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The question of an appropriate philosophical response to „global terrorism": Derrida and Habermas

How to respond philosophically to „terror" and „terrorism"? This has been for some time an increasingly unavoidable question on a planet where space has shrunk, not only for international travellers in the multicultural world of postmodernity, but for those intent on exporting „terror" as well.[1] The „terrorist" attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States on *September 11*, 2001, have triggered such responses in various quarters,[2] but in my judgement few could be as philosophically significant as those on the part of Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas – until the time of Derrida's death in October 2004 arguably the world's two most important living thinkers – brought together by Giovanna Borradori[3] in exemplary manner. Here I shall concentrate more on Derrida's contribution than on Habermas's because I believe that it is significant and far-reaching in a more multidimensional manner than the German philosopher's.

Why should it be the case that the question of a philosophical response to terrorism is ineluctable? One answer to this question is that „terrorism" appears to challenge the very notion of reason, especially in its Enlightenment

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[1] There is a strange ambivalence about the fact that a figure such as Osama bin Laden, who represents an extremist Islamic group with *premodern* beliefs (that is, religious beliefs which are characteristic of a pre-Enlightenment world) uses electronic means of communication, such as television and internet websites, which represent what Hardt / Negri describe as the hallmark of *postmodernity*, namely, „informatization". HARDT, Michael and NEGRI, Antonio: *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 2001, 280–300. It is further well-known that television footage broadcast soon after *9/11* shows bin Laden wearing what appears to be a technologically advanced Timex sports watch – ironic for someone who opposes everything representing the (post-)modern world of rapid technological progress. Steger's „deconstructive" analysis of this phenomenon brings many of these ambivalences to light, especially in relation to globalization. STEGER, Manfred: *Globalization: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003, 2–7.

[2] See SORKIN, Michael / ZUKIN, Sharon (eds.): *After the World Trade Center. Rethinking New York City*. New York: Routledge 2002; OLIVIER, Bert: *11 September 2001: A change in the status of the image*. In: South African Journal of Art History 17 (2002) 140–143; OLIVIER, Bert: *After the World Trade Center: Architecture at the crossroads*. South African Journal of Art History 18 (2003) 94–103.

[3] BORRADORI, Giovanna (ed.): *Philosophy in a time of terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2003.

guise. After all, to invoke the historical Enlightenment (or enlightenment as a process) amounts to a reminder that there once was a collective trust in reason as an „enlightening" power, that is, as a force to combat the „darkness" of superstition, fanaticism and barbarism at various levels, including the scientific, the social, the political and the artistic. Both Habermas and Derrida are what one may describe as „philosophers of enlightenment", and of what may be called a „new" Enlightenment, even if their philosophical „styles" or approaches are as different as can be. While they seem to be in agreement that there is a chasm separating justice and power,[4] for instance, their ways of approaching this issue diverge fundamentally, with Habermas putting his trust in the normative power of constitutional democracy, and Derrida deconstructing the complex relationship between justice and law. It is therefore not surprising to find that important „Enlightenment" themes are addressed, very differently, in their respective responses to this, the most devastating terrorist attack in history, as I shall try to show.

It is by no means easy to convince everyone that Derrida is a champion of enlightenment[5] – Habermas himself resisted this idea strenuously, arguing that Derrida is guilty of erasing the „genre difference" between philosophy and literature in favour of „universal textuality", in this way vitiating philosophy's capacity for „solving problems" by fatally assimilating it to the „world-disclosing" function of art and literature.[6] But the persistence with which Derrida has addressed questions of undeniably „enlightenment"-provenance, such as those concerning truth and justice,[7] seems to have convinced even Habermas – by the time that Borradori approached him and Derrida with a view to including interviews with both in a philosophical book on *September 11* – that, his criticism of Derrida's specific philosophical approach notwithstanding, he is, after all, on the side of reason and enlightenment.[8]

One pertinent manifestation of Derrida's affiliation with the movement of enlightenment, is his response to a question by Richard Kearney about a

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4 HABERMAS, Jürgen: *Fundamentalism and terror: A dialogue with Jürgen Habermas*. In: BORRADORI (ed.): *Philosophy in a time of terror*, 25–43, here 39; BORRADORI, Giovanna: *Deconstructing terrorism: Derrida*. In: BORRADORI (ed.): *Philosophy in a time of terror*, 137–172, here 168.

5 See CAPUTO, John D. (ed.): *Deconstruction in a nutshell. A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press 1997, 36–44.

6 HABERMAS, Jürgen: *The philosophical discourse of modernity: Twelve lectures*. Tr. LAWRENCE, F. Cambridge: Polity Press 1987, 190; 205–207. See OLIVIER, Bert: *Derrida: Philosophy or literature?* In: *Critique, architecture, culture, art*. Port Elizabeth: University of Port Elizabeth 1998, 167–180, here 167–172.

7 See CAPUTO (ed.): *Deconstruction in a nutshell*, 125–155; NORRIS, Christopher: *Reclaiming truth: Contributions to a critique of cultural relativism*. Durham: Duke University Press 1996, 50–57.

8 BORRADORI, Giovanna: *Preface* and *Introduction: Terrorism and the legacy of the Enlightenment – Habermas and Derrida*. In: BORRADORI (ed.): *Philosophy in a time of terror*, ix–xiv & 1–22, here xi, 1, 14–18.

month after *9/11*,[9] namely, how he (Derrida) understood the „dialectic" between the American nation and the „other out there", as well as (more disturbingly) the „other within" the nation. Derrida's „short" answer alludes to the (ironic) consequences of the Cold War, in the course of which America surrounded itself with nondemocratic allies (bin Laden was trained along „American lines"), some of whom have since turned against it. The „longest" way to understand this dialectic, however:[10]

> „will be the study of the history and embodiment of Islam. How can one explain that this religion – one that is now in terms of demography the most powerful – and those nations which embody its beliefs, have missed something in history, something that is not shared with Europe – namely, Enlightenment, science, economy, development?... it took some centuries, during which Christianity and Judaism succeeded in associating with the techno-scientific-capitalistic development while the Arabic-Islamic world did not. They remained poor, attached to old models, repressive, even more phallocentric than the Europeans (which is already something)."[11]

In this interview with Kearney, Derrida therefore implicates an „other" that already features prominently in the earlier interview – immediately following *September 11* – with Borradori.[12] It is significant that, later in the Kearney interview, he explicitly refers to the importance of the political as a sphere that requires restructuring, for enlightenment to be effective in an Islam within which there are different, countervailing stances regarding violence:[13]

> „These differences, however, within Islam, cannot be developed efficiently without a development of the institution of the political, of the transformation of the *structures* of the society."

This is a clear indication of where Derrida stands on questions of „enlightenment": the contemporary persistence, in Islamic countries, of repressive, hierarchically theocratic rule is the political manifestation of their failure, historically, to adopt Enlightenment reason, as the West did, as fundamental principle for the transformation of an erstwhile autocratic, hierarchically authoritarian society, politics, culture and rules governing cognition. This, despite the ironic fact that, until the late Middle Ages, Islam was the

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[9] DERRIDA, Jacques: *Terror, religion, and the new politics*. In: KEARNEY, Richard: *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with contemporary thinkers*. New York: Fordham University Press 2004, 3–14, here 7–8.

[10] DERRIDA: *Terror, religion, and the new politics*, 8.

[11] In the interview with Borradori, Derrida also elaborates on related aspects of the history and present socio-economic conditions of Islamic cultures. DERRIDA, Jacques: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides – A dialogue with Jacques Derrida*. In: BORRADORI (ed.): *Philosophy in a time of terror*, 85–136, here 122–123.

[12] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 95, 98.

[13] DERRIDA: *Terror, religion, and the new politics*, 9.

equal, if not the superior, of Western Europe in philosophy, „science" and the technology of the time. The important point Derrida is making, is that unless Islamic states were to create the conditions where they do not simply use the technology developed in the course of a long history – albeit a problematic one – by the West, but subject their political and social structures to the transformative power of broadly rational political principles (currently embodied in a constitutional democracy), one would hope in vain for the establishment of a foundation for dialogue between the West and these states, which would ameliorate the perception on the part of the West, of Islamic peoples as „the other".

Clearly Habermas,[14] too, finds it impossible to avoid the question concerning the chasm that seems to separate the West and Islam. In answer to a question on his conception of fundamentalism as a modern phenomenon, he states that:[15]

> „When a contemporary regime like Iran refuses to carry out this separation [between state and church] or when movements inspired by religion strive for the reestablishment of an Islamic form of theocracy, we consider that to be fundamentalism. I would explain the frozen features of such a mentality in terms of the repression of striking cognitive dissonances. This repression occurs when the innocence of the epistemological situation of an all-encompassing world perspective is lost and when, under the cognitive conditions of scientific knowledge and of religious pluralism, a return to the exclusivity of premodern belief attitudes is propagated."

What makes this kind of fundamentalism specifically modern, according to Habermas, is therefore its (pre-modern) insistence that its particular religious doctrine, as well as the accompanying political consequences, be regarded as universally compelling, while obstinately ignoring the fact that it exists in a modern, techno-scientifically structured, pluralistic social situation where „the same respect is demanded for everybody" who still adheres to a religion (whether it be Muslim, Christian or Judaic, Hindu, Buddhist, or even a quasi-religion). For Habermas such an anomaly could only be a modern phenomenon. When perpetrators of „terror attacks" (such as *September 11*) in various parts of the „global" world are identified – by their own insistence – as belonging to such fundamentalist groups, it therefore makes the situation all the more intractable for would-be mediators: individuals whose actions are orchestrated by principles dogmatically regarded as binding on everyone, regardless of the fact that the contemporary situation is one of epistemic pluralism, are not open to rational persuasion. This explains why Habermas[16] contends

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[14] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 31.
[15] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 31–32.
[16] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 40–41.

that non-paternalistic, mutual tolerance is only possible in a situation where political or religious opponents operate within a social space politically regulated by a commonly accepted, democratic constitution.

It is interesting to note that Hardt and Negri (2001: 147–150) cast religious fundamentalism in the light of the „failure of modernization", but unlike Habermas, they insist that it is properly understood as a postmodern phenomenon. The reasons for this are complex, but one could say that, according to them, (Islamic) fundamentalism's postmodernity consists in its „refusal of modernity as a weapon of Euro-American hegemony".[17] They detect this stance in the work of contemporary Islamic scholars such as Akbar Ahmed, who contrasts Islamic modernism, recognizable by its „pursuit of Western education, technology and industrialization", with its postmodern counterpart, characterized by „a reversion to traditional Muslim values and a rejection of modernism".[18] In brief, Hardt and Negri view the current „resurgence" of fundamentalism as a „refusal" of the contemporary global alliance of dominant western powers at an economic, political, cultural and military level.

The question that poses itself here concerns the relevance of the link between (especially Islamic) fundamentalism and the question guiding this article, of a philosophically appropriate response to „global" terrorism. One possible answer is that – as Derrida points out – one would not understand the connection between such terrorism and Islam unless one painstakingly traced the historical circumstances (perhaps in the form of a Foucaultian genealogy[19]) surrounding the parting of ways between the West and Islam around the time of the emergence of modernity during the Enlightenment. Part of a philosophical response to global terrorism would be to understand the historical – but also the conceptual and the religious – conditions of its justification by Islamic extremists. Add to this Habermas's contention that, unless Islam allowed rational principles to transform it socially and politically in the direction of a constitutional democracy, it would remain intractable regarding any attempt to enter into constructive dialogue with it. Perhaps one could retort – implicitly endorsing Derrida's stance on the prerequisites for understanding Islam's historical imperviousness to the Enlightenment – that this presupposes

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[17] HARDT / NEGRI: *Empire*, 149.

[18] Quoted in HARDT / NEGRI: *Empire*, 149.

[19] See FOUCAULT, Michel: *The discourse on language*. In: *The archaeology of knowledge & The discourse on language*. Tr. SMITH, A.M.S. New York: Pantheon Books 1972, 215–237. Here he articulates, in succinct and programmatical manner, the principles governing the control *and* the production of discourse in society. These would illuminate the conditions under which Islamic „discourse" emerged – in the Foucaultian sense of „language, where meaning and power converge" – which was alternately hostile and emulating regarding Western culture. For an elaboration on discourse in this Foucaultian sense, see OLIVIER, Bert: *Discourse, agency and the question of evil*. In: *South African Journal of Philosophy* 22, 4 (2003) 329–348.

an understanding of the grounds for Islam's resistance to the adoption of such rationally transformative principles. That is, why should it resist the embodiments of reason in science, politics and the like, if Islam – even Osama bin Laden – readily makes use of Western technology, itself unthinkable without preceding developments in Western philosophy, science, the political and economic restructuring of society?

On the issues discussed so far there does not seem to be significant philosophical differences of judgement between Derrida and Habermas, even if the particulars of their respective stances may differ. Indeed, there are several other things that they agree on, by and large: the „uncertainty" that appears to be inseparable from „global" terrorism, the need to grasp its significance in relation to the broad movement of globalization, the necessity to address the issue of internationalism versus cosmopolitanism (what Hardt and Negri call the emergence of „a supra-national order")[20] regarding the appropriate institutional response to such terror – too many to discuss in detail here.[21] Are there any „significant" differences in their respective responses to *September 11*? In my judgement there are. Probably the most significant of these – and one towards which the others gravitate – concerns what one may refer to as Habermas's (modern) reliance on *transcendental* philosophical strategies, in contrast to which Derrida, as poststructuralist, avails himself of a *quasi-transcendental* logic.[22]

A pertinent demonstration of this kind of thinking on Habermas's part occurs in the dialogue with Borradori when he admits[23] that tolerance has usually been practised with a certain paternalism, that it is practised „within a boundary beyond which it would cease". This means, he then points out in a startling deconstructive „move", that it „possesses itself a kernel of intolerance". But instead of proceeding further along the deconstructive route (as Derrida would), demonstrating that the impossibility of avoiding the *aporia*

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[20] HARDT / NEGRI: *Empire*, 3–8.

[21] See BORRADORI: *Preface*, xi–xiv.

[22] See HURST, Andrea: *Derrida's quasi-transcendental thinking*. In: South African Journal of Philosophy 23, 3 (2004) 244–266. Also: BORRADORI: *Preface*, xii. This crucial difference between these two philosophers is behind the following remarks by Borradori on their respective responses to 9/11: „Habermas's dialogue is dense, very compact, and elegantly traditional. His rather Spartan use of language allows his thinking to progress from concept to concept, with the steady and lucid pace that has made classical German philosophy so distinctive. By contrast, Derrida's dialogue takes the reader on a longer and winding road that opens unpredictably onto large vistas and narrow canyons, some so deep that the bottom remains out of sight. His extreme sensitivity for subtle facts of language makes Derrida's thought virtually inseparable from the words in which it is expressed. The magic of this dialogue is to present, in an accessible and concentrated manner, his unmatched ability to combine inventiveness and rigor, circumvention and affirmation."

[23] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 40–41.

that opens up around „tolerance" has significant practical-ethical possibilities (because of the quasi-transcendental functioning of the „impossible" in the very concept of tolerance), Habermas dismisses deconstruction of the concept because it „falls into a trap".[24] Instead, he appeals to the „constitutional [democratic] state" in so far as it undermines the paternalism attaching to the concept of „tolerance" – the reciprocal granting of equal rights to one another by citizens precludes, for Habermas, the possibility of anyone arbitrarily „setting the boundaries of tolerance".[25]

This is a good example of „normative critique" on Habermas's part,[26] which is easily recognizable as an extension of a neo-Enlightenment, transcendental way of thinking in so far as it consistently „asks back" (*zurückfragen*) to the conditions of possibility of something, that is, to what must be presupposed by that something. In this case, the condition of the possibility of overcoming the paralysis induced by the ostensibly inescapable „intolerance at the heart of tolerance" (the fact that it is practised within certain boundaries only) is, for Habermas, the democratic constitution which enshrines citizens' rights. This constitution is the guarantee, he believes, that tolerance of the paternalistic variety cannot – or rather, *should not* – flourish. The emphasis that Habermas places on norms that putatively regulate human actions in such a way that every citizen in a democratic state would enjoy the same rights, is precisely what differentiates between him and Derrida.

Not that Derrida would not endorse such constitutionally enshrined rights; on the contrary. But instead of regarding it as guarantee that tolerance will necessarily be practised reciprocally, without undermining itself, his thinking proceeds, not along a transcendental avenue, but in a more paradoxical, *quasi*-transcendental manner. Such thinking would acknowledge the strange tendency at the heart of tolerance to limit itself, lest advantage be taken of the tolerant party, but Derrida would – analogous to his analysis of the concept of hospitality[27] – show that, as with many other inter-human phenomena, tolerance is inescapably subject to two countervailing „economies" (even when it is practised in a constitutional democracy). The first of these, the „economic", displays a structural dynamic of „investment and return", that is, it is conditional upon certain expectations (this is the „paternalistic" notion of tolerance). On the other hand, however, there is the „aneconomic" moment of excess or transgression, an „impossible" structural dynamic which

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[24] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 41.

[25] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 41.

[26] Habermas's „normative" approach, which differs radically from that of poststructuralists generally, is brought to light very clearly by Borradori in her discussion of terrorism in relation to his philosophical project. See BORRADORI, Giovanna: *Reconstructing terrorism: Habermas*. In: BORRADORI (ed.): *Philosophy in a time of* terror, 45–81, here 45–48.

[27] CAPUTO (ed.): *Deconstruction in a nutshell*, 109–113.

limits, and is limited by its economic counterpart.[28] Although „impossible" in any pure, unadulterated sense, this possibility of an „excessive" tolerance – as in the case of hospitality – is what first allows tolerance to happen, even if it is constrained and held in check by its economic counterpart. Conversely, the economic dynamic of tolerance – the functioning of a limit to its practice – is what gives rise to the transgressive gesture of an „unbounded", aneconomic tolerance (which is „impossible" because it is always restrained by its economic counterpart). This mode of reasoning is *quasi*-transcendental: it takes transcendental logic or reasoning a step further because it does not simply articulate the conditions of *possibility* of a phenomenon, but demonstrates (as the above example shows) that these are simultaneously the conditions of *impossibility* of the phenomenon in question. Admittedly, this is just a formula for the claim that, the very conditions that make something possible ensure that it is not possible in a „pure" state, or that the phenomenon is „ruined" by the very conditions of its own provenance. Hence, „pure" paternalistic tolerance (or „purely hostile" hospitality) is not possible because nothing would be tolerated by it (it is „ruined" by its counterpart, the aneconomic); similarly, „pure" excessive tolerance (or unbounded hospitality) is impossible because it would undermine the very possibility of it being extended (it is „ruined" by its counterpart, the economic).

From this example it is apparent that Derrida, instead of (like Habermas) extending a „normative critique", articulates a quasi-transcendental analysis of phenomena or events. To put it differently, he does not deal with counterfactuals as Habermas does, but uncovers the complex, paradoxical logic underpinning some of people's most common experiences. Moreover, he does it in such a way as to show that one is *not* paralyzed, as Habermas thinks, by the interwoven logic of the economic and the aneconomic, but is precisely galvanized into action by the necessity to *act*: as Caputo[29] explains regarding Derrida's logic, no one would be able to extend hospitality to a potential guest unless spurred on by a wish to *open* one's home to the other in an unlimited fashion (hospitality accompanied by all manner of limitations and prohibitions is not hospitality), but hospitality would be equally impossible if this impulse to be unconditionally hospitable were not limited by a smidgen of „*hostility*", if not possessiveness, on the part of the hosts (one has to allow for implicit limits, otherwise the host might not be in a position to offer any hospitality).

To return to these two philosophers' respective responses to *September 11*, the quasi-transcendental pattern of Derrida's thinking is apparent in his analysis of this „event" at various levels, including that of the very notion of it be-

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28 See HURST: *Derrida's quasi-transcendental thinking*, 251–257.
29 CAPUTO (ed.): *Deconstruction in a nutshell*, 110–111.

ing a „major event". The concept of the „event" touches on one of the Hei-
deggerian roots of deconstruction,[30] as Derrida acknowledges here. What is
important to note, he points out,[31] is that Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis*
(„event"), which bears on the „*appropriation* of the proper (*eigen*)", is insepa-
rable from the countervailing movement of „a certain *expropriation* that Hei-
degger himself names (*Enteignis*)". He adds: „The undergoing of the event,
that which in the undergoing or in the ordeal *at once opens itself up to and re-
sists experience*, is, it seems to me, a certain *unappropriability* of what comes or
happens". This goes to the heart of Derrida's understanding of the „event".[32]

   While Habermas[33] seems content to leave the very notion of the „event" it-
self unquestioned – while granting that the „monstrous act itself was new" in
terms of its „symbolic force"[34] – Derrida, by contrast, problematizes it to the
hilt. He concedes that it is „at least *felt*", with ostensible immediacy, to be an
event of an „unprecedented" kind, but questions the authenticity of such a
feeling:[35]

>   „this ‚feeling' is actually less spontaneous than it appears: it is to a large extent
>   conditioned, constituted, if not actually constructed, circulated at any rate
>   through the media by means of a prodigious techno-socio-political machine."

Nevertheless, one does not „yet really know how to identify" this event,
which would explain why the „minimal deictic" of the date is resorted to as a
way of naming this ineffaceable, (but also ineffable – „like an intuition with-
out concept")„thing" that has happened.[36] Labelling it an act of „international
terrorism" is hardly what one might call a „rigorous concept" that would
capture the utter „singularity" of what has occurred. The impotence of
language to assign this event a horizon of signification, Derrida insists,[37]
reveals itself in the „mechanical repetition" of the date – something that marks
another cardinal difference between himself and Habermas, in so far as it
reveals his intimate knowledge and interpretive use of psychoanalytic theory.
Derrida's remark concerning the „powerlessness" of language to grasp the
singularity of *September 11*, for instance, corresponds to Jacques Lacan's
contention that the register of the so-called „real" announces itself where lan-

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[30] As Mark Ralkowski has reminded me.

[31] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 90.

[32] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 90.

[33] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 26.

[34] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 28.

[35] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 86.

[36] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 86.

[37] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 86.

guage comes up „against its own limits".[38] The pertinence of this psychoanalytical insight shows when he elaborates on the necessity of repeating the date like a mantra:[39]

> „on the one hand, to conjure away, as if by magic, the ‚thing' itself, the fear or the terror it inspires (for repetition always protects by neutralizing, deadening, distancing a traumatism, and this is true for the repetition of the televised images we will speak of later), and, on the other hand, to deny, as close as possible to this act of language and this enunciation, our powerlessness to name in an appropriate fashion, to characterize, to think the thing in question, to get beyond the mere deictic of the date: something terrible took place on September 11, and in the end we don't know what."

No one should fool themselves that reason in the guise of clear, distinct conceptual language is adequate to grasp what happened that day; Derrida is here reminding rationalists like Habermas that, what is known in psychoanalysis as the „repetition compulsion", has the function of making the unbearable bearable, *but* at the cost of falsifying the „thing" which one tries repeatedly to pin down in language and image-replay. No matter how apparently successfully one inscribes it in the dominant discourses of the time – or even in esoteric ones – or how familiar the images of the mesmerizing implosion of the twin towers become, the „event" itself will always prove to be elusive. The function of the repetition is precisely to weave a web of iconic and symbolic familiarity around the „event", within which it will be (or has already been) archived „historically" (problematic as this term may be). But in so far as it has the status of the „real", it eludes one the moment you think you have managed to „name" or describe it. This does not mean that one should avoid articulating it in language – on the contrary, as Derrida insists:[40]

> „I believe always in the necessity of being attentive first of all to this phenomenon of language, naming, and dating, to this repetition compulsion (at once rhetorical, magical, and poetic). To what this compulsion signifies, translates, or betrays. Not in order to isolate ourselves in language, as people in too much of a rush would like us to believe, but on the contrary, in order to try to understand

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[38] See COPJEC, Joan: *Imagine there's no woman. Ethics and sublimation.* Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press 2002, 95–96. She explains Lacan's notion of the „real" as follows – effectively prohibiting the inclination to equate it with the Kantian Ding-an-sich: „Lacan's definition of the real is precisely this: that which, in language or the symbolic, negates the possibility of any metadimension, any metalanguage. It is this undislodgeable negation, this rigid kernel in the heart of the symbolic, that forces the signifier to split off from and turn around on itself. For, in the absence of any metalanguage, the signifier can only signify by referring to another signifier [...] Far from positing the existence of an elsewhere, the real as internal limit of the symbolic – that is, the very impotence of the signifier – is the obstacle that scotches the possibility of rising out of or above the symbolic."

[39] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 87.

[40] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 87–88.

what is going on precisely *beyond* language and what is pushing us to repeat end-
lessly and without knowing what we are talking about, precisely there where
language and the concept come up against their limits: ‚September 11, September
11, *le 11 septembre, 9/11*'."

But Derrida wishes to push this analysis to the point where he problematizes
the very question, whether *September 11* „really" constitutes an „event" in this
sense of something, some „thing", which tantalizes our ingenuity in fabricat-
ing conceptually adequate appellations for inscribing it, once and for all, in
the archive of a shared social and political history. Thus, in contrast to
Habermas's[41] willingness to abide by the consensual efficacy of subsuming
9/11 under the rubric of the „event" – which concedes, incongruously, its
symbolic novelty, while refraining from probing its putative singularity – he
unravels the aporetic logic of „eventspeak". Resorting to a quasi-Humean ter-
minology, Derrida[42] agrees with Borradori, that one could speak of an
„impression" of a *„major event"* here, reminding her that the „menacing in-
junction" to repeat the name, *September 11*, comes from a constellation of
dominant Anglo-American powers, from which, in its interpretive, rhetorical,
globalized guise, this impression cannot be divorced. However, to distinguish
rigorously between the „impression" as a putatively „brute fact", and its inter-
pretation, is, Derrida believes, a philosophical and political duty. „We could
say", he remarks:[43]

> „that the impression is ‚informed', in both senses of the word: a predominant
> system gave it form, and this form then gets run through an organized informa-
> tion machine (language, communication, rhetoric, image, media, and so on). This
> informational apparatus is from the very outset political, technical, economic."

There is therefore a „resemblance" between the „impression" as a global effect
and the „thing" that produced it by means of or through a whole web of mu-
tually reinforcing agencies (the media, technoscience, as well as military, eco-
nomic and diplomatic institutions), although neither the „thing" nor the event
is reducible to this impression.[44]

  This somewhat cryptic observation becomes more intelligible in light of
his subsequent explanation,[45] that the *„event"* comprises the *„thing"* itself as
that which „happens" („event" as „advent" or „arrival"), together with the
„impression" (simultaneously „spontaneous" and „controlled") created by it.
Although one cannot say that the ineffable „thing" *is* in any meaningful sense
„outside" the agencies which produce the „impression", one might say it is re-

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[41] HABERMAS: *Fundamentalism and terror*, 26–28.
[42] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 88.
[43] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 89.
[44] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 88–89.
[45] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 89.

fracted through these agencies as through a prism, so that it first becomes visible as „event" in its constituent „colours" when it has „passed through" the prism of language, dominant discourses, images, media and communication channels. Here one comes up against the limits of language – a sure sign that one has encountered the Lacanian „real" – for even the prism-metaphor falls short of capturing the relation between the „thing" and the „impression". Perhaps that of a crystal ball, in which amorphous phantasms swim into intelligible shapes, is more accurate: at first there is „nothing" there, and then, out of the not-present, something perceivable „morphs" into visible being, like James Cameron's T-1000 terminator[46] assuming its terrifying shape from out of a „liquid metal" matrix of pure possibilities. Importantly, whatever it is that thus becomes „visible" must of necessity do so in terms of the spectrum of humanly visible colours, which here represents language and iconicity in their widest sense.

Further – focussing deconstructively on the „other side" of the „constructedness" of the „event" – with every successive linguistic or iconic appropriation of the „event" one witnesses a cumulative process in action: with each appropriation (description, discussion, analysis, framing) something is added to it, complexifying it, constituting it *as* „event", with the paradoxical corollary that it increasingly assumes the character of something „sublime" in the aesthetic sense of being, strictly speaking, „unpresentable".[47] In this way it highlights the paradox, that the more is said about it, the more it recedes from humans' attempts to incarcerate it in the „prison-house" of language, and the more it asserts its irreducibility. Importantly, at the same time as the symbolic network progressively appears to assimilate the event (*Ereignis*), the countervailing process of withdrawal or „expropriation" (*Enteignis*), referred to earlier, occurs in a corresponding manner, announcing that „something" escapes it. And it is this traumatically experienced „something" which *repeatedly* returns, challenging and exhorting one to appropriate it interpretively in an attempt to exorcise its effects.

Even these finer distinctions are difficult to sustain, as Derrida[48] acknowledges, for it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the „impression" as „brute fact" and as „interpretation" made possible by the system of representations of it. If this were not the case, other „events", in the course of which

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[46] See OLIVIER, Bert: *Time, technology, cinematic art and critique in* The Terminator *and* Terminator II – Judgement Day: *A philosophical interpretation*. In: *Projections: Philosophical themes on film*. Port Elizabeth: University of Port Elizabeth 2002, 95–110.

[47] For an extended discussion of the sublime as „unpresentable", specifically in the context of postmodern culture, see OLIVIER, Bert: *The sublime, unpresentability and postmodern cultural complexity*. In: *Critique, architecture, culture, art*. Port Elizabeth: University of Port Elizabeth 1998, 197–214.

[48] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 89.

thousands of people also died – the Rwandan genocide comes to mind – might also have given the „impression" of having been „major events". A distinction should therefore be made between two kinds of „impression": on the one hand, unconditional compassion and sadness for the victims of such events and condemnation of their death – a response that touches the kernel of the „event" beyond all simulation; on the other hand, the „informed" or already „interpreted" impression, persuading one to „believe" that *9/11* is a „major event". Derrida emphasises *„belief"* here – „the phenomenon of *credit* and of *accreditation*" [49] in so far as it is inseparable from evaluation (hence the „inflated" significance of the dating). Perhaps the questions concerning the nature of an „impression" and a „belief", but especially of an *event* in the true sense, are „opening up" again here in a novel manner:[50]

> „For could an event that still conforms to an essence, to a law or to a truth, indeed to a concept of the event, ever be a major event? A major event should be so unforeseeable and irruptive that it disturbs even the horizon of the concept or essence on the basis of which we believe we recognize an event *as such*. That is why all the ‚philosophical' questions remain open… as soon as it is a matter of thinking the event."

Here Derrida forces one to confront the limits of Husserlian phenomenology in relation to history: if one is able to delineate the universal essence of a phenomenon (such as the „event"), all instances that conform to this essence should be recognizable on the basis of this known essence. But historically *novel* phenomena which might be subsumed under the rubric of especially names like „event" or „innovation" would then be paradoxical. They would conform to *and* transgress their own character simultaneously, that is, they would „disturb" their own „horizon" of „anticipatability". A „major event" would therefore be „unforeseeable", Derrida insists, even if, once having occurred, it demands to be recognized and appropriated as a „major event". But,[51]

> „there is no event worthy of its name except insofar as this appropriation *falters* at some border or frontier. A frontier, however, with neither front nor confrontation, one that incomprehension does not run into head on since it does not take the form of a solid front: it escapes, remains evasive, open, undecided, indeterminable. Whence the unappropriability, the unforeseeability, absolute surprise, incomprehension, the risk of misunderstanding, unanticipatable novelty, pure singularity, the absence of horizon."

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[49] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 89.
[50] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 90.
[51] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 90–91.

Derrida's radicalization of phenomenological reasoning therefore has the disconcerting effect of uncovering the *aporia*, that 9/11 *is and is not* an „event". In so far as one is able to affirm that, as manifestation of an irreducible „thing", it has shaken the framework by means of which we have been accustomed to recognize „events", it *is* an „event", but paradoxically, to the degree that the „impression" within which it has been couched is a production by and of a vast, powerful, globally dominant machinery of information and discursive-interpretive construction, it is certainly *not* an event. In fact, he argues, far from being an „unforeseeable event", it was quite possible to anticipate such an attack on American territory.[52]

With this cautionary note in mind, Derrida[53] grants that one could nevertheless proceed by speaking of *9/11* as an „event". Even the most insignificant occurrence in human experience, he reminds us, has something unforeseeable and event-like about it. If this claim seems strange to pragmatically-minded, common sense-adherents, they should remember that, *strictly speaking*, no particular future occurrence is predictable with absolute certainty, even if one could anticipate, with good reason (whether on Humean or, alternatively, Kantian grounds), that such occurrences would probably conform to familiar causal patterns. This is what Derrida calls the „messianic" structure of experience[54] – the quality of experience that reveals an abiding receptivity, if not a veritable exigency for the „advent of an event"; the tacit possibility that the „other" may surprise one. Hence one should always be open to the „incoming other", the structure of experience that exhibits this unforeseeability, even if unforeseeability itself is, paradoxically, „foreseeable". And, as the advent of *9/11* shows, „expecting the unexpected" does not necessarily bear on something pleasantly surprising.

To show that he is not engaged in an idealist pursuit by invoking a „horizon of nonknowledge",[55] Derrida's exemplary analysis goes even further, towards the „more concrete". Again he employs an aporetic or „quasi-transcendental" logic, which here assumes the form of the „law" governing what he terms an *„autoimmunitary process"*:[56]

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[52] As early as 1994 this was foreseen by certain architects; see DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 186–187; note 6.

[53] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 91.

[54] Derrida in CAPUTO (ed.): *Deconstruction in a nutshell*, 22–25; also Caputo's elaboration; 156–180.

[55] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 94.

[56] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 94.

„an autoimunitary process is that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, ‚itself‘ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its 'own' immunity.“[57]

The logic of this autoimmunity unfolds in what Derrida describes as „*three moments*“ of „autoimmunity“, of „reflex and reflection“. First: „*The Cold War in the head*“,[58] or to summarize brutally, autoimmunity as the fear of terror-ism that spawns terror and defence simultaneously – the fear of terror(-ism) „in the head“ (that is, psychologically in the individual's head, politically in the figure of the Capitol and the White House, and economically in the Twin Towers as the „head“ of capital) terrorizes most, and it engenders a „double suicide“ (of the „terrorists“ and of those hosts who trained them). Second: „*Worse than the Cold War*“,[59] or, again mercilessly condensed, the „event“ as trauma displays the paradoxical temporality of proceeding neither from the present, nor the past, but from „an im-presentable to come“: traumatism (with no possibility of a suffering-alleviating „work of mourning“) is produced by the future, by „the threat of the worst *to come*“.[60] And third: „*The vicious circle of repression*“,[61] or the paradox, that even if this worst of all terrors „touches the geopolitical unconscious (inscrutable as it may be) of every living being and leaves there indelible traces“,[62] it can „simultaneously appear insubstan-tial, fleeting, light, and so seem to be denied, repressed, indeed forgotten, rele-gated to being just one event among others“.[63] Yet, the effect of these attempts to deny, disarm or repress the traumatic impact of the „event“ amounts to nothing less than the autoimunitary process according to which „the very monstrosity they claim to overcome“ is generated or produced.[64] This is how repression in both its psychoanalytical and its political senses works.

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[57] The metaphor of „immunity“ or „autoimmunity“ clearly derives from medical-immunological discourse, in conjunction with those of zoology, biology and genetics. And in-deed, Derrida has written elsewhere on such „autoimmunity“ as the (paradoxical) process, on the part of a living organism, „of protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune-system“ (quoted in Derrida 2003: 187–188, note 7). An allergic reaction to certain toxins, venoms, natural or industrial materials would be an example of such a process, and in the case under discussion one could also speak metaphorically of an „allergic reaction“. See also what Derrida says about this *aporia* as an example of the *pharmakon*, something that is remedy and poison at the same time (2003: 124).

[58] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 94.

[59] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 96.

[60] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 97.

[61] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 100.

[62] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 99. This part of Derrida's elaboration pertains thematically to the third moment, regardless of it only being articulated on the next page.

[63] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 99.

[64] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 99.

The question ineluctably arises (somewhat incongruously, given the fact that he has „performed" its answer from the outset in the interview!),[65] what the role of philosophy is in the face of the „event" of *September 11*. His answer to Borradori's question should be understood against the backcloth of his philosophical „performance" of a deconstruction of this „event":[66]

> „Such an ‚event' surely calls for a philosophical response. Better, a response that calls into question, at their most fundamental level, the most deep-seated conceptual presuppositions in philosophical discourse. The concepts with which this ‚event' has most often been described, named, categorized, are the products of a ‚dogmatic slumber' from which only a new philosophical reflection can awaken us, a reflection *on* philosophy, most notably on political philosophy and its heritage. The prevailing discourse, that of the media and of the official rhetoric, relies too readily on received concepts like ‚war' or ‚terrorism' (national or international)."

Derrida's Kantian observation is a reminder to philosophers that „dogmatic slumbers" do not pertain to the same concepts in every era. Kant had Hume to thank for awakening him from his dependence on received notions concerning experience and reason; today, philosophers ought to ask themselves which concepts are too taken-for-granted, and hence most in need of critical scrutiny. In addition to those he has already examined, Derrida mentions „war" and „terrorism" here – concepts which he proceeds to unravel in the succeeding pages.[67]

Elsewhere Derrida[68] has related precisely this process, in which events are „artifactually created" by powers which monopolize the „actuality effect", to the question of philosophy's role or responsibility. Derrida understands „actuality" as something which is, contrary to conventional assumptions, „precisely, *made*":[69]

> „It is not given but actively produced, sifted, invested, performatively interpreted by numerous apparatuses which are *factitious* or *artificial*, hierarchizing

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[65] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 100.

[66] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 100.

[67] This involves the impossibility of identifying the „enemy" (against which the Bush administration has declared „war") in any clear-cut manner; the deterritorialization of the „technologies of aggression" (2003: 101); the ambivalence of the concept of „terrorism", which is largely derived from the Reign of (state) Terror during the French Revolution (2003: 102–103), thus making the oft-rejected notion of „state terrorism" appear less absurd; the dogmatic use and obscurity of the concept of „international terrorism", coupled with the need for subjecting it to a philosophical debate; and the importance of recognizing the „dominant power" behind the imposition, the legitimation and the legalization of a terminology which already calls for a specific interpretation of „events" (2003: 105).

[68] DERRIDA, Jacques: *Artifactualities*. In: DERRIDA, Jacques / STIEGLER, Bernard: *Echographies of television. Filmed interviews.* Tr. BAJOREK, J. Cambridge: Polity 2002, 3–27, here 3–5.

[69] DERRIDA: *Artifactualities*, 3–4.

and selective, always in the service of forces and interests to which ‚subjects‘ and agents (producers and consumers of actuality – sometimes they are ‚philosophers‘ and always interpreters, too) are never sensitive enough. No matter how singular, irreducible, stubborn, distressing or tragic the ‚reality‘ to which it refers, ‚actuality‘ comes to us by way of a fictional fashioning. It can be analysed only at the cost of a labor of resistance, of vigilant counter-interpretation, etc. Hegel was right to remind the philosopher of his time to read the papers daily. Today the same responsibility obliges him to learn how the dailies, the weeklies, the television news programs are *made*, and *by whom*.“[70]

In our time, therefore, the philosopher’s duty is first and foremost to render a vigilant critique – Derrida would say „deconstruction“ – not only of those events (like the Gulf War, or *September 11*) that are crucial for the understanding of cultural and historical transformations, but also (especially) of those processes at work, mostly imperceptibly – given the extent to which they are taken for granted – in the production or generation of a certain „reality effect“. Inseparable from this is the cratological-political question of the power, force, or relations of domination[71] underpinning the operation of the processes in question. This – Derrida’s rigorous logic of *aporia*, which uncovers a phenomenon as being „impure“, or constituted by elements which cannot conveniently (and misleadingly) be reduced to each other – is what distinguishes him from Baurillard, who would arguably have us believe that we live in an all-encompassing „hyperreality“ of simulacra[72] which hides the fact that it is all there is, that contemporary technologies generate this realm so pervasively that everything is a matter of „cultural construction“. Such a pseudo-ontological stance all too easily lets the philosopher – and everybody else, too – off the hook. By contrast, Derrida insists that:[73]

[70] It is important to note which terms are placed „under erasure“ by Derrida here by his use of inverted commas and italics – these are concepts that he pointedly wishes to problematize most severely.

[71] See DERRIDA, Jacques: *Specters of Marx. The state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international.* Tr. KAMUF, P. New York: Routledge 1994, 81–84, for a list of „plagues“ of the present world order, which are intimately connected to these questions of power. These include unemployment; the exclusion of homeless citizens from participation in democratic processes; the „ruthless economic war“ among nations worldwide; the insurmountability of the contradictions inherent to the concept of the „free market“; the connection between the worsening of foreign debt and economic hardship on the part of many millions of people; the apparently irreversible integration of the „arms industry“ with economic activity worldwide; the spread of nuclear weapons; the global proliferation of inter-ethnic wars; the virtually invisible or seamless infiltration of states and economies by „phantom-States“ (like the mafia and the Japanese Yakuza) as a strictly capitalist phenomenon; and the present condition of international law and its institutions, in so far as it suffers from certain historical and state-specific cratological limitations.

[72] See BAUDRILLARD, Jean: *The map precedes the territory.* In: ANDERSON, Walter T. (Ed.): *The Fontana postmodernism reader.* London: Fontana 1996, 75–77.

[73] DERRIDA: *Artifactualities*, 5–6.

„the requisite deconstruction of this *artifactuality* should not be used as an alibi. It should not give way to an inflation...of the simulacrum and neutralize every threat in what might be called the delusion of the delusion, the denial of the event: ‚Everything', people would then think, ‚even violence, suffering, war, and death, everything is constructed, fictionalised, constituted by and for the media apparatus. Nothing ever really happens. There is nothing but simulacrum and delusion.' While taking the deconstruction of artifactuality as far as possible, we must therefore do everything in our power to guard against this critical neoidealism".

Hence, Derrida's deconstruction of the „event" of the *September 11*-„terrorist" attacks, demonstrates the – above all *political* – futility of „enclosing" events such as these once and for all within the procrustean apparatus of mainstream media and hegemonic discourses by insisting that they are „constructed" in their entirety. He unmasks these „critical neoidealist" claims as instances of refusing to accept political and philosophical responsibility for either the consequences or the unprogrammability of that which „happens" or „comes" unexpectedly, and which is, as such, irreducible to the encompassing, exclusive productivity of technical and politico-discursive apparatuses. Only by relativizing the seductive claims of the petrifying Medusa-esque media-gaze, can the unprogrammability of history be acknowledged.

This is not to deny the crucial function of the manner in which the repetitive and cumulative weaving of the „event" into a discursive fabric adds to, enhances and perhaps first constitutes it *as* „event", making of it both more, *and* less than what it „is". Paradoxically, *events* such as *9/11* elicit conventional as well as creative elaborations precisely *because* their inassimilable singularity challenges the capacity of symbolic and iconic frameworks to accommodate them, generating, in the end, a reconfiguration of these contexts of comprehension. Even as humans elaborate on them, in the process enhancing them, „making" them „more" than what their initial „impression" seems to suggest, they also, like the so-called sublime, escape our very best attempts to enmesh and domesticate them in our symbolic networks. In this respect philosophers' difficult task is to do justice to the many-sidedness of the phenomenon of the event – its political, social, cultural, epistemic and axiological implications – without shirking their duty to do so by executing some or other obfuscating reduction. In the process it is imperative to pay careful attention to what makes the specific historical moment unique, different from other, preceding (and perhaps successive) historical situations, as Derrida suggests[74] by referring to the „new mediatic situation" which requires philosophers' as well as media professionals' careful consideration.

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[74] DERRIDA: *Artifactualities*, 7.

In fact, given the media-saturatedness of contemporary, postmodern society, philosophers should perhaps not only direct their philosophical-interpretive focus at the audiovisual images populating media-space, but actively promote the construction, generation or creation of *alternative* image-configurations. By „alternative" I mean those images and image-sequences which would present the opportunity to viewers of distancing themselves interpretively from the iconic constellation of dominant discourses and forces, specifically those representing global capitalism in its interwovenness with the „homohegemonic"[75] cultural, political and military powers – powers that are routinely, incessantly reinforced as the preferred nexus for identification on the part of media-viewers and listeners worldwide.[76] On this topic of creating the space for „alternative" cultural artefacts, such as films, and alternative film-traditions – which, to be sure, already exist, even if not enough viewers are attracted to them (yet?) – Derrida has the following to say:[77]

> „If you want to fight the hegemony of the ‚bad', ‚Hollywood' production, you're not going to do it by closing the market, but by promoting, through education, discussion, culture, in France and elsewhere, occasions for preferring one kind of film over another and by promoting, at the same time, a production that escapes the bad, Hollywood industry, in France *and* in America. It's a struggle for which one can elaborate new discourses...one can try to convince people, to ensure that the properly productive selectivity of those who were previously in the position of consumer-spectators can intervene in the market...You've got to promote diversity of preference all over the world: preference for this film over another...But if this struggle is not waged from the side of what are still called – provisionally – the ‚buyers' or ‚consumers', it is lost from the start."

Why is it necessary to emphasize the importance of iconicity, of images, here? What does it have to do with „global terrorism", or with the question of how philosophers can and should respond to it and to related phenomena in the contemporary, 21ˢᵗ-century world? It is no exaggeration, I believe, to say „Everything". Earlier I referred to Derrida's argument,[78] that the „impression" of the „event" of *9/11* was given form by a hegemonic system of interpretation, including language, communication, images and media. I believe that it has been shown persuasively by a variety of thinkers and theorists that media-images play a crucial role in patterns of identification on the part of viewers and audiences, and the ease with which people worldwide are subjectivized in

[75] DERRIDA: *Artifactuality*, 41–55.

[76] See OLIVIER, Bert: *Popular art, the image, the subject and subverting hegemony*. In: Communicatio (South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research), 32, 1 (2006) 16–37. Here the question of effective strategies for dislodging the stranglehold of images invested with capitalist value on the contemporary, globalized world, is addressed.

[77] DERRIDA: *Artifactuality, homohegemony*, 54–55.

[78] DERRIDA: *Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides*, 89.

terms of the interests and values of the intertwined, globally hegemonic economic and political systems, has a great deal to do with images offering sites of identification to viewers through mainstream media.[79] It is to Derrida's credit that, unlike Habermas, he has given sustained attention to this problematic (which is closely connected to questions of power). This strikes me as being quite ironic, given Habermas's reputation as the philosopher of „communicative action",[80] and is comprehensible, I believe, in light of what I referred to earlier as his preoccupation with „normative" critique – a strict focus on the normative foundations and counterfactual conditions for „undistorted communication" would understandably distract one's attention away from the concrete historical circumstances (including contemporary patterns of identity-formation in relation to media-images invested with hegemonic interests) that comprise the foci of poststructuralists' analytical scrutiny. This is not to deny the conceptual-analytical usefulness of much of Habermas's work, for example his well-known distinction between „strategic" and „communicative action"[81] – a valuable tool in discourse-analysis for unmasking disingenuous attempts at wielding power, which masquerade as would-be acts of communication.

What light has the preceding discussion cast on the question regarding an appropriate philosophical response to „global terrorism"? Performatively as well as constatively, both Derrida and Habermas are exemplary in demonstrating that there is such a thing as a distinctly *philosophical* response to this scourge of the present age, and, moreover, that it is a responsibility that philosophers cannot evade. Philosophers face the responsibility of elucidating the sometimes opaque, confusing or disconcerting occurrences of their time, without necessarily forgetting what links this era to (or distinguishes it from) former epochs. This responsibility entails, in the first place, the „labour of reason" in the broadest sense; not merely Enlightenment reason, or analytical reason, or social-scientific, or hermeneutic-interpretive reason, but reason in the sense of philosophers availing themselves of every resource, capacity and nuance of human rationality to reach understanding of what is at hand, from formal, informal and symbolic to quasi-transcendental; phenomenological or structural interpretation, discourse-analysis, psychoanalytic interpretation, performativity and more – not merely as an armchair activity, but with the social and political objective, to communicate such understanding to their fellow human beings in the hope of fostering insight into the conditions for

[79] OLIVIER: *Popular art, the image, the subject and subverting hegemony.*

[80] See for example BRAND, Arie: *The force of reason. An introduction to Habermas'* Theory of communicative action. London: Allen & Unwin 1990.

[81] BRAND: *The force of reason*, 15–16.

peaceful co-existence as well as into the obstacles in the way of such a state of affairs.

Needless to say, as both of these thinkers indicate, this philosophical task entails everything from investigations into the historical preconditions of present problem-areas (such as Islamic „fundamentalism") to the deconstruction of hegemonic cultural, political and military relations. It is especially important to note that, judging by their example, no philosopher worthy of the name can be „neutral" in the face of something as devastating to the thought of human solidarity as „terrorism" in any guise. Philosophers should not teach and practise their discipline with the objective of restricting it within the confines of academia, or indeed of the institutions of publishing. Although these are foremost as avenues for the dissemination of philosophical discourses within the ostensibly innocuous realm of intellectual debate, they are never limited in their effectivity to these domains, as every philosopher should know. All philosophical thinking faces the daunting responsibility of having to articulate its consequences and implications for social and political practice. As such, philosophy, in addition to being an intellectual or rational, linguistic activity or practice, is in principle also a social and political one, as both Derrida's and Habermas's contributions to the dialogue with Borradori on terrorism amply demonstrate. As for myself, I believe that Derrida succeeds even better than Habermas in this, simply because his thinking moves on so many different levels compared to Habermas's. As such, it has the potential to awaken, not merely contemporary „philosophers" from their dogmatic slumber, but ordinary citizens too, through the mediation of philosophers who are willing to practice their trade more widely – taking novel risks in the process, to be sure – for the sake of disabusing such citizens of the anaesthetizing prejudices inculcated in them by hegemonic powers through mainstream media.

It is time for the heirs of Socrates to follow the example of philosophers like Derrida and Habermas and confront the pressing philosophical problems raised by asymmetrical power relations in the contemporary world, and, importantly, to do so in those spaces which correspond, today, to ancient Athens's streets. These include e-mail and the internet, media such as television, radio and newspapers, universities' lecture halls, political meetings as well as any social, cultural or political spaces (such as arts festivals) that lend themselves to philosophical debates and reasoned calls to subvert hegemony and engage the (cultural, political, racial, gendered, economic) *other* with a view to instantiating – or, at least, preparing the way for – democracy and justice which are, as Derrida says, always „to come".[82] Philosophers must, lest they

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[82] BORRADORI, Giovanna: *Deconstructing terrorism: Derrida*, 168–172; Derrida in CAPUTO (ed.): *Deconstruction in a nutshell*, 16–19; 22–24.

become even more socially and politically irrelevant than they already are, find inventive ways to become *activists* in a distinctively philosophical manner.

Zusammenfassung
Der Prozess der „Globalisierung" ist weiterhin voll in Gang. Schranken und Grenzen, die früher galten, wurden aufgebrochen und existieren nicht mehr. Die Entwicklung geschieht auf allen Ebenen: auf der wirtschaftlichen, politischen, kulturellen und gesellschaftlichen Ebene. Die Globalisierung bringt es mit sich, dass auch Terror Grenzen überschreitet, und zwar in einer Form, wie es bisher noch nicht vorkam.

Nach dem 11. September haben sich zwei bedeutende Denker auf unterschiedliche Weise philosophisch zur weltweiten Bedrohung durch den Terror geäussert: Jacques Derrida und Jürgen Habermas. Dieser Artikel arbeitet die philosophischen Unterschiede zwischen den beiden Denkern heraus, die der Frage nach der „Philosophie in der Zeit des Terrors" nachgehen. Ihre Antworten werden hier in einen grösseren Zusammenhang gestellt, wobei Derrida wegen seiner ausführlichen Gedanken mehr Beachtung erhält als Habermas.