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TRANSPARENCY AND THE LOGIC OF AUTO-IMMUNITY

Accorder à la majorité une autorité illimitée,
c'est offrir au peuple en masse
l'holocauste du peuple en détail.¹
Benjamin Constant

In *Voyous*² Jacques Derrida updates the formulation of the general law of the immune process and its application to the analysis of social facts that he had previously stated in *Foi et savoir*. I intend to deal in the following pages with an analysis of the language and the use of the vocabulary of immunology that, it appears to me, Derrida employs in a rather superficial and hasty way. Showing how Derrida fails in using this terminology – the one of immunology – I will claim that this misuse leads to a number of expeditious considerations that somehow hide a powerful intuition. A certain abrupt and misleading use of concepts and notions like those of autoimmune suicide (*suicide autoimmunitaire*), a certain misunderstanding of the logic and dynamic of auto-immunity bring Derrida to jumble up ideas, functions and concepts that are to be kept rigorously apart. Through a detour in René Girard's mimetic theory, I'll try and disentangle what Derrida garbles.

As an introduction, he proposes an exemplary case study which deals with the suspension of normal democratic procedures recorded in Algeria, in 1992, «au moment où l'état et le parti dominant ont interrompu un processus électoral démocratique»³ in order to avoid the normal process to lead, democratically, to the end of democracy. The electoral process risked to give the power to an essentially Islamic and islamist majority to which was attri-

¹ B. Constant, *De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation dans leur rapports avec la civilisation européenne*, in *Ecrits politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet, Paris, Gallimard, 1997, I, ch. 13, *De l'uniformité*, p. 169.

² J. Derrida, *Voyous. Deux essais sur la raison*, Paris, Galilée, 2003.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

buted, realistically with good reasons, the intent to change the constitution and abolish the regular functioning of democracy or the effectivity of an ongoing democratization. According to Derrida, the Algerian government and a relevant portion of the Algerian people preferred to put an end, «suspendre du moins provisoirement la démocratie *pour son bien* et pour prendre soin, pour l'immuniser contre la pire et plus probable agression»⁴.

The hypothesis, Derrida tells, is that of a power taken from or given to a people that, in its electoral majority and according to democratic procedures, wouldn't have avoided the destruction of democracy, «un certain suicide de la démocratie», un «suicide auto-immunitaire»⁵.

This example is just one determined occurrence of a paradigmatic process: «les totalitarismes fasciste et nazi sont arrivés au pouvoir, ils ont pris le pouvoir au cours de dynamiques électorales formellement normales et formellement démocratiques»⁶.

Derrida enlarges the field of observation taking into account the facts that lead to 1992 events: «une série d'exemples en chaîne d'une pervertibilité auto-immunitaire de la démocratie»⁷. Algeria, in order to immunize itself against the internal aggressor – the islamist majority determined to democratically destroy democracy – and against the external aggressor – the French colonial power violently imposing a democratic culture and political idiom – produced its enemies on both sides of the front, caught at the mercy of the illusion of a choice between homicide and suicide.

So, Algerian democracy, assaulted from without with a violent imposition of democracy reacted setting of a civil war – the abhorred *stasis* – and a war of independence; assaulted from within, anti-democratically suspended democracy in order to stave off the risk for it to be democratically destroyed. Derrida considers these two reactions as immune protections⁸ against the risk of an auto-immune suicide.

Before we get back to *Voyous*, I'll follow Derrida in his reference to the previous formulation of the general law of the auto-immune process given in *Foi et savoir*⁹, whose subtitle helps us fo-

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Id.*, *Foi et savoir*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1996/2001.

cusing on the topic I want to deal with: *Les deux sources de la «religion» aux limites de la simple raison*.

In this essay, the general law of the auto-immune process is stated in order to determine one of the two families, one of the two logs, one of the two sources of religion: «la pulsion de l'indemne, de ce qui reste allergique à la contamination, *sauf par soi-même, auto-immunément*»¹⁰. Sometimes it seems like Derrida is using either the term *immune* or *auto-immune* without making any proper distinction, as he overload the text with other expressions that belongs to the semantic field of immunology, such as those we find, juxtaposed without harmony, in the sentence quoted above. Allergy, for example, is not at all an auto-immune reaction, but an hypersensitivity reaction, an abnormal reply of the immune system with regard to the nature of antigens, in this case, the allergens. The text presents a series of other statements that make the reader somehow doubtful about the very comprehension of the immune logic that Derrida is trying to explain, although we may remark that the essay nurtures ambitions that go beyond the topic of this contribution. It's the case of the considerations that follow the etymological note at the lemma *immune*, that designates that who or which is «affranchi des charges, du service, des impôts, des obligations (*munus*, racine du commun de la communauté)¹¹». In this note, Derrida elaborates upon the origin of the semantic field of immunity, clearing the field of any biologicistic or reductionist misunderstanding¹²: it's in the filed of biology that the jargon of immunity has developed its authority, that is true, but not before being widely spread in the fields of constitutional, international and, above all, canonical law. In biology – that by the way abundantly employs metaphors and terms that do not belong to its field¹³ – «la réaction immunitaire protège

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42. The other source, the other religious experience is, according to Derrida, *la croyance* (see *ibid.*, p. 52).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67. See also R. Esposito, *Communitas*, Torino, Einaudi, 1998, text which, interestingly enough does not take into account Derrida's essay.

¹² Even clearer, with the same purpose, see J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p 175. It is to be underlined that, beyond the root *munus*, about which Esposito has been working for the last decade, most of the terminology of biological immunity is borrowed from humanities, from the *insult*, to the *self*, to the *tolerance*. For this reason, eventhough historically it has produced some deleterious effect – see again R. Esposito, *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Torino, Einaudi, 2002 –, Derrida's work aspires to «une portée sans limites», see J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p 175.

¹³ Se A.I. Tauber, *The immune self: Theory or metaphor?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

l'indemnité du corps propre en produisant des anticorps contre des antigènes étrangers»¹⁴. This correct sentence is followed by an improvident consideration: «quant au processus d'auto-immunization, qui nous intéresse tout particulièrement ici, il consiste pour un organisme vivant, on le sait, à se protéger en somme contre son autoprotection en détruisant ses propres défenses immunitaires»¹⁵. This sentence is quite surprising: autoimmune processes do not protect « contre son autoprotection» and for sure they do not destroy immune defenses. If I had to range this description in the spectrum of divers pathologies of the immune system, I would rather think of immunodeficiency. It is precisely in this slip that I'll try and find the leeway needed to recast Derrida's argument.

The confusion in the argument is not interesting as such, nor it is the aim of this contribution to syndicate on the correct application of concepts whose precise determination belongs indeed to other fields and disciplines. The relevancy of these odd oscillations depends on the use Derrida is making in *Voyous* of the general law of the autoimmune process, that is to say, the application of what I'd simply call immune logic to the discussion of the essence and fate of democracy. In *Voyous*, one can read, after the pages dedicated to the Algerian case, some considerations about the reaction of the United States after the terrorist attack at the Twin Towers, the reaction at the «effet de ce qu'on appelle le "11 septembre"»¹⁶.

According to Derrida, the fact that the American administration «prétendant partir en guerre contre l'"axe du mal", contre les ennemis de la liberté et contre les assassins de la démocratie dans le monde, doit inévitablement et indéniablement restreindre, dans son propre pays, les libertés dites démocratiques ou l'exercice du droit», is a process «visiblement auto-immunitaire»¹⁷.

Basically, Derrida considers the antidemocratic reaction of democracy as an autoimmune attack to the immune self, to the immune *autos*, that is to say, to democracy; and yet immune logic would intuitively lead to maintain other claims.

The spirit that leads both the considerations about the Algerian case and those on the American case is clearly the same, de-

¹⁴ J. Derrida, *Foi et savoir* cit., p. 67, footnote.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

mocracy, in order to defend itself against the aggression, the offense, the *insult*, reacts with means that seem to deny democracy itself. But, let's take the example of the vaccination, the process of *artificial induction of immunity*. In order to defend an organism from a possible aggression, one inoculates a minute amount of an infectious agent in an effort to protect against infectious diseases and help the immune system to provide the immune response, in this case, reinforcing the *antibodies* of democracy. The case of Algeria, which «du moins provisoirement»¹⁸ suspends democracy in order to save democracy seems quite similar to a simple vaccination. Why does Derrida consider the temporary suspension of normal democratic procedures in defense of democracy an immune procedure, but judge the American administration operation, amenable to the same logic – let evil be cured by evil –, an auto-immune process?

Secondly, why does he think that Algeria ran the risk of an auto-immune suicide? The Algerian case looks like the specular reverse of a vaccination: it's not about democracy assaulting democracy, but rather democracy defending itself against a particular aggression, lead with democratic rules. Once again, it seems that the Algerian case, as a reaction against an internal aggressor, looks like an artificial induction of immunity against a menace to which the immune system cannot object its own innate immunity.

It is now possible to retrace the origin of the surprising confusions in Derrida's essay. In this text, filled with terms about which Girard has been dedicating his attention for the last four decades – such as *méconnaissance*, resentment, (human) sacrifice – Derrida's thesis resonates with girardian analyses of archaic communities and of the logic of the sacred, the so called *Logos of Heraclitus*¹⁹. According to Girard, the immune logic appears as a modern recasting of the sacrificial mechanism focused in the 1972 essay:

The patient's defenses, according to modern theory, must be reinforced so that he can repulse a microbotic invasion by his own means. The beneficent process is still conceived in terms of an invasion repulsed, a harmful intruder chased from the premises [...]. The physician inoculates the patient with a minute amount of the disease, just as, in the course of

¹⁸ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 57.

¹⁹ See R. Girard, *Things hidden since the foundation of the world. Research undertaken in collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and G. Lefort*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987, pp. 263-280.

the rites, the community is injected with a minute amount of violence, enabling it to ward off an attack of full-fledged violence. The analogies abound. «Booster shots», for instance, correspond to the repetition of sacrificial rites. And of course, in all varieties of “sacrificial” protection there is always the danger of a catastrophic inversion; a too virulent vaccine, a too powerful *phamarkon*, can promote the illness it was supposed to prevent. In the first chapter I used vaccination as a metaphor to illustrate certain aspects of sacrifice. Now we can see that vaccination, like so many other human institutions, really amounts to a metaphorical displacement of sacrifice.²⁰

Girard sees in the immune logic the fundamental dynamic of the constitution and conservation of the community’s integrity: one could add one more detail. There are two different kinds of vaccination, the vaccine prophylaxis and vaccine therapy²¹. In the first case it is a procedure of active protection whose aim is to create an immune condition against the risk of contracting a disease. The vaccine therapy is a procedure with therapeutic ends against diseases already contracted, whose aim is to reinforce the organism’s antibodies. Analogies with the mimetic theory are quite amazing. The fundamental thesis of René Girard maintains that the founding moment of the sacred is a violent victimization, a scapegoating process thanks to which a community, in an undifferentiation crisis, that is to say caught in a crisis of violent rivalries and *vendetta*, can find its own unity and integrity at the expenses of a single victim whose expulsion or killing brings back the peace, restating the fundamental distinction, the fundamental discrimination «between friends and foes».²²

The scapegoat, that as such, if such, remains unknown, *méconnu* to the other members of the community, bears the responsibility of the crisis and the merit of the renewed harmony. A minute amount of supplementary violence can put an end to the intestine violence. As one can understand, the founding murderer looks quite like a vaccine therapy, just as the sacrifices, the booster shots are in general and above all, vaccine prophylaxis, preventive procedures.

The autoimmune disease, that as we will see is different

²⁰ R. Girard, *The violence and the sacred*, translated by P. Gregory, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, p. 305.

²¹ As far as the preventive function of sacrifice is concerned, *ibid.*, p. 18 *et passim*.

²² See D. Mazzu, *La métaphore auto-immunitaire du politique*, in Id. (eds.) *Politique de Caïn. En dialogue avec René Girard*, Paris, Désclée de Brouwer, 2004, p. 274.

thing than the autoimmune reaction, is not, as Derrida says, «cette étrange logique illogique par laquelle un vivant peut spontanément détruire, de façon autonome, cela même qui, en lui, se destine à le protéger contre l'autre, à l'immuniser contre l'intrusion agressive de l'autre»²³.

The autoimmune disease is a pathology because of which the immune system attacks normal tissues as if they were foreign organisms, it attacks the *self* and can eventually destroy it. The matter is actually much more delicate than this: autoimmune disease does not lead the immune system to attack «cela même qui, en lui, se destine à le protéger contre l'autre» nor, à l'immuniser contre l'intrusion agressive de l'autre»²⁴, nor «[détruit] ses propres défenses immunitaires»²⁵.

Behind this confusion a misunderstanding has to be concealed, and it deals with the very same theme that animated the debate between Metchnikoff²⁶ and Ehrlich: in its constant interaction with the exterior – and with the interior –, the immune system, a proper threshold, does just defend the integrity of the *self* or does it actively take part in the progressive and continuous determination of identity?

There are two rhetorical gestures that lead to suspect that Derrida is misusing the concepts of the immune logic. First of all, as I said, there is this odd confusion about the *victim* of the autoimmune aggression, the immune defense rather than the *self*, the ego's integrity – to speak the truth one must say that there are pages where Derrida juxtaposes the two uses, and this does not reduce but rather increases the feeling of confusion. Secondly, one is struck by the fact that Derrida does not even hint at the fundamental distinction between autoimmune diseases and autoimmune reaction. The latter is an extremely normal physiological process, a process that is indeed necessary for a normal performance of the immune system. Autoimmune disease, instead, is determined as the result of a failure of the immune system in controlling the discrimination process, that is to say, the process

²³ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 173 and, in other words but on the same argumentative line, J. Derrida, *Foi et savoir* cit., p. 67.

²⁴ Id., *Voyous* cit., p. 173 and, in other words but on the same argumentative line, J. Derrida, *Foi et savoir* cit., p. 67.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ilya Ilyich Mechnikov, russian biologist that moved to Paris to work at the Institut Pasteur and Paul Ehrlich won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1908 for their work on phagocytosis.

through which the system defines what is *self*, what is to be protected and healed, and what is *non-self* and therefore must be attacked and destroyed. In an autoimmune disease the autoimmune reaction is not any longer confined against the *non-self* but goes out of control.

The immune system is based upon the autoimmune reaction, which participates actively in the constant operation of discrimination between *self* and *not-self*, which is not directed exclusively against menaces coming from without. It is precisely this operation of discrimination that contributes to the constitution of the *self*, product and origin of the immune discrimination – «the self is self-defining»²⁷. The defense of the organism, of the *self*, is rather the constitutive operation of the *autos* itself²⁸. For hermeneutic charity, one could think that this is the case to which Derrida is hinting when he says that «l'auto-immunité [est] un principe d'autodestruction sacrificiel ruinant le principe de protection de soi (du maintien de l'intégrité intacte de soi)»²⁹, but this sentence would anyway be just partially correct: the principle of self-protection coincides only in part with the process of maintenance of the integrity of the *self*, and it is not autoimmunity that put this in jeopardy.

Nevertheless, there is a chance to save Derrida's intuition and to recast his argumentative strategy through a thorough confront with René Girard's mimetic theory and with the most significant consequences of its application to the matter.

As it has been said, the victimage and sacrificial dynamics are associated to vaccination, a procedure that provides the organism with an acquired immunity. There is one more possible analogy between the immune logic and the sacrificial logic on which Girard has shed light on, and it has to do with the discrimination processes.

Metchnikoff stressed so often that the struggle of phagocytes with intruders (that is, interspecies competition) was only a secondary effect of their normal activity. The defense of the organism from parasitic attack was only one of several functions, including phagocytic repair of damaged tissue and surveillance of malignant or senile cells. Thus, the phagocyte (the immune system as a whole), in Metchnikoff's system, defined organismic identity; that is, it determined what was not to be destroyed

²⁷ A.I. Tauber, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

²⁸ See *Id.*, *op. cit.*, p. 136 *passim*.

²⁹ J. Derrida, *Foi et savoir* *cit.*, p. 79.

or eaten, whether foreign or native.³⁰

The organism, with some «obvious genetic (i.e., built-in) restrictions», is «defined immunologically by a dynamic and ever-changing *process* of immune selection»³¹, which, as it has been already said, operates discriminating what is to be protected and what is to be destroyed, regardless of it being native or foreigner, coming from within or from without.

I'm insisting very much on this aspect because it gives me the chance to focus on the second analogy – or identity – between the logic of the sacred and the immune dynamics; an analogy that will provide me the means to recast Derrida's discourse.

There is one text, about which Derrida has written very interesting pages in *La pharmacie de Platon* and in *Khôra*, whose absence in *Voyous* is even louder than its presence elsewhere. This essay is *Ambiguïté et renversement. Sur la structure énigmatique d'Œdipe-Roi*³², in which Vernant claims that the Athenian institutions of the *pharmakos* and the *ostrakos* – whose ritual origin is more than evident –, are to be considered together as specular phenomena

Quand elle [la cité] fonde l'ostracisme, elle crée une institution dont le rôle est symétrique et inverse du rituel des Thargélie. Dans la personne de l'ostracisé, la Cité expulse ce qui en elle est trop élevé et incarne le mal qui peut lui venir par le haut. Dans celle du *pharmacos*, elle expulse ce qu'elle comporte de plus vil et qui incarne le mal qui la menace par le bas. Par ce double et complémentaire rejet, elle se délimite elle-même par rapport à un au-delà et un en deçà. Elle prend la mesure propre de l'humain en opposition d'un côté au divin et à l'héroïque, de l'autre au bestial et au monstrueux.³³

This excerpt clearly confirms the double analogy between the immune system and the logic of the sacred that I have advanced above – «the immune self arises from immune activity».³⁴

³⁰ A.I. Tauber, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

³² J.-P. Vernant, *Ambiguïté et renversement. Sur la structure énigmatique d'Œdipe-Roi*, in AA.VV., *Echanges et communications. Mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi-Strauss*, Paris, Mouton, 1970, t. II, pp. 1253-1279. From this same essay Girard took inspiration to state his own theory of the undifferentiation crisis, this truly similar to an auto-immune suicide, see R. Girard, *Violence and the sacred* cit., p. 93 *et passim*.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1274-1275.

³⁴ A.I. Tauber, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

The violent rite, the expulsion of the *ostrakos*, and the sacrifice (expulsion or killing) of the *pharmakos* are at the same time a vaccination – the inoculation of a minute amount of violence: the killing, the expulsion – and a discriminative operation, a double and complementary rejection, thanks to which the *polis* delimits and constitutes itself.

Vernant also offers the chance to shed light on a surprising cut in Derrida's argument, the one he performs when referring to Aristotle's *Politics* in order to introduce the topic of unconditionality and to comment on the role and topology of exception, of the rogue, of the outlaw. Well, Derrida takes into consideration the famous excerpt (Arist, *Politics*, 1284a) in which Aristotle is expanding about the possibility of a man that is «as a god between men» (Arist, *Politics*, 1284a), a man «qui ait une vertu ou une capacité politique incomparables, incommensurables, inégales à celles des autres»³⁵: submitting such a man to *isonomia* would betray the idea of justice, of *dikè*, because for these men there is no law, there is no *nomos*, for they are the law (*autoi gar eisi nomos*). Well, what struck my attention in this argument of Derrida's is not «la faiblesse de la souveraineté et la raison du plus fort dont cet exposé – says Derrida – fait en somme l'économie»³⁶, but the fact that Derrida interrupts his quotation and his comment on Aristotle on the sentence «Au vrai, on serait ridicule d'essayer de légiférer (*nomothetein*) contre eux; ils diraient sans doute ce que, selon Antisthène, les lions répondirent aux lièvres qui revendiquaient en assemblée l'égalité pour tous»³⁷ and severs off the following one; the sentence on which all aristotelian argument stands on, that is to say, an explanation of the *ostracism*: «and for this reason democratic states have instituted ostracism» (Arist, *Politics*, 1284a, 19).

Athenian democracy, as Vernant recalls and Aristotle confirms, maintains, defends, constitutes its own self integrity, its own indemnity thanks to procedures whose origins are indisputably ritualistic³⁸, based on mechanisms of immune discrimination.

The third pillar of mimetic theory – beside the theory of mimetic desire and the theory of the victimage mechanism – main-

³⁵ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 112.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, «Any would be ridiculous who attempted to make laws for them: they would probably retort what, in the fable of Antisthenes, the lions said to the hares, when in the council of the beasts the latter began haranguing and claiming equality for all».

³⁸ See J.-P. Vernant, *Ambiguïté et renversement* cit., pp. 1273-1274.

tains that precisely the ritual procedures of arbitrary discrimination are subjected to a weakening process of erosion prepared by the Old Testament and set off by the evangelic Revelation. Taking into serious account this thesis, as I am here trying to do, means to reconsider the abolition of discriminatory procedures as, to stick with the analogy already cleared of any biologicistic misunderstanding, – and trying and avoid any implicit axiology – some sort of acquired immunodeficiency. Christianity, extending René Girard's major claim, has weakened immune defenses of democracy, and has turned it – and still does, in an ongoing effective and performative process against which every reaction would necessarily swing between the impotent and the abnormal – into an *immunodeficient autos*³⁹.

Once one takes into account this slip, Derrida's intuition and strategy become coherent. Democracy, «l'*autos* de l'auto-délimitation déconstructive»⁴⁰ is a regime essentially bereft of essence *because* it is built on the negation of the processes of discrimination that should constitute and define that very same essence. This characteristic, though, it is itself intrinsically historic and as a matter of fact determines the «historicité intrinsèque qu'elle ne partage avec aucun autre régime»⁴¹ and therefore partially gainsays Derrida's argument:

Dans son auto-immunité constitutive, dans sa vocation à l'hospitalité [...], la démocratie a *toujours* voulu tour à tour et à la fois deux choses incompatibles: elle a voulu, *d'une part*, n'accueillir que des hommes, et à la condition qu'ils fussent des citoyens, des frères et des semblables, en excluant les autres, en particulier les mauvais citoyens – les voyous –, les non-citoyens et toutes sortes d'autres, dissemblables, méconnaissables, et, *d'autre part*, à la fois ou tour à tour, elle a voulu s'ouvrir, offrir une hospitalité à tous ces exclus.⁴²

Democracy, as Vernant and Aristotle tell us, has not always wanted two incompatible things and therefore it is not a constitutively auto-immune system – or it was, but, as I have shown, not in the sense Derrida uses the word –: it is rather an historically im-

³⁹ I completely adhere to what A.J. McKenna says in the essay published in this same issue – Id., *The Ends of Violence: Girard and Derrida* –: «Deconstruction is not a solution to the crisis, but its symptomatology».

⁴⁰ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 131, J. Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, Paris, Galilée, 1994, p. 129.

⁴¹ Id., *Voyous* cit., p. 106.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 95, I underline «*toujours*».

munodeficient regime.

What makes this analysis more and more interesting is the fact that precisely in the revelation of the violent origin of sacrificial systems and institutions and in the unveiling of the arbitrariness of the discriminative processes, sacrificial themselves, finally, as a result of a struggle for transparency, one can individuate the trigger of this historical process. Interestingly enough, it's the struggle for transparency – a struggle for purity – that makes the discriminative immune procedures upon which the constitutive processes of the democratic *autos* stand, impossible and therefore it exposes democracy to the risk of being bare and helpless, that is to say, bereft of democratic antibodies, against the pathological hypertrophy and degeneration of tissues that the auto-immune system can no longer eat or destroy.

The opposite risk is the one faced by Paul Dumouchel in *Le sacrifice inutile*⁴³, essay dealing with the problem of the abnormal use of political violence by the State against its own citizens, that is to say those cases in which the discrimination processes don't expel or destroy just the elements pertaining the *non-self* but turn against the *self*, progressively destroying the entire organism or entity: those cases we can call autoimmune catastrophes – for example the appalling tragedy of Cambodia⁴⁴.

Derrida collapses two different intuitions in one argument. Autoimmunity does not attack the immune defenses, it is instead a discrimination process that, in the discrimination, in the selection of what is to be saved and healed and what is to be destroyed, constitutes the *self*. The autoimmune disease, to which Derrida seems to refer, is the pathological degeneration of this discriminative process, that leads the immune system to turn against the cells and the tissues of the *self* and destroy them. Derrida's intuition is to observe that democracy risks to die – and not to destroy itself – by excess of democracy; to correct this consideration a *détour* through mimetic theory was needed. It has been possible to shed light on the fact that Athenian democracy had its own constitutive discrimination systems based on the opacity of rituals, on the *méconnaissance* protecting the specular and complementary institutions of the *pharmakos* and the *ostrakos*, the Thargelia festival and the ostracism. I think it is precisely the overlapping (that

⁴³ P. Dumouchel, *Le sacrifice inutile. Essai sur la violence politique*, Flammarion, Paris 2011.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 191-214.

Derrida does not realize) of this two immune functions – the autoimmune reaction, discriminative, delimiting and constitutive of the two rituals and their vaccine function – that blurs the issue. If one takes into serious account Girard's thesis, one can realize that, once unveiled the violent essence of discrimination⁴⁵ – that, as far as ostracism is concerned, already Aristotle, even if with different reasons, had flashed out – the democratic regime loses the fundamental constitutive function played by the autoimmune reaction and it sees indeed weaken its immune defenses.

I can now reformulate Derrida's intuition: if Athenian democracy could live thanks to the performance of a ritual immune system, based on regular constitutive discrimination and vaccination against intestine violence, modern and liberal democracy, once disarticulated this autoconstitutive mechanism, is forced to live on the threshold that sunders a destruction by immunodeficiency and an autoimmune catastrophe.

Proposal: 27/06/2010, Review: 15/08/2011, Publication: 04/02/2012

⁴⁵ Interestingly enough the term «discrimination» – at least in my mother tongue, Italian – has by now lost its neutral meaning of division, selection, and it is used only to describe violent, illegitimate, arbitrary operations.