

RENVOI
**(A NOTE ON THE ENIGMA OF
DERRIDA'S *DIFFERANCE*)¹**

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Les renvois renvoient aux renvois.
(Derrida 1967, 421)²

1.

From the outset of his magnum opus, *De la grammatologie*, which appeared in 1967, Jacques Derrida links the absence of the transcendental signified to what he calls the process of the signifying renvoi.³ Almost forty years later, in his last book, entitled *Voyous. Deux essais sur la raison* (2003), he explains the lack of the very idea of democracy by having recourse to the democratic renvoi. I advance the hypothesis that the process of renvoi accounts for a structural law that Derrida had formalized in 1967—if not earlier, as we will see—and whose resources he continued interrogating up to his latest work. To put this hypothesis to the test, I will trace the irreducible traits that the two evoked and chronologically distant renvois share. On my reading, renvoi describes the necessary relation that, within a system of signification, the generalized structure of renvoi (a trace, as we will see) entertains with an X (sense, difference, the other, democracy, and so forth) that presents itself in the presence of something other, that is, the renvoi itself. This process is double and indefinite so long as, by definition, the renvoi to X is also a renvoi to another renvoi. According to Derrida, this double and indefinite renvoi touches upon the most enigmatic knot of his philosophical writing, namely, the irreducible synthesis of the economical and the non-economical, of the same and the other, in *différance*. Finally, what seems to motivate the renvoi, its force, is X itself, more precisely, a demand for presence that is associated to X and thus drives double and indefinite renvoi.

2.

In “Force et signification” (originally published in 1963 and then included in *L'écriture et la différence*, 1967), for the first time Derrida takes up the term *renvoi* in order to formalize the necessary relation that I described above. In a key moment of the first part of this text, in which he

highlights the metaphysical presuppositions of structuralism, Derrida dissociates writing from the classical, namely, Leibnizian, paradigm of divine creation. Furthermore, he welds this dissociation with the legacy of the concept of writing that Husserl elaborates in his late work *Origin of Geometry* (1936).⁴ At this point, Derrida recalls the earlier interpretation of the *Origin* that he had developed in the introduction to his French translation of Husserl's text (1962).

It [to write] is also to be incapable of making meaning [*sens*] absolutely precede writing: it is thus to lower meaning [*faire descendre ainsi le sens*] while simultaneously elevating inscription (...) To write is to know that what has not yet been produced within literality has no other dwelling place, does not await us as prescription in some *topos ouranios*, or some divine understanding. Meaning [*sens*] must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning [*sens*]. This is what Husserl teaches us to think in *The Origin of Geometry* (...) It [writing] does not know where it is going, no knowledge can keep it from the essential precipitation toward the meaning [*sens*] that it constitutes and that is, primarily, its future [*son avenir*]. (Derrida 1978, 11)

In §§6-7 of his introduction, Derrida explains how the geometric ideality ("just like that of all sciences," Derrida 1989, 76) passes from an originally intrapersonal emergence (namely, "the subjective egological evidence of sense," 63) to its ideal objectivity through the mediation of language. In §6, he points out that here Husserl, who "seems *redescending* [my emphasis] toward language" and, therefore, more generally, toward culture and history, "does exactly the opposite" (77). "The return to *language*," Derrida continues, "brings to its final completion the purpose of the reduction itself" (77), by liberating ideality from the psychological life of a factual individual community ("the inventor's head," 78), in which it has emerged first, and by letting it be what it is (namely, other than itself). Therefore, language is "constitutive" with respect to sense, which, otherwise, would remain "ineffable and solitary" (78).⁵ However, still another reduction is required to accomplish the passage of sense from the originally psychological formation to its historical constitution. In §7, Derrida observes, in the wake of Husserl, that only writing permits the full accomplishment of the ideal objectivity of ideality, by unbinding the latter from an actual subjectivity in general, that of the inventor as well as of the community of his fellows, and thus by granting the ideality's traditionalization, that is, the possibility of its omnitemporal and omnispatial reactivation.⁶ Returning to "Force et signification," it seems that, by recalling the legacy of the *Origin of Geometry*, Derrida reinscribes his recent interpretation of Husserl into the elaboration of a more general concept of writing. Husserl's understanding of writing as well as of the genesis of sense comes back here to account for the absolutely constitutive trait of writing and thus to demarcate it from the poor creativity of Leibniz's God, whose writing would merely consist in transcribing what is already in act, that is, prescribed, in his understanding or logos.⁷

In the passage quoted at the beginning of the section, Derrida develops the implications of a non-classical and non-Leibnizian concept of writing for a system of signification in general. He describes signification as a process in which the signified X, namely, sense (*sens*), presents itself (in the sense of dwelling, becoming itself, coming to light, etc.) in the presence of a signifier, namely, an inscription or, more generally, writing. Derrida designates this process as a movement of precipitation, so long as writing is constitutive for X and thus there is no prescribed sense that reappropriates writing as if it presented itself in its own presence. X presents itself, in the presence of writing, as irreducibly non-present.⁸ For this reason, writing refers (*renvoie*) to X as to that which is not present yet, which is to come, the to-come (*l'avenir*) of writing itself. Anticipating a language to which Derrida will have recourse later and that, in fact, unfolds the implications of renvoi, we may suppose that writing *announces* X, or, the latter *announces itself* in writing, as not yet present or to come, as the to-come of writing. The renvoi that binds writing and X is double, to the extent that X announces itself in the presence of writing and not in its own (by means of writing), and thus it is indefinite, to the extent that the lack of sense motivates writing and thus the renvoi of writing to writing. Derrida makes explicit this consequence of the process of signification a few pages later, in the second part of the text, when he raises the following rhetorical questions:

In this demand for the flat and the horizontal, what is intolerable for structuralism is indeed the richness implied by the *volume* [*c'est bien la richesse, l'implication du volume qui est intolérable au structuralisme*], every element of signification that cannot be spread out into the simultaneity of a form. But is it by chance that the book is, first and foremost, volume? And that the meaning of meaning [*le sens du sens*] (in the general sense of meaning and not in the sense of signalization) is infinite implication, the indefinite referral [*renvoi*] of signifier to signifier? And that its force is a certain pure and infinite equivocality which gives signified meaning [*sens signifié*] no respite, no rest, but engages it in its own *economy* so that it always signifies [*faire signe*] again and *differs*? (Derrida 1978, 29)

This passage accounts for the process of signification, the sense of sense, as double and indefinite renvoi.⁹ X only presents itself in the presence of the renvoi as what is to come, and thus through the renvoi of the renvoi to the renvoi, through indefinite renvoi.¹⁰ Derrida focuses on a force that would engage X in the process of signification and indefinite renvoi, a force of signification and renvoi. He identifies this force as the pure and infinite equivocality that he had evoked earlier on, in the pages dedicated to the elaboration of a non-classical concept of writing.¹¹ In these pages, he explains how, in literary creation, pure speech passes into inscription, through a rewriting of the Leibnizian scene of creation, which constitutes the paradigm of classical writing. Derrida suggests that, like the Leibnizian essences (namely, the possibles), speech and significations are constituted by a claim or demand (Leibniz's *exigentia*) for the inscription that would bring them into existence or actuality. However, in contrast to Leibniz, he identifies speech and significations as an “autonomous

overassemblage of meanings, a power of pure equivocality [*une sorte de sur-compossibilité autonome des significations, puissance d'équivocité pure*]” (8). For what concerns our reading, this means that they demarcate themselves from Leibniz’s essences, which are organized into possible universes made up of possible compossibles, that is, of possibles that can exist together, universes among which the will of God chooses the best one. Within the framework of Derrida’s non-classical and non-Leibnizian writing—in the wake of Husserl—speech and significations do not precede writing but demand for an inscription that would be absolutely constitutive. This demand, or force, is what motivates or drives the process of writing: the demand of a sense that presents itself in the presence of an inscription. By pointing to this demand as to the force of signification and renvoi, in the passage quoted above, Derrida seems to highlight a structural trait of the process of signification and indefinite renvoi. An irreducible demand or force constitutes X, that is, the very non-presence of X to itself, X’s constitutive lack, which motivates or drives the renvoi and the renvoi of the renvoi to the renvoi.¹²

3.

Derrida offers the most elaborated formalization of the process of the renvoi in *De la grammatologie*, in the section of Part I Chapter II that is dedicated to the reading of Saussure’s thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign. Here, he ties together the figures of the renvoi and the trace by establishing an essential relationship between them that he will conjure up again in the late formulation offered in *Voyous*.¹³ In Chapter II, Derrida unfolds a close reading of Saussure’s general linguistics in which he highlights the deconstructive resources that shake the metaphysics and the reduction of writing implicit in the very elaboration of this linguistics. In the aforementioned section, Derrida proposes replacing the concept of arbitrary sign with the structure of the instituted trace as the shared possibility of all systems of signification. At this point, he describes the trace as a structure of renvoi, thus making explicit those irreducible traits that we have found inscribed in the earlier formalization of the signifying renvoi. I will reread Derrida’s passage, which has been quoted and examined extensively, from the singular perspective of the renvoi.

One cannot think the instituted trace cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears *as such* and thus permits a certain liberty of variations [*liberté de variation*, freedom of variation] among full terms. The absence of *another* here-now, of another transcendental present, of *another* origin of the world appearing as such, presenting itself as irreducible absence *within the presence of the trace* [*dans la présence de la trace*, my emphasis], that is not a metaphysical formula substituted for a scientific concept of writing. This formula, beside the fact that it is the questioning of *the* metaphysics itself, describes the structure implied by the “arbitrariness of the sign,” from the moment that one thinks of its possibility short of the derived opposition between nature and convention, symbol and sign, etc. These oppositions have meaning only after the possibility of the trace. The

“unmotivatedness” of the sign requires a synthesis in which the completely other [*tout autre*] is announced as such [*s’annonce comme tel*]*—without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity—within what is not it.*¹⁴ (Derrida 2016, 50-51)

The trace as a structure of *renvoi* is constituted by a synthesis, that is, by the irreducible relationship between the *renvoi* and the X that presents itself in the presence of the *renvoi*. Derrida designates this X (difference, the other and the wholly other) as that which appears, presents, or announces itself as such: by differing from itself, as an irreducible absence, or in the presence of something other. In other words, the synthetic structure of the trace bears within itself the process of double *renvoi*, by which X becomes itself at the same time as is yet to come. In unfolding the synthetic structure of the trace, Derrida has recourse to the interpretation of Husserl’s concept of the *alter ego* that he puts forward in “Violence et métaphysique. Essai sur la pensée de Emmanuel Lévinas” (originally published in two parts in *Revue de métaphysique et morale*, 1964, and then included in *L’écriture et la différence*). In Part I of this text, Derrida distances himself from Lévinas’s interpretation of the *alter ego* as the neutralization of the absolute alterity of the other, by focusing on key articulations of Husserl’s elaboration in *Meditation V*. He argues that, conversely, only Husserl’s transcendental description of the experience of the other as the *alter ego* allows us to account for the relationship between two finite ipseities and thus with the other as other. Indeed, from the outset of his analysis, Derrida interprets the appearance of the other for an ego as a process of *renvoi*.

He [Husserl] is concerned with describing how the other as other, in its irreducible alterity, is presented to me. Is presented to me, as we will see later, as originary nonpresence. It is the other as other which is the ego’s phenomenon: the phenomenon of a certain non-phenomenality which is irreducible for the ego as ego in general (the *eidos ego*). For it is impossible to encounter the *alter ego* in very form of the encounter described by Levinas, impossible to respect it in experience and in language, if this other, in its alterity, does not appear for an ego (in general). (Derrida 1978, 153-154).

In the examined passage from *De la grammatologie*, Derrida designates the synthetic structure of double *renvoi* as the formula of the contestation of metaphysics. A few pages later, he makes this designation explicit by identifying metaphysics as the powerful desire to put an end to the process of *renvoi* at one time or another. We already know that double *renvoi* is irreducibly indefinite, that is, the *renvoi* of the *renvoi* to the *renvoi*, which carries with itself the structural relationship to X. Therefore, the evoked contestation of metaphysics consists in bringing to light what a metaphysical understanding of signification wishes to limit, the process of double and indefinite *renvoi*. Derrida writes:

Peirce goes very far in the direction that we have called the de-construction of the transcendental signified, which, at one time or another, would place a reassuring end to the redirection [*renvoi*] from sign to sign. We have identified logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence as the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for such a signified. Now Peirce considers the indefiniteness of redirection [*renvoi*] as the criterion that allows us to recognize that we are indeed dealing with a system of signs. *What broaches the movement of signification is what makes its interruption impossible.* (Derrida 2016, 53)

De-constructing the transcendental signified thus means pushing the *renvoi* that is at work in a system of signification to its limits, or, in other words, uncovering the structural law of signification. Metaphysics constitutes a reassuring limitation for the irreducible process by which an X presents itself only in the presence of a *renvoi* and, consequently, through indefinite and uninterrupted *renvoi*. From the perspective of double and indefinite *renvoi*, metaphysics wishes to neutralize the force of signification, namely, the structural demand or lack of X.

4.

In his last book, *Voyous*, Derrida conjures up the figure of the *renvoi* in order to describe a certain irreducible fate associated to the concept of democracy. In Part I Chapter III, dedicated to “The Other of Democracy, the ‘By Turns’: Alternative and Alternation,” he proposes a formalization able to account for the structural law that undergirds some historical vicissitudes of democracy. In particular, he takes up the case of the suspension of the electoral process in Algeria, which he presents as follows:

The Algerian government and a large part, although not a majority, of the Algerian people (as well as people outside Algeria) thought that the electoral process under way would lead democratically to the end of democracy. They thus preferred to put an end to it themselves. They decided in a sovereign fashion to suspend, at least provisionally, democracy for its own good, so as to take care of it, so as to immunize it against a much worse and very likely assault. (Derrida 2005, 33)

According to Derrida’s formalization of this case, here we have the “example” of “an autoimmune pervertibility of democracy,” by which “to immunize itself, to protect itself against the aggressor (whether from within or without), democracy thus secreted its enemies on both sides of the front” (35). “Its only apparent options,” Derrida continues, “remained murder and suicide; but the murder was already turning into suicide, and the suicide, as always, let itself be translated into murder” (35). At this point, the *renvoi* enters the scene. Derrida remarks that the formalized process “always consists in a *renvoi*” (35).¹⁵ In what follows, he rewrites the autoimmunitary process as a structural effect of the double and indefinite *renvoi* that we have seen at work in the writings of 1967. The

renvoi at stake here is “democratic renvoi” (35) or the renvoi of democracy, so long as the X of the renvoi is democracy itself and as this X, its essential non-presence or lack, drives the renvoi itself.¹⁶ Derrida points out that the autoimmunitary process of democracy operates according to (a) spatial as well as to (b) temporal renvois (such as expulsions, exclusions, interruption of electoral process, etc.), through which democracy finds itself outside itself and beyond its presence. Derrida offers the following formalization of the two kinds of renvoi:

(a) Operating in space, the autoimmune topology always dictates that democracy be sent off [*renvoyer*] elsewhere, that it be excluded or rejected, expelled under the pretext of protecting it on the inside by expelling, rejecting, or sending off to the outside the domestic enemies of democracy (...) (b) But since the renvoi operates in time as well, autoimmunity also for putting off [*renvoyer*] until later the elections and the advent of democracy. (Derrida 2005, 35-36)¹⁷

This elaboration of democratic autoimmunity in terms of renvoi carries with itself a set of implications. Democracy presents itself in the presence of a spatial or temporal renvoi and thus as irreducibly non-present and yet to come. For this reason, this renvoi is double and indefinite. Democracy itself, that is, the structural demand or lack of democracy, motivates or drives democratic renvoi, the presentation of democracy as non-present and yet to come, and the renvoi of the renvoi to the renvoi. For Derrida, democratic renvoi constitutes an irreducible determination of the concept of democracy, which is understood as characterless and plastic—as an X—in the wake of Plato.¹⁸ We may read this thesis as the contestation of the metaphysical interpretation of democracy that wishes to put an end to democratic renvoi. Derrida extends the deconstruction of the transcendental signified to democracy by suggesting that democracy itself, like the X of signification, only announces itself as such, as a free concept, that is, as non-present to itself and yet to come. Therefore, the following paragraph may constitute an elaboration of the previously examined formalizations of the general structure of the renvoi.

This double renvoi (sending off—or to—the other and putting off, adjournment) is an autoimmune necessity inscribed right onto [*à même*] democracy, right onto the concept of a democracy without concept, a democracy devoid of sameness and ipseity, a democracy whose concept remains free, like a disengaged clutch, *freewheeling*, in the free play of its indetermination; it is inscribed right onto this thing or this cause that, precisely under the name of democracy, is never properly what it is, never *itself*. For what is lacking in democracy is proper meaning [*sens propre*], the very [*même*] meaning of the selfsame [*même*] (*ipse, metipse, metipsissimus, meisme*), the it-self [*soi-même*], the selfsame, the properly selfsame of the it-self. Democracy is defined, as is the very ideal of democracy, by this lack of the proper and the selfsame. And so it is defined only by turns, by tropes, by tropism. (Derrida 2005, 36-37)

Democracy is a free or plastic concept, a concept without concept, an X. Therefore, there is neither proper meaning nor ipseity of democracy. Democracy presents itself as such, namely, as X, and thus through democratic renvoi. The ultimate thesis of this deconstruction of democracy is, for Derrida, “the lack of the very idea of democracy: a certain true idea of democratic truth” (Derrida 2005, 36). Democratic renvoi and non-presence of democracy cannot be dissociated, as he puts it: “the incompleteness and essential delay, the self-inadequation of every present and presentable democracy, *in other words* [my emphasis], the interminable adjournment of the present of democracy” (Derrida 2005, 37).

As anticipated at the moment when renvoi entered the stage, Derrida is interested in the irreducible relationship between the values of renvoi and those of *différance* (another key figure of Derrida’s work, which he addresses explicitly in the essay entitled “*Différance*,” originally published in 1968 and included in *Marges de la philosophie*, 1972).¹⁹ In his late pages, he seems to suggest that democratic renvoi touches on what he had designated in “*Différance*” as the most obscure point and the enigma of *différance*. He rewrites this enigma by developing further his formalization of democratic renvoi. Here we have the most explicit affirmation of the double structure of the renvoi in general as the renvoi of/to X, constitution and suspension of X, presentation of X in the presence of another, self-becoming and self-differing, structural non-presence, and so forth. Derrida describes the synthesis of these two movements as the articulation of the economy of the same with the experience of the other (as other), where the democratic X is at once and in the same place ipseity and the other, the X of all systems of signification. Democratic renvoi, as the essential self-inadequacy and indefinite renvoi of democracy, allows us to think those movements together and at once. Derrida writes:

This renvoi of democracy is thus still very much related to difference. Or if you prefer, this democracy as the sending off of the putting off, as the emission of remission [*envoi du renvoi*], sends us or refers us back [*renvoi*] to difference. But not only to difference as deferral, as the turn of a detour [*tour du detour*], as a path that is turned aside [*voie détournée*], as adjournment in the economy of the same. For what is also and at the same time at stake—and marked by this same word in difference—is difference as reference or referral [*renvoi*] to the other, that is, as the undeniable, and I underscore *undeniable*, experience of the alterity of the other, of heterogeneity, of the singular, the not-same, the different, the dissymmetric, the heteronomous. (Derrida 2005, 38)

This ultimate elaboration of the process of renvoi responds to the most difficult task associated to the thinking of *différance*, as I suggested above. In the quoted passage from *Voyous*, Derrida refers implicitly to a text from “*Différance*” in which this task is announced.²⁰ In his early text, Derrida wonders how it is possible to think “at once” (*à la fois*) and “together” (*ensemble*) the two features of *différance*: “the economic detour which, in the element of the same, always aims at coming back

(...) to the presence that have been deferred by (conscious or unconscious) calculation” and “the relation to an impossible presence, as expenditure without reserve (...) the entirely other relationship [*rapport au tout-autre*] that apparently interrupts every economy” (Derrida 1982, 19). This articulation of the economical and the non-economical, of the same and the other, which constitutes the synthetic structure of *différance*, is also, for Derrida, what makes impossible to think *différance* itself. Finally, he points to his reading of Bataille, developed in the essay “De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale – Un hegelianisme sans réserve” (1967, then published in *L'écriture et la différence*). There, he suggests, we have a rigorous and scientific attempt to articulate (*mettre en rapport*) the two movements of *différance*.²¹ Therefore, returning to our reading of *Voyous*, we may observe that democratic renvoi and, more generally, the renvoi tout court, account for the structural articulation of ipseity and otherness, for the structural non-presence of ipseity.

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² For the English translation, see Derrida 2016, 324: “References refer to references.”

³ See Derrida 2016, 7: “There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references [*renvois*] that constitute language. The advent of writing is the advent of this play.” I will not translate *renvoi* into English as if it were an untranslatable, as if it resisted translation. On this point, see what Derrida writes about Schelling’s word *In-Eins-Bildung* in the essay “Théologie of traduction,” 1985 (Derrida 2004, 68-69). Fighting the resistance of *renvoi*, translators have resorted to multiple solutions (also in the same text): reference, referral, deferral, sending off, send-off, putting off, remission, etc. As we will see, the untranslatability of *renvoi* is a necessary effect of its double and indefinite structure.

⁴ For an overall interpretation of this moment in “Force et signification” and, in particular, of Derrida’s elaboration of his implicit sources (such as Leibniz, Hegel, Feuerbach, Freud, and Althusser), permit me to refer to the Introduction of my forthcoming volume on dissemination: *Germes of Death. The Problem of Genesis in Jacques Derrida* (2018).

⁵ From this paradoxical evidence Derrida concludes that the relationship between language and sense as well as the one between the factual and the transcendental need to be reformulated: “The paradox is that, without the apparent fall back into language and thereby into history, a fall which would alienate the ideal purity of sense, sense would remain an empirical formation imprisoned as fact in a psychological subjectivity—in the inventor’s head. Historical incarnation sets free the transcendental, instead of binding it” (Derrida 1989, 78).

⁶ Cf. Derrida 1989, 87-89.

⁷ Cf. Derrida 1978, 9-10.

⁸ For a further elaboration of the movement of signifying precipitation, see Derrida’s remarks in the opening essay of *La dissemination* (1972), entitled “Outwork, prefacing.” He describes signifying precipitation as the movement “that pushes the preface to the front” (Derrida 1981, 20) and makes the latter irreducible to semantic saturation, that is, to the teleological reappropriation of it that would be at work within the Hegelian text. He writes: “If it would be ludicrous today to attempt a preface that really was a preface, it is because we know semantic saturation to be impossible; the signifying precipitation introduces an excess facing (un *debord*) (‘that part of the lining which extends beyond the cloth,’ according to Littre) that cannot be mastered; the semantic after-effect cannot be turned back into a teleological anticipation and into the soothing order of the future perfect; the gap between the empty ‘form,’ and the fullness of ‘meaning’ is structurally irremediable, and any formalism, as well as any thematism, will be impotent to dominate that structure” (Derrida 1981, 20-21).

⁹ For the determination of the sense of sense as a historical object (that is inscribed, namely, engraved in the world), see Derrida's introduction to Husserl's *Origin*: "If the sense of geometrical sense is Objectivity or the intention of Objectivity, if geometry is here the exemplary index of being scientific, and if history is the highest and most revelatory possibility for a universal history (the concept of which would not exist without it), then the sense of sense in general is here determined as object: as some thing that is accessible and available in general and first for a regard or gaze" (Derrida 1989, 64).

¹⁰ I limit myself to remarking that Derrida had imagined a set of infinite renvois (*renvois infinis*) in his *mémoire* entitled *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl* (written in 1953-1954 and published only in 1990). Here he takes up the concept of renvoi from Pfeiffer and Levinas's translation of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* (1953) and, in particular, of *Meditation II*, §38 ("Passive and Active Genesis"). In a passage from this section, Husserl resorts to the concept of the intentional renvoi (*Verweisung*) to describe the structure of the genetic constitution of sense: "Yet, without putting ourselves back into the realm of passivity, to say nothing of using the external psychophysical point of view of psychology, we can, the meditating ego can, penetrate into the intentional constituents of experiential phenomena themselves—thing-experiencing phenomena and all others—and thus find intentional references [French translation: *des renvois intentionnels*] leading back to a 'history' and accordingly [*ces renvois*] making these phenomena knowable as formations subsequent to other, essentially antecedent formations (even if the latter cannot be related to precisely the same constituted object). (Derrida 2003, 144). Commenting on this passage in his *mémoire*, Derrida suggests that the intentional renvois evoked by Husserl are "in principle infinite" (Derrida 2003, 143). In fact, he explains, a passive synthesis always precedes an active one and thus the latter cannot ever assimilate absolutely the existence that is pre-constituted in the former. Rather, it can encompass that existence only as being already constituted. Cf. Derrida 2003, 142-149.

¹¹ See note 4.

¹² In a later passage from "Force de loi" (1990), Derrida reconstructs the scene of responsibility in judging in a way that resonates with the scene of responsibility in modern writing that I have just examined. In this passage, Derrida finds the force of deconstruction, understood as juridico-political transformation, in the disproportion between justice and its historical and determinate interpretations. It seems to me that here, as well as in "Force et signification," which, evidently, offers a matrix for later developments, the same kind of force is at work. In the final sentence of the aforementioned passage from "Force de loi," Derrida writes: "For in the end, where would deconstruction find its force, its movement or its motivation if not in this always unsatisfied appeal, beyond the given determinations of what one names, in determined contexts, justice, the possibility of justice?" (Derrida 2002, 249).

¹³ See, for instance, Derrida 2005, 39: "If every send-off [*renvoi*] is differential, and if the trace is a synonym for this send-off [*renvoi*] then there is always some trace of democracy ..."

¹⁴ The text continues as follows: "*Announces itself as such*: there we have all *history* [*c'est là toute l'histoire*], from what metaphysics has defined as 'non-living' up to 'consciousness,' passing through all levels of animal organization. The trace, where the relationship with the other is marked, articulates its possibility in the entire field of being [*étant*], which metaphysics has defined as the being-present [*étant-présent*] starting from the occulted movement of the trace. The trace must be thought before being [*étant*]. But the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself as self-occultation. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself. This formulation is not theological, as one might believe somewhat hastily. The 'theological' is a determined moment in the total movement of the trace. The field of being [*étant*], before being determined as the field of presence, structures itself

according to the diverse possibilities—genetic and structural—of the trace. The presentation of the other as such, that is to say the dissimulation of its ‘as such,’ has always already begun and no structure of being [*étant*] escapes it.” In this second part of the text, Derrida seems to rewrite Heidegger’s contestation of metaphysics by insisting on the occulted movement of the trace and thus on its structure of double and indefinite *renvoi*.

¹⁵ The translators here choose to keep the French *renvoi* and supplement it with what follows: “... *renvoi*, a referral or deferral, a sending or putting off” (Derrida 2005, 35).

¹⁶ On this point, Derrida writes a few pages later: “We could multiply ad infinitum these examples [of democratic *renvoi*], and I mean ad infinitum, since they are produced by democracy itself” (Derrida 2005, 37).

¹⁷ Focusing on the irreducible link between the immunitary pervertibility of democracy and the process of the *renvoi*, Derrida observes a *propos* of spatial *renvoi*: “Democracy protects itself and maintains itself precisely by limiting and threatening itself. Depending on the governing syntax or grammar, the inevitable *renvoi* can signify simultaneously or by turns a sending off of [*renvoi de*] the other through exclusion and the sending off or referral to [*renvoi à*] the other, respect for the foreigner or for the alterity of the other. It could be shown concretely, with regard, for example, to the problems of immigration, whether with or without assimilation and integration, that these two contradictory movements of *renvoi*, of sending off, haunt and autoimmunize one another by turns” (Derrida 2005, 36).

¹⁸ For the thesis of the free concept of democracy, see Derrida 2005, 24-27.

¹⁹ See Derrida 2005, 35: “The figure of the *renvoi* belongs to the schema of space and time, to what I had thematized with such insistence long ago under the name spacing as the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space. The values of the trace or of the *renvoi*, like those of *différance*, are inseparable from it.”

²⁰ This text begins with the following remark: “Here we are touching upon the point of greatest obscurity, on the very enigma of *différance*, on precisely that which divides its very concept by means of a strange cleavage ...” (Derrida 1982, 19).

²¹ See Derrida 1982, 19: “Elsewhere, in a reading of Bataille, I have attempted to indicate what might come of a rigorous and, in a new sense, ‘scientific’ relating [*mise en rapport*] of the ‘restricted economy’ that takes no part in expenditure without reserve, death, opening itself to nonmeaning, etc., to a general economy that *takes into account* [*tenant en compte*] the nonreserve, that keeps in reserve the nonreserve, if it can be put thus. I am speaking of a relationship between a *différance* that can make a profit on its investment [*retrouve son compte*] and a *différance* that misses its profit [*manque à retrouver son compte*], the *investiture* [*la mise*] of a presence that is pure and without loss here being confused with absolute loss, with death.”