

Of Natural Metaphors. Derrida on the Eluded Necessity of the Hegelian System¹

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ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on what Derrida understands as the eluded necessity of the Hegelian concept of life as well as of the living organization of the Hegelian system: why must we recur to images borrowed from natural life in order to speak of the life of the spirit? As Derrida points out in *Glas*, on the one hand, Hegel conceives of the natural image as a metaphor or rhetorical operation, insofar as it is based on the analogy (and difference) between nature and spirit (nature's being the spirit outside itself). On the other, the natural metaphor is claimed as necessary to account for the life of the spirit (the negative process of the syllogism) and, thus, for the structure of history and of the system. The argument of the paper is that, in pointing to what remains unexplained in Hegel's recourse to natural metaphors, Derrida proposes to reconsider natural life (namely, the circulation of singular and mortal germs) as that from which the life of the spirit and the living system cannot be liberated.

KEYWORDS: Derrida, Hegel, Metaphor, Life, Germ.

The absolute idea, as the rational concept that in its reality only rejoins itself, is by virtue of this immediacy of its objective identity, on the one hand, a turning back to life; on the other hand, it has equally sublated this form of its immediacy and harbors the most extreme opposition within.²

1. *The place of the phoenix*

In the middle of *Glas*, on the left column, Derrida adds a decisive remark on the progress of *Sittlichkeit* as it is exposed by Hegel in the early *System of Ethical Life* and *Natural Law*. He observes that, in Hegel's exposition, the process of spiritual life is illustrated through the use of images drawn from natural life. They are precisely images, that is, deforming imitations and metaphors, insofar as they hinge on the relation of analogy (and difference) between nature and spirit according to which nature is the initial moment of

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² HEGEL, G. W. F. *Science of Logic*. Trans. G. Di Giovanni. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.735.

spiritual life (that is, of the spirit's return to itself), the general form of the spirit's other or the spirit's being outside itself.³ This analogy makes the recourse to those images possible and, more generally, allows for the remark of life in distinct regions of the system and for the metaphorical exchanges between these regions. In suggesting what remains unexplained here, Derrida formulates the eluded question that will be traced in the following pages: why cannot Hegel speak of spiritual life without recurring to natural life and natural language? Derrida writes:

This whole process is described through what Hegel considers natural 'images.' He criticizes them less than explains their necessity: the regulated relation they maintain with their spiritual sense. The animal and oriented figure of the Phoenix will be put back in its place by *Reason in History*. All the references to natural life and death imitate and deform the process of spiritual life or death. Everywhere the relation of nature to spirit is found: spirit is (outside itself) in nature; nature is spirit outside self. The finite metaphor, real organic life is impotent to receive all the spiritual divinity of *Sittlichkeit*; nevertheless it 'already expresses in itself the absolute Idea, though deformed.' It has within itself the absolute infinity, but 'only as an imitative (*nachgeahmte*) negative independence—i.e., as freedom of the singular individual.'⁴

Derrida draws attention to the impuissance of natural life in relation to the life of the spirit. As we will see, this impuissance (*Ohnmacht*) is inherent in the self-inequality of natural life as the region of the originary separation, sexual contradiction, classification and death. The passage raises the case of the phoenix. A few pages above, Derrida observes that the phoenix describes the activity of the spirit in the element of *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel refers to the animal in an implicit fashion in order to account for "the ethical body" which "must incessantly repeat

³ For Derrida's schematization of the nature-spirit relation see the following remarks on the progress of the *Sittlichkeit* through its determinations as it is described in the *Philosophy of Right*: "But as every sally of the spirit outside of itself has the general form of its other, to wit, nature; nature is the spirit outside of itself but also a moment of the spirit's return to self, so *Sittlichkeit* will entail this naturalness. That will be a spirit-nature. Its naturalness will resolve itself, reabsorb itself, spiritualize itself in proportion as *Sittlichkeit* will develop itself through the form of its moments, will exhaust the inner negativity that works (over) it, will produce itself by denying itself as nature" (DERRIDA, J. **Glas**. Trans. J. P. Leavey, Jr. and R. Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, p.15). Furthermore, on the 'difference' implicit in the concept of 'analogy' see DERRIDA, **Glas**. 104: "In the analogy, the difference [between natural and spiritual life, metaphorical value and semantic tenor, etc.] remains essential."

⁴ DERRIDA, **Glas**, p.103. For the Hegelian text Derrida refers to see HEGEL, G.W.F. **Political writings**. Trans. H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.155: "For although, in the living shape or organic totality of ethical life, what constitutes the real aspect of that life is [to be found] in the finite, and therefore cannot in and for itself fully incorporate [*aufnehmen*] its own bodily essence into the divinity of that life, it nevertheless already expresses the absolute Idea of ethical life, albeit in a distorted form. Admittedly, ethical life does not inwardly unite into absolute infinity within itself those moments of the Idea which are of necessity kept apart; on the contrary, it has this unity only as a simulated negative independence, namely as freedom of the individual. But this real essence is nevertheless completely bound up with the absolute indifferent nature and shape of ethical life; and if it must perceive this nature only as something alien, it does nevertheless perceive it and is at one with it in spirit."

the spiritual act of its upsurge.”⁵ However, it is only in a late text such as *Reason in History* that he acknowledges that the phoenix is an image drawn from natural life, a natural metaphor, and that this rhetorical operation refers to the analogy and difference between natural and spiritual life. Derrida recalls this moment as follows: “*Reason in History* specifies the limits it is advisable to recognize in the wingspan of the Phoenix”: it is only “an ‘image’ of the spirit, an analogy drawn from the ‘natural life’ of the body [...] an ‘oriental image.’”⁶ The passage is added as a remark on the analogy Derrida himself suggests between the phoenix and the infinite germ of spiritual life, which is incorruptible and self-inseminating. The “like” of the suggested analogy is in italics precisely because we are before a natural metaphor and a rhetorical operation. The metaphor of the germ will come back soon as it consists in the “ontotheological” figure that is remarked throughout the regions of the system and regulates the play of correspondences among them, the metaphorical play tout court.

2. *The systematic figure of the germ*

Derrida focuses on Hegel’s use of the natural image of the germ in the exposition of ‘the determination of the spirit’ in *Reason in History*. Hegel explains that the essence of the spirit is activity, which consists in the self-equality of spiritual life, that is, in the spirit’s reproducing itself, in its being at once the beginning and the end of this act of reproduction, father and son and, thus, family. This activity is not natural and is finite only in a restricted sense (namely, in man), just as the father-son relation and family are. Hegel writes:

When the spirit strives (*strebt*) towards its own center, it strives to perfect (*vervollkommenen*) its own freedom; and this striving is fundamental to its nature. To say that spirit exists would at first seem to imply that it is a completed entity (*etwas Fertiges*). On the contrary, it is by nature active (*Tätiges*), and activity; it is its own product (*Produkt*), and is therefore its own beginning and its own end. Its freedom does not consist in static being (*ruhende Sein*), but in a constant negation of all that threatens to destroy freedom. The activity of spirit is to produce itself, to make itself its own object and to gain knowledge of itself; in this way it exists for itself. Natural things do not exist for themselves: for this reason, they are not free.⁷

⁵ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.102. See HEGEL. *Political Writings*, pp.145-146: “In the first case, the relation is properly [to be found] in shape and indifference, and the eternal restlessness of the concept, or infinity, lies in part in the organization itself as it consumes itself and relinquishes the appearance of life, the purely quantitative, in order to rise up eternally out of its ashes, as its own seed-corn, to renewed youth.”

⁶ DERRIDA. *Glas*, pp.116-117.

⁷ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.24. For the French edition Derrida refers to see HEGEL, G. W. F. *La Raison dans l’histoire*. Trans. Kostas Papaioannou. Paris: Union générale d’édition, 1965, p.76.

Spiritual activity starts with the becoming-life of matter. Within this movement, the shift from the animal to man marks the transition from the animal moment of life to the spiritual one. To schematize the process, Hegel ascribes the transition to the fact that man inhibits the animal pressure (*Trieb / poussée*) by idealizing and interposing the ideal between pressure and satisfaction. He explains that “since he knows the real (*Realen*) as the ideal (*Ideellen*) [...] this knowledge leads him to suppress (*hemmt*) his pressures; he places the ideal, the realm of thought, between the demands (*Drängen*) of the pressure and their satisfaction.”⁸ Therefore, he concludes, by interrupting the animal auto-mobility in himself man breaks with natural life and frees freedom (what Derrida calls “the self-mobility of the spirit”⁹). At this point, Hegel retrieves the natural image of the germ in order to account for the transition from natural to spiritual life and, thus, for the liberation of spiritual activity. As anticipated, Derrida observes that the germ is a systematic figure that is marked in all regions and relates the one to the other on the basis of the analogy between nature and spirit (or, as Derrida calls it, speculative dialectics). He explains:

The germ (*der Same*) is also, as germ, the onto-theological figure of the family. This concept (of) germ (*Same, semen, seed, sperm, grain*) regularly enters on the scene in speculative dialectics, in places and regions of the encyclopedic discourse that are not at once homologous and distinct, whether of the vegetal, biological, anthropological, or the onto-logical order in general. Among all these orders, speculative dialectics assures a system of figurative correspondences.¹⁰

The germ describes the essence of the spirit as activity, the very process of the syllogism in which the spirit returns to itself through the negation of its other in general, that is, of nature, from which the germ is borrowed. Therefore, the spiritual germ allows us to think the activity through which the spirit liberates itself from the natural germ, which is mortal and singular. We may wonder which necessity prescribes Hegel’s recourse to the natural image of the germ. Derrida notes that “the figure of the seed is immediately determined: (1) as the best representation of the spirit’s relation to self; (2) as the circular path of a return to self.”¹¹ Furthermore, the germ was already at stake in Hegel’s previous

⁸ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.26. Cf. HEGEL. *La Raison dans l’histoire*, p.77.

⁹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.27.

¹⁰ DERRIDA. *Glas*, pp.27-28.

¹¹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.28.

determination of the essence of the spirit as self-identical and self-reproducing life, father-son relation and family.¹²

In the text commented by Derrida, Hegel borrows the image of the germ from nature in order to illustrate the activity of the spirit. We may suppose that the recourse to the germ is granted by the analogy between natural and spiritual life. In the Hegelian philosophies of nature that will be examined below, the germ marks the end of an individual and the beginning a new one and, therefore, the positive self-relation of natural life in its self-inequality. Therefore, here it plays as a deforming imitation and a metaphor of the life of the spirit. Hegel's text reads:

Only the returned-home-to-self is subject, real actuality. Spirit exists only as its own result. The example of the seed (*die Vorstellung des Samens dienen*) may help to illustrate this point. The plant begins with the seed, but the seed is also the result of the plant's entire life, for it develops only in order to produce (*hervorzubringen*) the seed. We can see from this how impotent life is (*die Ohnmacht des Lebens*), for the seed is both the origin and the result of the individual; as the starting point and the end result, it is different and yet the same, the product of one individual; as the starting point and the end result, it is different and yet the same, the product of one individual and the beginning of another. Its two sides fall asunder like the simple form (*Form*) within the grain and the whole course of the plant's development.¹³

The already mentioned impuissance of natural life comes back in this passage. This impuissance, which derives from the analogy with spiritual life, implies that the natural germ is an image, a rhetorical operation in the text. Hegel explains the shift from the animal to man in the light of the spiritual activity illustrated by the metaphor of the germ. While the animal belongs to nature and, thus, undergoes a natural development whose telos is a death without return, man is already spirit and, thus, reproduces itself. In other words, they correspond to different regions of the system that are related the one to the other through the systematic figure of the germ and according to the nature-spirit analogy. Hegel explains: "Its growth (*Wachstum*) [of the animal] is a merely quantitative increase in strength (*Erstarken*). Man, on the other hand, must make himself what he should be; he must first acquire everything for himself, precisely because he is spirit."¹⁴ In natural life the germ neither reproduces nor

¹² See DERRIDA. *Glas*, p. 29: "And in the description of the spirit that returns to itself through its own proper product, after it lost itself there, there is more than a simple rhetorical convenience in giving to the spirit the name father. Likewise, the advent of the Christian Trinity is more than an empiric event in the spirit's history."

¹³ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.28.

¹⁴ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.28.

returns to itself; it is not self-identical, father and son at once, a family. Therefore, Derrida remarks, “there is no natural family, no father/son relation in nature.”¹⁵

The same conclusion is drawn from the reading of the philosophy of nature of the *Encyclopedia*. Hegel explains the relation between natural and spiritual life on the basis of the quasi-remark of copulation in the sexual reproduction of animals as well as in the syllogism. The figure regulates the correspondence between the two regions. The process of copulation is analogous to the copula of syllogism in that it amounts to the self-equality of the genus, that is, of the universality in the animal, and yet, differs from it in that copulation brings about the death without return of individuals. Spiritual life begins with the first moment of *Sittlichkeit*, human family. Derrida writes:

The *Encyclopedia* states it precisely: in the animal kingdom, generation, the sex relationship, the process of copulation that, like a syllogism’s copula, gathers together the genus with itself—they all engulf individuals in a death straight out [*sans phrase*]. Unlike the human, rational family, animal copulation does not give rise to any higher determination. Animal copulation leaves behind itself no monument, no burial place, no institution, no law that pens and assures any history. It names nothing.¹⁶

In the commented reading of the spirit’s progress in *Reason in History*, Derrida concludes that man is already spirit insofar as man reproduces itself, is the result of its own activity. Therefore, the human germ is already spiritual germ, self-identical life, father-son relation and family. It is already the negation of the germ of nature and, ultimately, describes the movement of history and the organization of the system. As Derrida puts it, “it is, more than the plant or animal, its own proper product, its own son, the son of its work [...] the human individual is descended from its own germ. It conceives itself.”¹⁷

Following the development of the text examined, Derrida explains that the human individual and, more generally, the human and rational family are in turn examples and finite images of the properly called spiritual life, “of the infinite father/son relation, of the relation of infinite spirit freely relating to itself.”¹⁸ The most sublime example of this relation—or, better, the truth from which all examples derive—is given by the Christian God. “In the first place,” Hegel writes, “he is Father;” “secondly, he is [...] a dividing himself into two, the

¹⁵ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.29.

¹⁶ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.12. For the text of the *Encyclopedia* see HEGEL, G. W. F. *Philosophy of Nature*. Trans. A. V. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press.1970, p.414.

¹⁷ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.29.

¹⁸ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.29.

Son.” “But this other than himself,” Hegel continues, “is equally himself immediately; he knows himself and intuits himself in that—and it is this self-knowledge and self-intuition which constitutes the third element, the Spirit itself.”¹⁹ Therefore, the Christian God is properly said self-identical life and spiritual germ by using those unexplained metaphors that allow us to think and speak of it. It is the Father-Son relation, Derrida explains, the element in which the seed returns to the father.²⁰ Recalling the ontological figures of germ and copulation, he describes this relation as a process of self-reproduction that implies neither the death without return of the individual nor sexual difference, and thus as a “self-fellatio,” “self-insemination” or “self-conception.”²¹ A few pages later, commenting on Hegel’s reading of John’s evangel in the early *Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, Derrida points out that the spirit, as the Father-Son relation and the element of the self-identical and self-reproducing germ, is the name. Hegel translates the name proper of man (*onoma*), which makes man recognize itself as the son of God, into relation (*Beziehung*).²² Derrida justifies this operation by observing precisely that “the name, the relation, the spirit (Hegel sometimes translates *onoma* by ‘spirit’) is the structure of what returns to the father.”²³

In the passage from *Reason in History* dedicated to man, Hegel identifies the human example of the Christian family with a process of education/formation (*Bildung*). Derrida investigates this articulation of human family with education through a close reading of the Hegelian exposition of the third *Potenz* (‘Possession and Family’) in the early *Philosophy of Spirit* 1803-1804. Hegel explains that the speculative dialectics of the wedding consists in the formation of the consciousness of the son, that is, in the process of education (*Erziehung*):

It is in the child that the partners recognize themselves as one, as being in one consciousness, and precisely therein as *superseded* [my emphasis], and they intuit in the child their own coming supersession. [...] As they *educate* it, they posit their achieved consciousness in it, and they generate their death, as they bring their achievement to living consciousness.²⁴

¹⁹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, pp.30-31.

²⁰ Cf. DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.31. See also, for instance, HEGEL, G. W. F. *Early Theological Writings*. Trans. T. M. Knox. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948, pp.255-256.

²¹ DERRIDA, *Glas*, p.31.

²² Cf. DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.79. See also HEGEL. *Early Theological Writings*, p.259: “They know God and recognize themselves as children of God, as weaker than he, yet of a like nature in so far as they have become conscious of that spiritual relation suggested by his name (*ὄνομα*) as the *ἄνθρωπος* who is *φωτιζόμενος φωτὶ ἀληθινῷ* [lighted by the true light]. They find their essence in no stranger, but in God.”

²³ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.79.

²⁴ HEGEL, G. W. F. *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*. Trans. H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox. Albany: State University of New York, 1979, p.233.

Education is the positing and negation (*Aufhebung*) of the consciousnesses of the genitors in the living consciousness of the son. Reading this passage, Derrida recalls the correspondence with animal copulation, which brings about the genitors' death without return and no further determination. In education we find the human and rational moment of family, of the father-son relation and, thus, of the spirit's self-insemination. It is according to this play of correspondences (between the animal and the rational) that Derrida observes that "the natural child does not bear [*ne porte pas*] the death of its genitors. So the death of the parents *forms* the child's consciousness."²⁵ This bearing must have to do with the *Aufhebung* of the parents and, more precisely, of the father.²⁶ Therefore, we are already in the element of the spirit: there is a father that returns in the son, an incorruptible and self-reproducing seed, spiritual life. Unfolding the analogy with natural life, Derrida explains that "the relieving education interiorizes [idealizes] the father. Death being a relief, the parents, far from *losing or disseminating themselves without return* [my emphasis], "contemplate in the child's becoming their own relief."²⁷ The spiritual seed is not disseminated and, therefore, returns to itself. It is the *Aufhebung* of the natural seed, which is singular and mortal. The natural image of the seed is not just a metaphor in that it is necessary in order to speak of self-return; but this necessity is precisely what, for Derrida, Hegel does not reckon with. The spiritual seed, as the *Aufhebung* of the death of the father, as its 'being' dead, is the thesis (presupposition, *parti pris*, etc.) of the Hegelian philosophy. Derrida remarks:

Ideality is death, to be sure, but to be dead—this is the whole question of dissemination—is that *to be* dead or to be *dead*? [...] if death is the being of what is no more, the no-more being, death is nothing, in any case is no longer death. Is own proper death, when contemplated in the child, is the death that is denied, the death that *is*, that is to say, denied. When one says 'death is,' one says 'death is denied,' death is not insofar as one posits it. Such is the Hegelian *thesis*: philosophy, death's positing, its pose.²⁸

²⁵ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.132.

²⁶ See DERRIDA. *Glas*, pp.132-133: "Like every formation, every imposition of form, it is on the male side, here the fathers, and since this violent form bears the parents' death, it matures [*se fait*] above all against the father."

²⁷ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.133. Derrida continues: "They [the parents] guard in that becoming their own disappearance, reg(u)ard their child as their own death, they retard it, appropriate it; they maintain in the monumental presence of their seed—in the name—the living sign that they are dead, not the *they are dead*, but that *dead they are*, which is another thing" (p.133).

²⁸ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.133.

At the end of this reading the question of dissemination, as the circulation of the singular germ in the element of natural and biological life, will appear as irreducibly interwoven with the eluded necessity of the natural and biological metaphor.

3. *The tree of life*

The reading of the metaphor across the Hegelian system culminates in the examination of the recourse to the vegetal image in *The Spirit of Christianity*. Derrida focuses on a tree of life that is marked at least three times in order to speak of the truth of the father-son relation, the bond between God and Jesus Christ. Is the tree of life a metaphor? Is it not required in order to think that bond, that is, the element of self-return and, thus, the spirit's activity? Does it not account for spiritual life as metaphoricity, in that the whole is recollected in each part? But, then, we may also wonder why Hegel must recur to the part in order to speak of the whole that returns in it. These questions underwrite the following pages.

Derrida is examining the fourth section of the *Spirit*, which follows the reading of the last supper and is dedicated to "The Religious Teaching of Christ." The first tree of life is quoted as a remark to the text (it does not appear in the English edition of the *Spirit*):

This relation of a man to God in which is found the son of God, similar to the relation of branches, of foliage and fruits to the trunk their father, had to rouse the deepest indignation of the Jews, who had maintained an insurmountable abyss between human being and divine being and had accorded to our nature no participation in the divine.²⁹

The vegetal image illustrates the bond between God and Jesus Christ, that is, life itself, life as the return of the whole in the part. Derrida explains: "The bond (*Band*) [what Hegel determines as life] holds God and Jesus together, the infinite and the finite; of this Jesus is a part, a member (*Glied*), but a member in which the infinite whole is integrally regrouped, remembered."³⁰ Is the tree of life an illustration, a metaphor? Or, is it, rather, what permits us to think life as the self-return of the spirit and the negation of its other in general? Developing Hegel's passage, Derrida suggests that the tree of life says what remains inaccessible to the

²⁹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.73.

³⁰ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.72.

Jews, the self-circulation of the whole from the seed throughout its parts.³¹ This tree is not merely a natural image, it would be possible to take up the sections of the organics dedicated to the plant nature in the philosophy of nature (§§343-349) and verify the impuissance of vegetal life to represent the self-identical and self-reproducing life of the spirit, that is, the God-Jesus Christ relation. Rather, the tree of life describes the analogy and difference between natural and spiritual life and, thus, the unfolding of life itself and of the system. In recurring to the vegetal image Hegel does not speak of spiritual life through a biological discourse (for instance, preformationism), but, rather, he says what makes any regional discourse possible, the ontological figure of the tree, the analogy between nature and spirit. It is at this degree that the question about the necessity of the vegetal image remains eluded. Therefore, Derrida suggests that, rather than a metaphor, the tree of life speaks of (spiritual) life as metaphoricity, understanding the latter as a certain bond between the whole and the part. As Derrida he points out, “when one feels it from inside [what the Jews could not do], one knows that life is metaphoricity, the alive and infinite bond of the whole thought in its parts.”³² Here, the Jews take the place that corresponds to their understanding of life; in other words, they are systematized on the basis of the analogy that regulates the exchanges between the regions of the system, that is, on the basis of the systematic ‘metaphor’ of (spiritual) life. At the beginning of the fourth part of the *Spirit* Hegel notes that “to the Jewish idea of God as their Lord and Governor, Jesus opposes a relationship of God to men like that of a father to his children.”³³

The tree of life is conjured again, a few pages below, to reinforce the idea of life as the bond between the whole and the part. The tree divides into parts that are themselves the whole, as well as God divides into the other in which he recalls himself. “Life is a strange division producing wholes,” Derrida remarks. The Hegelian text reads:

³¹ Cf. DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.73: “... a tree, a vegetable being, a tree of life. The whole circulates in it, from the root toward the top through all the parts. The whole already resides in *le gland* [acorn, glans].”

³² DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.73.

³³ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.36 (cf. HEGEL. *Early Theological Writings*, p.253). In Part I of *The Spirit of Christianity*, on which Derrida had previously commented in *Glas*, Hegel explains that the Jewish family is not yet a family in the Christian sense (which is the truth of family). Abraham, the progenitor of the Jewish nation, did not reconcile with men and nature and, thus, as Derrida suggests, he could only found a family (nonfamily, cf. DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.36 and ff.), a genealogical tree, that “takes root nowhere, never reconciles itself with nature, remains foreign everywhere” (DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.40 and . HEGEL. *Early Theological Writings*, p.185).

... a branch of the infinite tree of life (*ein Zweig des unendlichen Lebensbaumes*). Each part, to which the whole is external, is at the same time (*zugleich*) a whole, a life.³⁴

Again, Derrida seems to suggest that this is not merely a metaphor, yet it speaks of the movement of life and of the system itself. “Here the ‘metaphor’ [my emphasis] of the tree,” he observes, “turns up again as a family metaphor: the genealogical tree in a radical sense.”³⁵ We may suppose that the tree of life is the most sublime example and, more properly, the truth of life. All other examples derive from this tree and are organized in relation to it. It speaks of the analogy (life as metaphoricity or whole-part reconciliation) according to which they exchange the one with the other within the system. The blind spot of this radical tree is the necessity to recur to a natural image, the necessity of the regional discourse. Derrida draws attention to the Hegelian *zugleich*, which literally means “at the same time,” *en même temps*—“the structural at once (*simul*) of the living whole and morsel”³⁶—because it keeps the secret of life as metaphoricity (which the Jews cannot understand) and, perhaps, what the secret itself leaves unaccounted for.

Before evoking for the third time the three of life, Hegel recalls the distinction between the Jews, who are situated in the region of the concept and, thus, remain on this side of life, and the Christians, who are in the region of the whole-part relation (namely, metaphoricity)—the system itself—and, thus, look at life from inside. He explains:

The relation of a son to his father is not a unity, a concept (as, for instance, unity or harmony of disposition, equality of principles, etc.), a unity which is only a unity in thought and is abstracted from life. On the contrary, it is a living relation of living beings, a likeness of life [*gleiches Leben*, which Derrida translates into *l'égalité de la vie*]; simply modifications of the same life, not the opposition of essences, not a plurality of absolute substantialities. Thus the son of God is the same essence (*Wesen*) as the father.³⁷

Once again Derrida suggests that the metaphoricity of the tree of life is required. “Since this unity [that of Father-Son] cannot be stated in the understanding’s abstract language,” he writes, “it requires a kind of metaphoricity.”³⁸ Of course, acknowledging the necessity of the natural image does not explain why (spiritual) life is spoken through (natural) life, that is,

³⁴ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.77. Cf. HEGEL. *Early Theological Writings*, p.258.

³⁵ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.77.

³⁶ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.78.

³⁷ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.80. Cf. HEGEL, *Early Theological Writings*, p.260.

³⁸ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.80.

through natural language. This time the tree of life consists of the self-circulation of the whole in every part as well as of the equality and, thus, permutability of every part with every other. Hegel describes the tree as follows:

A tree which has three branches makes up *one single tree (einen Baum)*; but every son of the tree, every branch (and also its other children, leaves and blossoms) is itself a tree. The fibers bringing sap to the branch from the trunk are of the same nature (*gleichen Nature*) as the roots. If a tree is set in the ground upside down it will put forth leaves out of the roots in the air, and the boughs will root themselves in the ground. And it is just as true to say that there is only *one single tree* here as to say that there are three.³⁹

Derrida draws attention to the implications of the permutability of parts. Translated into the father-son relation this permutability means that the son always becomes “the father of the father” as well as the father becomes “the son’s son.”⁴⁰ This point will be further discussed in a moment. It is time to reconsider the tree of life and, more generally, the natural metaphor of (spiritual) life in relation to the system and how Hegel wants to be read. If the tree of life speaks of spiritual life and, thus, of the living organization of the system, as already pointed out, what would the consequences be for our reading of Hegel’s oeuvre? In other words, does the tree of life say something about how, according to Hegel, we should read Hegel?

Derrida analyzes the metaphor as such by recurring to the instruments of rhetoric. It can be divided into a “semantic tenor,” corresponding to the “life of spirit,” and a “metaphorical vehicle,” consisting in natural life. “The life of the spirit,” he explains, “is named through natural life in which it grows [*végète*],”⁴¹ where ‘vegetating’ accounts for the spirit’s being outside itself. Secondly, Derrida explains that the metaphor allows us to think the spirit’s self-return as it is accomplished throughout life and the system, namely, the *Aufhebung* of nature as the general form of its other. “This double mark of life,” he notes, “describes the structure of all life, the living organization of the Hegelian system.” Therefore, the system must reproduce the metaphor and the double mark. Derrida gives an index of it by referring to the greater *Logic*, which has a privileged place within the system. It would not be by chance that, in the last section, dedicated to “The Idea,” we find the mark of life at the beginning as well as at the end of the syllogism, that is, as the first moment (natural and immediate life) and as its

³⁹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.81. Cf. HEGEL. *Early Theological Writings*, p.261.

⁴⁰ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.81.

⁴¹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.82.

movement (true and absolute life). Derrida proposes to understand this remark as the spirit-nature relation and, thus, as the metaphor of life:

In this syllogism of the Idea, life first appears as a natural and immediate determination: the spirit outside self, lost in naturalness, in natural life that itself constitutes a “smaller” syllogism. The immediate Idea has the form of life. But the absolute Idea in its infinite truth is still determined as Life, true life, absolute life, life without death, imperishable life, the life of the truth.⁴²

The “proper, literal sense” of life, Derrida explains, is neither in natural life nor in the absolute one, for “life produces itself as the circle of its reappropriation, the self-return before which there is no proper sense.”⁴³ Therefore, the metaphor is more than a simple metaphor insofar as circle and self-return could not be said otherwise. Does this conclusion prevent us from insisting on the question about the necessity of the natural metaphor? Are not the analogy and difference between (spiritual) life and (natural) life already presupposed? Holding on to the hypothesis that the system unfolds itself into a tree of life, according to Derrida we can say how Hegel wants to be read, that is, precisely as such. “Thus the Hegelian system commands that it be read as a book of life,”⁴⁴ he writes. He takes up the case of Bernard Bourgeois’s book on *Hegel at Frankfurt*. The book, Derrida explains, recurs to the categories of preformationism by which the young Hegel would be the preconfiguration of the adult one, in which he finds his accomplishment.⁴⁵ However, this is not Hegelian enough because it looks at the system from the outside, from a Jewish perspective. It produces divisions that do not reconcile with the whole and are neither equal nor permutable as they would be in the tree of life. It does not admit that the tree can be turned upside down and that leaves begin to root and roots begin to flower. Derrida concludes:

Nothing more Hegelian. But nothing less Hegelian: in distinguishing the old from the young, one sometimes disassembles the systematic chains of the ‘first’ texts; and above all one applies a dissociating and formal analysis, the viewpoint of the understanding in a narration that risks missing the living unity of the discourse; how does one distinguish philosophically a before from an after, if the circularity of the movement makes the beginning the end of the end? And reciprocally? The Hegelian

⁴² DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.82.

⁴³ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.82.

⁴⁴ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.83.

⁴⁵ Cf. DERRIDA. *Glas*, pp.83-84.

tree is also turned over; the old Hegel is the young Hegel's father only in order to have been his son, his great-grandson.⁴⁶

4. *The circulation of singular germs*

The analysis of the last sections of Hegel's philosophy of nature is introduced by a remark on the place of *Naturphilosophie* within the organization of the system. Derrida writes that "the philosophy of nature is the system of this fall [of the spirit] and of this dissociation into exteriority. The philosophy of spirit is the system of the relief of the idea that calls and thinks itself in the ideal element of universality."⁴⁷ Therefore, the last sections of the philosophy of nature secure the transition from one region of the system to another and the metaphorical exchange between the two. As Derrida points out, in the Jena philosophy of nature (JPN), as well as in the philosophy of nature in the *Encyclopedia* (EPN), the transition from natural to spiritual life is achieved through disease and death, which put an end to the self-inequality of natural life. In the last sections of JPN, Hegel speaks of disease as the "dissolution of the whole" (*Auflösung des Ganzen*), "negative force" (*negative Kraft*)⁴⁸ and "critical dissociation" (*kritische Ausscheiden*)⁴⁹ that bear the spirit's becoming. Referring to this passage, Derrida remarks that the spirit itself, and, thus, the very becoming of life and the system, operates within natural and biological life as the work of negativity and dissociation:

In the dissociation of the natural organization, the spirit reveals itself. It was working biological life, like nature in general, from its negativity and manifests itself therein as such at the end; spirit will always have been nature's essence; nature is within spirit as its being-outside-self. In freeing itself from the natural limits that were imprisoning it, the spirit returns to itself but without ever having left itself. A procession of returning (home).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.84. For a preliminary formulation of a kind of preformationist strategy in reading Hegel see DERRIDA. *Glas*, pp.20-21, in which Derrida supposes that this strategy would look for preconfiguration and invariance throughout the system.

⁴⁷ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.108.

⁴⁸ HEGEL, G. W. F. *Jenaer Systementwürfe III. Naturphilosophie und Philosophie des Geistes*. Neu hrsg. V. Rolf-Peter Horstmann. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1987, p.167.

⁴⁹ HEGEL. *Jenaer Systementwürfe III*, p.168.

⁵⁰ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.109. For a reading of the dissociation of biological organization from an Hegelian perspective see Derrida's Artaud in *La Parole Soufflée*. The latter conceives of "organization" as, at the same time, "the membering and the dismembering of my (body) proper" (DERRIDA, J. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. A. Bass. London and New York: Routledge and Keagan Paul Ltd., 1978, p.234, translation modified). Therefore, the reappropriation of "my body" must go through "the reduction of the organic structure" (p.235).

The same negativity is at work in the last sections of EPN so that natural life and the life of the spirit take their places as Hegel's *Book* develops. "This joint [*conjuncture*] will assure, in the circle of the Encyclopedia, the circle itself, the return to the philosophy of spirit," Derrida remarks.⁵¹ In this circle Derrida finds the accomplishment of teleology, namely, of the concept of internal finality that Aristotle had discovered in nature (*physis*) and Hegel reformulates as an unconscious instinct (EPN, §360). At this point the reading of the last sections of the organics, which are grouped under the heading of "The Process of the Genus" (§§ 367–375), begins.

Paraphrasing the opening section of this part of the organics, Derrida draws attention to the process by which the simple universality of the genus, that is constituted by an originary division, strives to return to itself through the negation of universality itself and that of the natural living (namely, its death). "Genus," he writes, "designates the simple unity that remains (close) by itself in each singular subject," but "as it is produced in judgment, in the primordial separation (*Urteil*), it tends to go out of itself in order to escape morseling, division, and to find, meet itself, again back home, as subjective universality."⁵² In the addition to the section, Hegel points out that, since "the genus is related to the individual in a variety of ways," the genus-process takes on different forms or processes (division into species; sex-relation; disease and natural death) that amount to "the different ways in which the living creature meets its death."⁵³ In the first case, the genus is divided into species that distinguish themselves the one from the other through their reciprocal negation. As Derrida observes, in this case "the genus produces itself through its violent auto-destruction."⁵⁴

However, the genus is not only a hostile relation between singularities but also the positive relation of singularity with itself, which is called sex-relation. As Hegel puts it, "the genus is also an essentially affirmative relation of the singularity to itself in it; so that while the latter, as an individual, excludes another individual, it continues itself in this other and in this other feels its own self."⁵⁵ Sex-relation consists of the following moments: (a) it begins

⁵¹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.109.

⁵² DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.109. Cf. HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.410.

⁵³ HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.411.

⁵⁴ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.109. See HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.411: "The genus particularizes itself, divides itself into its species; and these species, behaving as mutually opposed individuals, are, at the same time, nonorganic nature as the genus against individuality—death by violence."

⁵⁵ HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.411. Derrida paraphrases EPN as follows: "The bellicose and morseling operation of the generic process (*Gattungsprozess*) doubles itself with an affirmative reappropriation. The singularity rejoins, repairs, or reconciles itself with itself within the genus. The individual 'continues itself' in another, feels and experiences itself in another" (DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.110).

with a “need” and a “feeling of lack” because of the originary and constitutive separation between the singular individual and the genus immanent in it; (b) the genus operates in the individual singular as a tension to resolve its inadequation and, thus, as a striving to integrate itself with the genus, to close the latter with itself and bring it into existence; (c) the accomplishment of this operation is copulation (*Begattung*).⁵⁶ In the wake of Hegel’s exposition, Derrida anticipates the result of sex-relation, that is, the originary separation and the constitutive self-inequality of the genus. “In the same stroke,” he observes, “pressure [*la poussée*] tends to accomplish just what it strictly reduces, the gap of the individual to the genus, of genus to itself in the individual, the *Urteil*, the primordial division and judgment.”⁵⁷

A long addition follows the section of EPN dedicated to sex-relation. “In it Hegel treats of the sexual difference”, Derrida points out. Hegel explains that the union of sexes, namely, copulation, consists in the development of the simple universality that is implicit in them, the genus itself, and, thus, in the highest degree of universality an animal can feel. However, neither this universality becomes the object of a theoretical intuition such as thought or consciousness nor the animal reaches the free existence of the spirit. The addition explains:

The process consists in this, that they become in reality what they are in themselves, namely, one genus, the same subjective vitality. Here the Idea of Nature is actual in the male and female couple; their identity and their being-for-self, which up till now were only for us in our reflection, are now, in the infinite reflection into self of the two sexes felt by themselves. This feeling of universality is the highest to which the animal can attain; but its concrete universality never becomes for it a theoretical object of intuition: else it would be Thought, Consciousness, in which alone the genus attains a free existence. The contradiction is therefore, that the universality of the genus, the identity of individuals is distinct from their particular individuality; the individual is only one of two, and does not exist as unity but only as a singular. The activity of the animal is to sublimate this difference.⁵⁸

Derrida focuses on the contradiction highlighted by Hegel at the end of the passage. This contradiction has to do with sexual difference insofar as the latter divides the universality of the genus, which is the same as the identity of the individuals, from the particular individuality, which is one of the two or a (sexually differentiated) singularity. “Sexual difference,” Derrida remarks, “opposes unity to singularity and thereby introduces

⁵⁶ Cf. HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.411. On *Begattung* Derrida writes: “the operation of genus (*Gattung*), the generic and generative operation” (DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.110).

⁵⁷ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.110.

⁵⁸ HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.412.

contradiction into genus or into the process of *Urteil*.” Therefore, sex-relation is the *Aufhebung* of sexual difference and of the inherent contradiction, to the extent that it resolves as well as conserves them (and, more generally, natural life). Here, as Derrida suggests, we find the definition of (natural) *Aufhebung*, as “the relation of copulation and the sexual difference,” that allows Hegel to think and speak of *Aufhebung* (in general), or, in other words, that is indispensable to the remark of *Aufhebung* at the end of the system.⁵⁹ In the following section dedicated to sex-relation, Hegel explains that the “product” of copulation (as “the negative identity of the differentiated individuals”) is the “realized genus” and, thus, “an asexual life,”⁶⁰ namely, the *Aufhebung* of the contradiction sexual difference bears within itself. However, this occurs only in principle, he adds, because “the product [...] is itself an immediate singular, destined to develop into the same natural individuality, into the same difference and perishable existence” (I emphasize the “and” that accounts for the irreducible articulation of sexual contradiction and biological life).⁶¹ Hence, the generic process develops through a “spurious infinite process” without being liberated from its primordial and constitutive separation (and contradiction). In the addition to the section, Hegel demarcates the genus from the spirit that “preserves itself” and “exists in and for itself in its eternity.”⁶² Therefore, the relation between biological and spiritual life is thought on the basis of the analogy between the natural, singular and mortal germ of a species and the incorruptible and infinite germ of God.

After the sections on the division into species and sex-relation, Hegel proceeds to analyze the third form of the genus-process and, thus, the third way in which the animal dies so that natural life and the life of the spirit find their proper place and the circle of encyclopedia is secured. “Another negativity works (over) the indefinite reproduction of the genus, the nonhistoricity and the faulty infinite of natural life,” Derrida notes. “The genus observes itself only through the decline and the death of individuals: old age, disease and

⁵⁹ On this point see DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.111: “Copulation relieves the difference: *Aufhebung* is very precisely the relation of copulation and the sexual difference. The relief in general cannot be understood without sexual copulation, nor sexual copulation in general without the relief. *In general*: if one takes into account that the *Aufhebung* is described here in a strictly determinate (strangled) moment of the becoming of the idea (the final moment of the philosophy of nature)—but also that this moment of life is re-marked at the term of the philosophy of spirit—then the *Aufhebung* of the sexual difference is, manifests, expresses, *stricto sensu*, the *Aufhebung* itself and in general.”

⁶⁰ HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.414.

⁶¹ HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.414.

⁶² HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.414.

spontaneous death.”⁶³ The following pages will offer an examination of Derrida’s reading of the last sections of EPN on the natural death of natural life. Hegel’s argument is that, apart from the inequalities caused by disease, there is a self-inequality of natural life that the animal cannot overcome—the opposition between implicit universality and natural singularity, that is, the contradiction within the originary separation—and, thus, the genus-process operates as a negativity within the animal itself, as the spirit’s becoming. The text reads:

The animal, in overcoming and ridding itself of particular inadequacies, does not put an end to the general inadequacy which is inherent in it, namely, that its Idea is only the immediate Idea, that, as animal, it stands within Nature, and its subjectivity is only implicitly the Notion but is not for its own self the Notion. The inner universality therefore remains opposed to the natural singularity of the living being as the negative power from which the animal suffers violence and perishes, because natural existence (*Dasein*) as such does not itself contain this universality and is not therefore the reality which corresponds to it.⁶⁴

As Hegel explains in the addition, the “necessity of death” does not lie on a particular cause but on the “necessity of the transition of individuality into universality” the genus-process consists in.⁶⁵ Therefore, the genus-process plays in natural and biological life as spirit, as its essence or truth. Following the Hegelian argument, Derrida concludes that there is a natural death of natural life and gives it the name of classification. “There is natural death,” he writes,

it is inevitable for natural life, since it produces itself in finite individual totalities. These totalities are inadequate to the universal genus and they die from this. Death is this inadequation of the individual to generality: death is the *classification* itself, life’s inequality to (it)self [*l’inegalité à soi de la vie*].⁶⁶

In the following section, which is dedicated to “The Self-Induced Destruction of the Individual,” Hegel identifies the inequality immanent in the animal (the difference between its singularity and the implicit universality of the genus) as a constitutive inequality and, thus, as a prescription of death: “the disparity between its finitude and universality is its original disease and the inborn germ of death, and the removal of this disparity is itself the accomplishment of this destiny.”⁶⁷ As Derrida points out, that constitutive inequality bears within itself sexual difference and the contradiction inherent in it; therefore, one should

⁶³ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.115.

⁶⁴ HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.440.

⁶⁵ HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.441.

⁶⁶ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.116.

⁶⁷ HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.441.

attribute the determinations of originary disease and mortal germ also to them. They “inhabit the same space,”⁶⁸ Derrida observes: the space of life’s self-inequality, of natural and biological life, from which Hegel must borrow images in order to account for the life of the spirit. Furthermore, if we understand the germ as literally situated in this space, then, Derrida suggests, “germ of death is a tautological expression.” Naming the individual singular that is inadequate, sexually differentiated, classified, and so forth, the germ is always a germ of death. Dissemination is the circulation of the singular and mortal germ in the space of natural and biological life. Derrida explains:

At the bottom of the germ, such as it circulates in the gap [*écart*] of the sexual difference, that is, as the finite germ, death is prescribed, as germ in the germ [*en germe dans le germe*]. An infinite germ, spirit or God engendering or inseminating itself naturally, does not tolerate sexual difference. Spirit-germ disseminates itself only by feint. In this feint, it is immortal. *Like* a phoenix.⁶⁹

The passage recalls the ontotheological figure of the germ on the basis of which we can think the relation between natural and spiritual life as well as the living organization of the system. Not only is the spiritual germ neither singular (separated from the genus, sexually differentiated, classified, disseminated) nor mortal, but it is also the *Aufhebung* of the natural germ, the spirit’s return to itself through the death of the natural germ. Therefore, it accounts for the double mark of life and for the circle of the *Encyclopedia*. Derrida remarks that it “disseminates itself only by feint” by rewriting an expression from Feuerbach’s “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy” (1831), in which Hegel’s idea of alienation is described as follows: “The estrangement (*Entäußerung*) of the idea is, so to speak, only a feint [*une feinte*]; it makes believe, but it produces not in earnest; it is playing.”⁷⁰ At this point, the question about the double mark of life returns: should we consider the spiritual and infinite germ a metaphor of spiritual life? Where does the proper sense of germ (and of life) lie? Does not the metaphor precisely describe the self-return of the spiritual germ through the *Aufhebung* of the natural one? As Derrida puts it:

⁶⁸ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.116.

⁶⁹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, pp.116-117.

⁷⁰ DERRIDA, J. *Dissemination*. Trans. B. Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p.40. The text is quoted by Derrida in a decisive footnote of the preface to *Dissemination*, in which he observes that Feuerbach turns back against Hegel the accusations of speculative empiricism and formalism (in Feuerbach’s words, of ‘feint’ and ‘play’). Derrida quotes Feuerbach from the collection of essays translated and published by Louis Althusser with the title *Manifestes philosophiques* (1960).

Then, the germ, finite germ of sexual difference, the germ of death is it a metaphor of the infinite germ? Or the contrary? The value of the metaphor would be impotent to decide this if the value of the metaphor was not itself reconstructed from this question.⁷¹

This answer does not explain why we must speak of a spiritual *germ*, recurring to an image drawn from natural and biological life. Perhaps, this unexplained necessity has something to do with the term “classification” that Derrida had emphasized above. Hegel treats classification in the *Remark* and in the addition that follow the section on the particularization of the genus into species. It is understood as a main concern of zoology that searches for “sure and simple signs of classes, orders, etc., of animals [and, thus, as he explains a sentence below, of “artificial systems”] for the purpose of a subjective recognition of them.”⁷² However, classification is a difficult task, Hegel explains, to the extent that nature is the self-externality of the idea and, thus, the existence of the idea in nature is determined by manifold conditions and circumstances and can present itself in the most inadequate form.⁷³ In Derrida’s quoted passage classification refers to the self-inequality of natural and biological life and, thus, to the constitutive process of *Urteil*, sexual contradiction and dissemination in general. The concept is developed in a more explicit fashion in *Of Grammatology* (1967), a few pages before the section dedicated to Levi-Strauss’s reading of the battle of the proper names among the population of the Nambikwara. Derrida conceives of classification as the spatial inscription or metaphor (in the sense of the primordial expatriation of language into the space)⁷⁴ of which there is no outside and thus as the general text of history and life. In the wake of Hegel this space, text or regulated system of differences is described as the other from which the life of the spirit cannot be liberated. Derrida writes:

Thus the name, especially the so-called proper name, is always caught in a chain or a system of differences. It becomes an appellation only to the extent that it may inscribe itself within a figuration. Whether it be linked by its origin to the representations of things in space or whether it remains caught in a system of phonic differences or social classifications apparently released from ordinary space, the proper-ness of the name does not escape spacing. Metaphor shapes and undermines

⁷¹ DERRIDA. *Glas*, p.117.

⁷² HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p.423.

⁷³ See HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, pp.417-418: “If we admit that the works of man are sometimes defective, then the works of Nature must contain still more imperfections, for Nature is the Idea in the guise of externality. [...] In Nature, it is external conditions which distort the forms of living creatures; but these conditions produce these effects because life is indeterminate and receives its particular determinations also from these externalities. The forms of Nature, therefore, cannot be brought into an absolute system, and this implies that the species of animals are exposed to contingency.”

⁷⁴ For this concept of metaphor see DERRIDA. *Writing and Difference*, p.140.

the proper name. The literal (*propre*) meaning does not exist, its “appearance” is a necessary function and must be analyzed as such in the system of differences and metaphors. The absolute parousia of the literal meaning [*sens propre*], as the presence to the self of the logos within its voice, in the absolute hearing-itself-speak, should be situated as a function responding to an indestructible but relative necessity, within a system that encompasses it. That amounts to situating the metaphysics or the onto-theology of the logos.⁷⁵

We may wonder whether the irreducible space Derrida refers to in this passage consists in the natural life or natural language from which Hegel cannot avoid borrowing images and metaphors to account for the life of the spirit. We may wonder whether, when pointing to the unexplained necessity of the natural metaphor in *Glas*, Derrida is not suggesting that this space is the name of what the Hegelian concept of life and, thus, the living organization of his system do not reappropriate.

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⁷⁵ DERRIDA, J. **Of Grammatology.** Trans. G. C. Spivak. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974, p.89. In *Positions* (1972) Derrida recalls that Saussure recurs to the concept of classification to account for a semiotic code in general (“language and in general every semiotic code—which Saussure define as ‘classifications’ ...” DERRIDA, J. **Positions.** Trans. A. Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981, p.28). Saussure writes: “Language, on the contrary, is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification. As soon as we give language first place among the facts of speech, we introduce a natural order into a mass that lends itself to no other classification” (SAUSSURE, Ferdinand de. **Course in General Linguistics.** Trans. W. Baskin. New York: The Philosophical Library. 1959, p.9).

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