Chapter Four

Possible Impossibilities of a Deconstructive Subject: De-cision, Machine, Materiality

Introduction: Toward a Notion of the Subject

In the previous chapter, we discussed the double bind of the deconstructive ‘trace’ that carries with it a threat of ontologization, of a materiality that tries to ground the trace, never letting it totally free of the ‘inside’, in effect also producing it. But it was still not clear if the work of this trace or ‘cut’ can be read around a logic of intentionality, even if at different moments of our discussion we have encountered the question ‘who/what works’ (at the margin of the self-differing/appropriating structure, through the cut)? This question indicates a different analytic than the one assumed by the concept-metaphor ‘subject’. Especially in its received meaning of having an usurping authority in objectifying things around it, validating their existences, while remaining itself self-certain and fully present\(^1\). In the present chapter, I deal with the intersections between these two concepts, the deconstructive analytic of the ‘who’ and the received notion of the fully present subject and try to think their complicity and divergence. Following the general trajectory of our discussion, I broach the question of the ‘subject’ from the terrain of the ‘structure’ and our preferred point of departure would be the concept of ‘hegemony’ proposed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

\(^1\) See the Heideggerian critique of the self-certain subject, and Derrida’s gloss on it in the previous chapter.
Laclau and Mouffe have tried to probe the possibility and impossibility of thinking society as a structural whole chiefly in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). In their opinion, one has to abandon the model of society as a sutured and self-enclosed terrain since “every totality” is “necessarily incomplete” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 111). I understand this incompleteness in the dual sense of not being able to master its outside and not being constituted of fully present building blocks. In a gloss over the Althusserian term ‘overdetermination’, they call the “field of identities which never manage to be fully fixed, […] field of overdetermination” (emphasis in original, Laclau and Mouffe, 111). They also call it the “discursive field”, where the relations among its various elements have a “material character” (emphasis in original, 108). This argument has a similarity to our position discussed thus far and I generally agree with the statement that for post-structuralist notion of ‘textuality’ (Laclau and Mouffe’s term is: ‘society’), “neither a total interiority nor a total exteriority is possible” (111). I would, however, agree with the proposed material character of the field only so far as the ‘material’ is a lingering trace always already in transaction with the ‘non-material’, and not a determining characteristic of the discursive as Laclau and Mouffe seem to stress. In this chapter I try to inaugurate a discussion of the concept of the ‘subject’ through a study of Laclau and Mouffe’s articulation of the problematic. It especially interests us because it starts from a conception of a structured field and then tries to follow its

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2 Laclau and Mouffe 2001.

3 Laclau and Mouffe are nuanced enough to keep this tendency at a minimum, and it is not very certain if they do have a decisive leaning toward fullness of materiality. It rather might be the case that the prevailing valorising of the ‘non-material’ renders their re-turn to the axis of the material as a bit more forceful than they would intend to. Our unease does not lie here, but rather in the places where their theoretical argument relies on a material – non-material ‘separation’ for the argument/reading to take place. For example, in the following analysis of the Marxian value: “The non-materiality of labour as substance of value is expressed through the equivalence among materially diverse commodities. However, the materiality of commodities and the non-materiality of value are not equivalent to each other” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 127-28). I have tried to make a different argument here (see previous chapter). However this tendency is almost too subtle to become the undoing of Laclau and Mouffe’s general argument.
drifts and shifts within and away from itself, trying to think the possibility of ‘change’, much similar to the guiding thread of our discussions so far. Moreover, that their way of thinking ‘hegemony’ is fundamentally ‘deconstructive’ is mentioned by Derrida himself⁴, even if one might mention, half in jest, that Derrida’s signature is not stressed enough in their compact and incisive text.

For Laclau and Mouffe, hegemony is that ‘game’ working in the ‘social’, which tries to stabilize positive articulations in managing the incompleteness of the numerous different discursive positions, domesticating “democratic demands” (189) as far as possible, and achieve a situation which is farthest from a state open to instability, or “radical democracy” (189)⁵. It is this notion of hegemony as the trick or ruse through which certain discursive formations try to close off the dispersion of the social, that inaugurates a theory of ideology, much ignored by recent scholarship. In a separate text⁶, but still in the same vein, Laclau has proposed that the “utopic closure of the ideological is constitutive of the social and the subject” (emphasis in original, Das 2010, 22). What hegemony therefore tries to fix, is the dispersion of diverse discursive positions, and these are precisely the nodes through which subjectivity can be thought. As mentioned, for Laclau and Mouffe, discourse has a material character which consequently dismisses any concept of subjectivity modelled after an unifying consciousness which organizes experience. (One may ask in an aside: does the unifying logic of consciousness work like a hegemony, trying to unify the dispersed experiences and memory traces? And therefore, can one say that the ‘subject’ is structured like the social?). Instead of an unifying consciousness, dispersion of “diverse subject positions” are stressed (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 109). This immediately takes one away from the axis of the ‘individual’, who is not only an unified consciousness but also an indivisible body, individuated by and

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⁴ In “Eating Well” (in Derrida 1994).

⁵ This is rather a pointer to the highly heterogeneous notion of hegemony that Laclau and Mouffe introduce in the mentioned text. For a detailed discussion along with a convincing comparison with other important articulations of the concept-metaphor, see Das 2010, 18-36. Das takes the further step of highlighting the interstice of the differing notion of ‘hegemony’ and a theory of ‘ideology’.

⁶ In “The Impossibility of Society” (in Laclau 1990).
bound to the state-law as citizen, and therefore the foundational unit of that imaginary (‘state’)\(^7\). Instead, the ‘subject-positions’ are said to be scattered within the discursive formation, and it is not clear if they can be equated with separable bodies. These assorted subject-positions surface as “partial fixations” (112) in a field where full fixity remains elusive. Laclau and Mouffe start therefore, by rejecting the concept of the rational subject, which is pre-discursive and transparent to itself, and instead propose open ended subject-positions overdetermined by each other and structured as discourse. This has to be distinguished from any study of discursive practices that does not take into consideration the point about overdetermination and merely tries to produce descriptive accounts of specific practices without adequately arguing their claim to specificity. For Laclau and Mouffe, subject-position is not only a node which can be observed alone, for it is also thus through an incomplete operation of overdetermination by other nodes. The question we would like to set for such a proposition however, would be this: can one think of this work of overdetermination in terms of a persistent process extended in both space and time? Without that, the subject-positions would still retain a similarity with the rational subject in their very conception as points in space, in their not being trails of ‘withdrawal’ of being (Entziehung, Heideggerian term\(^8\)). This trail of the Heideggerian withdrawal, as I have indicated, is a writing which is not imagined as addition of separable ‘points’ in space. Thought simply as spatial points it might also result in a theory of the subject as some kind of stasis or embodiment of decision, a tendency that I show below as surfacing in the work of Laclau. This would result in Laclau’s self-confessed difference from deconstruction in positing a “subject before subjectivation” (Butler, Laclau, and Zizek 2000, 79), which I would try to contest by posing ‘decision’ as stretched-within, and extended in time, and therefore, ‘decision’. Subject-positions also live through this divisibility-within. In other words, there is yet another ‘social’ (another polyphonic play of overdeterminations) at work.

\(^7\) Such a law wavers when confronted by a body not totally under the sway of an individuated mind, for example, the figure of the criminal as mentally ill.

\(^8\) See ‘Chapter Two’. Heidegger is conspicuous by his near absence in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy which compacts such a rigorous critical overview of the relevant literature.
inside each subject-position, nodes within nodes and so on. On this note I now go on and propose two ways of thinking the ‘subject’. One through ‘decision’ in the axis of the ‘event’, and the other through representation in the axis of ‘sur-vival’. I would then try to show the internal transactions between these two approaches, together resisting the very conception of a subject. What follow are not two contesting positions, but two related ways of thinking the same problematic, of conceptualising intentionality and responsibility through but beyond the category of the subject.

‘Like a Bridge’: The Subject of Decision

Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down (Simon 2008, 55)

I want to move toward the figure of the ‘subject of decision’ through a reading of a later text by Michel Foucault, where the problematic of the subject is broached, along with related discussions by Ernesto Laclau. The ‘subject’ never seems to be one of Foucault’s preferred analytical categories, and one needs to be

9 That Laclau and Mouffe think ‘time’ can be divided into clearly examinable units is manifest in their use of metaphors. For example in the following instance “Let us simply pierce a moment in time and try to detect the presence of that void which the logic of hegemony will attempt to fill” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 8). I do not want to stress this point too much, but at least in Hegemony And Socialist Strategy, the key-terms ‘suturing’, incomplete ‘articulation’, ‘force’, ‘contradiction’, ‘positivity’ etc are all thought chiefly in terms of space and ‘time’ is hardly ever mentioned in its relation to ‘being’. Derrida’s attestation starts to show its limits.

10 I do not know how to separate the signatures Laclau and Mouffe other than how they sign their works, together or alone, because it seems that they always argue with the same threads that are set up in the Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. In a certain way, the name ‘Mouffe’ is always to be heard whenever one invokes the proper name Laclau. However, it should also be stressed that Laclau seems more ambitious of the two in going along with the work of situating a separate theory of hegemony which apparently can work as an independent world-view, an effort which does not always help, as we will try to find out below.
careful. Alain Badiou for example, makes this cryptic comment that it “personally moved” and “touched” him to note that Foucault has reintroduced “the category of the Subject” in his genealogy of sexuality (Badiou 2009, 122). Derrida also recognizes, “in his [Foucault’s] last phase, there again, a return of morality and a certain ethical subject” (Derrida 1994, 256-257). I want to make a short comment on Foucault’s alleged unease with the category of the subject, which has marked similarities to Derrida’s critique of it, and also in that specific sense deeply phenomenological as has been indicated by some rare interventions\(^\text{11}\). I share Anirban Das’s attention in reading the Foucauldian notion of ‘anoatomopoitics’ in its juxtaposition with ethicality, where power becomes “ontologically constitutive of the body” and therefore complicit with any investigation of being (Das 2010, xix). It is this imagination of a pre-ontological field which precedes the ontic nodes of the political subject that enables one to think ethics at the register of the pre-propriative. This is also the register of what Foucault has called the ‘subindividual’. In “Can the Subaltern Speak” Spivak critiques Foucault for his “tenacious commitment to the sub-individual” (and on the other hand, to “the great aggregative apparatuses”) which seemingly prevents him from following the itinerary of the subject at the register of ideology (Spivak 1999, 252)\(^\text{12}\). In other words, this exclusive attention to the ‘subindividual’ (and to the supra-individual) might resist a study of the intentionality of the subjects, and subsequently the question of responsibility (see Das 2010, 8-9). And yet, this attention to the ‘subindividual’ cannot be given up either at a strictly theoretical level, if one wants to account for the lost steps taken

\(^{11}\) I am referring here chiefly to the scholarship of Spivak and Das. Das in his turn reads Spivak and also Deleuze closely, who are astute in re-covering and writing a more philosophical Foucault than most of the mainstream Foucault scholarship would have us read. See Das 2010, 17-36. Also see Deleuze 1988 and Spivak, “More on Power/Knowledge” in Spivak 1993.

\(^{12}\) Spivak’s specific critique was that in a certain text (a dialogue between Foucault and Deleuze) both the ‘sub’ and ‘supra’ get blurred in the making of self-present subjects located in the non-European space. This move in turn reinstates the assured intellectual subject of the west who keeps the fragments of the de-centred subjectivities for himself, and who also gets rid of the responsibility to re-present ‘others’ in the process (See “Can the Subaltern Speak”, Spivak 1988).
before the thought of the subject congeals as individual. The individual as a subject of intentionality is implicated in a fabric of law and therefore cannot be the preferred category of studying the interstices of ‘laws’ and ‘bodies’ where they constitute each other. May be this, along with the ‘critique of humanism’ is the crux of Foucault’s project when he endeavors to study “sex without the law” aiming to analyze “power which do not derive from the system of right and the form of law” (Foucault 1990, 90-1). In a later text Spivak recognizes this in studying ethicality through the precipitations of the subject in the “details of everyday”, which also makes her revise her position on the Foucauldian ‘subindividual’. She now see in the move a close interaction between a deconstructive approach and the “ethical concerns of the final Foucault” (Spivak 1999, 38). The attention toward the ‘sub-individual’ therefore can be placed at that register of the pre-ontological where one can account for the presuppositions taken for granted in constituting the subject of law. Consequently it might be a way to study and possibly intervene into the pre-propriative of the ethical. In early Foucault, this specific study of ethicality or of ideological intervention is not delineated with theoretical clarity, and the critique as if is contained in the disarming dissections of the ‘subindividual’ on the one hand, and chronicling of the overarching trails of regimes of practices on the other, ‘bodies’ falling somewhere in between the two. This project is sounded already in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971) where Foucault sets up for genealogical study, following Nietzsche, not the individual or the national, not “Greek” or “English”, but “the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel” (Foucault 1994, 173). Therefore, not merely the subindividual but “subindividual marks” which intersect to form a network (Foucault’s prose would typically say “difficult to unravel” and not admit impossibility). One cannot not ignore the distinction made between the subindividual as a thing, and the “singular” marks or traces of the subindividual.

13 Spivak’s term. Elsewhere, this reading of the “final Foucault” enables her to read the signature ‘Foucault’ into the signature ‘Derrida’, a reading which is performed most exquisitely in “More on Power/Knowledge”, where she adds a third register to the double-register of ‘sub’ and ‘supra’, a register indicating to the ‘everydayness’ and therefore aiming at a correspondence between ontology and ethico-politics (in Spivak, 1993; also see Das 2010, 8-17).
What is the exact meaning of this singularity is not elaborated, but this might indicate Foucault’s closeness to a deconstructive notion of the ‘inscribed trace’ as a mark of that violence which forecloses the singular, and the use of such a conception in thinking/undoing the subject of individuated body and consciousness. And yet, it is only in a later text that Foucault explicitly talks of the ‘subject’ through a notion of ‘resistance’ at that level of the pre-subjective. I perform a brief reading of that “final Foucault”\textsuperscript{14} and then go on to a moment in Laclau which I would show as running the risk of precisely that overt commitment to materiality which is evaded by Foucault’s astute positioning of the subindividual.

I am reading here a late and important text called “The Subject and Power” (1982, in Foucault 2001). The first half of this article from where I will be quoting mostly is written originally in English by Foucault himself and called “Why Study Power: The Question of the Subject”. The crux of the ‘subject’ is approached here with a critical highlighting of the ‘moment of intervention’ which Foucault understands through the act of ‘resistance’:

I would like to suggest another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. (Foucault 2001, 329)

Foucault here is not merely talking about a middle ground between theory and practice but somehow trying to pose ‘resistance’ at a register where the two interact, a register which deals with the “relation between the two”, where both operate but neither can master the other. He also indicates that resistance can be a “starting point” in understanding power. Let me elaborate on this reading. For example, if one thinks of a finite line with two extreme points indicating ‘hot’ and ‘cold’, is it possible to pin-point, exactly where, in-between these two points, ‘hotness’ gives up

\textsuperscript{14} Spivak’s term, see previous note. The division between different stages in Foucault’s career apropos the concept of ‘subject’ is clearly recognized by Derrida “As to the Foucault’s discourse, there would be different things to say according to the stages of its development” (Derrida 1994, 256).
and ‘coldness’ takes over? Logically, there must be a point where one ceases and other starts, but it is impossible to reach that moment through finite calculation.

Conversely, to think ‘temperature’ one needs to think of a basic antagonism between ‘hotness’ and ‘coldness’. To think of a thing, to measure a field, the thinking of a basic antagonism seems necessary. We have used the example of a scale of temperature, but Foucault himself uses a much trickier, some would say much more scientistic metaphor:

To use [a] metaphor, it consists of using [...] resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their positions, find out their points of application and the methods used. (Foucault 2001, 329)

This assumption of thinking an antagonism is primarily a decision, a decision to think change. If one now goes back to the metaphor, a ‘catalyst’ is that substance which, when introduced, modifies or speeds up the nature or rate of a chemical reaction without being consumed itself. In itself, it does not change, but it underlines, highlights change. Like that, resistance, when thought, uncovers something, it “bring[s] to light” antagonisms (329). This work itself presupposes a decision to think antagonism which is always already presupposed in the ensuing act of resistance. It is here that an opening to ethicality can be glimpsed, at that register where a ‘decision before any decision’ is taken. This originary decision cannot be grasped through any antagonism since it precedes and produces antagonisms. In this specific moment in the Foucauldian text, it is evident that an attention to the subindividual makes it possible to retain an opening toward a notion of ethicality before (both prior and subjected to) any decision. The attention to the sub-individual implicates the ‘final Foucault’ with an ethical thinking, and with a thinking of ideology, even if it is in no way certain if only the study of ideology would be capable in straining the limits of the ethical as unthought.

Slavoj Zizek names ‘symptom’ that position degree zero, from where to think the “repressed real of antagonism”, and consequently runs the risk of ontologization (Das 2010, 32-33). It is here that Zizek differs crucially from the deconstructive grain. If the deconstructive specter “escapes the defining move of a counter-ideology, being present as absence,” the Zizekian symptom “claims an
ontology to be posited against the ideological” (Das, 34). Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, in his reading of Zizek, is more open to a de-ontologization since for him, as Das puts it, “the search for symptom [...] presupposes an ethical ‘pre-positioning’” (34). Therefore, Bandyopadhyay apparently goes beyond Zizek in recognising such a project of identification as always already ethical. But what does Bandyopadhyay mean when we read, “This does not however imply that the ‘symptom’ can be identified in merely mechanical ways” (Bandyopadhyay quoted in Das, 34)\(^{15}\)? If there cannot be a reading-machine for diagnosing ‘symptoms’ within a text, then does Bandyopadhyay have an intentional matrix in mind, which is not mechanical and would be capable of staging organic ‘events’? Is it at all possible to identify and therefore fix the symptom as event beyond uncertainty? It is here that the point about “ethical experimentation” (“naitik niriksha”\(^{16}\)) comes up as some kind of interested reading which separates the ‘ethically inclined few’ from “those who have an unflinching trust on and an incurable weakness for the prevalent system” (Bandyopadhyay quoted in Das, 34). Bandyopadhyay therefore, considerably undermines his own thesis of the always-already pre-positioned ethicality, and is only too eager to claim that moment beyond inscription for a certain ‘possible politics’. He also identifies this move as non-mechanical and ‘intentional’ (capable of producing new events) in the sense of being able to be ‘experimental’, therefore available as a political choice. But how to think of the ethical as always already prefigured by the mechanical, or the experimental trembling before the authority of the logic of repetition? One might need to go beyond what Bandyopadhyay is too eager to grasp as an accessible mode of ethical reading (how can it be accessible if it is not mechanical, and if it is, then how can it still be ‘ethical experimentation’ is the question his text forgets to ask). I will take up these questions latter in this chapter.

If Foucault’s starting point is the subindividual, Laclau and Mouffe work with ‘subject-positions’, which they take to be material, as I have already mentioned. I now aim to show how a commitment to a certain materiality and politics can run the risk of an excessive investment in ontology in the name of theorization. Foucault’s position in the text we have discussed has this marked

\(^{15}\) For source text, see Bandyopadhyay 1996, 25.

\(^{16}\) Bandyopadhyay, 25. I have modified Das’s translation only in this case.
difference from Laclau that it puts the dispersion of any actuality only after the presupposition of an originary field which is not only self-grounded but always already tinged by the decision that both produces and follows it, about a certain ‘antagonism’. The dispersed field cannot be accessed without the decision but it is also not reducible to it, making it both production of and prior to the very matrix of decision and therefore subjectivity. Even without naming an ethicality open to the prepropriative, Foucault’s argument could stage the ethical along with the irreducible trace of ‘reading’, and of ideology. Laclau, on the other hand, in the example below, seems to reject the opening to the ‘other’ and therefore the prepropriative altogether in favour of a subject who traverses the gap between decision and undecidability. I want to underline here that I am not presenting any comprehensive overview of the corpus signed by proper names ‘Foucault’, or ‘Laclau’, the effort instead is to stage different chosen moments according to the need of our discussion.

In a text intended to stage an encounter between his theory of hegemony and the Derridian deconstruction, Laclau notes that within a deconstructive frame, ‘decision’ “cannot be ultimately grounded in anything external to itself” (emphasis in original, Laclau in Mouffe 1995, 52). This positioning of the decision beyond the calculable, Laclau contends, is deconstruction’s central move. Quoting Kierkegaard, Laclau therefore writes that “the moment of decision is the moment of madness” (53). But he does not leave it at that, writing “strictly” as a “political theorist”, his next move would be to take some “tentative steps” in “tackling this [...] problem” of decision as madness (53). For Laclau, one needs to leave the deconstructive aporia and approach the question of the subject in thinking the relationship between decision and undecidability. It is here that he introduces the subject, who as if comes to plug this aporia by being the decision. Subject, therefore is not to be predetermined by the structure and must “go through the experience of undecidability” (54). But Laclau also adds that the subject also requires a “jump” to plug the distance between the undecidability of the structure and a “creative act”

17 Laclau makes it clear that he is not adhering to Derrida’s position, but stating his “own” (in Mouffe 1995, 53).
This identification of a ‘creative act’ in the being-decision of the subject marks Laclau’s departure from the slippery ground of madness. Laclau does propose that no decision is totally free (that would be an impossibility) and yet, also stresses that the leap that makes it a decision cannot follow from any grammar or structure. But even after setting up such an aporia, Laclau tries to figure a definite ontology of the subject of decision, I contend. For him “decision” is that last instance, which always “swings free of all rational activity”, and therefore remains at least pragmatically ungraspable, even if the pragmatist would be right in thinking decision (chiefly about ‘meaning’) non-foundational (70). Consequently, for Laclau, the connection between undecidability and decision is not to be grasped through any logical or ethical understanding. This rejection of the ethical in fact points to a crucial problem in Laclau’s theory (as I read it), for it tries to work with undecidability and difference without any detailed engagement with the problem of temporality, while I would argue that “the ethical relation to the other introduces time into the subject” (Chanter 2001, 178) and vice-versa.

Following the Levinasian grain, Tina Chanter’s description of the instant which marks the coming of the ‘subject’ is markedly different:

Hypostasis [in early Levinas] is the moment in which a subject arises; it is the upsurge of the subject, and as such it is a moment of mastery, or virility [...] but this mastery is neither pure nor uncomplicated: the subject is also burdened with itself, unable to escape itself, and subject to suffering. (Chanter 2001, 149)

The unfinished and complicated nature of subject’s mastery follows from the fact that it is not possible to think of an ‘instant’ outside of the temporal drift, where

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18 This has a resemblance to Althusser’s reading of Lenin, who meditates on the gap that stays between the ‘uncertainty of matter and the political necessity of drawing a line’ (see ‘Chapter One’).

19 In her detailed treatment of the place of ‘time’ and temporality in the Levinasian thought, Tina Chanter writes, “we might say that whereas egoism is lived from moment to moment, as instantaneous enjoyment, the ethical relation to the other introduces time into the subject” (Chanter 2001, 178).
subject can have such a fully present proper place. “Clearly and inevitably”, writes Chanter, “each instant coalesces with a continuous time” and therefore “it is impossible to conceive of the instant outside time, or to construe the hypostasis as a present that is not yet time” (44). I am trying a similar critique of Laclau’s position on the ‘jump’ of the subject albeit through a reading of Derridian deconstruction

To restate: the ignorance of difference (with the ‘other’, and with the ‘self as other’ at a different moment) in time makes Laclau’s analysis too spatial and incapable of dealing with such a notion as the pre-propriative in terms of memory or the ‘to come-ness’. In short, with the ‘call of the other’ as fundamental opening to ethicality as such. For Laclau therefore, the “function” of decision ultimately embodies the impossible fullness of the subject (60). Therefore subject’s body as if becomes that bridge which joins the undecidability of the structure and the contingency of the decision. The ‘I’, as if lays itself down and embodies the bridge, resolving the aporia between structure and event. This conceptualisation departs from deconstruction fundamentally in its effort to have a ‘theory’ of decision. Even if Laclau apparently follows a deconstructive rigour in identifying any such decision as “self-grounded”, he still tries to think of this within the pale of possible reason, as another theory and self-confessedly not as “ethical injunction” (55). I believe this might be an example of what Spivak calls elsewhere (may be too caustically), “the desire to philosophize” and “to remember others” but “not knowing how to” (Spivak in MacCannell and Zakarin 1994, 32). For Laclau, the “otherness of the other” does not prompt the ethical, but it is the universal which appropriates the singular in its ethical injunction. The problem with this model consists in placing ‘decision’ in the position of the singular, and fusing the two (decision as ‘jump’ and as ‘singularity’) at the locus of the subject. Laclau’s theory however remains blind to this criss-cross of the subject (of decision) and the singular, and therefore open to an uncomplicated binary between the singular and the universal.

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21 This is from Spivak’s critique of Jean Luc Nancy’s notion of the ‘Corpus’.
22 See the Derridian discussion of the distinction and transaction between the ‘singular I’ and the ‘universal I’ below (see Derrida 2002, 134).
‘other’ is merely the universal that “precedes and governs any decision” (Laclau in Mouffe 1995, 55). Again, we are compelled to propose that the notion of a temporal distance is being missed here, which could have interrupted this scene in thinking the locus of decision as extended in time. A notion like that would have recognized the production of decision not only shaped by the usurping authority of the universal but also enchanted by the call of the undecidable, the undecidable which both opens and closes the law of decision-making. Instead, Laclau’s model makes clear-cut divisions between contingency and predetermination, decision and the undecidable etc, forgetting their complicity as well as restance of incomparability. This, I believe, comes from a desire to theorize, and to leave nothing un-theorized in a textual production (or any production, and therefore the setting apart of ‘creation’ from ‘madness’). Even after repeatedly stressing the importance of going through the ‘experience of the undecidable’, Laclau wants a narrative of that experience in theory and subsequently concludes,

To summarize: deconstruction and hegemony are the two essential dimensions of a single theoretico-practical operation. Hegemony requires deconstruction [...] But deconstruction also requires hegemony, that is, a theory of the decision taken in an undecidable terrain: without a theory of the decision, that distance between structural undecidability and actuality would remain untheorized. (Emphasis added, 62)23

J. Hillis Miller, much in the line of our argument, has noted that a “salient difference” of Laclau from Derrida contains in the latter’s rejection of “spectral notions”, which also means Laclau misses Derrida’s point about the madness of

23 I believe it is for this reason that a pragmatist like Richard Rorty can still quip that he finds Laclau “overestimating Derrida’s political utility” and that it is a case of “over-philosophication” (Rorty in Mouffe 1995, 78), much in the vein of what I have indicated by a desire to leave nothing un-theorized. The pragmatist can see no better idea in Laclau (compared to a list of luminaries from Freud to Derrida) in understanding “a legal and political system” (78). Not agreeing with Rorty in his magisterial generalising of very different textualities, we might still recognize that Laclau does have a misplaced faith in a complete theorization of ‘actuality’.
decision being related to the trace of the “wholly other”\textsuperscript{24} (Hillis Miller in Mouffe 1995, 222). For Laclau, even if the “trace of contingency” resides as “dislocation”\textsuperscript{25} within the structure, this trace seems too self-grounded and therefore easily claimed by the subject. To put it in deconstructive parlance, Laclau seems to prefer a notion of the trace-in-itself, or an ontologized trace, even if for deconstruction, the trace cannot be a determined ‘thing’ or a being, but always a materiality haunted by a specter and vice-versa. As is discussed in the previous chapter, the ‘trace’ is always only a representation; or, to be more precise, the non-rhythmic, irregular ‘step’ of representation. A claiming of this trace for a theory of decision therefore becomes only too easy a way to theorize the subject. If by construing such a notion of decision without any reference to the ethical pre-propriative (or the wholly other) Laclau only tries to stress the materiality of subject-positions, then that fails if one understands by ‘materiality’ an interaction between the ontological and the spectral. If one only tries to stay at the side of the ontological to be more material, one ends up being more idealistic, since the purely ontological would be as non-material as the purely spectral. If materiality consists in not only thinking within the limits of the possible, but also in straining the limits of a certain un-thought, through thought, then one needs to imagine a ‘cut’ even within the metaphor which apparently fixes or stops calculation, one needs to re-write decision as de-cision. De-cision\textsuperscript{26} does not only interrupt the smooth deliberation of speculative reason and theory, it also interrupts itself through a cut, both grounded and un-grounded. As Derrida replies to Laclau within the same debate, “if the decision is identification then the decision also destroys itself” (86). The problem for Laclau then consists in putting decision

\begin{itemize}
  \item \[\text{I, however do not agree with Hillis Miller when he thinks that there is a similarity between Laclau and Derrida in that both think that the subject “is brought into existence by decision” (Hillis Miller in Mouffe 1995, 223). As I hope will be clear below, Derrida does not have such a clear-cut notion of ‘decision’, and for him, it is rather de-cision, a cut within, and not a suture.\] \textsuperscript{24}
  \item \[\text{Laclau in Mouffe 1995, 56.}\] \textsuperscript{25}
  \item \[\text{‘Cision’ in the sense of the homonymic ‘scission’ which can mean cutting, severing, or cleavage. De-cision also reminds one the Heideggerian term de-severance representing the logic of de-distancing. See Chapter Two. De-construction the name follows the same mechanism of catachresis.}\] \textsuperscript{26}
\end{itemize}
beyond any double-bind and yet within ‘law’ or that which can be theorized. The
difference that for Laclau congeals between undecidability and decision can be said
to exist within decision itself, as its own unthought. Moreover it extends de-cision,
throws and stretches it in time, never reaching the fullness of adequately answering
to the call of the ‘other’, like that unthought which is also named ‘justice’ by
Derrida, which is not deconstructible, and yet materialises in the work of law, or the
‘being’ of law in time.

In the following I argue that precisely such an unthought needs to be
sharpened in thought, if one is to have any glimpse of the trace that grounds the
ethical in representation and de-cision. For example, the body is not needed to be
theorized in full to ‘know’ it’s ‘actuality’ since the actuality itself is a notion which
requires the excess not only of the ‘decision’, but also of the undecidable. Contrary
to what Laclau seems to propose, the ‘subject’ (if one sticks to the term, knowing its
paleonymy) gets a body not only in decision, but also in cutting itself off from that
moment of de-cision, being that ‘body’ which is extended toward that which is not
an extension of present calculations. I argue this through the notion of an incomplete
subject lingering in time. I would also like to refer back to the discussion of the
‘sensuous non-sensuous’ body taken up in the previous chapter where body cannot
be thought without that which strains its margins, a certain body-ness where body
matters through haunting. The body is haunted not by a pure non-body, but by
something that inscribes both body and it’s interruptions. To relate this to the words
of that famous song written by Paul Simon (quoted above), even if the ‘I’ lays itself
down as the bridge, that embodiment of the bridge traversing the aporia of
undecidability gets extended as a work, never quite being able to cross-over. A
ceaseless work always unfinished in time but intending an im-possible fulfilment at
each instant.

The Returning Revenant: Resisting the ‘Tragic’ Subject

In Specters of Marx, Derrida asks, what is the difference between
‘repetitions’ and (a concept of) the “first time” (Derrida 1994a, 10). But this exercise
is self-defeating since the moment one tries to figure any ‘first time’ into the
conceptual weave which depends on the generality of the repeatable instances, one also reduces it. And yet, there still remains the very thought of a ‘first time’ which cannot be ignored either. That lingering trace of a possible impossibility\(^\text{27}\) which both restricts and retains the trace of a ‘first time’ is also the coming of hauntology in the Derridian scheme. Hauntology does not only make the thought of a first time possible, it also signals its im-possibility since each first time is also the ‘last time’. Singularity houses origin, and the death of it, in the same instant (Derrida, 10). What then, of the simulacrum, of representation, if each node is a singularity? This puts us face to face with the \textit{aporia} we have been gestured toward all along, the one that stays between temporality of being and its divisibility in fully present units of ‘nows’. Might one not say that what is given to the being as such is only the work of the simulacrum or of the hauntology, which can never take ‘place’ (if it is singularity which only ever can)? In the classical way of staging this \textit{aporia}, the choice was extreme, between being and non-being, ‘nowness’ and ‘temporality’\(^\text{28}\). But what if one chooses none and yet tries to think an analytic open to a certain ‘questioning’\(^\text{29}\) which keeps to a lingering and precipitation of ‘being’? Clearly there

\(^{27}\)Derrida actually puts this much abused and misused expression in the title of an article, and shows how to philosophize about it within a limit, see “On a certain possible impossibility of saying the Event” (2007a). I personally remember strong objections from a few senior philosophers and feminists to this term at a national conference, which also indicated, to me, an obsessive rejection of logical impossibilities, a rejection structural to a kind of thinking.

\(^{28}\)As Derrida reminds, the usual way of looking or philosophizing misses the spectral since that stabilizes the work of the ‘ghost’. Derrida makes a bit of a fun of the scholarly figure of Horatio to stress this point “charging or conjuring him [it is still of the father] to speak, Horatio wants to inspect, stabilize, arrest the specter in its speech” (Derrida 1994a, 13).

\(^{29}\)I am using the word ‘analytic’ primarily with reference to the specific way Heidegger proposes \textit{Dasein} without reducing it to any commonsensical notion of the subject. This prompts the Derridian use of the expression “Heideggerian analytic of \textit{Dasein}” in many of his texts (for example see Derrida 2007, 352). This gets rid of the considerable problem that a language faces where its ambition is also to talk about the metaphorical articulation of thought itself. The “analytic” is the name for the search in writing for the ‘other’. It is an invention not sure of its destination and purpose, opposed to a “doctrine” or “revelation” which works with a certainty of intention and subject (Derrida 2007, 33). In “Psyche:
is no getting away from a thinking of divisibility of the temporal into settled present
nodes, since without that, ‘time’ would only be inflicted with non-being. The
question that deconstruction sets for itself then, would be this: how to think of nodal
points, stoppages in the lingering of being, but not as full presence? Différance, as
we have tried to show, is an inadequate name for such a (not fully) present
component of ‘being’. The non-rhythmic steps of time which cannot forget the trace
of presence and which are not to be mastered by full presence either. Derrida names
this analytic positioned in the ‘register of continuity or sur-vival’: ‘hauntology’; we
might note that at the ‘register of divisibility’, it is named ‘différance’. Let us step
back for a moment and take stock.

If thinking ‘being’ as a trajectory, which is “necessarily without heading and
without assurance” (27) is deconstruction’s only proposition, then it cannot be
radically novel, and Derrida does refer to the moment in the Heideggerian textuality
where this analytic appears. It is not far from the analytic of Dasein, but more
precisely it can be seen in Heidegger’s reading of the pre-Socratic ‘Anaximander
Fragment’ (Heidegger 1975), where ‘being’ is seen as a “jointure” given to the
necessary dis-junction of time. It is an echo of this basic move that Derrida reads in
Hamlet30 where the prince of Denmark wonders if it has come upon him to ‘mend’
the time that is ‘out of joint’. “Jointure” (Fuge) is Heidegger’s preferred word for
the Greek ‘Dikē’ and not ‘justice’ as some other translations would have it, since he
wants to stay clear of any “juridical-moral” notion (see Derrida 1994a, 27).
Therefore the “lingering awhile” (“je-weilig”, 28) of Being proposed by Heidegger

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30 The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (1602-1604) by William Shakespeare (Shakespeare 2003).
chalks out a passage which remains persistent in joining the disjointed time. ‘Being’, in its ‘lingering-awhile’, tries to remain in the gap of disjuncture, and yet it cannot totally traverse this gap, since that would only fill it with presence. On the other hand, if it does not give itself to such a work, then time remains ever dis-jointed and impossible. What then gives it purpose to make the journey? Reducing the conceptual model drastically one can get the following image: a certain ‘work’ (of ‘being’) trying to bridge the gap between two points, points which as if stand as markers of a passage, like two pegs holding two ends of a curtain, never quite revealing the scene, both producing the passage and giving it a certain tension. Derrida proposes that in this scene (also used by Heidegger), the former point, one which stays in the past is usually taken to be a mark of an originary violence or a ‘crime’, whereas the latter point, staying in the future promises a ‘justice’ which nullifies the originary ‘crime’. Derrida calls this structure essentially ‘tragic’, which depends on the placing of the ‘crime’ in the anterior:

There is tragedy, there is essence of the tragic only on the condition of this originarity, more precisely of this pre-originary and properly spectral anteriority of the crime – the crime of the other, a misdeed whose event and reality, whose truth can never present themselves in flesh and blood, but can only allow themselves to be presumed, reconstructed, fantasized. (Emphasis in original, 24)

This anteriority of crime fantasized into precipitation calls for the other desire\(^{31}\), that of justice, which is contingent on the crime and therefore works like a ‘vengeance’, Hamlet being the exemplary figure: “If right or law stems from vengeance, as Hamlet seems to complain that it does [...] can one not yearn for a justice that one day, a day belonging no longer to history, a quasi-messianic day, would finally be removed from the fatality of vengeance?” (25). Heidegger is implicated in this structure, for even if he tries to reject the word ‘justice’ and place the analytic of the lingering-awhile outside the ambit of law, he still imagines the passage perched

\(^{31}\) It might be worthwhile to remember here that Chanter sees desire as inextricably linked to subject’s tarrying in ‘time’. With the introduction of time in thinking subjectivity, she opines, “Desire – insatiable and infinite – comes to define the subject” (Chanter 2001, 178).
between dis-jointure and jointure, *Unfuge* and *Fuge*\(^{32}\). Deconstruction, on the contrary, retains and yet questions the ‘tragic’ in at least two ways. Before anything it doubts the futurity of justice. Derrida writes, “is this day [of justice as vengeance] before us, to come, or more ancient than memory itself?” (25). This doubt radically interrupts the ‘tragic’ by putting forth the possibility that justice might also belong to the realm of ‘memory’, or even be “more ancient” (25). Does this also not imply that the ‘crime’ on the other hand, can very well claim a placement in the future and therefore be rather a ‘desire’ than ‘fantasy’? Deconstruction however would not resort to such a simple reversal and instead place both (crime and justice) in the non-place that is indicated by the expression ‘more ancient than memory’, where desire and fantasy coincide. If memory works like inscription or writing then ‘justice’ thought as ‘more ancient’ might prefigure memory itself as mark of an erasure which can also be named ‘crime’. This considerably transforms the very concept of memory, making it undecidable if it is at all a chain of causal temporality which goes toward a future, where this future is an extension derivable from the present (and also existing before the present as a ‘past’). The assurance of linearity is no longer possible since there might very well be a ‘futurity’ which is more ancient than memory itself, producing memory through its own discontinuity. The trajectory of the ‘lingering-awhile’ then, cannot be certain of its placing and purpose. Moreover, and this is the second related departure of deconstruction from the ‘tragic’, undecidability stems from the fact that one can only think in the present, from within this present of (human) lingering which Derrida calls “today”, and not from any other place:

> If it is difficult, in truth impossible, *today*, to decide between these two hypotheses [of crime and justice], it is precisely because “The time is out of joint”: such would be the originary corruption of the day of today, or such would be, as well, the malediction of the dispenser of justice [...]. Is it possible to find a rule of cohabitation under such a roof, it being understood

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\(^{32}\) Derrida comments that this duo is not even outside the terminology of ‘law’: “Let us note in passing that *mit Fug und Recht* commonly means “within rights, “rightfully,” “rightly” versus “wrongly”” (Derrida 1994a, 26)
that this house will always be haunted, rather than inhabited by the meaning of the original? (Emphasis in original, 25)

The “house” is the closure of “today”, and its placing is structured like a haunting of the memory that remains, a memory that is not certain of a distinction between past and future, crime and justice, as well as fantasy and desire. It is from this gap of the ‘today’ that one calculates, where the question set by deconstruction has farrowed ‘time’ and therefore inaugurated a difference which cannot measure its place or stance. Derrida is distinguishing between a disjuncture that presupposes the ‘unjust’ at the origin and ‘justice’ at the future (the register of the tragic) and one that “opens up the infinite asymmetry of the relation to the other” (26), which can also be named ‘justice’, but a deconstructive justice. This other ‘justice’ , which does not depend on “the economy of vengeance or punishment” and therefore not “calculable and distributive justice” (26) is deconstruction’s step away from the tragic. Heidegger’s model does not let go of the time of the tragic, which reassures as if from above, giving the time of the ‘today’ some substance and measure and place, making it a fallen version of that meta-time. Any present being, then, is to be arranged and given a purpose with reference to that ‘tragic time’ above. Heidegger, therefore, without recognizing it, in effect adopts the Hegelian notion which he himself calls a ‘vulgar notion of time’ where “history, which is essentially history of spirit [...] falls (fällt) into time” (Hegel quoted in Derrida 1991, 25). Deconstruction’s separation from the Heideggerian model is palpable here. In a gesture of translation between

33 It is typical of deconstruction that it stays with the ‘name’, or the paleonymy around it, rather than trying to coin a new name, which would not escape the same structure either. Therefore Derrida persists with ‘justice’ trying to stage a catachresis, even if this can make way for confusion in inattentive reading, just like it has in the case of ‘writing’ or ‘hymen’. This makes one wonder about the (early) embracing of the unfamiliar in the name différance.

34 See previous chapter.

35 This Heideggerian re-turn to a transcendental time would be put under the scanner by Derrida most strictly in Of Spirit, where Derrida would show how for Heidegger the fall of ‘spirit’ into time comes as a decadence (Verfallen): “Fallen will no longer be the Fallen of spirit into time, but the lowering, the descent, or the degradation of an original temporalization into a temporality that is separated into different levels, inauthentic,
philosophy and literature, Derrida translates Heidegger into Shakespeare and finds that literature has an excess, that of the ghost, which always already conditions the ontological question (‘to be or not to be’). It is precisely this that produces Hamlet’s precariousness before a certain limit which cannot be crossed merely by calculative steps. It is a “limit” that “prevents one in fact from understanding the very things which it wants to explain: tragedy, precisely [...] the hesitation to take revenge, the deliberation, the non-naturality or the non-automaticity of the calculation neurosis, if you like” (emphasis added, Derrida 1994a, 30). This non-automaticity of calculation is a Derridian gloss on Heidegger, as the resistance of hauntology comes through:

This is where our question would come in. Has not Heidegger, as he always does, skewed the asymmetry in favor of what he in effect interprets as the possibility of favor itself, of the accorded favor, namely, of the accord that gathers or collects while harmonizing [...], be it in the sameness of differents or of disagreements [différends], and before the synthesis of a system? (Emphasis in original, Derrida 1994a, 32)

For Derrida, the lingering of the ‘Being’ does not ‘join’ anything because it works only between two absences, “what is no longer and what is not yet”, beyond which stays a time completely and wholly other, which can only be thought into existence as an anamnesis (30). The (non-) placement of ‘today’, therefore, cannot have a tension (like a tense cord held between two rooted ends), or any purpose until it names it’s ‘former’ and the ‘latter’ (and therefore places itself). The ‘lingering’ becomes tragic, if they are named ‘crime’ and ‘justice’ respectively, which, as is apparently the case with Hamlet, would be tied to the notion of a debt, a property handed over in a chain of patrimony. But Derrida proposes a different kind of debt, one that is not mastered by any property of the origin or injunction of the future, neither ‘pre’ nor ‘post’ but a logic of ‘ex’-appropriation, which works through the prosthetic supplement of an anamnesis, imagined as more ancient than memory improper...” (Derrida 1991, 28). And when this decadence would be likened by Heidegger to a spiritual decadence of the German people of his time (1920’s) compared to the time of the spirit above, Heidegger would indeed sound more vulgar than Hegel could ever be. Derrida shows this with a brutal force in Of Spirit (Derrida 1991).
where this imagination has a materiality as long as memory carries the trace of an intended image. The trace returns and haunts, not as non-material, but as inscription. This move distinguishes hauntology from any onto-theological structure (named ‘tragic’ by Derrida), and takes one to the much mis-read argument about “messianicity without messianism”\(^{36}\). But we would not go there. We ask instead the question of the subject, of agency in the context of spectrality.

The Derridian argument chalked above also critiques an uncritical assumption of the subject of decision. Hauntology would resist such a subject who would “risk [...] inscribing this whole movement of justice under the sign of presence”, like the Heideggerian reading does, proposing a justice done to the self through self-appropriation and therefore also appropriating the “proper of the other as presence” and therefore thinking the other as self-same (32). Derrida gestures instead to the persistence of staying with dislocation or “anarchy” of the given present and thinking ‘agency’ within that limitation, which would indeed even “risk evil” because there would be no “calculable insurance” (32). I want to make a pause here and underline two gestures we have encountered. First, the precipitation of an anamnesis which both is memory and produces memory, and second, the rejection of any ‘calculable insurance’ and therefore of any subject ensuring presence of things. How can the two go together? Is not the precipitation of a certain ‘revenant’\(^{37}\) also an assurance that something is, moves and gives purpose to being and time, and if so then can it not work as an insurance? It can, but not within the limits of ‘calculation’, and hence it is a different kind of insurance one is tracking here. If calculable justice in form of vengeance makes way for a subject of calculable insurance, then the ‘other’ justice “as incalculability of the gift and singularity of the an-economic ex-position to others” (26) must think of a different insurance altogether. Derrida calls this a “doing” which persists as a work without having the arrogance of being the agent of vengeance or restitution, different from an “action” which just fixes, joins, and appropriates the other in a gesture of giving

\(^{36}\) See Derrida in Sprinkler 2008, 250-254. Also see Derrida 1994a, 92.

\(^{37}\) In Latin ‘revenant’ means ‘returning’, it has etymological connection to the French ‘revenir’, or ‘to come back’, and therefore Derrida’s crucial later concept of l’avenir.
the other justice (32). Derrida’s discomfort with ‘action’ or simply with a
preponderance of the ‘act’ is manifest in other places of his oeuvre as well. For
example in Limited Inc (Derrida 1988) Derrida likens ‘action’ to ‘event’ and
remarks that the “value of the act (used so generally and analyzed so little in the
theory of speech acts), like that of event, should be submitted to systematic
questioning” (Derrida 1988, 58). He then widens the implication by pointing out that
in the “entire philosophical tradition” there is a curious support given to the fullness
of presence based on this notion of action and actuality of meaning, which he then
proposes to “defer” through the notion of iterability (Derrida, 58). Iterability
therefore, becomes the parallel of ‘doing’ in Derrida. The specter is also returning,
revenant, it works like iterability, and therefore empties out the place of the subject
of action, in the course of ‘doing’ its work, deconstructing the “philosophical
responses that consist in totalizing, in filling in the space of the question or in
denying its possibility” (Derrida 1994a, 36). But if this ‘doing’ is of the specter, or
of specters as Derrida insists, how can that be claimed by a ‘subject of doing’?
Several interlaced propositions are in order.

I. The visitation of the revenant is not separated from the one who is visited. From
within the limits of a present (as against past or future) lingering, of ‘today’. If one
has witnessed the ghost, then the ghost has pervaded and constituted the being of the
witness, and there cannot be any separation. The ‘cut’ affects the subject or the agent
as indicated earlier. Taking part in the work of iteration, the subject (if we keep the
term) is always already iterated as well.

II. It still falls on the ‘spectator’ to ‘speak’ to the revenant, and therefore there is an
impossible foothold of doing that is of the spectator, which the ghost or the structure
of iterability cannot fully ventriloquise. Derrida points out that Marcellus could not
speak to the ghost since he “did not know what the singularity of a position is”
(Derrida 1994a, 12).

III. But speaking to the ghost would also mean stuttering the work of ‘doing’ that
goes on through the revenant, and therefore it would be an ‘act’ of an ‘instant’ (and

38 We will see later how this critique influences Spivak’s conceptualisation of the scholar
who re-presents others.
not ‘doing’, in the register of ‘sur-vival) which stops ‘work’. This is the double-bind of the scholar. This *aporia* works very much like the ‘signature’ which cannot be an ‘act’ and a ‘doing’ at the same time; it “splits immediately into event and legend, and cannot be at one and the same time what it immediately is, event and legend” (Derrida 1984, 108). This “legend” is the ‘ghost’ in our discussion. When the scholar speaks to the ghost, ‘he’ reduces the work of the ghost (sur-vival in time) to an event, and the *ghost as work* cannot belong to him. Therefore, the ghost is like the ‘signature’, the very signature that one inscribes as one’s own, yet referring at the same time to a structure of repeatability which cannot be reduced to one signature only. In the logic of the signature therefore, implicated are both the event and the repetition (‘becoming legend’ of event), ‘singular I’ and ‘universal I’. Together they stage the “paradoxology of the singular mark” (Derrida 1992a, 58). The paradox consists in this: that one can only reply to the other by affirming the other (counter-signing), even if in doing so one tries to mark an uniqueness (signature), making an inimitable inscription proper to oneself. The scholar therefore, the moment he opens his mouth, is only countersigning the ghost that is both of the other, and of his own:

> if I had to reply (responsibly, that’s the point) to a different provocation or countersign a different singular work, signing but with a signature which countersigns and tries to respond in another way to the signature of the other [...] My law, the one to which I try to devote myself or to respond, is the text of the other, its very singularity, its idiom, its appeal which precedes me. (Derrida 1992a, 66)

If one has to think of the subject, one needs to think through this double bind of the signature. One can only affirm a signature by a counter-sign, and yet that must also make the other one’s own and therefore risk the violence of stalling the work. The “countersignature signs by confirming the signature of the other, but also by signing in an absolutely new and inaugural way, both at once” (67). Deconstruction, therefore, cannot totally reject the usual way of thinking the subject as the subject of

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39 I am indebted to Derek Attridge for these references (in Derrida 1992a, 2n3).
40 See Derrida 2002, 134, See below for discussion.
action. Even after all the critique of such a subject and its authorising, usurping violence, one must remember that a trace of that ontologization remains in the very structure of ‘doing’ or there remains a trail of the work of hauntology, just as the subject of action cannot really ever stop the play and would be always already haunted by the re-turning signature. How then, to think of both the unique and the recurrent within the same analytic? What materiality remains in the survival of the event? Before going into a discussion of other ways of thinking the subject along with the machine, I want to underline that any such effort to think a new analytic, keeping the name ‘subject’, would also be an exercise in paleonymy, in writing over the old inscriptions and meanings that always cling to any word.

Between Machine and Event: Folds of the Cut

Derrida is also tempted to make a theory of decision. But decision is always already cut-within (therefore de-cision) and it cannot place itself as an unique event or action. No decision is taken for the ‘first time’, every decision is taken based on previous experiences of decision-making. It cannot place itself as an unique event or action, for to survive as an event, it must slide into the axis of doing. It does that by cutting itself off from its first occurrence, by re-presenting itself. This ‘cut’ is also the mark of the work of the other in self. This is the double-bind of decision. For example, in a court of law the individual is deemed responsible for an action, even if the action is interpreted based on previous patterns. Therefore, ironically the newness and authenticity of a decision can only be recognized if it successfully cuts itself off from the unique event-ness and sur-vives in a matrix of repeatability.

“Whenever I say “my decision” or “I decide,” you can be sure that I’m mistaken”, Derrida contends, for the decision “should always be the other’s decision”\textsuperscript{41} (Derrida 2007a, 455). But if this decision of the other is always pre-figuring ‘my’ doing, then does that make me ‘mechanical’ in a certain sense, incapable of producing new acts on my own? In the following I will try to show how

\textsuperscript{41} This takes Derrida to a Levinasian conception of the other’s decision in self, a rout that we would not take, even if in ‘Chapter Five’ I discuss the issue in brief.
this double-bind of the machine and the event can be understood through a
discussion of the ‘textual’.

In “Typewriter Ribbon 2”, Derrida takes up the problem of textuality and
oeuvre in reading Paul de Man. For de Man, the text or the ‘work’ survives through
a resistance. This resistance which for De Man is a ‘material’ one, is the resistance
of the ‘performative’ (at once spontaneous and intentional) working in every
textuality against that context of the text which is mechanically reproduced, usually
known as the ‘grammar’. ‘Grammar’ therefore, becomes the mechanical dispersion
repeated automatically from which the text is ‘cut’ and curved by the intervention of
a performative signature, which intervenes through the linguistic equivalent,
‘rhetoric’. For de Man the machine “is like the grammar of the text when it is
isolated from its rhetoric, the merely formal element without which no text can be
generated” (Derrida’s emphasis, de Man quoted in Derrida 2002, 152). Derrida
wants to deconstruct this duality. Testing the margins of the closure within which
the performative subject can be thought, one finds that ‘pure performativity’ would
require a living being “speaking one time only, in its own name”, and “in a manner
that is at once spontaneous, intentional, free, and irreplaceable” (Derrida, 74). (We
are tempted to open a parenthesis here and note that the ‘animal’ is not mentioned
here, Derrida is rather tracing the event/machine binary in the interstices between
the organic and the inorganic, living and the non-living. One must also note that at
stake here is the ‘text’. Might this mean that the ‘textual’ can traverse the closure of
the ‘human’ or of ‘language’? We cannot pursue this topic here and must end this
parenthesis).

‘Oeuvre’ can mean both a ‘work’ (text, artwork) signed by a signatory (an
intending subject), or work as such (labour) which likewise presumes a matrix of
intentionality, being the product of it. But Derrida expands this meaning
considerably as he takes it up as a concept-metaphor through which the event and
the machine can be thought. The ‘work’ then seem to indicate the very crux of an
analytic of ‘being’ itself, as that which has come to sur-vive rather than remaining
lost in the abyss of meaningfulness. As if Derrida is reformulating the Heideggerian
question as, ‘why are there works at all rather than nothing’.

In this placing of the ‘work’ at the site of what Heidegger calls the ‘question of the question’, one may glimpse a formulation of a deconstructive analytic of the ‘subject’ (even if the name ‘subject’ would be put under erasure), I contend. But it is a slow brewing argument, and one needs patience in tracing its trajectory. Derrida first sets up the question as the question of the ‘oeuvre’ and asks, if it is the trace of an instant of ‘cut’ (and therefore trace of an erasure, ‘more ancient than memory’), or is it a work in time, which produces the ‘event itself”? He then goes on to write:

> Every surviving oeuvre keeps the trace of this ambiguity. It keeps the memory of the present that instituted it, but, in this present, there was already [...] the essential possibility of this cut – of this cut in view of leaving a trace, of this cut whose purpose is survival, of this cut that sometimes assures survival even if there is not the purpose of survival. (Emphasis in original, Derrida 2002, 134)

Therefore, the cut is not only a ‘present mark’, but also a ‘work’. Derrida thinks of the ‘cut’ which always already works also as the very possibility of thought itself, and thought cannot decide if the cut is the production of the event or produces it in effect, for it works “at once” both as “a wounding and an opening, the chance of a respiration” (134). This metaphor of a ‘respiration’ through an unnatural slit (caused by violence) or ‘wound’ likens the ‘cut’ to the survival or to machinelike repetitions, as well as to the figure of a living body, a body that bleeds each time it repeats the act of survival (respiration). Each time the opening of the wound comes as a new event, a fresh pain, each time its living ensures a continuity of the event beyond itself, making it only a quasi-event, an event-like analytic. Derrida writes that this ‘cut’ is “marked, like a scar, the originary living present of this institution – as if the machine, the quasi-machine were already operating, even before being produced in the world, if I can put it that way, in the vivid experience of the living present” (emphasis in original, 134). Note that we have already indicated such a

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42 Heidegger glosses on the question formulated by Leibnitz, reading it as a metaphysical query: “Why is there something rather than nothing” (see Stambaugh 1992, 47-48), putting the stress on the ‘is’ rather than on ‘something’.
‘cut’ marked by the hyphen which internally divides decision as ‘de-cision’. I have also mentioned the possibility of this metaphor (of the open wound) in relation to the argument of Louis Althusser. But in the case of Althusser, the ‘cut’ is used in a slightly different context. It means the desire of a system to be able to intervene into itself, in the process marking the ‘being-scientific’ of a system of thought. But here, we are after a broader generality which the metaphor of the ‘cut’ represents, being the very step of being, of re-presentation as such.

It is this ‘cut’ that ensures repetition, iteration. ‘Cut’ makes the work of representation machine-like. But at the same time this machination is intrinsic to the ‘organic’ too, since the ‘organic’ is said to produce decisions which are able to survive their one-time occurrences in being re-presentable as ‘decisions’. The proposition then follows: that it is not merely that the ‘machine’ produces ‘repetitions’ but instead the machine itself is produced by the work of the ‘cut’. This is a familiar deconstructive gesture of thinking a concept-metaphor which can traverse the aporia in thought without reducing it (even if the name itself is a reduction in thought). ‘Cut’ is such a concept-metaphor, as we have been trying to indicate, which now surfaces as “the condition of production for a machine” (133). It is not merely that the machine causes the survival of the work, of the oeuvre, and therefore can manufacture and master the living, or the organic which sur-vives. The machine itself needs a logic of mechanicity or formality to produce itself. What the cut introduces is not another machine, but what Derrida calls an “autonomy that is quasi-machinelike (not machinelike but quasi-machinelike)” a “power” of iteration, which is also a “serial and prosthetic substitution of self for self” (133). One might object that Derrida is just introducing another machine (of the ‘cut’), a machine before the machine, and stepping into a vicious circle. That objection misses the crucial point however, that what is being abstracted from the ‘machine’ in the name of the ‘cut’, is the “quasi machinelike” work that does not have the full presence of a logic of machination. Thinking of the ‘quasi’ or of the (analytic of the) ‘as if’ is a key deconstructive move of interrupting full presence in thought; it is also about...

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43 We have written decision as ‘de-cision’ also because de-cision logically goes through a temporal stretch along the duration of calculations and deliberations that lies before the decision as product.
proposing to think how a thought works before congealing into a full-fledged conceptual category. To refer to our previous discussion, this might be understood as an approach to the question: what works at the margin of the ‘machine’, how does the machine, which produces repetition, repeats itself? The ‘cut’ in this sense, cannot totally escape the machine (therefore it is quasi-machine like), and yet, it cannot be mastered by the machine (therefore the autonomy). It is a wound that is felt before “any other possible suffering or any other possible passion”, and yet it does remain “unfelt”, neutralized “by the “as if,” by the “as if” of this quasi, by the limit-less risk of becoming a simulacrum or a virtuality without consistency” (135).

I am inclined to propose that this crucial neutralization happens in thought, in the folding of work of abstraction on itself, in other words, in deconstruction. But how to fold the ‘cut’ onto itself? Is it also not a name and therefore ontologized? Deconstruction takes responsibility for this minimal ontologization, affirms it, and therefore the materiality of the ‘cut’. This ‘folding’, in the last instance, if I may put it that way, is also of the text (and not of any deconstructive intention outside of it).

This can be noticed in the earlier quotation from de Man, where Derrida deconstructs the machine-event binary (exemplified by the grammar- rhetoric duo) proposed by de Man and yet also does stress the fact that in the text of de Man, grammar is already qualified by the expression ‘as if’ and therefore by the logic of the quasi (see above). We can go back to the Derridian text now:

The machine is cut as well as cutting with regard to the living present of life or of the living body. The machine is an effect of the cut as much as it is a cause of the cut. (Emphasis in original, 133)

What the ‘cut’ interrupts is the apparent self-producing power of the machine, by putting the quasi-machinelike logic between the machine and its self-production. It

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44 The other way of thinking about the ‘quasi’ would be to think of the Heideggerian analytic of Dasein, which as if works before the ontological question, and therefore it is quasi-human like. This corresponds with the following comment on the ‘quasi’ in the case of the machine: “the place of a thinking that ought to be devoted to the virtualization of the event by the machine, to a virtuality that, in exceeding the philosophical determination of the possibility of the possible (dynamis, power, Möglichkeit), exceeds by the same token the classical opposition of the possible and the impossible” (Derrida 2002, 135).
therefore, also cuts any organic production which is apparently devoid of the machine or of the inorganic. It is only through the ‘cut’ that the ‘oeuvre’ survives, and that the “oeuvre takes place” (“cela oeuvre”, it works, the work works)\textsuperscript{45}. One can now recognize the complicity of the Heideggerian reading of the German ‘es gibt Sein’ (literally: it gives being) with the Derridian thinking of the oeuvre/work. In the case of Heidegger, it comes down to the thinking of the analytic of Dasein which is not reducible to the human subject (and yet, as Derrida would show, essentially human). What might be such an analytic of the ‘work’, an analytic that follows the recurring question we have articulated as ‘who/what works’? How would it be different from the Heideggerian analytic?

One notes here the distinction that Paul de Man makes between ‘confession’ and ‘apology’, in reading Rousseau’s Conferences\textsuperscript{46}. For de Man, (the act of) ‘confession’ is always confession of something, making a reference to an “extraverbal moment”\textsuperscript{47}, whereas on the contrary apology has only language for its witness and cannot be verified outside of the discursive. This has a direct reference to the constative-performative distinction proposed by J. L. Austin where the former makes, what Austin calls a “historical reference” and therefore is descriptive (see Austin 1975, 6n3). The crux of the performative then lies in its self-referentiality, or in what de Man terms the “inner process” (de Man 1979, 281)\textsuperscript{48}. Derrida calls this distinction into question, wondering, “if the confessional mode is not already, always, an apologetic mode”, and, by extension, if the performative resides at the heart of the constative (Derrida 2002, 110). It is to be noted that Derrida does not simply merge the two categories proposed by de Man via Austin. Instead he proposes this very distinction to be “an impossible, in truth undecidable, distinction” (Derrida, 110). “In truth”; as if undecidability resides in truth. The specificity of the moment of the performative is therefore to be drawn from the undecidable “originary or pre-originary synthesis without which there would be neither trace nor inscription” (110). Derrida then goes on to propose that every statement claiming to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Derrida 2002, 151. See also ‘Chapter Three’.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Conferences (1769/1782, Rousseau, 2000) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).
  \item \textsuperscript{47} De Man quoted in Derrida 2002, 109.
  \item \textsuperscript{48} Also quoted in Derrida 2002, 109.
\end{itemize}
refer to a certain verifiable truth also does take the form of a testimonial and starts with an “implicit performative” referring to the self as witness. “In my address to another, I must always ask for faith or confidence, beg to be believed at my word”, Derrida reminds (111). But this proposition also cuts reverse, for no performative can be purely self-referential, in its very appeal there is a confession of a distance that it still has from its own self, precisely the gap that it tries to suture through appeal and faith. What does this tell one about the ‘subject of decision’? It seems that the event needs the support of a living subject who can say ‘I do’, ‘I’ being representation of a singularity, and yet the performative of the ‘I do’ remains implicated in a grammar-like program (remember the ‘signature’). The ‘machine’ reduces the performative, making a performative like ‘I apologize’ merely a site of “automatic and null efficacy” (134). The machine works at the very heart of the ego and the ‘I do’ only tries to justify itself “with an a posteriori that is a priori programmed” (emphasis added, 134). Even the singular, if it takes place, comes under the authority of a ‘cut’ which it must survive to be, and therefore it remains ‘before the cut’ both in the sense of being prior, and ‘before the law’ of the cut, in the sense of being subjected to it. The cut makes the event survive the ‘first time’ and re-present itself. The cut is affirmative in the sense that without its machine-like work, the performative cannot be produced as such. And therefore it both remains as “a threat at the heart of the promise” and “makes possible the expectation or the promise” itself (135). The performative ‘I do’ is not beyond this structure even if considered as one singular moment of intentional utterance, the jump or the sudden coming of a ‘subject’. The cut makes such a ‘subject of action’ impossible since it ‘cuts’ it from its origin, at the very instant it occurs, arrives, flashes, and therefore

49 One might remember here that for J. L. Austin, ‘I apologize’ is an exemplary case of the performative utterance where no external reference is needed, and just the “happiness” achieved by the expression ensures its “success” (Austin 1975, 47). De Man also tried to use this logic in separating between two kinds of confession, where confession in the “mode of revealed truth” would refer to a verifiable evidence (therefore constative), and that “in the mode of excuse” would simply be verbal (therefore performative, quoted in Derrida 2002, 107-8). But even after furrowing the act of confession, ‘cutting’ it further, de Man cannot let go of the self-referential speech. This has a similarity to the Husserlian ‘inner speech’ which Derrida reads elsewhere. See ‘Chapter Three’.
cutting it from the authenticity of the performative, from the singular, from the “eventness of the event” (113). This is also a “terrifying aporia” (134), because it reminds one how even the freest choice is infected by a mechanicity, a mechanistic logic which can always cut the subject of decision. It is like a “negative effect” that resides at the crux of each promise. The automaticity threatens to rob my act of its singularity or eventness, but it also does “reassure me” that the act would be recognizable and meaningful precisely by not being singular. Derrida significantly likens this to a “theft”, and describes as the “usurpation of the singular I by the universal I” (emphasis in original, 134). But the “singular I” would be inoperative as only a self-referential instance, if it does not refer to a logic of repeatability. Is not the verification of one’s own signature is also faking it, mechanically? The inorganic, in this way, makes the organic disseminate. All these point to an impossibility of retaining the term ‘subject’ in its received paleonymy which tends to tilt too much toward the ‘event’ or to the ‘organic’. How then to think of the matrix of intentionality and ethicality together? In the next section I propose a deconstructive analytic, the analytic of the ‘who’ which might take one closest to thinking a subject from within deconstruction. I have so far retained the word ‘subject’ even if it indicates only to one side of the analytic we are pursuing, that of the ‘event’, and not ‘sur-vival’. But one needs to take both into consideration if one is to answer the recurrent question, ‘who works’.

The Deconstructive Analytic of the ‘Who?’

As Derrida notes, concept of a structure always prefigures concept of a subject. A subject which cannot simply be liquidated, even if many sees that threat in the commonsensical readings of ‘post-structuralism’. For Derrida, the nervousness at the apparent dissolution of the subject and the subsequent hankering and battle cry to get it back might also be only a ruse to hide a certain ‘structure’ which cannot forget the subject in the first place. “One would have to ask”, Derrida reminds, “if the structure of every subject is not constituted in the possibility of this kind of repetition one calls a return” (Derrida 1994, 256). What seems even more important for Derrida is the way the question ‘who?’ sets up the lineament of the
subject, putting it even before any law-like structure or matrix of experience. This subject can therefore return in the time of law, with a claim to presence that cannot simply be validated let alone liquidated by law. Derrida is trying to recognize a symptom which has a much broader sweep and sway as a notion of the subject in the philosophical discourse: “If over the last twenty-five years in France the most notorious of these strategies have in fact led to a kind of discussion around “the question of the subject,” none of them has sought to liquidate anything,” (256) and in fact, the “ontological questioning that deals with the subjectum, in its Cartesian and post-Cartesian forms, is anything but a liquidation” (emphasis in original, 257). It is a conspicuous “doxa” that makes one conclude that “all [...] philosophers think they have put the subject behind them” (257).

Derrida however wants to keep the question ‘who?’ where the stress is on the questioning gesture (275-76). This gesture follows an analytic of invention which is not certain of what comes even before the mark of the question even if that is given to it as a problematic, much like the Heideggerian analytic of Dasein. The ‘who?’ cannot be thought without relying on the mark of the question, whereas the subject of decision can be. The subject of decision is not responsible to the ‘question’, since it always already takes a stance or a place beyond the ‘question’. The analytic of the ‘who?’, it should however be noted, cannot fully defy emplacement. It would still be haunted by the ontology of a place (as a mark or a ‘name’), and therefore by a certain presence. Therefore, even if the ‘who?’ is distinct from the subject, it does keep a trace of it. Staying with the question is not easy since the ‘question mark’ which is an inscription in writing, grounds the ‘question’ as well as makes it separable from the ‘who’ (there is always a space graphically representable between the ‘who’ and the ‘?’). The analytic of the ‘who?’ will always carry this materiality or dependence on ‘writing’.

Derrida talks of yet another way of thinking this analytic of the ‘who’ where the question itself is preceded by an affirmation:

But there is another possibility that interests me more at this point: it overwhelms the question itself, re-inscribes it in the experience of an “affirmation”, of a “yes” or of an “en-gage” [...], that “yes, yes” that answers
before even being able to formulate a question, which is responsible without autonomy, before and in view of all possible autonomy of the who-subject, etc. (Derrida, 261)

This affirmation is not of the self but of the other, in this scene the relation to the self must go through the step of ‘différance’ (261). The other does not deny the self, the other puts the self at a distance from itself, withdraws it from itself. Seen from this perspective, the ‘who’ has a singularity that is only grounded in the very naming of it. To put it in a reduced form, one decides on a self, or answers the question ‘who’ in effect closing the door on the face of the ‘who’ that lies still beyond.

Therefore Derrida would ‘agree that identification is indispensable, but this is also a process of disidentification’ (Derrida in Mouffe 1995, 86). The decision must be capable of destroying itself in the face of the incalculable other, even if the other produces it.

Let us now sum up and try to squeeze everything into the compactness of a few theses. The ‘singular’ is not the individual who is self-identical but that which puts the other even before the self; ‘other’ being the anamnesis\(^{50}\) of the ‘singular’ which also gives it a certain materiality interrupting its singularity and vice-versa. Each pulls the other into writing or materiality, but neither alone is to be mastered by the other. It is in this sense that we have mentioned earlier that the ‘trace’ cannot be the unit or building block of existence. ‘The singularity of the “who”’, Derrida writes, ‘is not the individuality of a thing which would be identical to itself, it is not an atom’, but instead it is that ‘which dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other’ (Derrida 1994, 261). The motif of singularity is more than a simple translation of the question ‘who?’, since it disseminates and gathers itself as the other, this division of the self in re-presentation is inherent to the thought of the singular. One might object that this is just a detour to achieve that same self-appropriation, only through the prop of the other. Deconstruction, however, tries to resist that possibility, even if it cannot, fully. Rather than re-appropriation, this circle that does not close (unlike the Hegelian metaphor of the circle which is enclosed in full presence) indicates a work of ‘ex-appropriation’.

\(^{50}\) For ‘anamnesis’, see ‘Chapter Two’, note14, also see previous occurrences.
is the “logic” of the “trace or of *différance*” that “determines this re-appropriation as an ex-appropriation” (269). If this sounds tautological, then one needs to go back to the painstaking analytic of the trace yet again. As we have been repeating, the crux of deconstruction consists in thinking the ‘trace’ as a work slanted toward an outside and immateriality and yet haunted by materiality and therefore an incomplete work folded onto itself albeit with an excess. Likewise, the ex-appropriation folds the ‘analytic of the who’ on itself, same as being both the writing and the surface being written on. This move also underlines the need to think the analytic as an extension in space and time, the impossible spatio-temporality of *différance*. A “subjectile” much in the figure of the typewriter ribbon, which is also an experience of the ‘question’, through but also beyond the “Heideggerian protocols” (270). It is here that Derrida makes at least one very palpable distinction between the deconstructive analytic and the Heideggerian *Dasein*. Heidegger seems to operate on a wholesale critique of calculative reason, whereas *Derrida only deconstructs the ‘calculable’ and not calculation itself*. It might be conjectured that the crucial specificity of deconstruction lies in its reliance on calculation and its persistence in going through the work of calculations, even that of the subject. The point is not to stop calculation, the crux is rather to think of the ‘incalculable’ as not merely an extension of the ‘present of the calculation’. It is this ex-appropriation of calculation that makes the question survive beyond both a notion of the calculable and a mere critique of calculative reason. Calculation in this sense does not simply paralyse action for the love of “play”, or to “neutralize decision”, but the incalculable produces “responsibility” and “ethico political decision”, even if they are never “reducible to calculation” (273). Decision has to pass through the undecidable and everything that such im-possible figures represent to get beyond the

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51 I use the term ‘fold’ in its Derridian sense, which is used to explain many figures, most notably the ‘hymen’ which is “at once its own inside and its own outside inside; between the outside and the inside, making the outside enter the inside and turning back the antre or the other upon its surface” (Derrida 1981a, 229).

52 The Derridian penchant for using metaphors in explaining a concept is by now evident.

53 “There has to be some calculation,” Derrida states, “and this is why I have never held against calculation that condescending reliance of ‘Heideggerian’ haughtiness” (Derrida 1994, 273).
authority of the subject who cannot usurp the whole responsibility and ethicality of it. Each decision, in going through the incalculable trace of the other, also faces the other’s de-cision. In the same volume from where we quoted Laclau earlier, Derrida replies to Laclau in the following terms:

I would say that once one poses the question in that form [question of subject through decision] and one imagines that the who and the what of the subject can be determined in advance, then there is no decision. In other words, the decision, if there is such a thing, must neutralize if not render impossible in advance the who and the what. If one knows, and if it is a subject that knows who and what, then the decision is simply the application of a law. (Derrida in Mouffe 1995, 86)

It is this ‘law’ of appropriation through which the subject of decision claims presence and it is this that the work of ex-appropriation would keep at bay. The ex-appropriating trail cannot be “absolutely stabilized in the form of the subject” since the ‘subject’ assumes “presence, that is to say sub-stance, stasis, stance” (Derrida 1994, 270). It is the excess that is the hearing/being-heard of the trace of the other. This excess would resist any stasis of this analytic.

Resisting the Subject: Materiality of the ‘Who?’

By now it is clear that Derrida is using that same logic of the supplement to think the event and the machine, or the complicity of the two. If the performative of the ‘singular I’ cannot get free of a mechanical re-production then it also gets its ontology and survival from that very machine-like work. The trail of this survival is also a certain materiality that never congeals as ‘matter’. Derrida is attentive to make this subtle difference between ‘matter’ and ‘materiality’. If the former has a claim to full presence then the latter is the trace or trail of the work that both is inside and outside of ontology, the trail without which no ‘work’ would exist. When Derrida talks about the ‘work’ he does not merely mean the act of the ‘singular I’ or the subject, but thinks a minimal intentionality that ‘works’ toward producing events, which is also machine-like in the process of repetition. To simplify matters I have
called it a ‘minimal intentionality’, but a better metaphor might be that of the ‘cut’ which indicates both to a structure of intentionality and a mechanical repetition. This ‘cut’ always already comes to being as an excess that exceeds the merely mechanical, and grounds the merely intentional. In this way the ‘cut’ is a quasi-event as we have discussed above. Where does this ‘cut’ originate? In the setting of the ‘aporia’, answers Derrida, where the aporia does not arrest movement, but initiates it. In this very specific sense, the ‘aporia’ is the key theory of movement and change, and should take that place in the corpus of Derrida which ‘dialectic’ takes in that of Marx:

Paralysis arrests, whereas aporia, at least as I interpret it (the possibility of the impossible, the “play” of a certain excess in relation to any mechanical movement, oriented process, path traced in advance, or teleological program), would be the very condition of the step [pas], or even of the experience of pathbreaking, route (via rupta), march [marche], decision, event: the coming of the other, in sum, of writing and desire. (“Provocation” in Derrida 2002, xvii)

This formulation only makes it difficult still to hold on to the received definition of the ‘subject’, most of the time understood as a human individual, a juridico-legal entity. The basic problem of such a naming is that it does away with the question ‘who’ (who works/takes the step/desires?). Deconstruction however tries to stay with that question, and therefore tries to experience the work (of ‘trace’, ‘step’, ‘cut’ etc) rather than definitely answering who works. This difference is key to understanding the deconstructive resistance to a theory of the subject. I want to reiterate the similarity of this move with the Heideggerian analytic of the Dasein, where Dasein is an ‘analytic’54, a trajectory of a basic ‘being-thrown’ which is “neither subjectum nor objectum” (emphasis in original, Derrida 2007, 352). Yet, Dasein also has a finitude, and this finitude makes the trajectory accessible in writing, even if this analytic is not reducible to “the common and metaphysical characters of human existence or experience (that of man as subject, soul or body, ego, consciousness or unconscious)” (Derrida, 352). I am trying to pose the

54 See above.
deconstructive tracing of the ‘cut’ or of the question ‘who’ as such an analytic. Like *Dasein* it is ‘open’ to the question of its own being and constitution, even if it can only pry open the question by subjecting itself not to ‘presence’, but to a lingering ‘work’. But unlike the Heideggerian *Dasein* the ‘who’ is never sure of its own dissociation from the closure of the human subject which always haunts it as a materiality or trail of ontology. The Heideggerian *Dasein*, if one remembers, is staunchly opposed to “the thing, to the metaphysical determination of thing-ness, and above all to the thingification of the subject, of the subjectivity of the subject as supposed by Descartes” (Derrida 1991, 15). It is for this reason, that the Heideggerian analytic of *Dasein* still retains “certain essential traits” of the cogito or the classical subject of consciousness even if it cannot be “reduced” to them (Derrida 1994, 254). But in affirming its complicity to all such ontology of the subject, the deconstructive analytic of the ‘who’ takes part in the risk of calculation, and does not evade it.

There is yet another important way in which the deconstructive analytic we are trying to get at is different from the analytic of *Dasein*: the way it thinks its relation to the ‘question’ it tries to guard. In deciding to guard the question (of the ‘Being’) is not Heidegger already taking a ‘decision’, and therefore limiting the opening to the question? Derrida asks, “This decision, this call or this guarding: is it already the question?” (9). This again leads us to the threat of ontologization which always haunts the ‘work’ of deconstruction, and any such analytic. I have tried to raise this point several times in the course of our argument, and have identified the trail of this ‘threat’ as a certain materiality. It would be difficult to claim this materiality for any (human) subject of decision or consciousness, before recognising it also as a production of the very ‘work’ that spills its margins. This spilling-over is partly mechanical and not entirely similar to what we have encountered as a ‘subject of decision’ above. How to understand this materiality which is both a de-cision and a sur-vival through machine-like production? In his reading of Paul de Man, the text we have been pursuing, Derrida refers to materiality at least in two ways. Firstly, it is to refer to the materiality of the ‘letter’ that de Man proposes. According to de

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55 Derrida repeatedly notes how “*Dasein* finds itself given the task of preparing a philosophical treatise on the question: ‘‘What is man?’” (Derrida 1991, 15).
Man, it is this ‘cut of the letter’ that creates the event of the textual out of mechanical repetitions of the ‘grammar’. He sides with this cutting, performing ‘letter’, or with the ‘rhetoric’ which is organic. Derrida however, insists on thinking not through either of the two sides (‘grammar’ or ‘letter/rhetoric’), but instead highlights the ‘work’ that goes on in-between the two, which produces and constitutes both, and names the trail of this work a “materiality without matter”, akin to a “formality without form” (Derrida 2002, 151). In siding with the ‘letter’ de Man is more ‘materialist’ than he is ‘formalist’, whereas Derrida holds on to the production of each, and therefore nods to neither of the sides if they are merely thought as fully present. Therefore materiality and not matter, formality and not form. It is also a “passive resistance”, Derrida mentions elsewhere (Derrida 2002, xxxiii). Ironically, this resistance is not of the decision, or of the ‘subject’, but thoroughly against such claims to ‘power’. This passivity is of the ‘form’, of the ‘machine’ so to say, which “marks the limit of a possible or a power, more precisely, of an “I can” or a “we can”” (xxxiii). It would be a fallacy to think of this ‘resistance’ as a simple resistance to the ‘subject’ of decision or agency, since this is also the resistance which writes the subject through its work, much like the writing of memory through a passive resistance of the ‘scene of writing’. But is it possible to dissociate the ‘writing’ from the ‘scene’ where it is written, the ‘power’ (of ‘I can’) from the resistance which both produces and hinders it? This takes us closer to the deconstructive analytic we are trying to work toward.

The other Derridian analysis of materiality comes up with reference to the figure of the ‘lost ribbon’ along with the metaphor of the ‘typewriter ribbon’ which I have already alluded to. This ribbon appears in Rousseau’s _Confessions_ as the lost object of desire which Rousseau steals and thinks of as a substitution of his desire.

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Still, Derrida decisively names this section in his text ‘materiality’, and even if we know he means formality too, that part of the heading is hardly ‘named’. Why? It seems to me that Derrida sides with ‘materiality’ even if the obverse would be as logical and valid. This choice of a ‘name’ (materiality) records deconstructions footprint on the side of materiality, affirmation and life, I believe.
for a woman, Marion. De Man gives Rousseau a transparent reading\(^{57}\) and thinks of the ribbon as a “free signifier”\(^{58}\) devoid of any ‘use value’ as such. This conclusion is supported by the proposition that in an act of theft one steals in order to appropriate ‘exchange value’ and not the ‘use value’ of an object. But in this way, de Man robs the ‘thing’ of its trace of materiality (which he would otherwise accord to the textual), omitting not only the fact that the ribbon was mentioned by Rousseau himself as ‘old’ and therefore indicating to a certain archive of memory and ‘use’, but also that the very act of exchange already presupposes it to be a “sexualizable signification of ornament and fetish” (Derrida 2002, 115). It is as if the metaphor of the ‘woman’ can be sublated (\textit{aufhebt}) through the circulation and exchange of an object belonging to her, merely as ‘pure signifier’, as if this exchange does not leave a trail of desire that is of the ‘man’, which one might unpack\(^{59}\). Derrida uses this opening also to think of the ribbon as having an inscription of its own, much like the ‘typewriter ribbon’ which both “produces and archives” events as textual, therefore material events (114). The figure of the typewriter ribbon therefore is both ‘writing’ and the ‘surface written on’, and has a marked similarity to the Freudian memory as the ‘scene of writing’, where the scene itself is produced by the very inscription that is inscribed on it\(^{60}\). This scene is not merely limited to the psyche of the individual or the collective, not even within the horizon of “anthropology”, one is urged to think beyond, “in the horizon of the scene/stage of the world, as the history of that scene/stage” (Derrida 2001, 288). Also in the axis of ‘work’ (the scene works), Derrida considerably blurs the authority of the ‘subject’ in reading the Freudian scene:

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\(^{58}\) De Man quoted in Derrida 2002, 148. Also see Derrida, 81.

\(^{59}\) This critique would be taken up in the next chapter in much more detail. In general this is also Derrida’s objection to Jacques Lacan’s insistence that ‘the letter always arrives its destination’ in ‘The Purveyor of Truth” (Derrida 1975). The cutting edge of the letter in de Man that produces the event, and the letter that always finds its non-place in Lacan, then, might have a complicity in forgetting and remembering too much about the ‘sexual’.

\(^{60}\) See “Freud and the Scene of Writing” in Derrida 2001.
There is no writing which does not devise some means of protection, to
protect against itself, against the writing by which the “subject” is himself
threatened as he lets himself be written as he exposes himself. (Derrida 2001,
281-2)

The word “subject” (or its paleonymy) is guarded by the use of the double quotes,
making ‘him’ work both as writing and the surface written on, as memory.
Therefore the subject as memory also works like a body, an archive. This body made
of the ‘materiality’ of the ‘mark’ or inscription is also the precipitation of the
spacing of ‘Darstellbarkeit’ (ability to be represented) Derrida contends (275). This
is the figure of the sensuous non-sensuous body that we have discussed in the
previous chapter. Between the inscription of an ‘use’ and of ‘use in exchange’ what
matters is a difference of two inscriptions. If (the prior) ‘use’ is a body, then it
cannot evade the haunting of exchange (that apparently comes latter), and likewise
exchange cannot be empty devoid of the inscription of ‘use’. ‘Body’ then, resides
not in the pre-propriative exclusively and cannot be fully essential, neither can the
‘sign’ be fully empty. To put the thesis in a slightly different way, between body and
its re-presentation, what lies is not a spacing, but another body-like inscription. The
‘spacing’ of representation then, is not merely between bodies but body-like in itself.

**Re-presentation is an embodiment.** This view of the body however, would need
further sharpening which is taken up in the last two chapters.

**Conclusion: More or Less than a Subject**

At stake then, is a materiality that remains, not as permanence but as
resistance or inscription of any knowing and being, in short, of re-presenting. The
materiality of such re-presenting inscriptions and bodies would have the dual work
of being the “support” of the scene and the “resistance” which produces the scene.
“What is the body, or even the materiality”, asks Derrida, “that confers on this
inscription both a support and a resistance?” (Derrida 2002, 114). Derrida opines
that this *inscribing-inscribed upon* ribbon is “surely” a subject but both “more or
less than a subject” (Derrida, 122). ‘More’, since it inscribes and produces events,
‘less’, because it also archives and gets inscribed upon. Derrida is deconstructing
thus the crucial body-mind binary that works in the theory of the ‘subject’. It is generally taken for granted that the subject archives, he is the master of the archive, where the archive is a passive thing to be added on or manipulated. But through the figure of the ribbon which works like a ‘memory’ always open to new inscriptions, it is shown that just as memory can have a body, the body itself is not completely dissociated from inscription. The body, in its mechanical routines and practices is not merely the surface inscribed upon but it is inscribing as well, so much so that the two cannot be separated from each other: ‘body/archive’ from the ‘work of new inscription/event’. One therefore broaches a thought of the ‘body’ or of ‘materiality’ when one thinks change or exchange. But that might only be the thought of a subject-like structure or a quasi-subject. That is why we have proposed to suspend the word ‘subject’ and use instead the ‘analytic of the who or what’. This accounts for the reduction of this analytic into human individual only (even if one only works within such a closure, just like one always can think only from within the ‘present’ time), and opens the analytic up to other metaphors, like the ‘body’ or the ‘archive’ or the ‘machine’. The thinking of the who and what together opens up the question to something which appears to be older than this distinction itself, to that which deconstruction would call the “restance” or the remains that puts the whole analytic in motion. ‘Restance’ is a name for that figure of thought which, “being “nothing,” no being, thus not at all reducible to the substantial or essential permanence of what remains [...]undoes] the ontological question” (Derrida 2002, xxxii). Elsewhere Derrida mentions that the restance is more of a remainder rather than mark of a permanence (see Derrida 1988, 52). Therefore, Derrida insists that one thinks of the ‘restance’ primarily as a materiality without matter, even if it is also a formality without form. Deconstruction then, has this curious tendency, at least in the writings of Derrida, to side with the body or with materiality, even if only in naming (also see above).

If there is any opening to an ethicality of deconstruction then that might be in claiming the thought of this materiality or this restance body. There cannot be any definite grammar of such a claim, or verifiability, but one might be able to try and work in sharpening the ‘un-thought’ of this ‘materiality’. In Of Spirit, Derrida quotes Heidegger,
The more original a thought [...] the richer its Un-thought becomes. The Unthought is the highest gift (Geschenk) that a thought can give. (Quoted in Derrida 1991, 13)

‘Ethicality’, I propose, is the trace (also in naming) of such an ‘unthought’ which can only be made sharper and richer through the thinking of its limits and material trails, but can never be thought or calculated in itself. The ‘trace’ subverts any claim to full agency and “is the erasure of selfhood, of one’s own presence” (the trace is partially erasable, the fully unerasable trace will be “no trace”), but at the same time, it is also constitutive of a threat of the “disappearance of its disappearance” (Derrida 2001, 289). In this way, the trace also threatens absence with presence (it is also not fully erasable)\(^\text{61}\), un-thought with thought, and this threat cannot be exhausted by any economy. The subject, subsequently, can also be the name for a limited or an impatient calculation which stops short of straining the limits of the calculable, never quite knowing the trace of the un-thought or the incalculable. Therefore the deconstructive quip: the ribbon is ‘more of less than the subject’ (see above). This is a familiar deconstructive formula with a tinge of irony in it, also often expressed by Derrida as ‘\(\text{plus de metaphor}\)’, which means both ‘more metaphor’ or ‘excess meaning’ and ‘no more metaphor’ or \(\text{incalculably less than full meaning}\), I contend.

The ‘excess’ part of this figure is often underlined in reading deconstruction, but the other point about ‘less than full meaning’ is as important. It tells one that the cut of the margin cuts inside as well, and therefore not only that the outside is not to be grasped but even the inside is incalculable, and both ways, “the field is never saturated” (Derrida 1982, 220). This is somewhat similar to the distinction Gilles Deleuze makes between ‘exteriority’ and ‘outside’, the former being still within the reach of the epistemological weave of the inside whereas the latter “concerns force” and is in no way reducible to the inside\(^\text{62}\). Deconstruction, as if, tries to spell both

\(^{61}\) Even if in the commonsensical reading of deconstruction, trace would be the cut of absence in presence, or something that cannot fully be materialised. We are in turn proposing that the opposite is as important. This is also the other side of Freud’s ‘mystic writing pad’. The pad retains the trace. See “Freud and the Scene of writing” in Derrida, 2001.

\(^{62}\) See Das 2010, 6-7, and Deleuze 1988, 86-87.
these meanings in thinking the trace or the ‘cut’: A. ‘other than inside’, and B. ‘uncanny other in the inside’; and therefore must set up an *aporia* rather than make an analytical separation.

The ‘who’ or ‘what’ materialises both inside and outside, a work (or its itinerary in re-presentation) which we have tried to call an ‘analytic’. In the next chapter I look more closely into the materiality of the work of this analytic and consider if that work can at all be claimed for the feminist politics. It would seem, that if politics is only of the ‘possible’, calculated inside a law-like structure, then the thought of an im-possible feminist ethics would have to reach for the ‘unthought’, otherwise named ‘justice’ in the deconstructive parlance. But how exactly to pose this ‘justice’ through but beyond law within a feminist fold if feminism is yet another politics bound to a law-like structure? And if feminist ethics is necessarily im-possible then does it also presume the materiality of a certain trace? These questions await us in the next chapter. We then, at last, have come to the a point where we can embark on a direct engagement with notions of ‘feminist ethics’.