither equal nor different, neither internal nor external, to this economy of self-presupposition. Between the restricted economy of self-presupposition and the generalized one of the trace, there is not a fully constituted difference, but precisely the trace of a difference, the difference of a trace.¹⁷ The stakes and the promise of the whole Derridean project lie precisely in exhibiting and demonstrating, by means of an exhibiting that is a demonstration, that the very condition of possibility of the restricted economy of *Setzung* and *Voraussetzung*, of positing and presupposing, is a moment that *of necessity* exceeds this economy. The economy of reflection is set into play neither by a positing nor by a presupposing, but rather by the excess of an ex-positing or of an exposure: the excess of an *Aussetzung*. The exposure that first makes possible this economy and that, at the same time, exceeds the aegis of its logic — the abstract negativity that cannot be drained by any determinate one, the gift that precedes all notions of accountability, the unconditional hospitality

17 One should confront here with the claim found in Derrida's 1964–65 seminar that the 'difference' between Hegel and Heidegger, between *Erinnerung* and *Destruktion*, 'is thus as close as possible to *nothing*'. Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 9.

for the unposited Other, and so forth — this excess is found again, at each step, *within* the economy itself in a certain distancing of positing from itself: a distancing that does not quite amount to a full difference precisely because it does not distance two positings, but a positing and the other positing that will have been presupposed *only* by virtue of this very distancing. The trace is therefore not simply presupposition of itself, the trace does not *institute* a restricted economy of *Setzung-Voraussetzung*, but rather renders the latter *destitute* — i.e. it renders it justice — through the inscription of the generalized economy of *Setzung-Aussetzung-Voraussetzung*. Accordingly, every positing takes place by means of an exposure that is neither posited nor presupposed, every presupposing takes place by virtue of a non-positing exposure of positing, every exposure inscribes an economy of positing and presupposing.

Beyond Derrida — one could quote here a whole series of texts *in toto* — it is perhaps Hamacher the one to have most insisted in letting this structure emerge across the tradition. In Kant, where the very fact that the order of the posited is taken as the order of being ('The concept of position or positing (*Position oder Setzung*) is completely simple and is the same as the concept of Being'¹⁸) entails that positing itself cannot quite be said 'to be': 'it means that positing, affected by something other than Being understood as position, never *is* — never "is" according to its own sense of "is," according to the sense of thetic Being.'¹⁹ In Fichte:

Fichte's proposition can be characterized in this way: in order for the proposition to be able to realize its constative character through which the identity of the I with itself is designated as Being, it needs an absolutely nonrelational, performative positing, a sheer act that can be neither the action of an I nor an action in relation to an I, hence no action of consciousness and no intentional correlate of consciousness.²⁰

18 Werner Hamacher, 'Premises', in Hamacher, *Premises: Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan*, trans. by Peter Fenves (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 1–43 (p. 11; quoting from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*).

19 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

20 Werner Hamacher, 'Position Exposed: Friedrich Schlegel's Poetological Transposition of Fichte's Absolute Proposition', in Hamacher, *Premises*, pp. 222–60 (p. 234).

In Hegel:

Hegel does not dissolve the aporia of understanding. On the contrary, for him, the aporia constitutes the resistance from which experience must rebound and turn back on itself. By supposing that the incomprehensible has a meaning, spirit understands it as its object and understands itself as its positing. [...] [Spirit] takes the only path that the blockage of the aporia leaves open: a path back to itself.²¹

And, of course, in Heidegger:

In the essay 'On the Essence of Truth,' he [Heidegger] does not use the terminology of understanding and anticipation but that of letting, leaving, and ex-posing: 'As this letting-be, it exposes itself to beings as such and transposes all comportment into the open. Letting-be, that is, freedom, is in itself ex-posing [*aus-setzend*], ek-sistent. Seen from the perspective of the essence of truth, the essence of freedom shows itself as exposure [*Aussetzung*] to the unconcealment of beings.' [...] As the ex-posure of positing — the *Aussetzung der Setzung*, the interruption of every positional act, the exposition of every possible position — it draws on an opening, an unposited space, and a place impossible to posit.²²

It is from this standpoint that weathering, or the trace, appears not simply as an infinite regression of an always-already weathered existent, but rather as the emergence of this economy by means of an exposure to its unweatherable condition of possibility — an exposure to the event of the weather. The weather, the *factum* of language, constitutes the *archē anypothetos*, the giving of the economy of weathering — an economy that will always contain the inscription of a trace that cannot be weathered by anhypotheticity. In order to distance himself from Derrida, Agamben misses the opportunity to see that this distancing arises only by his mis-positing of the trace — a mis-positing that reveals the two projects to be perhaps as close as they could be. For, on the one hand, the event of language as *archē anypothetos* gives rise

21 Hamacher, 'Premises', pp. 7–9.

22 Hamacher, 'Premises', p. 38; quoting from Heidegger's 'On the Essence of Truth'.

to an economy of positing and presupposing in which one can always find the inscription of a trace, a trace that cannot be weathered by anhypotheticity. Conversely, by virtue of its own anhypotheticity, the trace precludes positing from positing itself by inscribing a distancing within positing itself: the event of positing, the weather, constitutes an *archē anypothetos*. To think the weathering or the anhypotheticity of the trace amounts then to thinking the event of language, the event of the weather, as *archē anypothetos*. Weather and weathering, event of language and trace, abandoned being and exposed positing, *archē anypothetos* and anhypotheticity of the lack of *archē* — but also, *bando* and *bande*, *potenza* and *puissance/potence*, *soglia* and *hymen*, and so forth — Agamben and Derrida's projects are tangent to each other without any possibility of being disjoined. One should mark each of the following words by Hamacher: 'Positing is exposed positing; abandoned by itself, it is thus ex-position.'²³ This essay is perhaps only a long exegesis of this one sentence, of the relation between the exposure of positing and the exceptional *bando* of abandoned being.²⁴ Hamacher articulates this relation as follows:

It thus becomes clear that there can be a position — and thus Being, subject, language, and understanding — only from the ex-position of this position: only, therefore, from what is precisely not an understanding of Being as position, not a subject, not a language, and not an understanding — and is, moreover, not a negation of any of these but the opening of every one. Only as an ex-posed, abandoned subject is there

23 Hamacher, 'Premises', p. 15. One should confront once again with the 'difference' between Hegel and Heidegger as found in Derrida's 1964–65 seminar, see previous note.

24 See also Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Abandoned Being', in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. by Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 36–47. Equivalent readings could have been performed by substituting exposure (*Aussetzung*) with either the de-posing (*Ent-setzung*) of positing (*Setzung*) or with its trans-posing (*Über-setzung*). Hamacher writes: "Translation [*Übersetzung*] is the exposition of languages in language [...]. In it, language exposes positing itself and being as the position of another being — or of another as being — which for its part presents itself not positively, [...] but rather only as the movement of this ex-posure [*Aus-setzung*] and de-posing [*Ent-setzung*] of positing [*Setzung*]." Werner Hamacher, 'Intensive Languages', trans. by Ira Allen and Steven Tester, *MLN*, 127.3 (April 2012), pp. 485–541 (p. 536). In this regard, see also Heidegger's discussion of the *Grundstimmung* of *Entsetzung*, Benjamin's work on translation, on the *Entsetzung* of the law, Paul's *katargēsis*, Agamben's destituent potential, and so forth.

a subject in the first place, and only as ex-posed, disrupted language and understanding is there anything like language or understanding at all.²⁵

The guiding question of this essay, the question of the weathering of the trace, is then inseparable from that of the event of the weather, of the *factum* of language. The two questions point, albeit in opposite directions, to one and the same matter, to the constitutive impossibility to think within language either an *archē anypothetos* or the anhypotheticity of a lack of *archē*. This rift within language, this internal fissure, is not to be taken as an infinitely distant boundary that establishes a limit with the real, but as the remnant of an encounter, the mark of the loss that language has had to sustain in order to constitute itself, the sacrifice through which language has had to make itself *sacer*, through which language has had to abandon itself. The impossibility to think the weathering of the trace and the failure to think the event of language *are* — finally without any metaphoricity — the real, the Other exposed to the Other, language exposed to itself:

The auto-parekbasis of language as such. It is the movement that leaps out of the uncontainable excess of speaking over the spoken, of positing over every positivity, of the act of positing over its fixation in the position of subjectivity. [...] Language speaks as absolute ex-position: as *ekbasis*, as excess, interruption, and opening up.²⁶

There can be no trace 'itself' and there can be no *autos* 'itself'.

IV

The urgency of the question at stake is seen to both propel the analysis forward and to put a halt to it — precisely for a lack of time. Had the question not been so urgent, one could have articulated the same logic, one could have attempted to apply the same change of coordinates

25 Hamacher, 'Premises', p. 16.

26 Hamacher, 'Position Exposed', p. 254. Parekbasis marks the speech that the chorus would give to the people in the middle of the play by stepping out (*ekbasis*) of the piece and of the limits of the proscenium, 'a complete interruption and *Aufhebung* of the play'. See *ibid.*, p. 248.

between the trace and the event of language, along other axes: following the guideline of language, concerning the performativity of the performative and the sacrament of language; following the guideline of the law, through the two readings of 'Before the Law'; following the guideline of the name, concerning the inscription of the trace in every proper name and the lack of a name for the name; following the question of matter, the question of the *khōra*; following the guideline of the promise, the question of messianism, both between Derrida and Agamben and between Derrida and Benjamin; following many other guidelines.²⁷ But had the questions not been so urgent, one would have had no reason to follow these guidelines to begin with. My own promise then, urgently.

We have already heard Agamben claiming that the experience of language that has structured our tradition, an experience that when made non-thetically thematic constitutes the sought after *archē anypothetos* — this experience of language is that of an immediate mediation. Said otherwise, language *as* the medium that gives access must itself be immediate, it can posit something only insofar as it is itself not posited. Were that not the case, rather than letting the existent come forth, it would hinder this process by its own obtrusiveness, it would itself appear and conceal the existent. With the assistance of a number of eminent predecessors, let us designate this conception of language by the epithet 'weak', or, equivalently, by the epithet 'little' — not comparatively, as opposed to a strong one, but absolutely so:

27 For what concerns the question of the performative see, e.g., Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994) and Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath*, trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011). For the reading of Kafka see Jacques Derrida, 'Before the Law', trans. by Avital Ronell and Christine Roulston, in his *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 181–220, and Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). For the question of the name and of the *khōra*, see Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, trans. by David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995) and Giorgio Agamben, 'Pardes: The Writing of Potentiality', in *Potentialities*, pp. 205–19. For an attempt at the question of the promise, see Damiano Sacco, 'Highest Openness: On Agamben's Promise', in *Openness and Medieval Culture*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, forthcoming), and references therein.

This movement of language from the withdrawal, this non-positional and presuppositionless language of freedom, is, according to one possible reading of Schlegel's note, 'little'. It does not show an object that would be little but shows 'how little' its showing is and thus shows that there is language.²⁸

And again:

The 'weakness' of *logos* [*to tōn logōn asthenes*, Plato's Seventh Letter 343a1] therefore consists precisely in the fact that it is not capable of bringing this very knowability and sameness to expression; it must transform the knowability of beings that is at issue in it in a presupposition.²⁹

And again:

To this presupposing structure of language corresponds the specificity of its way of being, which amounts to the fact that it must remove itself in order to make the named thing be. This is the nature of language Duns Scotus has in mind when he defines the relation as *ens debilissimum* and adds that it is for this reason so difficult to know. Language is ontologically very weak, in the sense that it cannot but disappear in the thing it names, otherwise, rather than designating or unveiling the thing, it would hinder its comprehension.³⁰

And again:

As Meister Eckhart writes, if the form through which we know a thing were itself something, it would lead us to its knowledge and turn away from the knowledge of the thing. The risk of being itself perceived as a thing, and of separating us from what it should reveal to us, is until the end consubstantial with language. Not being able to say itself while it says other things, that is, its being always ecstatically in the place of the other, is the unmistakable signature and, at the same time, the original taint of human language.³¹

28 Hamacher, 'Position Exposed', p. 259.

29 Agamben, 'The Thing Itself', p. 33.

30 Agamben, *What Is Philosophy?*, pp. 9–10.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

The event of language constitutes an *archē anypothetos* by virtue of the weakness of language, that is, by virtue of the impossibility of making thetic by means of language while, at the same time, making language itself thetic. The aim of this essay has been to argue that the weakness of language, its presuppositional economy and the ex-position or trace that inscribes this economy are coextensive and indissociable from one another.

Firstly, the weakness of language entails a presuppositional economy. Every positing, by virtue of its very being a *weak* positing, cannot be posited insofar as it is positing — it therefore *points to* a presupposed that must have posited it: a presupposed that can be itself weakly posited, thus pointing to a new presupposition.

Secondly, the presuppositional economy has always been exposed to the inscription of the trace. The dialectics of positing and presupposing takes place only by virtue of the *écart* that separates the posited from the presupposed before the latter has been posited and a full difference has been constituted between the two — an *écart* that is in fact a self-spacing of positing itself.

Thirdly, the trace or ex-position of positing entails that positing is always weak positing. Positing, as ex-posed positing, is always inhabited by a self-spacing that distances positing and the presupposed that must have posited it. This self-spacing of positing precludes positing from positing itself — it makes positing weak.

There is therefore no presupposition or condition of possibility to the economy of presupposition (by anhypotheticity), but rather only a quasi-presupposition, a condition of possibility that, according to the logic of the quasi-transcendental, is, at the same time, a moment of impossibility in the economy that it itself makes possible. Positing is weak positing and positing is ex-posed positing. Or, to repeat Hamacher's words: 'Positing is exposed positing; abandoned by itself, it is thus ex-position.' It is then quite clear that the task can be neither that of finding a prior presupposed to either version of anhypotheticity nor that of uncovering the hidden ground of the trace. The very quest for what the trace has secretly presupposed or pre-excluded is then irrevocably bound to fail from the start: the logic of presupposition itself is inscribed by the ex-position of the trace and there can be no presupposed to an *archē anypothetos*.

V

Is this then the whole story? Once again, as for Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida, and Agamben, the limits of a certain history and of a certain experience of language have been traced, a new end has been marked: the end of the history of philosophy, of the history of being, of the history of presence, of the history of a certain experience of language. And yet, every time a closure is declared, the very performance of this gesture seems to backreact on the closure itself, and to propel its movement one step forward: to a certain extent, the history of philosophy has not ended with Hegel only because Hegel has marked its end. Is it then possible that the destruction and deconstruction of presence might have not left presence unaffected — that the exposition of positing might have not left positing itself present in the same way? Said otherwise, is there a potential for the system of *Setzung-Aussetzung-Voraussetzung* to affect itself, or to be affected — but, of necessity, neither in the simple mode of an auto-affection nor in that of a hetero-affection?

The positing of all intentionality, be that linguistic, technical, or phenomenological, operates according to a certain notion of accountability of the medium or contribution that gives rise to the order of presence of positing. As soon as intentionality posits a certain order of presence, the accountability of the contribution that gives rise to this positing *points* to the presupposed of this order of presence: a presupposed that corresponds to the subtraction of the contribution of the linguistic, technological, or phenomenological mediation, and thus reaches a non-linguistic, external, in-itself presence. The first two paragraphs of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* present this notion of accountability for what concerns the mediation that we are to have with the Absolute, taking as model either the active reshaping operated by an instrument on a thing ('it is obvious that the use of an instrument [*Werkzeug*] on a thing [*Sache*] certainly does not let it be what it is for itself, but rather sets out to reshape and alter it')³² or the passive transmission operated by light ('a more or less passive medium through which the light of truth reaches us, then

32 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §73, p. 46. See also Levinas's discussion of these two technolo-

again we do not receive the truth as it is in itself, but only as it exists through and in this medium').³³ This conception of the medium that affords intentionality or positing — once again language, the hand, light — is the target of the destruction and deconstruction of presence, of the constant presence (*beständige Anwesenheit*) that underlies even the restlessness of Spirit. Most certainly, one should hasten to point out that Hegel proceeds to argue that this conception of the instrumentality of cognition is completely inadequate to think the Absolute, that we cannot learn how to swim before venturing into the water, and so forth: we must rather *presuppose* the Absolute and cognition *not* to be separated and in need of *external* mediation to begin with. It is nevertheless the case that Hegel, in order to set off the logic of presupposition, considers only the accountable mediation between two present 'things' — even in the case of the Absolute itself: 'If we subtract from a reshaped thing what the instrument has done to it, then the thing [*Ding*] — here the Absolute — becomes for us exactly what it was before this consequently superfluous effort.'³⁴

This notion of mediation comes to lose its status of accountability once philosophy — or perhaps, as Agamben would have it, 'centuries of humble analysis and grammatical education' — firmly establishes the lack of any hierarchically prior element that would be able to structure and complete the differential chain of mediations: there is neither a 'transcendental (or, rather, transcendent) signified' that would afford a linguistic value to every signifier nor a first being that would afford an 'ontological' value to all beings. The mediation or contribution that brings about presence is then revealed as being neither accountable nor, let alone, transparent or diaphanous. The import of the medium that brings about presence cannot be determined by any meta-element, it can be neither accounted for nor be disregarded: the contribution of the medium that produces presence is, crucially, *a priori unaccountable*. Unaccountable means that presence is brought about or produced through a contribution that is neither null nor accountable, but rather one that is to remain structurally undetermined

gical/optic metaphors in Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1981), p. 17.

33 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §73, p. 46.

34 *Ibid.*, §73, pp. 46–47; translation modified.

— for to account for it one would need to resort to an additional unaccountable mediation. The contributions of language, of the hand, of light, in bringing about presence cannot be determined: there is no distillation procedure through which the contribution could be isolated and subtracted from presence in order to restore, or at least infer, a self-presence anterior to the contribution of the medium. In the order of unaccountable presence, it becomes impossible to separate what is medium, and what is substance; what is for-us, and what is in-itself; what is described, and what is constituted. Crucially, the unaccountability of the medium precludes the subtraction of the contribution that has brought about the order of presence — a subtraction that would otherwise point towards the presupposed as to a non-linguistic and self-present hypostasis. There is no substratum that is changed by a relation, but only a relation that bars the substratum.

If on the one hand the contribution of the medium cannot be subtracted to infer a prior order of self-presence that would precede the mediated presence, it is nevertheless the case that positing, in taking place, still points to the site of its emergence, to the site of a presupposition. But since it is not an order of presence that can be presupposed, since a presupposed presence is actually barred by positing itself, the minimal determination that can be taken to precede the order of unaccountable presence is then one of potentiality: a tendency or liability for events of presence to arise through unaccountable contributions. This potentiality is in no way a determination of a substratum or an attribute of a self-present substance, but rather a possibility *for* determinations and attributes to come to presence. This order of potentiality, then, quite clearly neither ‘is’ nor ‘is not’: it is presupposed by the order of unaccountable presence only to the extent that the ‘sub’ of this pre-*sub*-position cannot be said to participate in the self-presence of a substratum, hypostasis or *hypokeimenon*. On the other hand, the order of unaccountable presence can be said ‘to be’ only to the extent that the mark ‘is’ now comes to signal a presence that cannot be disjoined from the medium that has produced it. The shift at stake is not simply one between two modes of saying or gathering the existent: from a saying according to a notion of substance and attributes (*kata ta skēmata tēs katēgorias*) to a saying according to potentiality and actuality (*kata dynamin / kata energeian*), as dictated by Aristotle.

It is rather a shift in the horizon of presence that underlies as much *dynamis* as *energeia*, as *ousia*, as *metabolē*, as *kinēsis*, and so forth — a shift that displaces each and every of these concepts. Metaphysical presence, constant presence, is in turn promised by the order of potentiality and barred by the order of a shifted actuality, but, as such, it is never attained.

Crucially, the shift from constant to unaccountable presence breaks neither with the weakness of language nor with the economy of presupposition and ex-position of the trace: the order of presence of the posited and of the presupposed is changed by the inscription of the trace *while* respecting the generalized economy of positing, presupposing, and ex-posure. Positing takes place in a different order of presence, but as weak and self-spaced positing, it still points to a 'presupposed' — a presupposed that is not reached by the subtraction of an accountable contribution, but one that, by virtue of the very impossibility of this subtraction, cannot be said to enjoy an autonomous self-presence: as such, the order of the presupposed is not that of a self-present substratum, but that of a potentiality for unaccountable presence to take place. In turn, then, the economy affords the positing of this presupposed: a positing that itself can only take place through a new unaccountable contribution and by pointing to a new prior potential presupposed. At each step, the trace of a difference distances the unaccountable positing from its unaccountably potential presupposed. The trace that distances unaccountable presence from its potential presupposed is neither the same nor different from the trace that distances constant presence from itself. It can only be said that the trace respects the presuppositional economy and the principles of anhypotheticity. Weak and unaccountable language — language that in positing cannot be posited and language that entails no transcendent signified or metalanguage — still respects the economy of presupposition, anhypotheticity, and trace. There can be no more originary principle that would account for a change or a weathering of presence and of the trace: the economy of presence and trace has the potential of affecting itself by means of a hetero-affection.

After having gone through all the figures of presence, it is presence itself, the order of the posited and of the presupposed — the order of metaphysics — that comes to be shifted. The image in the mirror, the reflected image, is still the same — present. As a present image, it still points to a presupposed of which it is but a reflection. And yet, the destruction and deconstruction of this order of presence have exposed the un-reflectable condition of possibility of reflection itself: the tain of the mirror, the opaque foil that covers the back of the mirror, which, according to Derrida and Gasché, in making reflection possible, cannot itself be reflected. The opaqueness of the tain precludes the closure of all chains of reflection: there can be no close system of self-present substances and reflected images — the tain cannot be reflected. If the system of values of presence and light cannot be determined, then the import, the contribution of light cannot be determined — as Levinas writes: ‘A light is needed to see the light.’³⁵ It is then impossible to separate, in the presence of the image, what is the reflected and what is the reflector, what is the result and what is the medium. The contribution of light does not precipitate at the bottom of the image, it cannot be removed to infer the presence of that which is reflected. ‘Before’ the reflection there is not something waiting to be altered by light: this retroactive positing is replaced by that of a potentiality that can be actualized through different unaccountable contributions. And yet, the contribution of light is neither null nor infinite, light is neither transparent nor opaque. In turning to see where the light comes from, in positing the presupposition through another light, a new unaccountable presence appears, and with it a new presupposition is assumed. The economy of reflection, the economy of positing and presupposing, is at the same time preserved and transformed. Constant presence and unaccountable presence cannot be distinguished: the image in the mirror is still the same, but one can no longer think of it *as an image of* any substance. The non-linguistic, the non-technological, the non-phenomenological are still shadows and presuppositions of language, of the hand, of experience — but there is no non-linguistic, non-technological or non-phenomenological substance, only possi-

35 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1979), p. 192.

bilities for different languages, different hands, different experiences. The order of presence of the signifier, of the concept, of consciousness are transformed and yet they preserve the economy of positing and presupposing. Presentation and representation can be claimed to persist only if presence itself cannot be accounted for: Hamacher himself puts forward 'the possibility of thinking about understanding no longer as an archi-eschatological self-appropriation, no longer as a making-present, as a presentation or appresentation, but as an always singular alteration and thus an alteration of the very concept of understanding.'³⁶ In the unaccountability of the present, truth as unconcealment (*alētheia*) and truth as correspondence (*adaequatio*) correspond to one another: *adaequatio* of *alētheia* and *adaequatio*. Equivalently, *adaequatio* is unconcealed: *alētheia* of *adaequatio*.³⁷

Whether presence has the potential to change again, whether its unaccountability can change and persist at the same time, how the trace is to weather through it all — the contribution of the question to thinking is neither that of an instrument on a thing nor that of the light for the eye; the contribution of the question to thinking is rather the incitement or soliciting of the potential of thinking to produce further unaccountable questions.

Exposed and abandoned language, lacking a final word, only comes forth in unaccountable presence.

Exposed and abandoned philosophy, lacking an abiding standpoint, only takes place through unaccountable contributions.

Exposed and abandoned weather, lacking an unweathered origin, only takes place through unaccountable weatherings.

36 Hamacher, 'Premises', p. 35.

37 Contrast the *alētheia* of *adaequatio* and the *adaequatio* of *alētheia* and *adaequatio* of the order of unaccountable presence with the trace between *alētheia* and *adaequatio/homoiōsis* in the order of constant presence. See e.g. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 192. It is perhaps to be remarked that Derrida will have remained silent throughout this essay. But then again, the question at stake has been that of the impossibility for the trace to render justice to itself, a question addressed most evidently not in order to find the what or the who that could render justice to the trace, but with the aim of halting that very search.

Damiano Sacco, 'The Weathering of the Trace: Agamben's Pre-supposition of Derrida', in *Weathering: Ecologies of Exposure*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, *Cultural Inquiry*, 17 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 143–66 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-17_07>

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