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# IS RADICAL ATHEISM A GOOD NAME FOR DECONSTRUCTION?

ERNESTO LACLAU

I want, first, to thank *Diacritics* for the invitation to answer the criticisms of my work contained in the very insightful and intelligent book by Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. I will go in a moment to those criticisms, but let me first say a few words about the main argumentative line around which Hägglund's theses are structured.

Some of the categories that are central to Hägglund's project—trace, spacing, autoimmunity—are well known to readers of Derrida, but others—desire, survival—are less so; it is on the latter that Hägglund's analytical effort is concentrated. As he asserts: “my main approach is analytical rather than exegetical. I not only seek to explicate what Derrida is saying; I seek to develop his arguments, fortify his logic, and pursue its implications” [11]. The central thesis around which his whole analysis revolves is that, unlike traditional atheism, which asserts that human reality is penetrated by a lack of being that one—unsuccessfully—tries to transcend, radical atheism puts into question the search for immortality and asserts, on the contrary, a search for survival that fully accepts our own mortality and contingency. It is here that the Derridean category of the “trace” would become constitutive of all experience and that time, conceived as an “ultratrascendental” horizon, becomes its inherent correlate. “Spacing” would thus assert the becoming-space of time and the becoming time of space. The consequence is the radical finitude of survival. “The radical finitude of survival is not a lack of being that it is desirable to overcome. Rather, the finitude of survival opens the chance for everything that is desired and the threat of everything that is feared” [1–2]. Trace, difference, spacing are alternative terms to designate this infinitude of radical finitude on which radical atheism rests.

The contrast that Hägglund establishes between deconstruction and negative theology is particularly significant. Referring to the works of Kevin Hart and Jean-Luc Marion, Hägglund argues that “[t]he respective reasons why God and *différance* are described as without being are . . . diametrically opposite. The God of negative theology is described as without being insofar as being is understood as a category of finitude. . . . In contrast, *différance* articulates the negative infinity of time. No moment is given in itself but is superseded by another moment in its very event and can never be consummated in a positive infinity. The negative infinity of time is an *infinite finitude*, since it entails that finitude cannot ever be eliminated or overcome” [3].

Hägglund's book is structured around a set of theses that try to specify Derrida's viewpoint vis-à-vis those of other thinkers. Against Kant, for whom God is an absolute instance not submitted to either space or time, Derrida asserts “the unconditional as the spacing of time that undermines the very Idea of a sovereign instance” [10]. In a similar way, the Derridean critique of Husserl's analysis of internal time-consciousness points toward a view of temporality whose radicalism avoids any notion of a transcendental pre-constitution. The critique of the ethicist, Levinasian-oriented readings of deconstruction

tries to show the impossibility of subsuming the latter under the former's approach to alterity. Finally, a similar critique is addressed to the various attempts at a religious retrieval of deconstruction. On most of these points, I find myself in agreement with Hägglund.

My disagreements start not where Hägglund tries to differentiate his own understanding of deconstruction from alternative approaches, but where he attempts to formulate that understanding *in positive* terms. His whole intellectual endeavor rests on the opposition between a desire for immortality as an absolute goal and a constitutive and irreducible mortality which would both limit and structure all possible meaningful desire. The question is: how to conceive of this opposition? Any dual alternative, from a deconstructive perspective, cannot be dealt with simply by opting for either of the poles that it, at face value, asserts. Deconstruction involves *contamination* of what would otherwise be an *exclusive* alternative. The alternative is, however, presented by Hägglund as an exclusive one. Either we have uncontaminated immortality or, alternatively, a mortality reduced to its ontic, evental nature, whose being is reduced to a simple negation of eternity. This does not look very much like a deconstructive operation but, rather, like a dialectical reversal. The *only* content of the mortal would consist in the pure and simple negation of immortality. Needless to say, this operation leaves the category of immortality intact, as that which is excluded. The conceptual content of "mortality" is reduced to being the pure and simple reversal of "immortality." This is a profoundly non-Derridean operation, in which contaminating logics play no role. The opposition between "traditional" and "radical" atheism that structures Hägglund's argument is based on this theoretical move, which, I think, distorts the very aim of the deconstructive intervention. Of course, Hägglund is right in asserting that deconstruction involves rejecting any appeal to an absolute ground beyond the logic of *différance*. Where I find his argument wanting, however, is in the way he specifies what this logic is about. He does not *interrupt*—as a true deconstructionist should—the alternative mortality/immortality, but just sticks to it, merely choosing between one of the two poles. His intellectual project—which I still see as very much valuable—would require, in my view, a drastic reformulation.

This general difficulty can be perceived even more clearly if we consider two categories, which, although playing, according to Hägglund, a central role in Derrida's theorization, were not sufficiently elaborated by him: "survival" and "desire." Let us start with "survival." Hägglund sustains—and the same assertion is repeated in different contexts throughout his book—that

*[t]he finitude of survival is not a lack of being that it is desirable to overcome. Rather, Derrida makes clear that whatever is desired is finite in its essence. Even the most intense enjoyment is haunted by the imminence of death, but without such finitude there would be nothing to enjoy in the first place. There is thus an incurable autoimmunity at the heart of every experience, since whatever one wants to affirm is constituted by the fact that it will be negated. There is no way out of this double bind because the threat of loss is not extrinsic to what is desired; it is intrinsic to its being as such. [34]*

Now, there are two sides to this assertion. On the one hand, survival is presented as internally affected by autoimmunity as a result of the inherent possibility of death (which means that it amounts to a naked assertion of bare life). In that sense, there would be no internal discrimination between different types of survival. On the other hand, to assert that "the most intense enjoyment is haunted by the imminence of death" introduces a new category—"enjoyment"—that cannot be deduced from "survival," even if one accepted the argument that survival (as haunted by death) is a precondition of every enjoyment. And here we already have a source of contamination that complicates the argument. Is the

*threat* of death—death as a threat—the only way in which death can relate to enjoyment? Accepting that death is opposed to survival, but also that the content of enjoyment is not merely provided by the notion of survival, can it not happen that, to some extent, enjoyment could be linked to death rather than to survival? (There is also the question, to which I will return presently, of the connection between death and immortality.)

Hägglund recognizes that in Derrida's work there is no fully developed theory of desire, but he thinks that such a theory is nonetheless a fundamental piece of the whole deconstructive intellectual project and that, as a result, it requires a precise formulation. The reason is that radical atheism, as conceived by Hägglund, requires a strict separation between the desire for life and the desire for immortality.

*The desire to live on after death is not a desire for immortality, since to live on is to remain subjected to temporal finitude. The desire for survival cannot aim at transcending time, since the given time is the only chance for survival. There is thus an internal contradiction in the so-called desire for immortality. If one were not attached to mortal life, there would be no fear of death and no desire to live on. But for the same reason, the idea of immortality cannot even hypothetically appease the fear of death or satisfy the desire to live on. On the contrary, the state of immortality would annihilate every form of survival, since it would annihilate the time of mortal life. [2]*

So what about mortality? Here Hägglund is unambiguous: "What I want to stress is that this argument presupposes that being is essentially temporal (to be = to happen) and that it is inherently valuable that something happens (the worst = that nothing happens). In other words, it presupposes that *temporal finitude is the condition for everything that is desirable*" [32]. The desirable has here assumed the status of being as such, because it has become identical with temporality, which has become now, in turn, the *only* terrain in which being as such is constituted. (Discussing the question of the ontological options of a discourse meaningfully aiming at being *qua* being exceeds the aims of this response.)

The basic question is now the following: to what extent do we find in Derrida—and in the new argumentative developments to be found in Hägglund—something amounting to an elaborated theory of desire? The answer is that we don't even remotely find anything of the kind. If we put together Derrida's scattered references to desire and Hägglund's attempts at building out of them some kind of coherent construct, we arrive at a theoretical structure that looks more or less like this: (1) temporality and mortality go together and they constitute life as such; (2) desire is desire for life, and as the latter is internally threatened (autoimmunity) by death, the desire for life is the same thing as the desire for survival; (3) immortality would be the negation of temporality/mortality—that is, of life; (4) the desire for immortality would be equivalent to the desire for death; ergo, it would be radically undesirable; (5) the search for an unattainable eternity that has been at the root of most religious and theological conceptions is not only the search for a chimera but also the search for something that is intrinsically undesirable.

Why is this theoretical sequence fundamentally unsatisfactory? Basically because it does not propose any theory of desire as it is actually structured, but only a philosophical argument about the logical implications of a search for eternity. The very status of the argument is ambiguous. What does it mean to say that something is "undesirable"? It sounds like an ethical injunction, in which case Hägglund's reasoning would be dangerously bordering on the normativism that he—quite rightly—tries to avoid. So let us not follow that path. The only other option is that, independently of any injunction, "undesirability" is grounded in an allusion to the way in which human desire operates. But to that effect, it is clearly insufficient to say that the desire for immortality is equivalent to the

desire for death—unless it is shown that there is something intrinsically contradictory in a desire for death. This is, anyway, an argumentative line that at no point Häggglund pursues.

These difficulties and ambiguities are particularly apparent if we consider the way in which Häggglund deals with the psychoanalytic approach that, unlike deconstruction, offers an elaborate notion of desire. Referring to Lacanian theory, Häggglund asserts:

*While Lacan clearly recognizes that there is no fullness of being, he holds that we desire to reach such fullness and that our mortal being is a lack of being. . . . Even though Lacan often describes the lacking fullness in terms that may seem to invoke a lost object (such as “the Thing”), it is important to understand that the desired fullness cannot be equated with any object whatsoever. What is desired under the heading of “the Thing” is a state of absolute fullness to which no object can ever be adequate. The lack of such fullness is for Lacan the cause of desire, since it is precisely because desire cannot be fulfilled that there is desire. [192]*

Here Lacan has to introduce the *drive* as a different register, in which there would not be metonymical displacement from one object to the next but investment in a particular object. This movement from desire to drive, however, does not put into question the status of the object as the object of lack: “The difference is that desire rejects all objects as inadequate in comparison to the Thing that would satisfy it once and for all, whereas the drive satisfies itself with a substitute. It is clear from this schema, however, that the lack of fullness is not called into question but is located at the root of both desire and drive. The object of the drive is explicitly posited as an object of lack, from which the subject can derive satisfaction only by regarding it as the incarnation of fullness” [193]. The conclusions of this analysis are clear. The psychoanalytic conception of desire would share with traditional atheism two basic theoretical premises: that the fullness of being is unachievable and that it is, however, eminently desirable—it is, indeed, what structures the very nature of human desire. So it is a new version of the classical teleologism that finds its epitome in Kant’s regulative Idea.

Is this assimilation, however, really warranted? Let us say, to start with, that a psychoanalytically oriented theoretician would disagree so little with Häggglund’s equation of immortality with death that the search for the fullness of being has been called the “death drive.” Freud is quite explicit in this respect:

*we cannot escape a suspicion that we may have come upon the track of a universal attribute of instincts, and perhaps of organic life in general, which has not hitherto been clearly recognized or at least not explicitly stressed. It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life. [Freud 36]*

And again:

*Let us suppose, then, that all organic instincts are conservative, are acquired historically and tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things. It follows that the phenomena of organic development must be attributed to external disturbing and diverting influences. The elementary living entity would from its very beginning have had no wish to change; if conditions remained the same, it*

would do no more than constantly repeat the same course of life. . . . If we are to take as a truth that knows of no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that “the aim of all life is death” and, looking backwards, that “inanimate things existed before living ones.” [37–38]

So if Hägglund would like to criticize the psychoanalytic notion of desire he would have a far more difficult task than to merely assert the equivalence between immortality and death; he would have to deny the existence of such a thing as the death drive—a task that he fortunately does not take up and one in which Derrida, most certainly, would not have accompanied him. There are, however, two aspects that would require, from this perspective, a particular emphasis. The first is that the death drive does not involve any teleology of the regulative Idea type. It is not linked to any successive approach to an ideal perfection. Freud himself dissociated his analysis from the normativist account under which Hägglund attempts to subsume it:

*It may be difficult, too, for many of us, to abandon the belief that there is an instinct towards perfection at work in human beings, which has brought them to their present high level of intellectual achievement and ethical sublimation and which may be expected to watch over their development into supermen. I have no faith, however, in the existence of any such internal instinct and I cannot see how this benevolent illusion is to be preserved. The present development of human beings requires, as it seems to me, no different explanation from that of animals. What appears in a minority of human individuals as an untiring impulsion towards further perfection can easily be understood as a result of the instinctual repression upon which is based all that is most precious in human civilization. No substitutive or reactive formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct's persisting tension; and it is the difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is demanded and that which is actually achieved that provides the driving factor which will permit of no halting at any position attained, but, in the poet's words, “ungebandigt immer vorwärts dringt.” [Freud 42]*

This is a good point at which to begin the deconstruction of the stark opposition mortality/immortality. What the Freudian intervention claims is that the death drive, far from being opposed to human desire, enters into the constitution of any desire—except that the related notion of a fullness that is achievable has now nothing to do with any unachievable immortality. Freud asserted that the unconscious is timeless, but it should be clear that this timelessness is not one linked to any transcendent instance. The opposite is rather the case: because there is no transcendence, the object in which desire is invested can only be a *temporal* one, which, however, incarnates, in a certain historical context, the closure inherent in a certain horizon of representation. That the constitutive lack to which Hägglund refers is also at the root of religious and semi-religious discourses postulating an unachievable transcendence is only too true, but this does not mean that they are the only possible destiny of the dyad lack/desire. It is the task of a deconstructive reading to show the variety of routes that open out of this dyad, instead of fixing it, in an essentialist way, to a transcendent instance.

Hägglund writes: “Derrida articulates the negative infinity of time as an irreducible condition for being in general. We can describe it as an *infinite finitude* in order to spell out that finitude never can be consummated in a positive infinity. Each finitude is always transcended by another finitude, which in turn is transcended by another finitude, and so

on. Such temporal finitude entails all sorts of extermination and erasure, but it cannot come to a final apocalyptic end. Or rather: the end of finitude would be ‘the worst,’ since it would destroy everything” [45–46]. I find myself in one hundred percent agreement with Hägglund’s statement, except that it says too little. I do not know from it anything concerning those “exterminations” and “erasures” to which he refers or, more generally, the logic of the movement from one finitude to the next. That this logic does not involve for him—as it does not for me—any kind of dialectical or teleological process, I take for granted. It is not “programmed,” as Derrida would put it. The problem is that without further specifications the very notion of finitude (as a *positive* category) becomes ambiguous and without direction. The only possibility emerging out of it is to say that any succession of finitudes is not inscribed in any positive infinity. But this is not to say too much. What for Hägglund is the conclusion of the analysis is for me only the starting point.

This point can be further clarified by making reference to a text of mine where apparently I am making the same point as Hägglund, but where the differences in formulation involve a change in the theoretical perspective. The passage comes from a polemic with Slavoj Žižek, where I answer that my contention that the Thing as such is never touched and is substituted by radical investment in a plurality of subsequent objects does not involve the Kantian notion of an infinite approach to the thing in itself because the successive investments are not structured in a teleologically oriented series. I assert in that text:

*For a subject within a hegemonic configuration, that configuration is everything there is; it is not a moment within an endless approach to an Ideal. For that reason, Žižek’s references to Kant are entirely misplaced. For Kant the regulative role of the Idea does result in an infinite approach towards the noumenal world, but nothing of the kind happens in the case of a hegemonic identification. Infinite approach to what? The alternative that Žižek presents . . . collapses once a radical investment has been made in a partial object (once the object “has been elevated to the dignity of the Thing”). And this object, albeit always partial, could involve radical change or global social transformation, but even when this is the case, the moment of radical investment will necessarily be present. At no point will the Thing as such be touched directly without its representation through an object. [234–35]*

Apparently, I am making the same point as Hägglund: like him, I am denying that historical life can be grounded in any achievable fullness of being; like him, I am also denying that the impossibility of achieving such fullness would lead to an infinite approximation which would retain the latter as a desirable Ideal; like him, finally, I do not think that there is anything beyond the infinite succession of finitudes. The main disagreement comes from the fact that, unlike Hägglund, I specify a mechanism—investment—through which finitudes as such are constituted, while his notion of finitude proceeds through purely empirical, common sense allusions, and at the conceptual level it is barren, because it only manages to think its logical antithesis with infinitude. To proceed the way I suggest requires, as I said, the deconstruction of the category of infinitude, showing that many of its internal dimensions are not necessarily linked to the ontological objects to which they were traditionally attached. To do the opposite—to maintain intact the classical notion of “infinitude” and to simply oppose to it “finitude” as its logical reverse—is to remain within the field of the most traditional metaphysics.

To close this point, let us go back for a moment to Lacanian theory. The notion of radical investment is associated with that of the object *a*. Hägglund makes several allusions to it and my linking of it to the notion of “hegemony” that I have formulated. He

makes particular reference to the use I have made of Lacanian categories in connection with the work of Joan Copjec. It is worth reproducing here a couple of quotations from her work, because they touch all the main dimensions of the issue we are discussing. In relation to the destructive impulses inherent in the death drive, Copjec says: “(1) that there is no single, complete drive, only partial drives and thus *no realisable will to destruction*; and (2) the second paradox of the drive, which states that the drive inhibits, as part of its activity, the achievement of its aim. So some inherent obstacle—the object of the drive—simultaneously *brakes* the drive and *breaks it up*, curbs it, thus preventing it from reaching its aim and divides it up into partial drives” [34]. These partial objects are the objects *a*. The second quotation runs as follows:

*The development of the concept of Vorstellungrepresentanz [ideational representative in Freud's English translation] appears, then, to sever the Ding-component of the Nebenmensch complex into two parts, into das Ding and Vorstellungrepresentanz, although das Ding is no longer conceivable as a noumenal object and is retained only by the description of Vorstellungrepresentanz as partial. It is clear from the theory that when this partial object arrives on the scene it blocks the path to the old conception of das Ding, which is now only a retrospective illusion. . . . The traitorous delegate and the partial object act not as evidence of a body of a Thing existing elsewhere, but as evidence of the fact that the body and satisfaction have lost the support of the organic body and the noumenal thing. [37]*

Here we have all the necessary preconditions to answer Hägglund's objections. Firstly, the Thing is not an actual object but a retrospective illusion—if you want, the presence of an absence. Secondly, because of that it is not an “ideal” either—that is, it is not a noumenon, the point of arrival of a teleologically constructed series. Thirdly, the *Vorstellung repraesentanz*—what Copjec calls the “traitorous delegate”—has occupied the totality of the series. There is not, on the one hand, the Thing and, on the other, its vicar, the ideational representative, because the ideational representative is everything there is. The only distinction between entities is that they have differential cathectic investments, but there is no ground where these uneven cathexes would find any ultimate source. So the only thing we have is a contingent succession of differential investments. Here is where we find the infinitude of finitude that Hägglund was asking for. If he has not realized it, and so presented a distorted view of psychoanalysis, it is because, in his mind, the opposite correlate of a “constitutive lack” can only be infinitude conceived as transcendence, and thus he has been unable to operate deconstructively within classical oppositions. The assertion of the infinitude of finitude is one with which I would certainly concur, but it is a rather minor point which, I think, would be accepted by many contemporary philosophers who are quite alien to the deconstructive tradition.

We could here, perhaps, introduce a philosophical distinction in order to clarify the issues at stake: that between the *contingent* and the *accidental*. The accidental is just an internal ontic distinction within the entity as such: it is just the negative correlate of the essence. With contingency, the situation is altogether different: contingent is that being whose essence does not involve its existence, so contingency cuts across the distinction essence/accident: the essence is as contingent as the accident. But in that case there is a *facticity* in contingency that is not merely *empiricity*. Heidegger's notion of Dasein as being *thrown* into the world captures well this dimension of contingency. In that case there is an ineradicable dimension of lack in contingency. To come back to the issue that we are discussing: the infinitude of finitude is not just an empirical succession of ontic states; these are temporal materializations of a constitutive lack.

There is, finally, a reference I want to make to the way in which, in the last part of his book, Häggglund discusses my work. He makes there a spirited defense of my approach, which I have appreciated and found convincing, but he also makes a central criticism in relation to what he sees as my dependence on the Lacanian theory of desire. Let me say, in the first place, that my theorization of the political, centered on the category of hegemony, long precedes my knowledge in depth of Lacanian theory. The latter is largely the result of my intellectual association with Joan Copjec, at the time (2000–04) when we were both teaching at SUNY-Buffalo and organized a series of graduate seminars on “Rhetoric, Psychoanalysis, and Politics.” It was at that time that I started perceiving the structural similarities between my post-Gramscian approach to politics and the logic of the object *a* as developed by Lacan. Häggglund is clearly critical of this Lacanian orientation of my work, where he sees a departure from my former promising “deconstructive” leanings. Anyway, having already expressed my reservations about the way Häggglund reads the psychoanalytic tradition, let me move to what he sees as a major contradiction in my approach.

Let me quote *in extenso* the crucial passage in which Häggglund’s criticism is formulated.

*The structural contradiction in Laclau’s theory should now be apparent. On the one hand, he maintains that political engagement requires a radical investment that identifies the object of engagement with the idea of fullness. On the other hand, the democratic society that Laclau advocates actually precludes such a radical investment. To make a radical investment in the foundations of a society, one cannot believe that these foundations are contingent and finite, whereas democracy explicitly presents its foundations as contingent and finite. As Laclau puts it: “the only democratic society is one which permanently shows the contingency of its own foundations.” [200]*

This quotation shows, *in nuce*, everything Häggglund does not understand of my approach to politics. Firstly, he speaks of “a radical investment in the foundations of a society,” while my argument is that society has no ultimate foundation, so that the idea of radical investment has to be dissociated from the notion of such a foundation. Secondly, he grounds his argument in a traditional metaphysical idea of fullness which is precisely what the argument that I have tried to elaborate puts into question. Thirdly, if democracy believes that foundations are contingent and finite, its main task is to say what a contingent and finite foundation is, which is what my whole approach tries to clarify, while that of Häggglund does not even try to answer his own question. It is reduced to a purely empty assertion according to which foundations are contingent and finite, but one does not know any longer what a foundation is or, indeed, what is finitude and contingency.

There is no point in going through the argument that Häggglund elaborates in the next few pages. So let us concentrate on the three points mentioned in the previous paragraph and answer each of them.

1. At no point have I asserted that radical investment take place at the level of the *foundations* of society. If that was the case there would be a logic of the ground that would precede and determine the working of hegemonic logics—while the latter is for me the terrain in which any contingent grounding takes place. So the assertion of a “radical investment in the foundations” of a society is something that is totally alien to my approach, as anybody minimally aware of the main lines of my work would know. What radical investment means is the process by which a certain signifier, through an equivalent relation with other signifiers, manages to construct an equivalential chain. To refer to an example that I have used several times: in the Solidarnosc movement in Poland,

the symbols and demands were at the beginning only the demands of a group of workers in Gdansk, but, given that these symbols and demands took place in a terrain in which several other demands were equally frustrated, they became the symbols of a wider social movement—that is, people made a radical investment in them and thus gave them a certain centrality. But there was no question of any preceding foundation, it was the contingent creation of a space that was, given its contingency, subjected to further disruptions. The radicality was, thus, a contingent radicality that gave a certain centrality to particular demands in a given context. But, within that context, the investment was radical in the sense that it could not be changed at will for a whole historical period.

2. Fullness means that, within a certain social space, some signifiers assume a role of general representation. The symbols of an emancipatory struggle, in a certain context, assume the representation of something wider than any particular demand and are to that extent quite indeterminate. Sometimes, when a certain oppressive regime has been overthrown, people live for some time under the illusion that what has been overthrown is oppression in general, and the limits within which the signifiers of liberation operate are thus indeterminate. This indeterminacy, which is certainly contingent, is what gives its content to fullness, but this is not the metaphysical fullness of which Hägglund is thinking.

3. I think that the preceding arguments make clear what the contingency of radical democracy is about. If what we called radical democracy were simply the assertion of pure contingency, we would have no democracy but mere nihilism. Any democracy takes place in a context in which certain values are uncompromisingly affirmed—are the object of a radical investment—but the contingency of those values is equally affirmed. What is essentially wrong is to create an absolute chasm between the substantive values of democracy that are the object of a radical investment in a certain context and the radical contingency inherent in democratic politics. Is there, however, not a logical contradiction between these two requirements? There is, and because of that reason it can be politically negotiated but not logically solved. The name of the space in which the negotiation of that contradiction takes place has a name: *autoimmunity*. As Hägglund is well aware, there is no square circle through which the incompatible dimensions of an *autoimmune* whole can be brought together. What I would add is that the impossibility of their *logically* being brought together finds its correlate/reverse in their need to be brought together as an *actual* fact. This is the point at which, in my work, I have insisted that the points of identification which lead to this *non-logical-being-put-together* requires us to escape the strictly *conceptual* sphere and to enter a *nominal* one. This latter sphere is, however, unthinkable without bringing to the fore an arsenal of categories in which “identification” and “lack” occupy a pride of place. This is the way in which the infinitude of finitude is constructed.

Let us end by making a few remarks concerning the issues at stake in this exchange. Hägglund has made what I think is a rather substantial contribution to the various ways in which deconstruction allows us to approach the question of the discursive construction of identities. In actual fact, I think his analysis reaches what we could call the *zero degree* of deconstruction, the point in which deconstructive logics show their internal potential and cannot be assimilated to any of the various discourses—ethicist, religious, and so forth—which have tried to hegemonize it. The limit of this project, as I have tried to show in this response, comes at the moment at which deconstruction claims to be a self-determined operation, one that does not allow for any contamination of its own internal dimensions.

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