Reverberating the *glas*: Towards a Deconstructive Account of Particularity in Hegel’s Logic of the Concept

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**Abstract**

Understanding Hegel’s account of particularity has proven to be anything but straightforward. Two main accounts of particularity have been advanced: the particular as an example or instance and the particular as a subjective perspective on a universal concept. The problem with these accounts is that they reduce particularity either to singularity or to universality. As Derrida’s analyses make apparent, the ‘structure of exemplarity’ in Hegel is quite intricate. Hegel uses ‘example’ in three senses: it means (1) ‘instance’, ‘illustration’, or (2) ‘model’, ‘exemplary individual’, ‘paradigm’, or (3) a by-play (a meaning derived from Hegel’s neologism *beiherspielen*, in which *Beispiel* is understood quasi-etymologically as a ‘by-play’ of accidental moments). A *Beispiel* in the first sense can be replaced by another instance in a free play (by-play). This play of accidental moments, however, is not entirely free; it generates a series (of replacements) that ultimately leads to an example in the second sense, to an exemplary individual. I argue that particularity can be taken as exemplarity of this kind, oscillating between a singular example and a universal paradigm. Within this by-play, the universal concept, its law, is supposed to be mediated and determined. However, out of the differences between the examples the by-play induces another law, the law of non-mediation, which may, in Derrida’s view, actually negate the dialectical movement towards universality. I argue, utilizing Malabou’s concept of plasticity, that this disruption may be recovered. This implies that each individual example within a series is a particular determination of the universal. Hence, we can take literally Hegel’s claim that the movement of the concept is a play.

**Keywords**

Hegel, concept, particularity, deconstruction, Derrida, example, paradigm

Particularity is a typical mediating ‘third term’ of a kind that has fascinated philosophers ever since ancient times. Other examples of this sort include Plato’s *methexis*, Aristotle’s *energeia*, Kant’s schematism, Marx’s ‘mystery of speculative construction’ and various accounts of the (productive) imagination or symbolism. For Derrida too, ‘everything [about a philosophical] system comes down to the question of the “third”’ (2001: 5). Furthermore, there has been a tendency to eliminate all indeterminacy from this mediating—a desire for total rationality. I shall argue that Hegel’s account of particularity provides a way of countering this tendency. Informed by Derrida’s deconstruction, I offer an understanding of particularity as a kind of play. Moreover, I consider and allay Derrida’s worry that play can subvert not just the ideal of total rationality, but also the whole dialectical movement.

# Particularity

For Hegel, the concept (*Begriff*) is not merely the fundamental structure of our thinking, but rather a form that warrants the speculative identity of thought and being. Hegel recognizes three basic moments of the concept: universality, particularity and singularity (individuality).[[1]](#footnote-2),[[2]](#footnote-3) Figuring out what particularity is and how it works is thus indispensable for understanding Hegel’s system as a whole. Yet there is no scholarly consensus about what exactly the moment of particularity is. Hegel begins his dialectical account of the concept, i.e. a dialectical movement from universality to particularity and finally to individuality, with abstract universality. Universality is something already available from the logic of essence. As something presupposed, abstract universality or a general conception (*allgemeine Vorstellung*) is characterized by its neglecting particular features which would account for specific differences among the subspecies and individuals that fall under the concept in question. Particularity then mediates between universality and individuality.

What, then, is particularity? The traditional (Aristotelian-Leibnizian) view of particularity is that of a subspecies or a subset (cf. Stekeler-Weithofer 1992: 350). A universal applies to a whole domain—*all* entities of a certain kind (‘all men’, ‘every object’, ‘all fruits’, etc.); a particular applies to a specific subset—*some* entities of a certain kind (‘some men are dark-haired’, ‘some objects are heavy’, ‘some fruits are apples’, etc.). The particular as subset is a negation of the universal. Hegel, however, finds this subset view of particularity too narrow and thus unsatisfactory; the particular is not something less than the universal. Hegel says quite clearly that ‘each moment of the concept is itself the entire concept’ (*EL*: §163, 237). Hence: ‘The particular is the universal itself.’ (*SL*: 12.38) As already mentioned, Hegel distinguishes between abstract universality and concrete or true universality. The latter universality contains its own principle of difference, which differentiates the whole concept within itself. The particular moment of the concept is this principle. Hegel says that ‘the *determinateness* of the particular is *simple* as *principle*, but it is also simple as a moment of the totality, determinateness as against the *other* determinateness.’ (*SL*: 12.39) The whole concept is differentiated into the particular as its sole subspecies, which is different from the universal. The particular thus has a dual determination: it is the principle of the difference within the universal and its subspecies. The particular is the principle of this differentiation, i.e. a particularization of the universal and the result of this particularization, a particular subspecies. Hegel says that in the internal sense, ‘the particular remains a universal’, while in the external sense, ‘it is a *determinate particular*’ (*SL*: 12.49). The *whole* concept, in its being and activity as both substance and subject, differentiates its universal moment[[3]](#footnote-4) (human, object, fruit, etc.) into the particular (dark-haired men, heavy objects, apples, etc.). These particulars are universals with respect to their particular and singular elements; they are, however, also determinate particulars with respect to the universal (to be dark-haired is a determination of men, to be heavy is a determination of objects, to be an apple is a determination of fruits).

Understanding Hegel’s account of particularity has proven to be anything but straightforward. Hegel probably adopted his conception of particularity from Gottfried Ploucquet, who was active at the time of Hegel’s studies in Tübingen. Ploucquet distinguished between ‘exclusive’ and ‘comprehensive’ particularity. An *exclusive* particular A is an instantiation of A. What is meant by the expression ‘this particular tree’ is this tree as opposed to that tree over there. This is why this use of particularity is exclusive. Comprehensive particularity, in contrast, does not exclude any singular instance of the term in question. If exclusive particularity is instantiation, then this kind of particularity comes closer to what Hegel later refers to as singularity (even the phrase ‘some particular trees’ can be understood as, say, this group of trees as opposed to that group of trees over there).[[4]](#footnote-5) Then, however, the crucial question remains: how are we to understand comprehensive (i.e. genuine) particularity? Only comprehensive particularity is the whole concept, as Hegel requires (*SL*: 12.32).

Arguably, this distinction between exclusive and comprehensive particularity aligns with two main contemporary interpretations of particularity. On the first interpretation, the particular is a (comprehensive) perspective on the whole concept. Slavoj Žižek, following Catherine Malabou, writes: ‘Hence the true particularity of a universal Notion [concept]is not simply one of its species which can, as such, be grasped by a neutral subject observing this universality […]; rather, the true particularity is, primarily, the *particular subjective position from which the universal Notion is acceptable to me*’ (2012: 360, emphasis original). A particular is a specific historical appearance, or, rather, *the* true historical appearance of a universal. On the second interpretation, the particular is an example (that is, an instantiation). This interpretation was advocated by Goethe,[[5]](#footnote-6) and more recently by Richard Winfield, who writes: ‘As particular, each instance of the shared quality comprises an undifferentiated example, standing in an identical relation to the quality they hold in common.’ (Winfield 2006: 76)[[6]](#footnote-7) For Winfield, a particular is an *undifferentiated* example, that is, an example (of the universal) whose accidental (non-exemplifying) features have not been specified. Particularity is a kind of variable, something unsaturated, i.e. a moment of the whole concept, whose values are its individual instances (‘differentiated particularization’).

The advantage of the first (comprehensive) interpretation is that it determines the concept as such, not only a part of it. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it does not account for the difference within the whole concept. The only difference available is that between different subjective and historical perspectives on the concept. Žižek, however, is seeking to define *the* true subjective particularization of the universal and, hence, other particular perspectives are not available.[[7]](#footnote-8) The particular is, however, the (first) negation of the universal; it is something that the universal is not (cf. Winfield 2011: 233). A historical appearance of something is not necessarily its negation. It is, rather, something singular. And it is not clear which singular appearance of a universal comprises its true subjective position.[[8]](#footnote-9)

A problem with the second interpretation is that it is difficult to conceive an undifferentiated example, that is, to make an idea of a thing that has some qualities left unspecified (for instance, we cannot conceive an undifferentiated example of a triangle, i.e. a triangle with unspecified angles). We have arrived at the familiar problems with Kant’s schematism. An example is primarily something individual. But as something individual, it always exemplifies either too little or too much. Examples are either too imperfect to capture an ideal universality or else, possibly at the same time, may exemplify features that do not belong to the universal concept.[[9]](#footnote-10) The problem with these interpretations is thus that they render a particular as lacking a perspective on the example that would determine what qualities are being exemplified. Examples thus lack the determinateness of the particular.

We can understand particularity as a process of mediation that goes from universality to singularity (like the development of the predicate in the abstract judgement). In comprehensive particularity, the process, so to speak, has not started yet, whereas exclusive particularity is a result of this process. Comprehensive particularity is too universal, exclusive particularity too singular.[[10]](#footnote-11) These two interpretations of particularity not only complement each other, but one also dialectically turns into the other, something which hints at the solution I shall propose later. Comprehensive particularity, a historical perspective on a total concept, is necessarily a restriction of this concept. The outcome of restricting the total concept is its exemplification. A concrete historical appearance of a concept is an exemplification of this concept.[[11]](#footnote-12) Exclusive particularity proceeds in the opposite manner. A concrete example, which is an individual, becomes an undifferentiated example by abstracting from all its accidental qualities. A *Beispiel* passes to the essence and becomes universal. This dialectical opposition from the *Phenomenology* becomes crucial later. These two interpretations of particularity switch places. This dependency is in line with the exchange in the meaning of the two sides of the abstract judgement: ‘Subject and predicate then also acquire a [new] meaning, the former that of the particular and universal, the latter that of the particular and individual. This exchange in the meaning of the two sides of the judgment is what takes place under the two designations of “subject” and “predicate”.’ (*EL*: §169) Explaining particularity thus amounts to explaining this process of mediating between the individual (example) and the universal (perspective).

# Deconstructive approaches to exemplarity

My deconstructive interpretation of particularity will be driven by two main points. First, the particular is an example, or particularity is exemplarity. This holds, however, only if exemplarity is understood in a deconstructive manner, i.e. as a ‘passage from the example to the exemplariness of the example’ (Derrida 1986: 29). Second, this deconstructive understanding of exemplarity draws explicit inspiration from Hegel’s pun on the noun ‘*Beispiel*’ and his neological verb ‘*beiherspielen*’: an example (*Beispiel*) is not only an illustration of a universal concept but primarily an activity of play (*Spiel*) alongside (*beiher*) the essence. In short, particularity is exemplarity understood in Hegel’s sense.

Exemplarity is supposed to mediate between singularity and universality. One strand of the terminology stresses the singular moment, while another emphasizes the universal moment. The following expressions belong to the first strand: ‘example’, ‘instance’, ‘illustration’, ‘token’, ‘case’; these expressions can be modified by adjectives like ‘mere’, ‘arbitrary’, ‘undifferentiated’, ‘singular’. The latter group, relating to the moment of universality, comprises expressions like ‘exemplum’, ‘exemplar’, ‘model’ and ‘paradigm’ as well as less common words like ‘specimen’, ‘archetype’, ‘prototype’, ‘paragon’, ‘arche-example’ and ‘blueprint’. Sometimes terms are combined, as in ‘paradigmatic sample’ or ‘exemplary case’. Some expressions are limited to certain fields, such as law (e.g. ‘landmark case’ or ‘precedent’). The idea is that an example or an illustration of X merely illustrates or exemplifies the universal concept X. An example of X is a more or less randomly picked element of X (or something that falls under X), whereas exemplars, paradigms and their cognates have a normative function. There are, however, expressions that fall between these two moments. We often speak of ‘the best example’, ‘an ideal example’, ‘an exemplary example’, ‘an example par excellence’, ‘a privileged example’, etc. These expressions, and the fact that they are intelligible, indicate that there are differences among examples in terms of their exemplifying function. One example can be better or more suitable than another. What makes one example better is its proximity to the exemplar. This consideration calls into question any strict distinction between a singular or factual example and a universal or normative exemplar.[[12]](#footnote-13)

As discussed above, the example account of particularity faces the problem that it is indeterminate what exactly an example exemplifies. For Derrida, this indeterminateness is not necessarily a disadvantage:

What example? This one. And certainly, when I say this very example, I already say something more and something else; I say something which goes beyond the *tode ti*, the this of the example. The example itself, as such, overflows its singularity as much as its identity. This is why there are no examples while at the same time there are only examples; I have said this often about many examples. The exemplarity of the example is clearly never the exemplarity of the example. We can never be sure of having put an end to this very old children’s game in which all the discourses, philosophical or not, which have ever inspired deconstructions, are entangled even by the performative fiction which consists in saying, starting up the game again, ‘take precisely this example’. (1992a: 15)[[13]](#footnote-14)

An example thus exemplifies something more and something other than it is supposed to. This fact should not be taken as a flaw, but rather as an opportunity that gives the example a certain dynamic. Giving an example opens up the interval between this singular example and the exemplarity of the example, i.e. the exemplar.

‘Example’ and ‘exemplar’ are (or at least appear to be) clearly distinguished in English. However, the distinction between these terms and their cognates can be called into question. ‘Exemplarity’ is related both to ‘example’ and to ‘exemplar’. Derrida often subverts these fixed meanings, or, rather, he subverts the difference between them. This difference, which may be elided in spoken language, is attributable to the *différance* between the example and the exemplar and, ultimately, to the impenetrability of the original *différance*. The idea is that Hegel aimed at something similar with his pun on ‘*Beispiel*’ and his neologism ‘*beiherspielen*’. It is, however, quite clear that the German word ‘*Beispiel*’ signifies ‘example’ (and did so in Hegel’s times too). Hegel’s pun subverts this fixed identity. Andrzej Warminski, with reference to Hegel, delineates this disruption of the meaning of ‘*Beispiel’* as follows:

[T]his speculative wordplay on *Beispiel* accounts for itself by the word’s *meaning,* for *Beispiel* means both ‘model’ (*Vorbild, Muster*)and ‘example’ or ‘illustration’ (*veranschaulichendes Gleichnis*)*.* In other words, it both precedes and follows; it is both inside and outside, exemplary and derived. (1987: 98)

I shall argue that these two meanings of ‘*Beispiel*’ mark the poles of the deconstructive interval between the example and the exemplarity of the example. The fact that this is an interval means that there is no sharp distinction between these two poles, i.e. two meanings of ‘example’.

In *Glas*, his book-length interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy (as well as the writings of Jean Genet), Derrida distinguishes between an example as ‘a particular case in a whole or a homogeneous series’ and an example as ‘the exemplary ideal, the absolute sense of which the finite examples are precisely only approximating samples [*exemplaires*]’ (Derrida 1986: 29). This is, for Derrida, the passage from the finite (example) to the infinite (exemplarity of the example). Given this distinction, the Spirit is precisely an infinite exemplary example, not any finite example (of something). In the same sense, the nature of God is exemplary; everything else is an example of it (ibid.: 30). Derrida’s *Glas* primarily focuses on Hegel’s account of the family, where he shows the same interval between a finite example and infinite exemplarity. Each example of family relations from Hegel (the holy family, Antigone), Hegel’s own relation to his sister and Derrida’s contrasting examples from Genet’s life and work shows something beyond itself, beyond its singularity: ‘the uniqueness of the example is destroyed by itself, immediately elaborates the power of a generalizing organ’ (ibid.: 141). Every example points towards an exemplar. Even Derrida picked out one example from Hegel’s work, his account of the family, and treated it as exemplary for Hegel’s whole system.[[14]](#footnote-15) Before we investigate how precisely the generalizing organ, the passage from the example to the exemplar, functions, let us look at other works by Derrida where the interval between these two meanings is discussed from slightly different perspectives.

In the essay ‘Cartouches’ from *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida maintains that the Greek word ‘paradigm’ (para-deigma) aptly captures the pole of the exemplary model. A paradigm is not simply (or not only) an object that defines the common essence of all instances:

But if the paradigm appears to be at the origin of a genealogy, the scandal of usurpation will not delay and the paradigm will have to withdraw (retreat, exile, retirement). The paradigm was not at the origin, it is itself neither producer nor generator. It is a fac-simile of a model, will first have been produced—and even, in all the senses of this word, as model, reduced. [… The paradigm] is, then, indeed a matter of duction in series: neither induction, nor production, nor reproduction, nor reduction exhaust it with their modalities, nor even seduction which leads it astray [le conduit à l’écart]. (1987: 194)

The paradigm is not only an archetype which precedes or breeds instances (‘neither producer nor generator’); it has to be produced or chosen by labour or craftsmanship (*techne*) in order to exemplify some property. It is not only a result of an inductive process; it does not reproduce any instance. This is not to say that the paradigm does not have these functions or modalities. It does have them but cannot be reduced to just one of them. The paradigm has the meaning of *para-deigma*—showing to the side—because it cannot be said to simply belong to the set it defines. The paradigm ‘*belongs without belonging* to the series it makes possible’ (ibid.: 208). This paradoxical structure is what Derrida means by withdrawal, retreat, exile, retirement or even ‘the putting-to-death of the paradigm’ (ibid.). The paradigm is thus different from a single instance as well as from the universal set. This imagery of withdrawal, retreat and death gestures towards the notion of Hegelian negation. The dead or exiled paradigm is excluded from the scope of the universal concept and, at the same time, included in it. Taken in an abstract way as a singular instance, the paradigm does belong to the set, i.e. to the abstract universal. Only when the paradigm is taken as a particular can it not be conceived as an instance of the universal.

This Platonic analogy may illuminate the paradoxical structure of the paradigm: it is like a mould for an object, let us say a pot. Someone must have produced this mould. In creating this mould, they had to take a pot (or pots) and make, so to speak, a *fac-simile* of it (or them). After that, this mould makes a singular pot (or even a class of pots) possible, but it is not one pot among other pots, it is an inverted pot, the thing in reverse. This is not to say that every paradigm is a mould or reversed object (the standard metre, for instance, clearly is not). The point of this analogy is, rather, that we treat paradigms as if they were moulds even though as singular objects they are not.

Hence, an individual example (or a series of examples) can be transformed—by various techniques of negation—into a paradigm. The dead or late paradigm can, however, be transformed back: ‘Necessarily the dead takes his revenge. And the paradigm returns, it gets its own back. The “model” is always the dreamed-of ghost [le revenant rêvé].’ (ibid.: 217) A paradigm can—deliberately or by chance—be regarded as or transformed into an instance. If this happens, the object ceases to be a paradigm.

We opened our discussion with Derrida’s account of exemplarity in *Glas*, which is based on the interval between the example and the exemplariness of the example. In ‘Cartouches’, Derrida speaks not of the exemplariness of the example but rather of ‘the very *eidos* of model, the paradigm of the model, the paradigm of the paradigm’ (ibid.: 223). We know from the earlier discussion that the example of an example is not (or cannot be said to be) an example and, more specifically, the paradigm of the paradigm is not (or is beyond) a paradigm. At the same time, it is still the very same individual object, except deprive of all the qualities it was supposed to exemplify. What remains is the very *eidos* of exemplifying (i.e. of our practice of giving examples).

Let us bring our discussion of this complex structure of exemplarity closer to Hegel. Malabou, in her ‘plastic’ but broadly deconstructive reading of Hegel, focuses on the interval between singularity and universality. ‘[P]lasticity appears as a process where the universal and the particular mutually inform one another, and their joint outcome is that particularity called the “exemplary individual”.’ (2005: 11) Or: ‘“[P]lastic character” [is] making [man] at once “universal and individual”. This is exemplary for the way spirit’s universality, in its different moments, acquires concreteness and actuality through its incarnation in those individual forms.’ (ibid.: 73) Plasticity thus mediates, in both directions, between universality and individuality through exemplarity or exemplary individuals (variously called ‘privileged examples’, ‘absolute examples’, ‘exemplary ideals’, ‘paradigms’, ‘paradigmatic instances’). This is the familiar structure discussed above. Malabou’s interpretation is driven by a double meaning of ‘plastic’, in the sense of being capable both of receiving and of giving form. In Hegel’s logic, plasticity ‘manifests the double movement of essence becoming accidental and the accident becoming essential’ (2000: 136). In the one direction, an individual has many accidental properties that it has acquired (that have been given to it). In becoming an exemplary individual, some of its properties become essential. Such an exemplary individual can give form to other individuals. In the other direction, a universal essence is particularized in an exemplary individual (it can give form to this individual). This exemplary individual has, beyond (‘para’) its essential properties, some accidental properties (it can receive form).

Although the plastic processes of receiving and giving form are not mutually exclusive, one can dominate over the other in certain situations or historical epochs. Thus, Malabou speaks of ‘either the “becoming essential of the accident” in the Greek moment of subjectivity, or the “becoming accidental of essence” in the modern moment.’ (2005: 188) In ancient times, some ‘plastic’ individuals, such as Pericles, Phidias, Plato, Xenophon and Socrates (2005: 9), acquired the status of exemplary individuals, representing something universal, such as a virtue. On the other hand, Jesus is not a plastic individual; he does not exemplify anything beyond himself. In Jesus, God exemplifies Himself (2005: 119). Below, I shall now present some slightly different illustrations of these two processes taken from Hegel.[[15]](#footnote-16)

## Examples of examples: Caesar and Jesus

Hegel discussed Caesar’s life and his significance in history on many occasions. Let us turn to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (*PGh*: 379–80) where Hegel discusses Caesar’s death. Initially, Caesar was the name of an *individual* with many accidental properties. He acted in a *particular* way—militarily and politically—that was hostile to the Roman Republic. After he nominally assumed sovereign power—became dictator for life—the republic was on the verge of collapse. By assassinating him, the conspirators hoped to restore the republican regime. But the opposite happened: they precipitated the republic’s end. ‘Caesar’, a familial name, was changed into the title of the Roman emperors.[[16]](#footnote-17) This title then passed into many European languages (English is an exception) as the *universal* concept designating the role of an emperor (e.g. ‘*Kaiser*’ in German, ‘*czar*’ in Russian, ‘*císař*’ in Czech). What we have here is a transition from the individual (Julius Caesar as a person) to the particular (Caesar’s military and political way of acting) to the universal (Caesar as a title and a caesar as a property or role). Hence, in Hegel’s terms, Caesar’s life and death follows the qualitative syllogism S – P – U. The particular moment can be taken as an exemplar or a paradigm (Hegel writes that Caesar ‘may be adduced as a paragon [*Muster*] of Roman adaptation of means to ends [*Zweckmäßigkeit*]’ (*LPH*: 285; *PGh*: 379)). Caesar’s military and political career is the exemplary case of a person who is called an emperor (a caesar with lower-case c) or—in other words—a caesar (with lower-case c) is a person who is such that their political position is similar or comparable to Caesar’s (with a capital C).

One final remark before we proceed to the next example: the passage from individuality to universality is marked by a series of negations. Hegel stresses that the judgement ‘the individual is universal’ expresses ‘both the perishableness of singular things and their positive subsistence in the concept in general’ (*SL*: 12.61). Caesar as an individual had to perish in order to be transformed into a universal concept and to subsist as such (cf. Žižek 2012: 455). His physical death triggered this transformation. This is the ‘putting-to-death’ of the paradigm as discussed above, an aspect that becomes even more central in the next example.

From his early works to his final lectures, Hegel devoted many pages to the life of Jesus and to Christianity. In his very early writings from 1793, published as ‘Notes for a Folk Religion’, Hegel maintained that Jesus is a model [*Muster*] and an ideal of virtue. This is so because Jesus has a ‘supplement’ of the divine (*Beimischung*, *Zusatz* *des Göttlichen*) (*FS*: 83). Otherwise, he would only be an example of a virtuous man like Socrates. Jesus thus had both a divine and a human nature. Hegel sees this double nature as Christianity’s crucial advantage over the abstractness of older religions and ethical conceptions which neglect the moment of particularity.[[17]](#footnote-18) Moreover, Jesus was ‘a perfect man, [who] endured the lot of all men’ (*LHP III*: 5; *GP II*: 526). Jesus, by the way he lived and died, thus stands for all men. He is the paradigm of a (Christian) man.[[18]](#footnote-19)

If we follow the development of the concept of God, then the universality of God the Father is particularized in Jesus, the Son, and finds its final stage in the individuality of the Holy Spirit. The Christian Trinity thus follows the three moments of the development of the concept (cf. Stewart 2011: 509), the abstract scheme U – P – S, or ‘a *syllogism* of absolute self-mediation’.[[19]](#footnote-20) How can the Holy Spirit be taken as something individual? Is Christianity not considered the universal religion? The Holy Spirit is for Hegel ‘*the universal self-consciousness* of a religious community, […] the universal self-consciousness […], the individual together with the consciousness of the religious community’ (*PSa*: ¶763). The Holy Spirit is also the reunification of the Father with the Son, the universal with the particular. Let us take the Holy Spirit to be an individual believer who, by following the model of Jesus Christ within a religious community, reflects the infinite essence of God the Father. Now, Jesus is the negation (the first negation) of God the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the negation of Jesus (i.e. the negation of the negation of God the Father). Let us focus on the second negation, i.e. the negation of the negation.

This negation of the negation, or the death of death, has two moments. On the one hand, it is the death of the manifested God: ‘Christ dies; [but] only as dead, is he exalted to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God; only thus is he Spirit. He himself says: “When I am no longer with you, the Spirit will guide you into all truth.”’ (*LHP III*: 14; *PGh*: 393) The physical death of the particular, of Jesus Christ, is necessary for its transition into the individuality of the Spirit. This is analogous to the death of Caesar, after which his ‘spiritual and inward existence was unfolded under Augustus’ (*PGh*: 385). Hegel clearly recognizes this analogy at the opening of the ‘Christianity’ section in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. There is one disanalogy here. Whereas Caesar follows the development from individuality, through particularity, to universality, i.e. the qualitative syllogism S – P – U, the Trinity follows the reverse direction from universality, through particularity, to individuality—what Hegel terms a syllogism of absolute self-mediation.

On the other hand, the negation of the negation is the negation of this death; it is the death of death. It is God’s preservation; through His resurrection, God rises into life again. Curiously enough, Hegel maintains that Christ’s human nature is also preserved; moreover, the death of death is the highest preservation and elevation of his human nature (*Rel II*: 291).

## Inside the interval: beiherspielen

In this section, we get to the core of the deconstructive account of exemplarity, which is based on the interval between an individual example and a universal model. As we already know, this account of exemplarity took its inspiration from Hegel.

As noted earlier, in today’s usage, an example exemplifies the essential properties of what it is an example of. The table I am now sitting at exemplifies the essence of the universal concept of a table (having some legs, a tabletop, etc.). This table also has accidental properties that do not belong to the essence of the concept of a table (having exactly four legs, being made of wood, etc.). Another example of a table must exemplify the same essence but can have different accidental properties (having one leg, being made of metal, etc.). To make an example of a table, one can take *any* table. Its accidental properties do not matter; what matters are the essential properties. The deconstructive account of exemplarity reverses this relation between the essence and the accident. What matters is a play of accidental moments.

Let us look at Hegel’s usage of ‘example’ (*Beispiel*). It is, in fact, one of his famous plays on words. The key passage comes at the beginning of the ‘Sense-certainty’ chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here is the German original:

An dem *reinen Sein* aber, welches das Wesen dieser Gewißheit ausmacht, und welches sie als ihre Wahrheit aussagt, spielt, wenn wir zusehen, noch vieles andere beiher. Eine wirkliche sinnliche Gewißheit ist nicht nur diese reine Unmittelbarkeit, sondern ein *Beispiel* derselben. (*PdG*: ¶92)

Here is Michael Inwood’s recent[[20]](#footnote-21) translation, which aptly renders the meaning of the verb ‘*beiherspielen*’.

¶92. But in this *pure Being*, which constitutes the essence of this certainty, and which this certainty claims to be its truth, much more comes into play, if we look. An actual sensory certainty is not just this pure immediacy, but an *exemplifying by-play* of it.

The core of the first sentence is ‘An dem reinen Sein […] spielt […] noch vieles andere beiher’. This sentence is rendered by Inwood as ‘in this pure Being […] much more comes into play’. Terry Pinkard’s translation is slightly different, but also instructive: ‘there is a good deal more in play in this *pure being*’. The word ‘*Beispiel*’ in the next sentence assumes, beyond its usual meaning, the meaning of the substantivized form of ‘*beiherspielen*’. This is probably why Inwood translates ‘*Beispiel*’ as ‘exemplifying by-play’ whereas Pinkard only has ‘example’. Moreover, Inwood’s translation tries to preserve the dual meaning of ‘*Beispiel*’: ‘example’ and ‘by-play’.[[21]](#footnote-22) From the second sentence, it can be inferred that ‘*Beispiel*’ means both ‘this pure immediacy’ (example in our normal usage) and ‘by-play’ (of accidental moments). The essence (*Wesen*) of the certainty thus takes in its accidental moments. Here we are at the root of the explanation for what Malabou describes as the ‘becoming essential of the accident’.

What emerges here is the third meaning of ‘example’ (*Beispiel*): by-play of accidental moments. This meaning is different from the ones discussed above, i.e. from ‘example’ in our normal usage as instance and ‘example’ as model.

In the next passage of the ‘Sense-certainty’ chapter, Hegel makes a distinction between ‘*Wesen*’ and ‘*Beispiel*’:

Diesen Unterschied des Wesens und des Beispiels, der Unmittelbarkeit und der Vermittlung, machen nicht nur wir, sondern wir finden ihn an der sinnlichen Gewißheit selbst […]. (*PdG*: ¶93)

The question is which of these meanings the word ‘*Beispiel*’ has here: ‘example’ as instance or ‘by-play’ or both? An example in the normal usage, an instance, exemplifies the essence. Since ‘*Beispiel’* is here opposed to essence, it must exemplify the negation of essence, something that essence is not. My working hypothesis is that ‘by-play’ has to be understood as exemplifying accidental moments. ‘*Beispiel*’, as opposed to essence, can only mean, in this context, ‘by-play’. And, indeed, Inwood translates ‘*Beispiel*’ here as ‘by-play’ (Pinkard again as ‘example’).[[22]](#footnote-23)

Later in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel uses the verb ‘*beiherspielen*’ or its substantivized forms ‘*das Beiherspielende*’ and ‘*ein Beiherspielen*’ in a privative manner and in contrast to essence or substance: the wealth of sensory knowledge is only in play *beside* sense-certainty (‘nur das Beiherspielende’) (¶112). Later, in the ‘Religion’ section, Hegel alludes to the ‘Sense-certainty’ chapter when he writes:

Der Inhalt, den dies reine Sein entwickelt, oder sein Wahrnehmen ist daher ein wesenloses Beiherspielen an dieser Substanz, die nur *aufgeht*, ohne in sich *niederzugehen*, Subjekt zu werden und durch das Selbst ihre Unterschiede zu befestigen. (*PdG*: ¶687)

Pinkard translates ‘ein wesenloses Beiherspielen’ as ‘an essenceless byplay’ (Inwood less aptly as ‘an essenceless sideshow’). Similar wording can be found in Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*: art can have various external purposes and then be a mere by-play (‘ein bloßes Beiherspielen’, *A I*: 20). In conscious symbolism, the meaning is primary, and its concrete visualization (‘Verbildlichung’) is only something standing beside and by-playing (‘nur das Danebenstehende und Beiherspielende’, *A I*: 490). Forms should only appear in genuine works of art as a mere by-playing accessory essence (‘als ein bloßes Beiwesen beiherspielen’, *A I*: 508). In the classical mode of representation, here and there some symbolic ingredients by-play (‘symbolische Ingredienzen beiherspielen’, *A II*: 20). When Hegel speaks of rhyme in poetry, he says that the artistic imagination, by focusing on the spiritual meaning, strips away the corporeal side of language and leaves it as insignificant by-play (‘unbedeutend beiherspielen’, *A III*: 304). Although such sensuous forms of communication remain only as something by-playing (‘die sinnliche Seite der Mitteilung das nur Beiherspielende bleibt’, *A III*: 229), they provide the proper material, which the poet has to treat artistically.[[23]](#footnote-24)

These excerpts from Hegel’s writings show that accidental moments *play* alongside the essence of the substance. Within this play, essential examples (instances) are turned into an essenceless by-play. The passage from an essential example into an essenceless by-play is the negation of the essence. Moreover, Hegel links this difference between instance and by-play to the difference between immediacy and mediation (*PdG*: ¶93). By-play is a mediation. But what does the by-play mediate between? By-play is also a negation of essence. However, in the logic of essence, the negation of essence is appearance. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel says that ‘appearance is not something merely essenceless but is the manifestation of essence’ (*SL*: 12.24). Appearance is a different negation of essence than by-play, i.e. a play of nonessential moments. I want to keep appearance and by-playseparate. Appearance is the manifestation of essence, something showing itself *instead of* its essence,[[24]](#footnote-25) whereas by-play is a manifestation, i.e. an exemplification, of something *alongside* essence (and hence *alongside* appearance of essence). Clearly, there is a tension between the accounts of the negation of essence in the *Phenomenology* and in the *Logic*. However, at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel does not differentiate between being and essence. Being and essence are in unity, which means they are treated as substance, i.e. ‘the final unity of essence and being’ (*SL*: 11.394). From this perspective, it is intelligible that a by-play of accidental moments is a negation of essence.

This point paves the way to taking by-play as particularity. As already noted, Hegel’s subjective logic begins with abstract universality, which can be derived from the logic of essence. By-play can be taken as a negation of this universality, that is, as particularity which mediates between the singular and the universal.

Before moving on to Derrida and a more developed account of by-play, I would like to note a partial etymological affinity between Hegel’s usage of ‘*Beispiel*’ and ‘*beiherspielen*’ and the (old) Greek term *para-deigma*, as discussed above. The prefix ‘*beiher*’ has a sense close to the Greek prefix ‘*para*’, whose meaning revolves around ‘from the side of’, ‘from beside’ and ‘alongside’.[[25]](#footnote-26) It might be that Hegel, in coining this prefix, aimed to approximate the Greek ‘*para*’. The roots of these words, ‘*spiel’* and ‘*deigma’* (show, indicate, display, exhibit),[[26]](#footnote-27) are not etymologically related, and, indeed, have different connotations. Both can, however, be understood in terms of exemplarity (or as kinds of exemplarity). Hence, there is a way of understanding by-play as a mediation between a singular example and a universal paradigm/model. That is what I shall argue for in the next section.

## Inside the interval: the logic of exemplarity

Derrida addressed Hegel’s account of exemplarity on several occasions, most notably in *Glas* and in his essay ‘Parergon’ (included in *Truth in Painting*), which focuses on the exemplarity in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*. Hegel shares with Kant the idea of free or essenceless play of accidental moments. Derrida builds on the idea that this play is never innocent; in fact, the play has its own dynamics and follows its own logic, sometimes called the logic of the exemplary or the other law.

One could say that a universal concept can be illustrated by any singular example; one example is just as good as another.

In the finite the examples (*Beispiele*) can be substituted for each other, and that is why they are examples, particular cases classed according to the general law. This substitution is the freedom of play, of the play among the examples. (Derrida 1986: 30)

This general law is available only in the case of a movement from universality to singularity. In the opposite direction, no such general law or concept can be presupposed. Such examples are *particular* cases of the general law or of the law that emerges through their play. In this play, each example—so it seems—can be substituted freely for another. On another occasion, Derrida says that ‘an example is always a kind of substitutable substitute’ (Derrida 2010: 409).[[27]](#footnote-28) Such substitutability is an act of utmost violence. Derrida even says that exemplary substitution is (like) ‘child substitution’. Every substitution of one example for another recalls, in its violence, substituting a child. What, then, is the logic of substitution, that is, the logic of the supplement or the logic of exemplarity? One has to realize that:

[Substitution] is a matter of an absolutely singular and irreplaceable existence that, in a free act, substitutes itself for another, makes itself responsible for another, expiates for another, sacrifices itself for another outside of any homogeneous series. Substitution is not the indifferent replacement of an equal thing by an equal or identical thing. (ibid.: 417)

Derrida speaks here of singular existences. However, in a substitution, as Derrida stresses, one singular existence is put *in the place of* another. These singular existences are instead particular examples, as is clear from the context of this quotation. The idea is thus that an example as a singular existence substitutes itself for another. It is not that an example is substituted for another by some external agent, but rather that an example substitutes itself. To put it in terms of Hegelian subjectivity, the example is both substance and subject, and, in substituting itself, performs a self-negation. Derrida goes on to claim that this subject of substitution is ‘unique, […] irreplaceable for being replaced’, and that it is necessary that ‘this irreplaceable be aware of itself’ (ibid.: 419–20). The example must be a self-consciousness and the by-play a self-development. However, we can already discern a critical polemic against Hegel’s account of dialectical movement from singularity to universality. If an existence is irreplaceable, its substitution is an act of (metaphysical) violence that does not follow any law or logic.

Moreover, this play of substitutions would be pointless if any example were just as good as another. Some examples are better or more suitable for exemplifying the general law. We often speak of ‘the best example’, ‘an ideal example’, ‘an exemplary example’, ‘an example par excellence’, ‘a privileged example’; such expressions are not uncommon in Derrida’s works. What makes one example ‘better’ than another? It cannot be their essential qualities, because these qualities are fixed by the general concept. There is no difference between examples; in terms of their essential qualities, all examples are identical. Thus, what makes one example better than another is its accidental qualities. If one discriminates examples according to their exemplarity, they must be taken as a by-play (of accidental moments). To anticipate a later point, Derrida’s critique of dialectical thought consists in relativizing and ultimately deconstructing the distinction between essential and accidental qualities. Each quality could be drawn into a by-play.[[28]](#footnote-29)

In a by-play, examples come in a series. An example appears in a vertical relation to the general concept it is supposed to exemplify and in a horizontal relation to another example in the series. It matters where an example is situated in the series (remember that the particular is the principle of difference within the universal). As we will recall, what differentiates examples in the series is their accidental qualities.[[29]](#footnote-30) In the present context, however, these qualities are accidental relative to the universal concept (law). If their accidental qualities matter, they must be essential with respect to some other law. This consideration rests on the intuition that to say that *something matters* is an informal way of saying that *it is essential*.[[30]](#footnote-31) This essentiality is, in fact, something universal. What kind of law is this? What essence/universal concept?

Let me return to some points we have already addressed above. Derrida says in *Spectres of Marx* that ‘An example always carries beyond itself: it thereby opens up a testamentary dimension.’ (2006: 41) In *On Touching*, Derrida writes that an example is ‘a simulacrum of a sample whose symptom would give away another, hidden teleology: the hand may not be an example among others but the best *metonymy* of some other’ (2005b: 159). In a similar vein, in ‘Parergon’ we read, with reference to Hegel, that examples ‘can invert, unbalance, incline the natural movement into a parergonal movement’ (1987: 79). We have here a testamentary dimension, a hidden teleology, a parergonal movement. These expressions label the *law* that regulates the series of examples, i.e. the by-play of their accidental qualities. This law must be different from (the law of) the general concept.[[31]](#footnote-32) The most eloquent description of this difference is, again, to be found in *Glas* (in the right-hand column):

For example (the uniqueness of the example is destroyed by itself, immediately elaborates the power of a generalizing organ), the very moment we would claim to recapture there, in a determined text, the work of an idiom, bound to a chain of proper names and singular empirico-signifying configurations, *glas* also names *classification*, that is, inscription in networks of generalities interlaced to infinity, in genealogies of a structure such that the crossings, couplings, switchings, detours [*aiguillages*], and branchings never simply come under [*relèvent … d’*] a semantic or formal law. No absolute idiom, no signature. The idiom or signature effect does nothing but restart—reverberate—the *glas*.  
The *glas* is—then (dingdong) [*donc*]—of/for the idiom or the signature. (1986: 149–50)

This passage, again, addresses the singularity of examples. Examples, one may think, are singular, like idioms or chains of proper names. This singularity or uniqueness is, however, destroyed, i.e. negated, although not in a manner that allows general substitutability. An example—precisely by being an example—moves (or elaborates) towards the universal law. This is to say that the example, in negating itself and producing a series, moves towards the exemplarity of the example, i.e. towards a paradigm/model. This movement, however, is not straightforward (like an inductive generalizing); it is full of crossings, couplings and detours which defy any ‘semantic or formal law’ (much as idiomatic inscriptions defy certain semantic laws, e.g. the law of compositionality). This movement is like reverberating, like a dingdong, like an echo; it is the (sound of the word) *glas*.[[32]](#footnote-33) *Glas* is this sound and an example of this sound. A few lines below the last quotation, Derrida says that ‘*Glas* must be read as “singular plural”’ (ibid.) An idiom or a signature is something singular—a group of words with fixed meaning, a handwritten signature referring to an individual person. And a signature is something universal—a (personal) style, a characteristic mark (and to say that something is characteristic of a thing amounts to saying that it is part of the universal essence of that thing).[[33]](#footnote-34) *Glas* is a dingdong of the idiom/signature in the singular sense and a dingdong of the idiom/signature in the universal sense. Note that this genitive formulation ‘a dingdong of’ must be taken as simultaneously subjective and objective. The idiom/signature is both a singular that restarts the *glas* and a universal that is reverberating the *glas*. *Glas* is also something particular that mediates between singularity and universality. The question that shall occupy us in the next section is whether the other law of the by-play, with its ‘crossings, couplings, switchings, detours, and branchings’, does, eventually, always lead to the general law. In other words, does the by-play reliably mediate between singularity and universality?

## Deconstructing dialectics: Derrida contra Malabou (perhaps)

As we discussed above, the by-play operates in a domain between the singular example/instance and the exemplarity of the example, i.e. the universal paradigm/model. This by-play is, however, not straightforward. What if the by-play does not eventually reach the paradigm? If there were no way of arriving at the paradigm, the whole dialectical movement of the concept would be lost. The by-play would negate the dialectic. Derrida, in fact, considers this negation when he says that the logic of exemplarity can lead to an abyss (2004: 120). A parergonal movement can ‘divert the energy of the ergon, introduce chance and the abyss into the necessity of the *Mutterwitz*: not a contrary order but an aleatory sidestep which can make one lose one’s head suddenly, a Russian roulette’ (1987: 79). In ‘Cartouches’, Derrida says that the paradigm can have the modality of ‘seduction which leads it astray [le conduit à l’écart]’ (1987: 194).[[34]](#footnote-35)

Derrida provides the most developed discussion of this topic in the preface to Malabou’s *Future of Hegel*. Derrida argues, against Malabou, that the teleological anticipation (of the general concept) can be interrupted by the explosive surprise (2005a: xvii). To oppose the plastic dialectical process, Derrida uses expressions such as ‘explosion’, ‘explosive surprise’, ‘gelignite dynamite’, ‘absolute interruption’, ‘the Absolute Other’, ‘the uncontrollable as such’, ‘the unsteadiness’, and links them to the aforementioned *abyss*.

To be sure, the plastic movement towards the universal concept can be interrupted. There can even be surprises. However, this interruption can be regarded as another dialectical moment within the movement of the concept. It can be a different general law that can, in turn, be sublated by a higher instance, i.e. by the original general law. Plasticity allows an interplay ‘of teleological necessity and surprise’ (Malabou 2005: 13). Derrida, however, suggests that such a sublation might not always be an option. The by-play can ‘lead to a non-dialectical contradiction, that is a contradiction which remains “non-resolute” and “without solution”’ (Derrida 2005a: xxv). For Derrida, the death of God is an accidental surprise of this sort: ‘Absolutely unpredictable and never re-appropriable, never re-essentializable, […] hopeless of any salvation or redemption, without essentializing *sublation*’ (Derrida 2005a: xlvii).[[35]](#footnote-36) Derrida brings up this suggestion with a big question mark: ‘Who could or would possibly be ready or able to subscribe to such a history, I ask you? […] I do not know anymore.’ (ibid.) What is at stake here is the meaning of the word ‘accident’, or even: ‘a strange accident happened to the word “accident” […], an accident of which I am no longer sure, of which no one can be sure of being able to *sublate*.’ (ibid.) This potential objection focuses on the whole dialectical account of the concept, not specifically on the exemplarity account of particularity, which is the main concern of this essay.

Let us consider possible ways of averting this objection, which threatens to undermine the dialectical process as such. Malabou, in her reply to Derrida’s objection, admits that ‘[t]o deconstruct Hegel […] would always come down to negating dialectical negativity’ (2000: 138). In contrast, her plastic reading of Hegel does not lead to dysfunction of the dialectic. Malabou argues that any change—surprising or not—takes place ‘on the form’ (*an der Form*) (ibid.: 139, *EL*: §189). As discussed above, there is a similar wording in the *Phenomenology*: ‘an essenceless by-play on this substance’ (*PSa*: ¶687, translation amended) (*ein wesenloses Beiherspielen an dieser Substanz*). What is important for Malabou’s plastic reading is the process of recovery, which she calls a ‘metamorphic procedure’ (2000: 140). The point of this process is not a ‘resurrection’ of the original shape or its essence, but rather a ‘convalescence’, a ‘regeneration’, a ‘healing up’, a ‘passing from the wound to the scar’. What lies behind this medical imagery is a partial preservation of the essence. The original essence may be negated, but it remains preserved. The essence is sublated. If something were completely annihilated (by the ‘all-burning’ [*le brûle-tout*], as Derrida (1986: 238) suggests, or by an ‘atomic bomb’, as in Malabou (2005: 193)), it could not have healed itself, i.e. transformed itself into a new shape. Within the by-play, (the form of) the example also transforms itself. ‘It is a contradictory continuity, not a rupture.’ (Malabou 2000: 139) And indeed, if the by-play is a part of the self-determination of the substance, taking place on the form, no absolute surprise or annihilation would be possible. The by-play is a play of accidental moments while the essence remains—at least in part—intact.[[36]](#footnote-37)

This argument is compelling only within Hegel’s system. If all change took place on the level of the form or as self-determination of the form, no surprise would be possible without essentializing sublation. One can make an external critique by maintaining that the dialectical process can be negated. But an external critique of this sort cannot undermine the main aim of this essay: to argue that particularity can be taken as exemplarity, i.e. as a by-play between a singular example and a universal model. Let us summarize this interpretation.

In a broader outline, a failure of the dialectics is attributable to the impenetrability of the original *différance[[37]](#footnote-38)* with its endless play of deferrals and nullifications. As a play, ‘[*d*]*ifférance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences.’ (Derrida 1982: 11) At the same time, *différance* is a somehow ghostly limit that forms the ultimate horizon of thought (like the prohibition of the law in Kafka’s enigmatic parable ‘Before the Law’). This paradoxical structure—simultaneously an endless play and the origin of differentiated conceptuality­—lies between the singular event and the universal concept or law (like in ‘Before the Law’, where Kafka depicts a curious *play* between the singular event of the man’s arrival before the gate of the universal law and his eventual death). This broader perspective now allows us to pose more challenges (besides the one advanced by Malabou) to the alleged failure of the dialectical process. If *différance* were not the absolute limit of thought, the dialectics would not need to fail. If this were so, the alleged abyss would be considered another dialectical moment between singularity and universality.

# Particularity as exemplarity

I hope it is already clear from the discussion above that exemplarity as by-play mediates between singularity and universality. First, the by-play presents a series of individual examples that issue from or point towards the exemplary individual/paradigm which makes up the universal moment of the concept. Second, within this by-play, the universal concept, its law, is mediated and determined. Third, out of the differences between the examples the by-play induces another law, the law of non-mediation, which may, in Derrida’s view, jeopardize or even negate the dialectical movement towards universality. Fourth, each individual example within the series is a particular determination of the universal (it can serve as a model/paradigm for a subspecies).

We began our discussion by reviewing two standard accounts of particularity. The particular is either an undifferentiated example (Winfield) or a historical perspective on a universal concept (Žižek). As we have seen, these two accounts are not necessarily incompatible with each other. Nor does my interpretation of particularity as by-play necessarily contradict either of them. The by-play leads to a universal model/paradigm that provides a universal perspective on a concept. Moreover, a historical appearance of a universal concept is a kind of by-play of accidental moments (e.g. Caesar as a historical individual acquired and lost certain accidental qualities throughout his life; some of them became essential for being a caesar, some did not). By-play is also a kind of dynamic undifferentiated example, for no static differentiated example can offer a comprehensive perspective on a universal concept. By-play is, at the same time, a series of negations and differentiations.

Two observations stand out. The first is that the opposition of essence and example (as by-play) is not central to Hegel’s system. Or at least, Hegel does not employ this notion of by-play in central passages of his system (the ‘Sense-certainty’ chapter of the *Phenomenology* is the sole exception). On the other hand, the conceptual moment of particularity is one of the key features of Hegel’s mature system. Why did Hegel himself not make the connection between particularity and by-play? It is evident that by-play as employed in Hegel’s works does not fit into the rigorous structure of Hegel’s *Logic*. By-play is opposed to pure being and essence at the beginning of the *Phenomenology* (*PdG*: ¶93), and later to substance (*PdG*: ¶687). Following the *Logic*, by-play amounts to a play of inessential appearances or a play of accidental moments. Maybe Hegel had the presentiment that the by-play may lead us astray and thus negate the dialectical process; in that case, it would be what Derrida calls a ‘defective cornerstone’.[[38]](#footnote-39) As we have seen, Hegel does not elaborate much on the notion of by-play. A by-play is just a play of accidental moments that can be transformed into the universal essence (though sometimes it fails to do so). To say that the moment of particularity can be understood in terms of such a play amounts to saying that the movement of the concept from universality through particularity to singularity is a play, which is something Hegel claims in the *Encyclopaedia* (*EL*: §161). Only if we employ Derrida’s and Malabou’s arguably richer understanding of exemplarity as the by-play between a singular example and a universal model does the connection to particularity become more intriguing. The very moment of accidentality loses its static character and becomes as dynamic as by-play. The traditional opposition between essence (or substance) and accident turns into an opposition between essence and example.

The second observation is Derrida’s—I would say blatant—ignorance of the moment of particularity in *Glas* when he discusses the relation between singularity and universality.[[39]](#footnote-40) What Derrida has in mind in those numerous passages is, in fact, the moment of particularity (as I hope to have shown). What is startling is the fact that Derrida does not employ or even refer to Hegel’s account of particularity from the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia*. Maybe—this is sheer conjecture—he might have sensed that a fuller elaboration of Hegel’s account of particularity as the mediation between singularity and universality would undermine his insistence on the impenetrability of *différance*.

In this essay, I have focused on those passages from Hegel’s works (specifically, the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia*) where he introduces the moment of particularity. In order to fully establish whether by-play really is a viable interpretation of particularity, one has to demonstrate that by-play works within (all kinds of) judgements and syllogisms. Providing this analysis must, however, be left for future work.[[40]](#footnote-41)

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1. Abbreviations of Hegel’s works:

   *EL* *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, *Part 1: Science of Logic,* trans. and ed. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

   *SL* *Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

   *PSa* *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

   *PSb* *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

   *LPH* *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Volume 1: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822–3,* ed. and trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson with the assistance of William G. Geuss. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

   *LHP II* *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, *Volume II: Plato and the Platonists*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

   *LHP III* *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, *Volume III: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

   *LA* *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

   *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969.

   *FS* 1 Frühe Schriften

   *PdG* 3 Phänomenologie des Geistes

   *E I* 8 Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I

   *BS* 11 Berliner Schriften 1818–1831

   *PGh* 12 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte

   *A I* 13 Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I

   *A II* 14 Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik II

   *A III* 15 Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III

   *Rel II* 17 Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion II

   *GP I* 18 Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I

   *GP II* 19 Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie II

   *GP III* 20 Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. In this essay I render the German expression ‘*einzeln*’ and its cognates as ‘singular’ or ‘individual’ depending on the context of the translation. Di Giovanni prefers ‘singular’ (*SL*: lxx), Pinkard ‘singular’ or ‘singular individual’ (*PSa*: 476), Brinkmann and Dahlstrom ‘singular’ (*EL*). Inwood (*PSb*: 328), in his glossary, argues that a whole is an ‘individual’, while its parts are ‘singular’. I do not reserve ‘individual’ exclusively for personal individuality as di Giovanni does (*SL*: lxx). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This formulation distinguishes between the *whole* concept as self-activity and its universal moment. In this essay, I shall use the expression ‘universal concept’ for the universal moment of the whole concept. A universal concept is thus different from abstract universality, which is a universality that is not conceived as a moment of the concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See Redding (2014) for a thorough discussion of this issue. Redding argues that ‘Ploucquet’s “exclusive” use would correspond to the quasi-naming role of the subject term in its immediacy, but as the properly logical form of the expressed judgement gets redetermined in different functional contexts it gets the properties of Ploucquet’s “comprehensive” sense of particularity.’ (2014: 293) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. ‘[A] particular [is] considered only as an illustration, as an example of the universal’. *Maxims and Reflections*, cited in Žižek (2012: 97). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Winfield discusses different types of universals that arise within the first three forms of judgement. The phrase ‘undifferentiated example’ refers to the particularization of the type of universal that arises within qualitative judgements. However, Winfield argues that the other types exhibit ‘a completely analogous linkage of universality, particularity, and individuality’ (ibid.). Hence, as he later summarizes, ‘In each of these three types of universality […] particularity comprises an undifferentiated instance and individuality comprises a differentiated particularization.’ (ibid.: 77) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Hegel maintains quite clearly that ‘there is no other at hand from which the particular would be differentiated than the universal itself’ (*SL*: 12.38). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Žižek conceives of particularity as the subjective position; however, this is how Hegel characterizes individuality: ‘individuality, the subject, is the concept *posited* as the totality’ (*EL*: §163, 237). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. For Žižek (2012: 364) this too little and too much marks the difference between the idealist and materialist use of examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. One can say that exclusive particularity is comprehensive particularity dialectically turned into singularity. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Žižek (2012: 364), in fact, distinguishes between particularity and the particular. Particularity is a historical perspective on a universal concept whereas the particular is an example of a universal concept. In my view, this is another rephrasing of the distinction between comprehensive and exclusive particularity. (I am grateful to Saša Hrnjez for drawing my attention to this distinction in Žižek.) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See my essay ‘The Logic of Exemplarity’ (Mácha 2020b) for a more detailed account of the usage of ‘example’ and ‘exemplar’. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Derrida expresses the same point in *Spectres of Marx* (2006: 41): ‘An example always carries beyond itself: it thereby opens up a testamentary dimension. The example is first of all for others, and beyond the self. Sometimes, perhaps always, whoever gives the example is not equal to the example he gives, even if he does everything to follow it in advance, “to learn how to live[”], as we were saying, imperfect example of the example he gives—which

    he gives by giving then what he has not and even what he is not. For this reason, the example thus disjoined separates enough from itself or from whoever gives it so as to be no longer or not yet example *for itself*.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. See Schülein (2016: 330) for a discussion of whether the brother–sister relation has a place in Hegel’s system. Schülein points out that Derrida’s critical argument rests on Kojève’s anthropological interpretation, which emphasizes the process of recognition. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. I discuss these two examples at length in my essay Mácha (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. This happened in 69 AD when the reign of the Julio-Claudian dynasty came to an end. However, anticipating the discussion of the notion of substitution in sect. II.iii below, the institution of Caesar as a symbolic exemplar might have happened much earlier, when he deliberately chose an adoptive son and instituted his heir. Derrida argues that this is an act where natural reproduction meets technological reproducibility: ‘At the heart of the logic of substitution or of the supplement, there is, therefore, apparently, this crossing of natural reproduction and technological reproducibility, of natural series and institutional deviation, of bio-engineering and freedom, of so-called natural filiation and adoption as legal fiction. One finds all this in this sentence by Vertot (in his *Révolutions Romaines* XIV, 282) quoted again in *Littré*: “One found [in Caesar’s will] that he had adopted Octavius, the son of his sister’s daughter, as his son and primary heir, and that he substituted to him, in the case of death with progeny, Decimus Brutus, one of the main conspirators.”’ (2010: 413) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. This neglect of the moment of particularity or of the paradigm can be illustrated by the example of Stoicism. The ideal of Stoic virtue, the sage, was an extrapolated, i.e. abstract, ideal, not a man of flesh and blood like Jesus. The concrete, paradigmatic sample is absent in Stoicism. Hegel quotes Cicero in this connection: ‘But who this wise man is or has been the Stoics never say’ (*LHP II*: 50–1; *GP II*: 269; *Academicae questiones* IV, 47). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. This indicates that the example conception of particularity is inadequate, to say the least. Jesus is neither an example of a virtuous man nor an example of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. *BS*: 413. Cf. Schlitt (2012: ch. 3) for a detailed argument that Hegel’s description of the three trinitarian movements can be understood in terms of syllogisms. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. I discuss only the two recent translations by Inwood and Pinkard which, arguably, attempt to preserve Hegel’s pun with *Beispiel* and *beiherspielen*. For a more comprehensive discussion of the translations of these terms, see my article ‘Beispiel/By-play in Hegel’s Writings’ (Mácha 2020a). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Pinkard’s translation is more uniform, because it renders ‘*Beispiel*’ consistently as ‘example’, but the crux of the wordplay gets lost (there is no connection between ‘example’ and ‘play’ in English). In Inwood’s translation, on the other hand, the deliberate ambiguity of ‘*Beispiel*’ is resolved, but the wordplay gets lost too. This is not a criticism of these translations. Hegel’s wordplay is probably not translatable without any loss. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Warminski thinks that, on later occasions, Hegel uses ‘example’ as ‘instance’, i.e. in its normal usage: ‘That “an actual sense-certainty is not only this pure immediacy, but an example (*Beispiel*)of it” means both “by-play”—particular, inessential and so on—and “example” as it later appears in the text (and as in its “normal” usage).’ (1987: 177) I think, in contrast, that ‘example’ in ¶93 appears in the text as ‘by-play’, not as ‘example’ in its normal usage. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. In these paraphrases I have drawn on T. M. Knox’s translation of Hegel’s *Aesthetics*. Knox, however, does not translate ‘*Beispiel*’ as ‘by-play’ as I do. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Pippin argues that ‘the inessential manifestations of some thing have to be understood in some way as a *thing’s essence showing itself as nonessential*, mere *Schein* (11.248), a kind of “self-repelling” self-negation’ (2018: 171). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Cf. the entry on ‘παρά’ in Liddell and Scott (1940). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Cf. the entry on ‘δείκνυμι’ in ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Derrida goes on: ‘when I say “for example,” I immediately say that I could substitute an other example; if I say “you, for example,” I imply that it could be someone else; which is why it is such a terrible phrase that says to someone “you, for example,” since it inscribes chance and substitution, possible replaceability in the address to the other.’ (Derrida 2010: 409–10) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Cf. fn. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. In this approach, the example is thus not undifferentiated (as Winfield maintains), but rather differentiated by its accidental qualities. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Cf. my essay ‘The Logic of Exemplarity’ (Mácha 2020b) for a detailed elaboration of this argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Cf. Roller (2015: 82): ‘Derrida contends that serial exempla have a dual allegiance, both to “the law” under which they are expressly marshaled (the classical category) and to an “other law” that emerges from their piecewise interrelationships (accounting for nonclassical behavior).’ [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. The meaning of the word ‘*glas*’ is, however, quite intricate. In the expression ‘the *glas* of *Sa*, *glas* as *Sa*’ (1986: 4), it refers to the death knell of Absolute Knowledge. ‘*Glas*’ also marks the negation of Absolute Knowledge and the dialectic: ‘The *glas*’s […] toll the end of signification, of sense, and of the signifier.’ (ibid.: 31) Cf. fn. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Cf. Fišerová (2018a, 2018b, forthcoming) for a detailed discussion of these two senses of signature, i.e. handwritten signature and ‘stylish trace’ (2018b: 493), in Derrida’s works and elsewhere. For another general discussion of the notion of signature, see Agamben’s essay ‘Theory of Signatures’ (2009: 33–80). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Cf. Roller (2015: 89): ‘an “other law” emerging from the exempla themselves—revealed in the first exemplum, and reiterated in the second—threatens to overturn altogether ‘the law’ ensconced in the framing argument.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. In *Glas*, the negation of the dialectic is marked by the event of Antigone’s death: ‘Nothing should be able to survive Antigone’s death. Plus nothing more should follow, go out of her, after her. The announcement of her death should sound the absolute end of history.’ (1986: 166) In his commentary on *Glas*, Simon Critchley argues that, since the concept of family exemplifies Hegel’s entire system, and Antigone’s dysfunctional family and her sacrificial death (i.e. her *gift*) do not fit into Hegel’s system and the Spirit’s path to Absolute Knowledge, ‘[u]ltimately, for Derrida, it is Antigone’s death that sounds the knell or *glas* of the system and announces the end of history’ (1988: 17). A true gift is something that exceeds the *quid pro quo* of dialectic. I would reply to this argument that if we take Antigone’s death precisely as an *example*, we can draw conclusions from this example—as Hegel and Derrida do. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. What if, as Derrida suggests, there were pure accidents, i.e. accidents without essence? Then an absolute surprise would be possible. In *Glas*, Derrida locates a pure accident in Hegel’s discussion of the luminous essence (*Lichtwesen*) within natural religion: ‘The all-burning is an essenceless by-play, pure accessory of the substance

    that *rises* without ever *setting*, without becoming a subject, and without consolidating through the self (*Selbst*) its differences.’ (1986: 238) Critchley, in his illuminating discussion, connects the essenceless substance to ontological difference: ‘to think essenceless substance without subject is akin to thinking Being (*das Sein*) prior to its determination with regard to a particular being (*das* *Seiende*)’ (1988: 23). Malabou’s argument, thus, depends on her claim that ‘for Hegel, there is no such thing as a pure accident’ (2005: 161). Further discussion of this crucially important issue is beyond the scope of this essay. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Cf. Lumsden (2007a; 2007b) for a general discussion of Derrida’s critique of the Hegelian dialectic (his papers are orthogonal to my present concern, as he focuses on the moment of singularity in Hegel and Derrida, whereas this essay is devoted to the moment of particularity). Lumsden argues that, according to Derrida, Hegel’s dialectic fails to account for thought’s essential instability. Derrida, in this critique, implicitly interprets Hegel’s philosophy metaphysically as a kind of spirit-monism. Following the rise of the so-called non-metaphysical Hegel in the works of Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard and Robert Brandom, this metaphysical interpretation is no longer unanimously accepted in Hegel scholarship. Lumsden claims that in this non-metaphysical interpretation, Hegel’s dialectic is as much concerned with the instability of thinking as Derrida’s *différance*. Of course, if the notions of essence and accident have a heuristic function (and do not designate metaphysical aspects of the spirit), Derrida’s argument for the fatal instability of the dialectical process would lose its force. (I am grateful to Lucas Thorpe for this suggestion.) [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Cf. Malabou (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. The mediation between individual singularity (of a person or an action) and universality (of a family, a law, the ethical life) is the central topic of *Glas*. Derrida reveals ‘the general law, the law of the law: individual subjectivity accomplishes in truth its freedom in the universality of *Sittlichkeit* that denies that subjectivity’ (1986: 14). In a similar vein, he speaks of the ‘dissymmetrical opposition between the singular and the universal’, of ‘the death between the two’, of ‘the *law* of singularity and the *law* of universality’ (ibid.: 142). ‘The two laws fight each other and exchange each other across differences of strata, stages, or steps (*Stufen*).’ (ibid.: 146) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. I am grateful to many colleagues, especially Michaela Fišerová and two anonymous reviewers, for insightful comments that led to substantial improvements in the present essay. This work has been supported by the Czech Science Foundation, project no. GA19-16680S. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)