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# Cut to the Quick, les mains ensanglotées: the Quick and the Dead in Respect to Derrida

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## **Cut to the Quick, *les mains ensanglotées*: the Quick and the Dead in Respect to Derrida**

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The nexus of this paper is the question (idea, fact, trope, etc.) of “life” as maintained by a number of intersecting paths running through works of Jacques Derrida, one of which is made by recurrences of the French word *vif*. To be privileged here is its occurrence in an interview with Derrida from the year 2000, on Paul Celan<sup>1</sup>. That word, “vif,” I and Philippe Romanski translated it by *quick*<sup>2</sup>. The word *quick*, as it is possible to learn, means “life.” “Quick” comes from Gothic, *qwiuis*, itself derived from Latin, *vivo*, *victum*, related to Sanskrit, *jīva*, “to live.” That word *vif* is also used in Derrida’s *Introduction* to the Edmund Husserl’s

<sup>1</sup> J. Derrida, “La Langue n’appartient pas,” especially 90-91. Hereafter “La langue” plus page number.

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Romanski and I translated “La Langue n’appartient pas” and other interviews and essays by Jacques Derrida, published in Jacques Derrida’s *Sovereignities in Question* (Fordham University Press, 2005), edited by myself and another person. After having sent back copy-edited pages with my final corrections, I discovered the book published in a bookstore without my ever having seen the galley proofs. Fordham copy-editor, Helen Tartar and others unbeknownst to me introduced *thousands* of changes, of the order of taking the impersonal expression in French, “il faut,” for a “he must,” or changing aberrantly the translation of *vif*, disfiguring scandalously the book.

*Origine de la Géométrie*, that the former published in 1962. Striking parallels exist between the interview and the introduction, concerning precisely the relation of the *vif* and death. Mediating the interview and the introduction, and the quick and the dead, is a path constituted by “haunting,” the topic of our present issue. Haunting is a link between the work on Celan and the *Introduction*; much of the present reading shall dwell on the three occurrences of the word “to haunt” (*hanter*) in the *Introduction*. Odd word, for such a book, it would seem. How does “haunting” intervene in this first publication? How does it come to pass in this so purely phenomenological study, given that “haunting” might seem to be a non-philosophical term, let’s say an accessory of literature?<sup>3</sup> How is *hanter* related to the most *vif*, phenomenologically, or poetically, speaking? Although many later themes in Derrida, such as “testimony,” the “archive,” “fidelity,” etc., make their first appearances already in the *Introduction*, my focus here on *haunting* – as not auxiliary, as not accessory, but as intrinsically structural to philosophy and to phenomenology – and on the relation between life and death, specifically as it is mediated by writing – is guided not by the purpose of showing that it is all there, genetically, in the first publication, but rather by the desire to elucidate how “haunting” is related to the “quick” in the *Introduction* via writing.

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**“Vif,” touched to the quick, cutting to the quick**

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In response to a question from Evelyne Grossman about language as living because it is worked over or worked through by death and negativity, Derrida states that maintaining life involves receiving or taking in, *accueillir*, mortality, the dead, the specters. Holding life in one’s hands is, if you will, shaking hands with death. It is this notion of life that I’d like to try to explicate through some

<sup>3</sup> A key moment in the history of philosophy for this expulsion of ghosts and of literature from philosophy is the movement Kant travels from his *Dreams of a Ghostseer* (1766) to his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), where “ghosts” are made to be the stuff of *factio* or *Erdichtung*, off realms for philosophy. On this exclusion, see T. Dutoit, “Ghost Stories, the Sublime and Fantastic Thirds in Kant and Kleist,” 225-254.

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examples from the interview. They indicate that Derrida thinks the life of a living present as of the life of language, and the life of language as of the always possible, always virtual, death of language. The basis of these remarks in the interview is established in the *Introduction*, but I start with some quotations from the interview.

*Il s'agit de la vie au sens où elle n'est pas séparable d'une expérience de la mort. [...] La vie de la langue c'est aussi la vie des spectres, c'est aussi le travail du deuil, c'est aussi le deuil impossible. Il ne s'agit pas seulement des spectres d'Auschwitz ou de tous les morts qu'on peut pleurer mais d'une spectralité propre au corps de la langue. La langue, le mot, d'une certaine manière la vie du mot, a une essence spectrale. Elle serait comme la date : elle se répète comme elle-même et est chaque fois autre. Il y a une sorte de virtualisation spectrale dans l'être du mot, dans l'être même de la grammaire. Et c'est donc dans la langue déjà, à même la langue, que l'expérience de la vie-la mort s'exerce. ("La Langue" 88.)*

Language is mourning, life the work of this mourning, impossible because never finished, save by finitude itself. Life is not only indissociable from the specters of the dead, so that my living present is a sort of *residence*, or habitat, for the dead. This spectrality, or haunting, is "proper to the body of language." There is a sort of chiasmus in Derrida's phrase, "la vie du mot a une essence spectrale," insofar as "life" is equated with "spectral," and the "word" with "essence." One would expect "life" to be associated with "essence," and "spectral" with "word." This is not what Derrida says, however. The life of the word is inside the word, so that the word is a kind of housing, but language is not the house of being; rather, the word is the house that has in it also "spectral virtualization." This co-habitation accounts for the hyphenated compound noun, "la vie – la mort." This latter expression, "la vie – la mort," the title of Derrida's seminar from 1975-76, is developed at length in the essay "Spéculer – sur Freud" (in *La Carte postale* 1980). We will return to this notion of virtualization in our reading of the *Introduction*, yet in order to draw the line from *vif* to *hanter*, we persist still with the interview.

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What is the *vif* of the subject, what is the most alive, the quickest, in a sense the most instantaneous yet also constant? It is what happens in poetry. It is going to and rendering oneself up to a certain “truth of language”:

*[J]e voudrais donner un sens plus vivant et plus dynamique à cette manière d'être, à cette manifestation de la spectralité de la langue qui vaut pour toutes les langues. [...] J'appellerais poète celui qui fait l'expérience [de la langue] le plus à vif. Quiconque fait à vif l'expérience de cette errance spectrale, quiconque se rend à cette vérité de la langue, est poète, qu'il écrive ou non de la poésie. (“La Langue” 90.)*

The manner of being of language is spectrality; what Derrida would give to it is a “more living meaning.” Spectrality, redefined as living and dynamic, is what the poet experiences, whether he writes or not what is considered poetry in bookstores. Poetry is experiencing *to the quick* spectral errancy. The quickest experience is of the ghostliness of language, what's closest to death, which is what's closest to life, most to the quick.

What is “spectral errancy”? The words are taken from *Schibboleth*<sup>4</sup>. There, Derrida calls the “errance spectrale des mots” the “revenance that does not come over words by accident, after a death”; this “revenance” is the heritage, the lot, and the parting (*le partage*) of all words, as of their first surfacing (*surgissement*). All words are split as of their appearance. Appearance is always already a re-appearance, a re-venance, one could say an iterability<sup>5</sup>. This splitting is the *partage* of every word. That split is why words will “always have been phantoms” (*Schib* 96). This split that makes a word a phantom, is what Derrida calls a “law” and this “law” rules in words the relation of soul and body. That is, a relation of soul and body obtains in words. We, as present living (*présents vivants*), know this relation not because we experience death or mourning but rather because our experience thereof comes from our relation to the revenance of the mark, language, the word. The experience of language as the experience of the revenance

<sup>4</sup> J. Derrida, *Schibboleth*, 96, hereafter *Schib* plus page number.

<sup>5</sup> J. Derrida, *Introduction*, 32, hereafter *Intro* plus page number.

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of the mark, of the originarity of the spectre, this experience is poetry, literature, art.

What interests me, then, is Derrida's deduction of poetry or a certain experience of language as what happens when the spectral errancy of language, when *hantise*, is lived to the very quick, to that quickest and most sensitive time-space where the quick and the dead would touch. This experience *to the quick* is also giving oneself to the "truth of language."

The *Introduction* and what it says about truth and truth in language elucidates this notion of the quickest experience being a giving oneself to the "truth of language." Going back to the first publication, that movement in return, will bring us forward again to this notion of the *quick*, "to the quick."

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### **The disappearance of truth, the ghost of its appearance**

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In Jacques Derrida's *Introduction* to Husserl's "Origine de la géométrie," the seventh section (the longest of the eleven) is where Derrida develops upon the idea of writing as an autonomous transcendental field that can be without any actual subject. Writing liberates truth from contingency and empiricism, but in doing so it also introduces the possibility of what Derrida terms the "disappearance of truth."

In that context, Derrida notes how, for Husserl, truth cannot be fully objective, ideal, intelligible for everyone and infinitely durable (*perdurable*), unless it can be said *and* written. Durability is the "sens même" of this truth, so that "les conditions de la survie [de la vérité] sont impliquées dans celles de sa vie" (*Intro* 87). Survival, and thus already a living-on, a sort of spectrality, is already implied in the "life" of truth. The possibility of the grapheme is what allows for the ultimate liberation of ideality. Ideality, non-spatio-temporality, comes to meaning only via its linguistic incorporability (*Intro* 88). What this means for truth is that it does not simply err spectrally in language; it is not simply irretrievably wandering in language at large (perhaps it is

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“l’errance à vif”<sup>6</sup>). Rather, truth (what was called its life but also its surviving) errs spectrally in language but does so in a complex way. How is this so?

In this context, Derrida writes that ideal objectivity can essentially inform the body of speech and of writing and depends upon a pure intention of language (*Intro* 88). This means that mediation, communication, tradition, pure history (all these are terms for a back and forth movement of *envoi* and *renvoi* in the *Introduction*) are prescribed with a “spatio-temporalité originale.” Writing is not either sensible or intelligible. Its original spatio-temporality is probably what Derrida later called arch-writing. In any case, this explains why, as of that original spatio-temporality (of mediation) truth is no longer “*simplement* exilée dans l’événement originaire de son langage” (*Intro* 88). The italics on “*simplement*” mean that truth is not lost in a no-return drift in that original event of its linguistic incorporability. It’s perhaps a *complex* exile, a complicated errancy. Even though consigned to sensible writing, truth could be returned to from that writing.

Jacques Derrida was for me an ideal reader, sometimes in fact. His factual death informs the context in which I would read the following quotation, the only instance of the word *hanter* in the main body of the text of *Introduction*.

*Le champ de l’écriture a pour originalité de pouvoir se passer, dans son sens, de toute lecture actuelle en général ; mais sans la pure possibilité juridique d’être intelligible pour un sujet transcendantal en général, et si le pur rapport de dépendance à l’égard d’un écrivain et d’un lecteur en général ne s’annonce pas dans le texte, si une intentionnalité virtuelle ne le hante pas, alors, dans la vacance de son âme, il n’est plus qu’une littéralité chaotique, l’opacité sensible d’une désignation défunte, c’est-à-dire privée de sa fonction transcendantale. Le silence des arcanes préhistoriques et des civilisations enfouies, l’ensevelissement des intentions perdues et des secrets gardés, l’illisibilité de l’inscription lapidaire décèlent le sens transcendantal de la mort, en ce qui l’unit à*

<sup>6</sup> J. Derrida, *Circonfession*, 237.



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*l'absolu du droit intentionnel dans l'instance même de son échec.* (Intro 85, my emphasis).

An actual, empirical, reader can be generally absent, the originality of the transcendental field of writing is that it is without that kind of subject. But the field of writing would be sheer unreadable materiality were there no general transcendental subject, and if writing were simply writing without the possibility of a retrieving reading: chaotic literality, sensible opacity, imploded signs. Without the ghost of virtual intentionality, the field of writing is vacated of any idea of a soul. Such haunting is the possibility of any meaning. Intentionality survives in a text in the mode of a ghost. Insofar as the statement "I am dead" is virtually true for any living present, then we, living presents, are already just ghosts. Without demonstrating this point, it can be still be said that living is defined as surviving, being dead on one's feet. If we as living presents are already ghosts, then we touch to the quick the poignancy of Derrida's expressions of melancholia (as in *Béliers* [2003]), for if we the living are ghosts, and if intention is a ghost in the text, then that means we, as actual readers, as ghosts, enter a communion with the ghosts that are the intentions in the text. Something survives in a text, and it is the ghost of virtual intentionality. This ghost of virtual intentionality meets us who are always already ghosts. Ghosts encounter.

Writing then assures the speaking-across, the absolute traditionalization, of ideal objectivity, which is to say, the purity of the relation of ideal objectivity with universal transcendental subjectivity. Writing does this by freeing meaning from an actual evidence, from any real subject, from any actual circulation in any determined community. Writing makes communication possible without any personal mediation or immediacy. Writing therefore becomes virtual communication. We see here the principle of auto-immunity, that is, the way a system must, to ensure its survival, admit (into it) what can just as well kill or destroy it: "Cette *virtualité* est d'ailleurs une valeur ambiguë: elle rend possible du même coup la passivité, l'oubli et tous les phénomènes de *crise*" (Intro 84). Writing, and the virtual ghost of intentionality, is the sole possibility for meaning, for ideality (durability), but by the same

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token for ideality to have its condition of possibility in writing (always defined by less and less ideal specifications) is for it to open itself simultaneously to the threat of the impossibility of its being activated: passivity, forgetting, meaninglessness. Crisis (as any of these various phenomena) is the result of *renvoi*, which is spacing: the fact or principle that anything divides and is identified with or by its other. In the *Introduction*, Derrida noted that “le phénomène de crise” “renvoie toujours, pour Husserl, à une maladie du langage – comme une dégradation” (*Intro* 91n3). In *Voyous*, “le processus auto-immunitaire [...] consiste toujours en un *renvoi*.”<sup>7</sup> What saves live communication from disappearance is what makes it a ghost of itself.

Derrida delves into a ghostly shadowy underworld footnote in order to comment upon how Husserl doesn't miss the relationship of thematic meaning and the ideality of the word with the linguistic event. This relationship he defines as the “étrangeté” of “sensible incorporation” (*Intro* 86). This strangeness is both that of meaning that inhabits the word, and that of the usage here and now of the ideality of the word. Double strangeness. In the second doubleness, what is active is the ideality of vague forms and of morphological types proper to the corporality of graphic and vocal signs. The forms of these signs must have a certain identity that can be recognized every time in the pure sensible facticity of language. This identity, which is ideal not real, is the condition of possibility for any sensible language to be possible as language. The meaning of a word depends on its morphology, and this morphology occurs in the union of the sensible form and the sensible matter, a “union *traversée* par l'intention de langage.” Derrida's point about this strangeness of the incorporation of the ideal in the sensible, meaning in the word, is that Husserl has to keep carving into hierarchy ever finer levels that each time “enchain” (*enchaînement*) ideality more and more in reality, and that this enchaining is done through mediations that are less and less ideal, in what Derrida calls “the synthetic unity of an intention,” retaining still, in 1961-62, the value of synthesis (dialectics). What is the strangeness of this unity? It's the

<sup>7</sup> J. Derrida, *Voyous*, 60.

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strangeness of haunting, and it is an early formulation of auto-immunity:

*Cette synthèse intentionnelle est un mouvement incessant d'aller et retour, travaillant à enchaîner l'idéalité du sens et à libérer la réalité du signe, chacune des deux opérations étant toujours **hantée** par le sens de l'autre, qui s'y annonce déjà ou s'y retient encore. Par le langage, l'idéalité du sens se libère donc dans le labeur même de son 'enchaînement' (Intro 86-87n3, my boldface).*

The zigzagging movement is ghostly insofar as the more and more ideality is chained in reality, the more it exists as ideality, but at the same time the more it is annulled because chained to reality. Ideality becomes ideality by becoming what it is not, something based in reality. Ideality must take into itself what is antithetical to it, namely ever more real gradations of language (the word, its form, its type). By a principle of auto-immunity, the enemy body overtakes the receiving body, reality overtakes ideality, but it is precisely in this labor that the ideality of meaning is achieved. That is, ideality of meaning is achieved by the very labor of its enchaining in language. By being killed by what it is not, by relinquishing its immunity system, ideality paradoxically is made most ideal. Spectrality, or haunting, is the name of *différance* here.

We find this ghost elsewhere in the *Introduction*, again in a footnote, one of the three occurrences of the word in the text. The ghost is underground, in the footnotes of the text, underfoot. Derrida's *Introduction* was an event in phenomenological studies in France when it was published. Not only did it announce the arrival of a thirty year old philosopher writing with a precision and incision enough to subtly undo Merleau-Ponty, Tran-Duc-Thao, more daringly Jean Cavaillès, and to reverse Eugen Fink and to extend Jean Hyppolite. It also was the arrival of his problematic, writing, but especially voice in writing, speech in discourse. For him to use the "metaphorical" word *haunting* in a phenomenological study that went on to win a prize for the best philosophy essay of the year explains perhaps its relative concealment in a footnote. *Haunting* allows Derrida to think the structure of the

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Present Living. *Haunting* is Derrida's re-writing of the myth of Persephone and Hades, of life and death, voice and discourse, not in two separate beings but rather in one single entity, the Present Living. If every re-writing of this fable before him uses two characters for this relation, Derrida makes the two characters be the constitutive structure of any living present. *Haunting* is the name for the structure of the living present.

This *haunting* thus shadows the analysis of Husserl, in the underworld of the footnotes. It names "traditionalité," an example of which is the relation between decidability and undecidability:

*Le mouvement même qui enrichit le sens [d'une tradition] retient au fond du sens nouveau la référence sédimentaire au sens antécédent et ne peut s'en passer. L'intention qui vise le sens nouveau n'a d'originalité que dans la mesure où elle est encore habitée par le projet antérieur auquel elle ne se contente pas de 'succéder'. Ainsi l'indécidabilité n'a un sens révolutionnaire et déconcertant, elle n'est elle-même que si elle reste essentiellement et intrinsèquement **hantée** dans son sens d'origine par le telos de décidabilité dont elle marque la disruption. (Intro 40n1. My boldface.)*

There can be no new meaning that is not haunted by a previous meaning. Meaning is haunting of meanings, more than it is any one meaning. Originality is only originality insofar as it is haunted by anteriority, thus haunting is the name of *différance* between a secondary originarity and a leftover anteriority. Haunting is an alterity ("une disruption") that is intrinsic and essential to any sameness ("elle-même").

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**"Disappearance of truth," what does it mean?**

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What does it mean to experience to the quick spectral errancy, to render oneself unto this truth of language, to be poet whether one writes poetry or not? It is about a certain AI (ouch/*äē!*, J-A-CK-IE, auto-immunity).

In order to save itself, meaning must deposit itself in writing, yet precisely this deposition, this de-position, imperils it. It takes down its immune system, in order to save itself, but this form of auto-immunity could be its death, its disappearance. Derrida does not use the terms “immunity” and “auto-immunity” in the *Introduction*, but their deduction is possible from a sentence like the following: “pour échapper à la mondanité, le sens *doit* d’abord *pouvoir* se recueillir dans le monde et se déposer dans la spatio-temporalité sensible, il lui faut mettre en péril sa pure idéalité intentionnelle, c’est-à-dire son sens de vérité” (*Intro* 91). The appearance of meaning is its disappearance, the risk of disappearance is the chance of its appearance. It is right here that Derrida isolates the most difficult problem of Husserlian phenomenology, namely the disappearance of truth: “On voit ainsi **apparaître** dans une philosophie qui [...] est le contraire d’un empirisme, une possibilité qui, jusqu’ici, ne s’accordait qu’à l’empirisme et à la non-philosophie : celle d’une *disparition* de la vérité” (*Intro* 91, my boldface). That which disappears is that which is annihilated in fact. What ceases to appear in fact is not however touched in its being or in its meaning of being (this meaning of being is revealed by a fiction – of its possible disappearance – so that the meaning of being is an effect of the fiction).

The most difficult of all the problems in Husserl is therefore to determine the meaning of this disappearance of truth. Derrida remarks: it did not *appear* possible to him (Derrida) to find an unequivocal answer in Husserl to this question. He presents three responses (deductions from Husserl’s premises) the first two of which are ruled out, the third being an equivocal answer.

First, the disappearance of truth is not the death of meaning in an individual egological consciousness: if meaning has appeared at least once in a consciousness, it is conserved in a sedimentary residence, and can in principle be reanimated.

Second, the disappearance of truth is not the ruination of the graphic sign. Husserl is interested in that ideality which is fully liberated from the sign, so the destruction of truth is not a destruction intrinsic to the sign (*Intro* 93). If it was the ruin of the graphic sign, that would mean ideality could be modified by destroying signs. But the

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catastrophe of the world – total, factual destruction of the world or the burning of all its libraries – is exterior to the historicity of ideality. The hypothesis of world catastrophe is a heuristic fiction, however, because it reveals eternal truth (*Intro* 95). Disappearance of the world is the modality of the appearance of the idea of the world.

The third response is the one that offers a way to understand the disappearance of truth. This third response is thirteen pages, and one of the richest mines in all of Derrida, I think. What follows is exploratory.

The problem to be encountered resides in Husserl's saying he not interested in writing as sensible phenomenon: For Husserl, writing is not only writing as a constituted body (*Körper*, one is tempted to say "a corpse"). Writing is also a proper body (*Leib*, translated as *chair* into French, but let's say a "life," that which is traversed by intention: the *Leib* exists insofar as it is this traversal of intention making a *Körper* into a *Leib*). The intention of writing and reading constitutes *Körper* in *Leib*. So, writing is both (*à la fois*) a factual event and the surfacing (*surgissement*) of meaning.

The disappearance of truth does not concern the threat to corporality, to writing as a body. The question of the disappearance of truth applies to the question of how to *save* (*sauver*) *Leiblichkeit* (*Intro* 97<sup>8</sup>), in a sense liveliness or fleshliness, from disappearance, because the meaning that is threatened is the meaning in the *Geistigkeit*, in the spirit, of the flesh or *Leib* (98). The loss, the oblivion, is not of the body but of the *Leib*, for forgetting is not something that the body can do, it is not something a corpse can do, the earth cannot forget. Forgetting is only something an *ego* can do, and meaning "will always be able to be reactivated – in principle and *de jure*" (*Intro* 98).

The disappearance of truth insofar as a forgetting or an oblivion is always only, according to Husserl, a weakness, a lapse, a breakdown, but never a defeat, never a death. "L'oubli de la vérité elle-même ne sera donc jamais que la faillite d'un acte et l'abdication d'une responsabilité, une défaillance plus qu'une défaite. On ne pourra le faire comparaître

<sup>8</sup> "Si la géométrie est vraie, son histoire interne doit se sauver intégralement de toute agression sensible," (*Intro* 94).

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en personne qu'à partir d'une histoire intentionnelle" (*Intro* 98). The "faillite d'un acte" testifies to the possibility of a re-activation. The oblivion of truth can be brought to trial in terms of intentionality, which is to say that one can, to that extent, be called upon to recall. It is not sickness or death (defeat, *défaite*). Forgetting is not dying, *faillite* is not *défaite*, it is failing to live. Neglecting may feel like dying, or one may feel like dying and thus one neglects, but not reading and forgetting are failing living. This failing is of an act, of an intentionality, of a mind, not of a graphic body, sign or corpse. Meaning is by definition capable of being reactivated. By the same token, forgetting would never be total, since reactivation is also never total. Meaning can always be reactivated, forgetting is always possible, and reactivation is never total, because there is a "pure equivocity" (*Intro* 107), that is to say an irreducible equivocity which consists in words and language in general never being absolute objects. (In the context of A-I, this is why speech and writing themselves offer no salvation: their irreducible mediatedness involves lapse, failure, if also reactivation: "[L] irréductible *médiateté* rendrait ainsi illusoire tout salut promis par la parole ou par l'écriture *elles-mêmes*" [*Intro* 106n1].) Pure equivocity means always a remainder elsewhere. Pure equivocity means a meaning always remaining to be said, and remains what every saying says.

That is how response 3 reacts to the *oubli* mentioned in response 1. Now, passivity, the point of response 2.

Passivity, passing away, is the danger that the sedimentation of meaning represents. "Devant le sens sédimenté (burial of universal transcendental reader/ writer ?), le danger, c'est d'abord la *passivité*" (*Intro* 99). Sedimentations are intentions and intentional meanings, original non-logical meanings, that are sleeping, perhaps dreaming. In a sense they are dreaming because all the sedimentations – imagine everything that has fallen to the ground since forever – are *implicated* (s'impliquent) in their totality (*Intro* 99). Every level is implicated in every other level, all the more so since every level is both part of the structure and of the genesis of the ensemble. Every sedimentation is *at the same time* (en même temps) the result of an uprising, an eruption, a springing – *un surgissement, un bond* – and a sedimentary fallout (*retombée*) of meaning. Every proposition leaves a deposition: this is the

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supposition of meaning of what sits (*siège*) under the crust, under the surface.

The underworld of sedimentation is the model for pure equivocity of meaning, for all the relations of all words. And in every *surgissement* activates, reactivates or passivates a *ci-gît*; in every *bond*, a *retombée*; in all *chair* (Intro 98), a *choir* (Intro 84). Both (*à la fois*) at the same time (*en même temps*).

The underworld of sedimentation is thus also a *gisement*. Indeed, right at this moment Derrida makes a point of giving Husserl's example of what he calls "contingent plurivocity," which is the German word for "dog," *Hund*. It signifies both "a kind of animal" and "a kind of cart (in use in mines)" (Intro 102). *Surgissement* is related to the *gisement*, insofar as the *surgissement* results in the *gisement*, the disposition of the layers of sediments.

*gisement* comes from the verb *gésir*: this verb comes from classical Latin, *jacere* (*jaceo* in the indicative first person: 'jassio', 'jackeo'), it has the sense of a result, as in "être couché, être étendu," properly speaking, "être dans l'état d'une chose jetée." This sense of result contrasts with the form of *jacio* (first person indicative also), meaning "jeter." The re-birth, or at least the re-baptism, of Derrida in this first publication, the first time he appeared under the name of "Jacques" and not "Jackie" (indeed, his students papers until then had been signed "Jackie"), is written into the word "chaque." Pure equivocity was when what Derrida called "chaque étape" or "chaque étage," *chaque* being double because both structural and genetic, was implicated in every other step or stage. Every word, both closed and open, in every other word. And when he describes total equivocity in language, he does so by imagining "un langage qui fasse affleurer à la plus grande synchronie possible la plus grande puissance des intentions enfouies, accumulées et entremêlées dans l'âme de **chaque** atome linguistique, de **chaque** vocable, de **chaque** mot, de **chaque** proposition simple » (Intro 104, my boldface). One is witness to the emergence of a writer, and indeed **Jacques** Derrida here defines writing, his writing, as both that of *Finnegans Wake* (total equivocity) and that of Husserlian phenomenology (univocal reduction).



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If *Hund* can mean both a “dog” and a “cart,” the one the unfaithful echo of the other, it’s because of a contingent equivocity. Husserl distinguishes contingent equivocity, *Hund* and *Hund*, from “essential plurivocity” (*Intro* 102). Essential plurivocity is inevitable, cannot be eliminated from language by any artificial technique or by any convention. Essential plurivocity stems from a word being used every time in a potentially new way or new context thereby animating the identity of the objective meaning. The example of contingent equivocity, the *Hund*-dog/*Hund*-cart, drives Derrida again into the underworld of a footnote, where he remarks how Husserl’s claiming that “philosophical language,” “learnèd language,” can freely establish conventions whereby we decide that a particular expression is limited to a single meaning. Derrida’s ear, like that of an alert sleeping dog, pricks up, as he adds, “La phrase [on limiting equivocal expressions to one single meaning] que nous venons de citer ne sonne-t-elle pas comme l’**écho fidèle** de telle autre phrase” by Leibniz where he writes that it depends on philosophers to fix the meanings at least in learned language, and to agree to them so as to destroy this tower of Babel (*Intro* 102n3). Husserl, the faithful dog of Leibniz? The *Hund*-dog gives onto the *Hund*-miner’s cart that descends to the underworld of the footnote where Husserl, like Fido (in Derrida’s *La Carte postale* [1980]), echoes his master Leibniz (*geistige Leiblichkeit? Geistige Lieblichkeit?*). But even this reduction of contingent equivocity does not suffice, since Husserl will try also to reduce “essential equivocity.” It’s here that Derrida shows himself to be an unfaithful disciple of the master, or faithful insofar as unfaithful.

One could contrast Husserl’s dog with those dogs stupefied and barking at the end of Claudian’s *De raptu Proserpinae*. At the very end of that text, the mother Ceres sets out tracking the footsteps of her daughter as her own tears wash away the very traces she needs in order to try to find the abducted Proserpine. Walking through the night holding torches, she walks into the emptiness of the space beyond the text, as it closes to the sound of dogs howling in the night. Claudian’s text was the first to have no return of the abducted girl. If Husserl’s dog is an example of the reduction of “contingent equivocity,” the restoration of meaning by means of the imposition of convention and

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artifice, Claudian's dogs are either reduced (*reductis*) to stupefaction (*stupefacta*) or continue barking (*latrat* being the text's closing and therefore unclosing word). Claudian's dogs thus succumb to silence or howl without any return of wandering, washed away traces, like a text condemned to lethargy or to an impossibility of being returned to, read, reactivated.

If the faithful/ unfaithful *Hund* became the "écho fidèle" that tries to eliminate Babelian echoes, what to make of Derrida remarking that Husserl's desire to reduce even essential equivocity reveals a concern "qu'on pourra aussi bien interpreter, une fois de plus, comme un refus de l'histoire que comme une **fidélité profonde** au sens pur de l'historicité"? (my boldface). For this concern to be a "fidélité profonde" is for it to be an 'infidélité à la surface'. Yet for Husserl *univocity* is at the surface ("l'expression univoque fait totalement surface," "le langage univoque reste *le même* parce qu'il donne tout à voir dans une evidence actuelle, parce que rien ne s'y cache" [Intro 103]). For Husserl, fidelity, that a word is equal to itself, that language remains the same, that meaning is at the surface, should be superficial, not profound. When Derrida writes "fidélité profonde," he as much as writes "unfaithful to the surface, unfaithful to univocity." The concern to reduce equivocity is in fact (or in essence) unfaithful to univocity, to the surface. That is to say, Derrida interprets Husserl's concern as a fidelity to *profondeur*, which is precisely what Husserl always wants to eliminate ("le process de l'équivocité soit toujours associé par Husserl à une critique de la *profondeur*"; Husserl: "La profondeur est un symptôme du chaos" [Intro 103, 103n1]). In writing that Husserl's attempt to reduce equivocity is profoundly faithful to, and faithful to profound, historicity, Derrida makes the point that reduction is always only the necessity of "indefinitely recommencing" (Intro 104) reduction, since if language were ever safely univocal ("sous la protection de l'univocité," under its cover), it wouldn't mean anything. Profound fidelity to historicity is fidelity to the equivocity of *Hund/ Hund*, to the duplicity of echoes, and to infidelity to the master. Such is what Derrida slips into his commentary in the form of *aparté*. Noting that finitude and necessary mediatedness could "frapper de non-sens tout le dessein de Husserl" (Intro 108) and just before picking back up with Husserl's point of view

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(“Mais pour Husserl, on le sait” [Intro 108]), Derrida delivers his take on the situation: “Ne faut-il pas alors, pour que l’histoire ait sa densité propre, que la nuit dans laquelle sont englouties les ‘archi-prémises’, tout en se laissant pénétrer mais jamais dissiper, ne **cèle** pas seulement le fait, mais le sens fondateur ? et que l’oubli ‘critique’ des origines ne soit pas l’égarement accidentel, mais **l’ombre fidèle** au mouvement de la vérité ?” (Intro 108, my boldface). As faithful ghost or fidelity to the ghost, forgetting and the night attest a fidelity to infidelity that extends to a forgetting or disappearance of truth so radical as to allow the possibility of the reappearance of truth. When “reactivation” is called, in a footnote, the “medium of fidelity” by which phenomenology retrieves meaning from the grave where it has passed into sedimentation, it is because “reactivation” is precisely like a “medium.” Fidelity is a fidelity not of sameness (fidelity to present meaning, to presence, to actuality and to activity) but a fidelity to the grave, to disappearance, to passivity, to what interrupts fidelity.

As in the slide between *Hund* und *Hund*, the *glissement* from *surgissement* to *gisement*, from *surgir* to *ci-gît*, from genesis to structure, from *chaque* to “Jacques,” the verb *surgir* has two basic meanings. *Surgir*, a rising, is related to words like *ressusciter*, to *resurrection*; yet the same grapheme, *surgir*, means “mouiller l’ancre”, “apparaître sur la mer.” This nautical term, *surgir*, means “arriver au port,” but changing the preposition to “de” gives *surgir du port*, therefore “quitter,” “sortir.” *Surgir*. coming and going, appearing and disappearing.

We are arriving at our port, preparing to push off (*Aufschub*). The answer to the “disappearance of truth,” the only one of the three to say something right but it’s not unequivocal, involves the irreducibility of passivity and activity. The possibility of the disappearance of the truth, of its passing into sheer passivity, is also its possibility of conversion in return, its wake-up (*réveil* [Intro 100]), its *Reaktivierung*.

*La Reaktivierung est, dans le domaine des objectités idéales, l’acte même de toute Verantwortung et de toute Besinnung, dans les sens définis plus haut. Elle permet de mettre à vif, sous les écorces sédimentaires des acquis linguistiques et culturels, le sens nu de l’évidence fondatrice. Ce sens est réanimé en ce que je le restitue à sa dépendance à l’égard de*

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*mon acte et le **reproduis** en moi tel qu'il a été la première fois produit par un autre. Bien entendu, l'activité de la **réactivation** est seconde. Intro 100-101, my boldface.*

The disappearance of the truth is its possibility of **re**-appearance, its appearance as **re**-appearance, as *repetition* (and thus possibly only a technical reproducibility which would be irresponsibility itself because without intentionality). Reactivation brings, or puts, to the quick the most stripped away meaning (this may be a *dépouille*, the fact of finitude, such may be the meaning to reanimate). It's through this spot that Derrida goes underground again, into a footnote to "éclairer ce point" of reactivation, where he states the way to do so is a confrontation with the problem of activity and passivity in phenomenology, recording especially the dislocation of any certainty or certain meaning by a multiplication of "perhaps": "Une telle étude devrait **peut-être** conclure que la phenomenology n'a fait que débattre avec exigence du sens de ce couple de concepts, ou se débattre indéfiniment avec lui, c'est-à-dire avec l'héritage le plus 'irréductible', et par là même, **peut-être**, le plus obscurcissant de la philosophie occidentale" (*Intro 101n1*, my boldface). The way to "clarify" this point is "perhaps" to "conclude" that it is the "most obscuring heritage," i.e., something that must be "every time (*chaque fois*)," re-created. Clarification concludes upon obscurity, yet obscurity is what is so passively received as to have to be reactivated.

Forgetting, passivity, crisis, all these are the possibility of re-activation. Disappearance of truth, disappearance of world, is a sort of structural death without which there could be no transmission or tradition of truth, no re-appearance. Yet no re-activation is total ("Une réactivation *totale*, même si elle était possible, paralyserait l'histoire interne de la géométrie" [*Intro 108*]). It always leaves a remains to be said.

Cutting to the quick of a remains? The *vif* of a *dépouille à nu*? Orphic or nereid function of the poet?

I'd like to come back to the Celan interview (2001) so as to wrap things up. I'd like to let Jacques Derrida's words be heard from the

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place of their sedimentation, in for example those preceding passages from the *Introduction* (written in 1961). Poetic action is closest to pure passivity, to what he had termed in the *Introduction* “retrouv[ant] la valeur poétique de la passivité” (*Intro* 104).

*L’acte poétique constitue donc une sorte de **résurrection** : le poète est quelqu’un qui a affaire en permanence à une langue qui se meurt et qu’il **ressuscite**, non pas en lui **rendant** une ligne triomphante mais en la faisant **revenir** parfois, comme un **revenant** ou comme un fantôme : il **réveille** la langue et pour faire vraiment à vif l’expérience du **réveil**, du **retour** à la vie de la langue, il faut être tout près de son cadavre. Il faut être au plus près de son **reste**, de sa dépouille.* (“La Langue,” 90-91, my boldface.)

The true experience of the quick, the truly quick experience, comes from a kind of pressure (“près”), the tightest quickness between *être* (“il faut être”) spelled *estre* before the circumflex (“to bend around, to wind around”) and *reste*. Such is relief. The re-leaf.

In the *Introduction*, in the context of Husserl’s belief that *translation* must always be possible, ought to always be possible (and we recall the sense of *translation* as the back and forth passage from the world of the dead and the world of the living), Derrida explains this belief as implying that any two speaking subjects, in front of a selfsame natural being, will always be able to strip it down to its nakedness: “on aura toujours pu **dépouiller** des superstructures et des catégories culturelles fondées en lui, et dont l’unité fournirait toujours l’ultime instance arbitrale de tout *malentendu*” (*Intro* 76). A word can be a *dépouille*, and a *dépouille* would supposedly, fundamentally, by that token, be a selfsame, unified, object. Performing this reduction, this stripping down to nakedness, is the highest cultural act that there is. This act consists in receiving “la terre elle-même” (*Intro* 76). The return to earth, returned earth, the *rendement* of the earth, is the fund, finding oneself closest to sheer non-meaning (geo) without which no language could ever (be the) return to meaning, which language always only is: a return to meaning, therefore a returned meaning, return to sender, to a sender (the earth) that is no subject but a purely natural object, the

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instance of an “il s’agit”: “Cet étant objectif purement naturel [‘la même chose, objet perçu comme tel’, see Derrida’s note here] est l’étant du monde sensible qui devient le premier fondement de la communication, la chance permanente d’une réinvention du langage” (*Intro* 76). Being pressed up against clay, I take it as a selfsame object, yet this selfsame object is the place of sheer equivocity (it is absolute sedimentation), and this selfsame object is the foundation, the *fundament*, a fund that is *dément* because, if we can all agree that the object is just what it is, namely an unnameable condensation of all words, what we have agreed to is the existence of an inexhaustible, plethoric, mine of meaning(s)<sup>9</sup>. The “permanent chance of a reinvention of language” is that basis of sheer equivocity, represented by the *dépouille*. Perhaps this is what Derrida is saying in other words in the Celan interview when he says that the poetic act experiences re-awakening of language truly to the quick insofar as it is (and is not, “faut être”) closest to the *dépouille*.

Poetry is this instance, this constancy, of pressure and relief (leaf, leave, live):

*À chaque instant, [Celan] a dû vivre cette mort [de la langue...]. Je suppose que Celan avait constamment affaire à une langue qui risquait de devenir une langue morte. Le poète est quelqu’un qui s’aperçoit que la langue, que sa langue, la langue dont il hérite ... risque de redevenir une langue morte et donc qu’il a la responsabilité, une très grave responsabilité, de la réveiller, de la ressusciter ... ni comme un corps immortel ni comme un corps glorieux mais comme un corps mortel, fragile, quelquefois indéchiffrable comme l’est chaque poème de Celan. (“La Langue,” 90.)*

Not trying to do that seems to mean receiving forgetting, not interpreting; it is putting to death, going to Lethe. Letting go of the possibility of the *surgissement* of the *ci-gît*: “Rien n’assure un poème contre sa mort, soit que l’archive puisse en être toujours brûlée dans

<sup>9</sup> It would be necessary to read how Derrida inserts the idea that what Husserl sees as the basis of deciding a misunderstanding is precisely non-communication and misunderstanding; any understanding is a compromise; we pretend that the “as such” is selfsame when the implication of the selfsame, the “as such,” is that it is everything and everything else (*Intro* 77).

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des fours crématoires ou dans des incendies, soit que, sans être brûlée, elle soit simplement oubliée, ou non interprétée ou mise en léthargie. C'est toujours possible, l'oubli" ("La Langue" 90).

I read in Derrida not only that we are ghosts, that our living present is accessed through survival of it as simple presence, and thus we are instances of prosopopoeia (writing in the voice, discourse in speech), but also that its flipside is that there is a life, also in the mode of a survival, in the death of something. The uncanniness is the *différance* of these two ghosts. And such statements would not be metaphorical promises of salvation, but conditions of possibility for living (on) dying, as worked out in the *Introduction*.

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