



”Dare He Die, Dear Reader: obligasequence, éblouibélierséquence”

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Dare he die, dear reader: obligasequence, ébloubélierséquence

Thomas DUTOIT

Preliminary question: What might be the obverse of the volume title under whose aegis we are all seeking to read and remember? It might be something like *Uninherited Dumbness: Neglecting and Forgetting Already* (Déjà). Reading and remembering is responding to a trust, to an inheritance. To experience this, to ponder, to respond to the volume title under whose aegis we seek to contribute, is to counter neglect and oblivion, is to have to traverse the risky quicksand of irresponsive impassibility.

In listening to the lines from “Adieu” that guide this issue, move between dazzlement and obligation, so as to tender all ears to the ligature of b + l (itself an effect of the + L effect from *Glas*) hearing therein the music of a *mais*lancholy that would be intonated in *Béliers*, where the differential pairing dazzlement and obligation would each be suspended over the abyss of an oblivion, synonym of mourning.¹ This *coup de donc*, this logic of obsequence, *Béliers* as original echo in which “Adieu” is always already sounding, delivers the Kantian subtext of our passage whose foundation, countered by explicit gestures of Levinas taken over by Derrida, has a fault-line scarp whose relief itself counters this explicit slant, insofar as Derrida’s retrieval of desire in Kantian morality implies that dazzlement is already accompanying obligation in the Kant against which Levinas would seem to be writing. At issue are love, sexual love, immorality, desire, melancholy and rebellion as guide for reading and remembering.

Derrida responds to his own question, our guiding line, by answering, in the paragraph subsequent to the one from “Adieu,” with reading. Reading is *éblouissement*, and this term is paired with *obligation*, as if the two terms formed a pair akin to how, in Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, a term like “duty” was the subjective correlative of the objective term “law,” and *Achtung* [respect] the ennobled term for its humiliating equivalent, *Verachtung*

[scorn]. The allusion to Kant in Derrida's answer to his, to our, question, is explicit, and it also will need to be read. Prior to that, it may be said that dazzlement and obligation are to be opposed to oblivion. What is oblivion, in Derrida, how does Derrida cast oblivion? In what measure are reading and remembering (dazzlement and obligation?) developed in contrast to neglect or oblivion? Derrida's own response to the trust inherited from Levinas sounds two notes whose echoing can be heard as a poetic event which is perhaps just desiring to let him speak, let him in us speak. Is this philosophizing with the Hammer? With the Rammer? Or Ramembling with music?

Derrida's passage, I contend, is a synecdoche of his readings of Kant's versions and conversions of the moral law, and of his wedging Levinas between himself and Kant. This contention, in other words, can be sounded out in a sort of echo chamber, a discussion of repercussion in Derrida. Without reading how a *donc* [therefore] can be a *gond* [hinge], or a /donk/ a /kond/, or a /b/ + /l/ an /l/ + /b/, there is no way of understanding that desire can be the law, obligation a bedazzlement, of understanding precisely the abyssal oblivion over which such overstanding hovers. It is for this reason, more accurately for this resonance, of the precedence of echoing that the Kantian/ Levinasian subtext of Derrida's "experience" – the contention here throughout – is, in the linear presentation of this paper, situated *after* a reading of the writing or musical notation of Derrida's "experience."²

* * *

The paragraph that guides us comes from what can be stabilized as a three paragraph movement. Derrida evokes first interruption, then in the second paragraph ponders how interruption is a certain form of espousal, whereupon in a third paragraph he qualifies that espousal as bedazzlement and obligation. The loss of the other is not for the other to be *oublié* [forgotten]; it is for me to be *ébloui* [dazzled] by and *obligé* [obligated] to the other. What are the implications here?

The guiding passage begins with a “donc” that can be heard thanks to its being left out of the English translation: “Que se passe-t-il *donc* quand...” becoming like a music that misses a beat, even a morphed sound, “What happens when...”³ If the English has the audible merit of sounding the “w” and the “h” (Wh, h, wh), it cannot but be silent to the repetition of /k/ (“que,” “donc,” “quand”), to how “donc” is a phonic chiasmus of “quand” (chiasmic effect repeated just afterwards in “en-tend-u,” “dout,” “a-ttend-ait [the resonance of /t/ and /d/]). Yet the English translation passing over in silence the “donc” in “What happens when...” (which may be what happens to a great tympanic writing when passed from one language to another) rings a bell. This stroke of the “donc” recalls the “coups de donc” [strokes of therefore] in the essay “Tympan” in *Margins*, where Derrida submits the “donc” to the effect of the “gond” and the “gong” [gong] and submits linkage of “raisonner” [to reason] to the repercussion of “résonner” [to resound]. For our guiding line begins with a *coup de donc*, right after the *coup de telephone* [telephone call]. Who called? Was it Levinas calling Derrida or Derrida, Levinas? Who came first? “[C]ette angoisse de l’interruption que je sentais chez Emmanuel Lévinas *quand*, au téléphone par exemple, il semblait à chaque instant appréhender la coupure et le silence ou la disparition” (A 21, my emphasis). Derrida does not mark who called whom, but does write “silence,” so the translators’ elision of “donc” might be explained by the repetition, in the English, of the lexeme “silence”: “the silence” and “a great thinker becomes silent,” whereas the “donc” in French is there because “le silence” is followed not by a verbal form of “silence” but by “*se tait un grand penseur.*”

The guiding line of this *coup de donc* is also followed by a paragraph that culminates in a *donc*: “la loi qui appelle donc à se rendre à l’autre préséance infinie du tout autre.” This “donc” closes a paragraph that consists almost entirely of naming and renaming, of repercussions distributed syntactically re-toning the notes that are sounded one after the other. It would be necessary to read aloud the whole paragraph. Instead, may it suffice to note the

“interminable” “re-commence-ment” in expressions like “avec Emmanuel Lévinas, comme avec ces pensées” where “Emmanuel Lévinas” is converted into “ces pensées” and the “comme” prepares the sounding of “commencer,” “re-commencer,” “commencement,” “commencerai.” Things or words are converted into other things or words by the turning of the syntax: “ces pensées qui sont des sources, à savoir...” where the copulative “sont” turns one thing into another, to be redefined again by “to wit” (*à savoir*). The rest of the paragraph is a cascade of recommencement, the fall of rhetorical variation: for example, “Chaque fois que je *lis ou relis*”; “je suis ébloui *de gratitude et d’admiration*”; and “je suis ébloui *de...*, ébloui *par*.” Practically every term undergoes variation, as the syntax turns like a kaleidoscope, a turning that is less the moral language of entrusted responsibility (i.e., Kantian or Levinasian descriptions of the categorical imperative or the relation to the other that form the substratum of this passage), and more a linguistic morality of a dare read, a dear reader, dreading, re-membling dissemination and dichemination (i.e. a derridean reading – *legere*, *lesen*, loss – where everything that is gathered is lost, loss the possibility of gathering).

Without yet analyzing semantically the terms – an analysis or undoing that will later highlight how Derrida situates these words as the difference or inter-referentiality of Kant and Levinas – dare read a syntactic rotating plough, for example: “cette nécessité, qui n’est pas une contrainte mais une force très douce” (i.e., x which is not y but z), “qui oblige et qui oblige non pas à ... mais à” (i.e., a that does not b but c), “courber autrement” to “autre courbure” (i.e., where the chiasmus is that between Kantian autonomy and Levinasian heteronomy, “respect” – of the *Critique of Practical Reason* analyzed in the 1980-81 Derrida seminar entitled *Le respect* – being replaced by “hétéronomique”), the final “donc” being the law by which “se rendre à cette autre courbure” becomes “se rendre à l’autre préséance.”⁴ The description is circular since the first syntagm, which consists in 1) “se rendre” + 2) “cette courbure hétéronomique” + 3) “qui nous rapporte” + 4) “tout autre,” becomes the second

syntagm, consisting in 1) “loi” [which was 2 before] + 2) “appelle” [which was 3 before] + 3) “se rendre” [which was 1 before] + 4) “tout autre” [which was also 4 before]. It is not here just that “selon la loi” (variation itself on Derrida’s signature expression, “se moduler selon tous les tons” [be modulated according to all tones])⁵ belongs to a thetic discourse wherein Derrida is elucidating his “experience” and his experience as vaguely Levinasian (or Levinas as vaguely Kantian). The “selon la loi” is not just referring to “cette autre courbure,” i.e., to the Decalogue, to theology, to philosophy of morality: the operative word in “selon la loi” is not only “loi.”

For the “selon la loi” is also the “loi” of the “selon,” of an “according” by which one thing is warped into another, and it is the law of the “donc,” the *coup de donc*, whereby a philosophy of timbre, or the hammer, of resonance is operating under the guise of a philosophy of logical consecution, linkage and reasoning. In these paragraphs, the absence of the “donc,” save at the outset and the terminus, and the presence of the spiralling and copulative movement of the syntax (i.e., x is not y but z and z does not a but b, and xy is yx) form less a thesis or theoreme about *dazzlement* and *obligation* and more a Derridean theorization of “experience” as precisely this twisting dichemination. Dare reading an experience.

Given its elaboration of (re)percussion in the essay “Tympan,” the *coup de donc* sounds an obsequent logic commanding the “comme si” Derrida enounces in our guide paragraph from “Adieu,” “on attendait *encore* une réponse, comme si elle devait nous aider non seulement à penser autrement mais même à lire ce que nous avons cru déjà lire.” Here, an echo of a rumour not yet received, an effect already of what has not happened. Derrida’s rhetorical figure of “not only but even” gives the rub: not on seemingly intelligible thought (*non ... à penser*) but on linguistic reading (*... mais à lire*) is where he places the stress, just as, at the beginning of the funereal address “Adieu,” he had split his proposition about the

word he writes, and speaks, in a split way: “à-Dieu”: “ce mot ‘à-Dieu’ ... qu’il m’aura appris à penserⁱ ou à prononcer autrement” (A 11). The French edition places a superscripted number after “penserⁱ” to signal an endnote, established and placed there not by Derrida but by Vanghélis Bitsoris, that refers to places where Derrida defined the meanings of the word. The note therefore belongs to “thinking” and not to “pronouncing.” The detail is telling. Thought is one way to define what language does and records. This way is content, the signified. Speech – pronunciation, intonation – is another way. Sound (and different intonations of the notes of a syntagm) is as much what transpires in any sentence, Derrida’s perhaps in particular, as is the “what” that is said. By placing the emphasis on pronouncing (and not just thinking), and on reading (and not just thinking), Derrida guides us to read the *line* of his thought, or writing, the twirled twill of it. Its whirl, its swirl, its world, is that of the zigzag (the term employed in Derrida’s *Introduction à l’Origine de la géométrie*⁶), that of the obsequent stream: where in philosophy is heard a *coup de donc*, a differential resonance, that deconstructs cause and effect, consecutive logic, because effects of sound and rhetorical blocking (in the theatrical sense) as much perform a happening as grammatical rules fix communicated meaning. And in the sentence that is our guideline, “une réponse, comme si elle devait nous aider non seulement à penser autrement mais même à lire ce que nous avons cru déjà lire,” the “comme si” announces the idea (i.e., a response that would make original what we thought was no longer original) before the subsequent paragraph that recasts this idea in terms of experience (“C’est là une expérience ... pour moi”), experience defined as commencement that does not stop (and therefore never can be said to begin), in other words where all is held in reserve (“tenait tout en reserve”) simultaneously to its being always still to come, *à venir*. The two paragraphs (i.e., first, the question: what happens when a thinker dies? and second, the answer: my experience is) are one in two by dint of the sinew of the sounds (but also the Derridean ideas) in “comme si” and “commencement.”

The “comme si” is of a “commence-ment” that has not yet happened all the while also being a response to what, because we have not had the response yet, we have not really yet read (and this “response” is itself a response to Levinas’s anxiety of a “non-response” [*sans réponse*]). A response, belonging to the written but in the mode of deferral, keeps the written from having been thoroughly read. This response, itself *comme si*, and (re)commencing, is an espousal, a link or bond, anamorphically under the rule of the “re-,” an original response, an original echo therefore. Such is not the consecutive logic of reason but rather the obsequent logic that, as it’s put in the essay “Tympan,” “ne fait pas le jeu d’un enchaînement. Il joue plutôt l’enchaînement. Ne pas *oublier* que tramer (*trameare*), c’est d’abord trouser, traverser, travailler le part-et-d’autre de la chaîne. Le conduit de l’oreille, ce qu’on appelle le méat auditif, ne se ferme plus après avoir été sous le coup d’un chaînement simulé, phrase seconde, écho et articulation logique d’une rumeur qu’on n’a pas encore reçue, effet déjà de ce qui n’a pas lieu.”⁷ Do not obliivate (*ne pas oublier*); rather, oblect, i.e., confront, go towards, against and in the way of (all these being the senses of “ob-”) reading. Not obliivating, not neglecting, is ob-lecting (*oublire*), *oui*, *bêler*, yes bleat. Not obliivating is letting resonate (“tr” +, in “tramer,” “trouser,” “traverser,” “travailler”), and the conduit of this tube or syntax is an obsequent stream in that there is a concatenation or repercussion occurring where what I have already read is met by my never yet having read it. The “comme si” (in “Adieu”) is the “rumeur qu’on n’a pas encore reçue” (in “Tympan”); the “avons cru déjà lire” (in “Adieu”) is the “effet déjà de ce qui n’a pas lieu” (in “Tympan”).

This logic of obsequence (“logique de l’obséquence”⁸; Derrida having delivered this short text “Adieu” at the funeral of Emmanuel Levinas; Levinas known for making “after you” be his rule of conduct) operating by the two *coups de donc* in this passage from “Adieu” is an echo from “Tympan”: “Cette répercussion vannée déjà d’un type qui n’a pas encore sonné, ce temps timbré entre l’écriture et la parole (s’) appellent un *coup de donc*. / Dès qu’il

perfore, on meurt d'envie d'y substituer quelque cadavre glorieux. Il suffit en somme, à peine, d'attendre" (*Ty* xxv). This repercussion that is already exhausted (or, as Derrida puts it later in *Apprendre à vivre enfin*, "quinze jours ou un mois après ma mort, *il ne restera plus rien*"), of a type, or from a guy, who has not yet rung or sounded (and as Derrida also said in *Apprendre à vivre enfin*, "on n'a pas commencé à me lire"⁹), this timbered or mad time between writing and speech, are called (call for) a blow of consequence. Derrida's writing has not yet arrived, but is a repercussion. An echo of an origin that has not yet happened. Difference between writing and speech, it is a blow to consequence because it obeys a logic of obsequence.

What is this *coup de donc*? The "donc" is the "therefore" of philosophical reasoning (emblemized, for example, in "je pense, donc je suis"). This "donc" is repeated throughout "Tympan," not merely in its philosophical usage of driving home a point in the reasoning, but in – if there's any difference – a performative, and poetic, way (beating a drum, making a certain noise, that has an incantatory and phatic function). "En termes de presse, donc, manuelle, qu'est-ce qu'un tympan ?" This question, the first sentence of a paragraph, is followed by, in the first sentence of the next paragraph: "En termes de presse manuelle, il n'y a pas, donc, un tympan, mais plusieurs tympan" (*Ty* xxii). The musicality of the argument keeps to the beat of the *coups* of *donc*, thus their being condensed in one, as in the following : "la maîtrise infinie permet à la philosophie d'intérioriser toute limite comme *étant* et comme *étant* la sienne *propre*. De l'excéder du même coup et donc de la garder en soi" (*Ty* xiv). Derrida's tympanic signature, his style of in(de)tonation, is therefore doubly operational by *coups*, breakthroughs in arguments, but also blows, beatings. Reasoning is therefore intimate with resonating, a similarity typed into "Tympan" ("Sur [la] multiplicité, peut-être, la philosophie [...] n'a jamais pu raisonner" [*Ty* xxiv]; "il résonne" [*Ty* xxi]; "Peut-on pénétrer violemment [le] champ d'écoute [de la philosophie] sans qu'aussitôt [...] la philosophie [...]").

le fasse résonner en elle?” [Ty iii]). The *coup de donc* belongs to philosophy but also drumming.

Thus is *donc* frequently echo of *gond* in the essay. For, if “gond” means “hinge,” “frame,” “joint,” it is the inverse of “dong”, the striking of a drum, or “gong.” In this essay devoted to the tympan, the eardrum, and to a kind of rap-rock philosophy-deconstruction, a paragraph may thus begin by an ellipsis, “pas une réponse, donc,” to conclude by a fragment, “[d]e le faire sortir en plusieurs coups de ses gonds,” immediately followed by a new, one sentence, paragraph, “[m]ais qu’est-ce qu’un *gond* (significant: à faire raisonner en tous sens)?” whereupon a new paragraph starts right off the bat without skipping a beat: “[d]onc à quelle question si fier...” Obvious chiasmus here/ hear (“donc,” “gonds,” “gond,” “donc”), the structure yokes reasoning and resonating around the equivocal term “entendre” very frequent in “Tympan”: to hear, but also, to understand (such as in, “Comment l’entendre?” “cette entente” [Ty iii], “entendue à parler” [Ty iii], and in “Adieu” the double sense is present when Derrida writes of having “lu, et relu, entendu aussi” the great thinker while he was still alive [A 21]). Philosophical consecution (proper to the display of *logos*) reverberates with an internal play or feedback, as “*loxôs*” mimes *logos* from within (Ty vii). The essay “Tympan,” which is both an echo of Derrida’s deconstruction of philosophy hitherto and a foreshadowing of what was to come, singles out the “proper” as what philosophy seeks, but also insists upon the proper being absolutely coextensive with the ‘very near’ that derives from the structure of “s’entendre-parler,” thus of hearing oneself speak. The proper, proper meaning, the argument, is inextricable from the sounds making it, as if one could hear one’s footsteps before one sees one’s foot even touch the floor, as if pronouncing words came before their intended meanings: “le *proprius*, ... ne répercute sa limite absolue que dans la représentation sonore. C’est du moins l’hypothèse la plus insistante de ce livre. Un rôle quasi-organisateur y est *donc* accordé au motif de la vibration sonore” (Ty xiii, my emphasis).

The logic of consecution, of cause and effect, important for a philosophical argument, is parasited by a logic of obsequence, where things are the reverse of what they should be, and where the proper is undone by the improper. “Obsequent” is a term used for a stream or valley whose course or character goes in the direction opposite to that of the strata of which it is a part; or for a fault-line scarp whose relief is the reverse of that originally produced by the fault; an “obsequent” stream would run uphill for example. “Obsequent” is synonymous with “going against the grain.” A logic of obsequence supposes and entails a precedence earlier than the self, a precedence of the completely other. Obsequent logic is what is called, in our passage, “selon la loi donc se rendre à” “l’autre préséance infinie du tout autre” (A 22).

The “donc” in *Adieu* is thus a distant echo of the *coup de donc* in “Tympan.” It is a bell tolling for one who has died, Levinas, whose argument or appeal was for the precedence of the other. The “donc”, mark of philosophy, also rings the bell of the deconstructive “argument” about what undoes the “donc”: the sound effect at the origin of meaning, the distribution of repercussion prior to logical, grammatical decoding. The sound of *éblouir* and *obliger* in “je suis ébloui ... par une force très douce qui oblige,” this sound of “bl,” might seem faint here, too faint to hear (*ouïr*) in “Tympan.” Yet “Tympan” is so striking because it binds obliquity to oblivion. What must not be obliterated or forgotten (and this form, “ne pas oublier,” will strike a solemn note in the essay *Béliers* where it occurs with the rarity of a once-used instrument in a majestic symphony, to be sounded later) is that any pattern, any consecutive pattern, is constituted by the difference of its grammar and rhetoric, its meaning and its sound, the back and forth of them that is its obliquity. “Ne pas oublier,” writes Derrida in the passage already quoted, “que tramer (trameare), c’est d’abord trouer, traverser, travailler le part-et-d’autre de la chaîne” (*Ty* xxv). This movement on both sides of the warp is also tubular: in a word, oblique.

To oblivate obliquity is to forget all the organs, not just the ear, with their vestibular canals (vulva, lips of the vulva, urethra, meatuses): again in “Tympan,” “il suffit de oublier [la structure du tympan] – et pour cela de s’y abriter comme dans la plus familiale demeure – pour crier à la fin des organes, des autres” (*Ty x*). Nullification of these organs, and consequently taking refuge in the de-sexualization and appeasement of “the family,” results from forgetting, letting slide into oblivion, obliquity, the structure of the limit, of the tympan (and other organs) in particular, of the limit in general. Indeed, by the nuance of pronunciation, “oublier” (“il suffit de l’oublier”) resonates and is, indissociably, also the rational obverse of the “oblique,” effect of proximity typographically struck into two liminally rubbing liparagraphs (and the paralleling text of Leiris quoted in “Tympan” evokes here the vocal cords), the former of which reads: “Donc à quelle question de droit se fier si la limite en général, et non seulement celle de ce qu’on croit être une chose très particulière parmi d’autres, le tympan, est structurellement oblique? Si donc il n’y a pas de limite *en général* ? de forme droite et régulière de la limite ? Comme tout *limus*, le *limes*, chemin de traverse, signifie l’oblique” (*Ty x*). The limit in general is the oblique, the non-generalizable limit, the off-limits limit: to oblivate the oblique is to sound the silence of servile and mortuary waiting and wasting of time (i.e., what Derrida formulated as “l’oublier – et pour cela de s’y abriter comme dans la plus familiale demeure”). Obliquity – another name, no doubt, for the deconstruction of philosophy – is avoiding frontal and symmetrical contestation (*Ty vii*); it is the amplification of vibration and of the surface of impression, dislocating the limit *from* the tubular limits *to* the skin or surfaces reputed non-liminal (and Derrida had just lamented “la ‘peau neuve’ la plus fruste” of attempts to think alterity that purport to be familiar with alterity [*Ty v*]).

The oblique distorts, dislocates, differentiates:

on sait que la membrane du tympan, cloison mince et transparente, séparant le conduit auriculaire de l’oreille moyenne (la *caisse*), est tendue obliquement (*loxós*). Obliquement de haut en bas, de dehors en dedans et d’avant en arrière. Elle n’est *donc* pas perpendiculaire à l’axe du *conduit*. Un des effets de cette

obliquité, c'est d'augmenter la surface d'impression et *donc* la capacité de vibration. On a observé, en particulier sur les oiseaux, que la finesse de l'ouïe est en rapport direct avec l'obliquité du tympan. (*Ty vii*, my emphasis)

Deconstruction is to the canalisation of sentences what the tympan is to the axis of the auditory canal linking with the middle ear. Both capture the sound effects that are then arranged or not into sense, but since this capturing occurs in two inverse directions (from inside to outside and vice versa), a super-developed tympan (enhanced obliquity, deconstruction of writing and reading, or of voices and phenomena) is to be dazzled with gratitude and admiration, and obliged to render oneself to a remainder that stays other. To oblivate such obliquity would be to neglect oblexis, a type of reading of the way of its occurrence, a type of reading that gets in the way of its way.

One might speak here of an obligation to reading, not as a rule that makes one have to read in the absence of any desire to do so, but as the conjuncture of obliquity, *éblouissement* and obligation, that occurs “chaque fois que je lis ou relis Emmanuel Lévinas” (*A* 22). Each time that I read or re-read, that is to say, each time that I link or re-link. Derrida's French “je lis ou relis” is homophonic with “je lie ou je relie” [I link or re-link]. Obligated to read (“une force très douce qui oblige”) may here be obliged to link, with a lightness that ought nonetheless to be earnestly. *Obliger* as *obléger*, an oblightness. Such oblightness as obligedness would be oblicking. *Obliger*, *obléger*, *oblécher*. A serac would describe the coming-together of these words. A “serac” is the ridge of ice on a glacier where different crevices intersect. It would serendipitously describe a randym occurrence, as when words form by hardening and melting, joining and separating. *Obliger* as *obléger*, *oblécher*. Licking as linking. To lick or to link, to lick as to link. Derrida's talking about obligation regarding Levinas cannot be read, seriously, without linking it and reading it through the feedback loops (or lips) of all the other places where he drew out the erotic implications and explicit accounts of eroticism in Levinas. Derrida did this in “Violence et métaphysique,”¹⁰ in “En ce moment même, me voici,”¹¹ in the book *Adieu*, too, and also in *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy.¹²

Reconstituting these would take a certain number of pages, and so is not done here.

Summarily, it can be stated that for Derrida, but also for Levinas albeit in different ways that Derrida makes clear, obligation very much included love and lovemaking. Sexual desire and obligation go together. So it is no way extrinsic to Levinas to give way to the lick, light or earnest, in the link, *oblécher* in *obléger* in *obliger*.



Lecher: proper name, Ernst Lecher, inventor of a device that measures high-frequency electric oscillation, consisting of two parallel wires joined by a sliding contact, positions of maximum response or absorption being separated by a distance equal to half the wave-length of the oscillation.



It would be wrong to forget this link which we make lightly in earnest. We have heard in “Tympan” Derrida letting “obliquity” and the injunction “not to forget” (*obliquité* and *n’oublions pas*) echo each other. In Derrida’s great book on the body (*Leib, Leibhaftigkeit*), *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, “let’s not forget” remembers the necessity of reading linkage in terms of the mouth: “*Ne l’oublions pas*: la démonstration [of the book *Ego sum* by Jean-Luc Nancy] c’est que sans la bouche on ne pourrait penser l’union de l’âme et du corps” (*Le T* 38, my emphasis). At issue is the opening and closing of the lips, around the tongue, that Nancy makes the effort to read, when he focuses on the Latin of Descartes. The union of the body and soul is somehow whole, and the opening of the mouth gives that quasi-mingling to be thought, or felt, *quasi permixtum*. Derrida’s injunction (do not forget the mouth as quasi-union of body and soul, and therefore as their hiatus also), insisting on the opened mouth as *béance*, anticipates the “bouche bée” [gaping mouth] in *Béliers*. We will get to this gaping mouth in *Béliers*, evocation of the lips and mouth as place of interruption.

In *Le Toucher*, this remembering, this reading, of the mouth belongs with other injunctions not to forget: “N’oublions pas le contexte et l’enjeu de la démonstration ... : il y va de la *liberté* et de la décision, rien de moins, de la liberté de penser la liberté” (*Le T* 123). Freedom, this *liberté*, means being unable to master excess. The context of *Le Toucher* is the touchable that cannot be touched. Handling what cannot be handled defines philosophy, as Derrida quotes Nancy characterizing philosophy as being delivered over to a thinking of what it can not inspect rationally (“arraisonner”). Might we, echoing “Tympan,” say, contrapuntally, what resonates in it? Is it just accidental that the context not to be forgotten (“N’oublions pas”) is *libe* rty? Liberty to think as deliverance to excess? Not forgetting (“N’oublions pas”) here is synonymous for freedom (“liberté”). The freedom to think a “b + l” or “l + b” effect even in the writing of Derrida? To hang one’s jaw? To laugh about it? Further on *Le Toucher*, in the context of a laughing mouth, “bouche, rouge et blanche,” we read the same type of ligature: “Mais n’oublions pas que [Nancy] parle ... avec ce sens de la justice qui respecte l’absolue singularité, en vue de garder en vue *ce texte-ci* de Baudelaire” (*Le T*, 132). The absolute here is this particular Baudelaire. What is not being forgotten here, in these ligatures of b + l (*oubli*, *liberté*, *absolu*, *Baudelaire*)? Something that cannot be mourned, digested and excreted, explained away and thereby consigned to the *oubliettes*? A type of melancholy, black melancholy, as reading, as to dare read a de(a)reading? As blindness and thereby insight?¹³

Is melancholy, is belancholy, the injunction not to forget? Is *oublier* to be confronted with the alternative of bleating? *Oublier ou bêler*? *Oubélier* as *ou bêler* versus *oublier*? How to say this in English? Forgetting or bleating? Forgetting, where to bleat?

* * *

Propulsed by Derrida’s relation to Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Celan, *Béliers* is obviously written against forgetting. The injunction not to forget occurs early on, in the first section devoted to Gadamer’s statements about the art object or poem in general. “Ne

l'oublions jamais, *Vérité et Méthode* ouvrait son espace propre par un chapitre consacré à l'expérience de l'art', à une 'expérience de l'oeuvre d'art' qui excède toujours fondamentalement tout horizon subjectif d'interprétation, qu'il s'agisse de celui de l'artiste ou de celui de l'auteur" (B 17). If Derrida's injunction never to forget is not a throwaway hyperbole, it is because he is insisting upon a certain excess, a certain remainder. An artwork always exceeds the subjective horizon of interpretation in part because the artwork transforms the subject, including the signatory of it. Sovereign is neither the writer-artist nor the receiver but the work itself whose sovereignty however is constituted by a call to response and to responsibility. A more careful analysis of what is at stake in Derrida's initial injunction of "never forget" would contextualize more, but, since here we are limiting ourselves to this seemingly off-the-cuff "never forget it" (*ne l'oublions jamais*), may it suffice to note that the backbone of Gadamer's hermeneutics is this priority accorded to the place of the artwork, and the poem in particular. Never forget poetic sovereignty, Derrida says. Never forget divided sovereignty. This "n'oublions jamais" is at this stage in *Béliers* not prominent, and does not seem intrinsic to Derrida's development of separation, interruption, or melancholy that caps the first section of the essay, save perhaps to how, in the process of explaining "la certitude mélancolique," and why "le deuil alors n'attend plus" [mourning waits no longer then], Derrida records that in any relationship between at least two beings, each knows that one of them will have been destined to survive the other, and pursue the dialogue with the other after the death of the other. Melancholic certainty starts from the origin. The origin of any relationship is certainly melancholic. There is no delay, no waiting. If in "Adieu" that passage has the survivor waiting to hear again the disappeared one, if in "Adieu" the survivor is still waiting for the one who has been survived, in *Béliers* friendship begins immediately without any waiting, that is to say, without any mourning. If mourning does not wait, it is because melancholy starts before it. If mourning waited, that would mean that mourning is waiting to

begin, it is waiting for the other to die. I can wait to mourn. I can love you, I can like you, I can talk and walk with you, which means I can postpone mourning. Mourning is what you could make wait. In contrast, melancholy is always already started.

Despite the cluster of the above examples, the recurrence to “let’s not forget” is not, to my knowledge, a frequent motif in Derrida. In *Béliers*, the only other instance of an appeal to not or never forgetting comes in its fourth section, where Derrida sketches a reading of some of the zodiacal and Biblical allusions in Paul Celan’s poem, “Grosse, glühende Wölbung.” Derrida notes that it is always possible to read Celan’s poem about inscription and song as saying something about poetry in general, and about this poem in particular, namely that the inscription described or referred to could be that of poetry and of this poem. It is here that Derrida resorts again, for the second and last time in *Béliers* to this “never forget” formulation: the poem might refer to itself, but “Aucune auto-télie sur elle-même close, certes, dans cette hypothèse, mais sans jamais l’oublier, ne nous y arrêtons pas trop longtemps” (B 61). Always remembering that self-reference is open, that poetic sovereignty depends on a remainder, we continue. We will not wait any longer. Not to forget is to remember openness, to remember incomplete remembering. Not to forget is to remember heterotelia and even hetero-non-telia. Not to forget is to remember to move on. We are no longer waiting mournfully, but riding/ writing along melancholically.

The only other time that the word “to forget,” *oublier* is used in *Béliers*, is in the fifth section at sub-section number 3.¹⁴ The word *oublier* intervenes explicitly in the context of mourning and melancholy, where Derrida introduces the name of Freud. A more careful analysis would tie together some of the threads here, but in quoting the passage following, what I wish to make mobile is the fairly classical Derridean idea of forgetting as mourning, and failed forgetting as melancholy.¹⁵ Protest is what the ram does. The *bélier* protests. The

bélier is rebellious.¹⁶ Revolt is melancholic. It refuses to accept. It refuses to forget. The *bélier* is an *oubélier*, something like the alternative to forgetting, to *oublier*.

Selon Freud, le deuil consiste à porter l'autre en soi. Il n'y a plus de monde, c'est la fin du monde pour l'autre à sa mort, et j'accueille en moi cette fin du monde, je dois porter l'autre et son monde, le monde en moi : introjection, intériorisation du souvenir (*Erinnerung*), idéalisation. La mélancolie accueillerait l'échec et la pathologie de ce deuil. Mais si *je dois* (c'est l'éthique même) porter l'autre en moi pour lui être fidèle, pour en respecter l'altérité radicale, une certaine mélancolie doit protester encore contre le deuil normal. Elle ne doit jamais se résigner à l'introjection idéalisante. Elle doit s'emporter contre ce que Freud en dit avec une tranquille assurance, comme pour confirmer la norme de la normalité. La 'norme' n'est autre que la bonne conscience d'une amnésie. Elle nous permet d'*oublier* que garder l'autre au-dedans de soi, *comme soi*, c'est déjà l'*oublier*. L'oubli commence là. *Il faut donc la mélancolie.* (B 73-74)

“Mais si” is not Messiah (*Messie*). Yet it is the ramming of a “But if” that is also “But yes” (*mais si* as the former, but also, same words different intonation, *mais si* as the latter). “Mais si” belongs to a moment where Derrida counters the Freudian idea of melancholy as simple pathology. In this passage, mourning is the meltdown of the world of the other. Mourning is the reception of this end of world of the other. That end is so interiorized as to be dissolved in the acid of a good conscience. On the contrary, melancholy receives failure and pathology. Melancholy is the protest of a “But if/ yes I must” (*Mais si je dois*). Melancholy is the anger, the protest, of the *bélier* (impossible to miss the reference, by dint of the word “protest”). *Bélancholie*. The force here is unleashed by the insistent surge of *mais* in “Mais si je dois” and “elle ne doit *jamais*,” reinforced by the homophonically beginning “La *mélancolie* accueillerait” and “une certaine *mélancolie*.”¹⁷ Good conscience is amnesia. A bad conscience or a good unconscious is unable to miss the typography of the italics that spell out the alternative: *oublier ou bélier*. Forget or ram. *Mais-bé-lancholie*.¹⁸

Thus when *obligation* intervenes in *Béliers*, it does so simultaneously with the *alibi* and the *abyssal*. Commenting upon the final line of Celan's poem (the line that reads “Die Welt ist fort, ich muß Dich tragen”), separated from the rest of the poem by a bigger blank than any of those separating the other stanzas, Derrida notes its reversibility. “The world is gone, I must carry you” can mean, ‘since the world is gone, I have to carry you’ but also, ‘if I am obliged to carry you, then that must mean that the world disappears.’ Obligation is the

disappearance of alibi, experience of the abyssal. Obligation is being dazzled. As such, the b + l effect flashes upon obligation/ alibi/ abyssal. Derrida puts this as follows: “Dès lors que je suis obligé, à l’instant où je *te* suis obligé, [...] aucun monde, pour l’essentiel, ne peut plus être là. Aucun monde ne peut plus nous soutenir, nous servir de médiation, de sol, de terre, de fondement ou d’alibi. Peut-être n’y a-t-il plus que l’altitude abyssale d’un ciel” (B 68).

“Obligation” intervenes in *Béliers* for the only time here. If I am obliged, then I have no alibi. If I am obliged, then I am standing on my head with my feet supported by no fences facing, only by the abyssal altitude of an infinite sky (the jingle here is from Celan’s poetic statement, “The Meridian”). The *éblouissement* of lovers (the world is gone, I must carry you) is to be without anything intermediary, without anything to stand upon. Yet obligation is also the absence of alibi. If to be *ébloui* is to be struck, this must be thought in terms of the abyssal and the absence of alibi. The interest of Derrida’s virtual deconstruction of anything like “aesthetics” and “ethics” would perhaps consist in a sort of coming-together of *éblouissement* and obligation, both abyssal, without any elsewhere to stand upon.

The importance in *Béliers* of the *mé, mais, bé, bél, bélier, rébellion, oublier, obligé* sequence belongs to the obsequent logic we have been tracing through Derrida’s writings and echoing in the guiding passage from “Adieu.” Active there is a basic attitude of going against the grain. This effort involves also complicating how we read the relation of pleasure and duty, and of Kant and Levinas’s accounts of desire and obligation. The third paragraph in particular is an almost transparent palimpsest of Kant and Levinas (especially concerning the general rubric of “obligation”), and Derrida’s previous readings of each.

* * *

Derrida’s 1980-81 seminar *Le respect* was devoted to the relationship between a subject and the law termed “respect” or *Achtung* in Kant (and to this relationship as figured by Levinas, not to mention Kafka,¹⁹ Hegel, Schopenhauer, Freud, and others). Having read and

studied this seminar years ago when I worked for Jacques Derrida preparing his professional papers for archivation, I cannot, in reading the passage from “Adieu” in the book *Adieu*, forget but also can only remember some thrusts of the *Respect* seminar, as they pertain to the relationship between something like bedazzlement and obligation. For the terms used in our three paragraph segment identify it as liminal place between Kant and Levinas, Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason* on the one hand, Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity* on the other. Derrida’s oblique intertwining of *éblouir* and *obliger* over and against the abyss of oblivion is his spin on desire and morality, on the defencelessness of extreme pleasure (*Wollust*) and on the distance of respect (although the four terms here cross by chiasmus, too).

Our analysis shifts here from attention to sound and syntax to examination of semantics. For precisely this reason of semantic units – analysis here returns to philology – the reading shall bear on the French texts of Kant used by Derrida. Dear to the reading will be daring to de-stratify the layers of writing for in there any one is several.

First: apt transfers

In “Adieu,” the word “respect” and the phrase that contains it, “non pas à courber autrement l’espace de la pensée dans son respect de l’autre, mais” (A 22) express, in parallel fashion, the operation of Kantian respect (“courber ... dans son respect”) and the Levinasian objection to it (“non pas ... mais”). In *Totality and Infinity*,²⁰ Levinas isolates the risk in Kant’s account of respect along the lines hinted at here by Derrida. For if Kant went so far as to equate subjective good will with an impersonal, i.e. universal, practical reason, he would erase the singularity of the subject and therewith what Levinas wants to keep – i.e., separation (the term so important moreover in the first of the three paragraphs in “Adieu”) – under the name of ethics, for instance.

Derrida's bedazzlement is composed of "admiration" and "gratitude." "Admiration" is what the French translation has for Kant's *Bewunderung*, which Kant grants may seem like respect. But, Kant indicates, since in admiration you cannot tell if it is my admiration for the natural talent of the admired one or for the acquired talent of the admired one, respect is not just admiration. Admiration, Kant adds, remains of the order of something appropriable (and therefore also capable of being rejected). As Kant puts it, it may seem that ("il semble que") that "admiration" is identical with respect ("soit identique avec ce sentiment"), yet Kant holds them separate: "Ce n'est donc pas simplement de l'admiration que ce respect ..." [CPR 82]). The passage in "Adieu" works a bit inversely: in the phrase quoted above, Derrida is quick to qualify the bedazzlement of admiration and gratitude as not Kantian respect. As the passage in Levinas referred to by Derrida's text also puts it, the feeling is not one of appropriation or possession: "Le rapport avec Autrui ne se mue pas, comme la connaissance, en jouissance et possession, en liberté" (quoted, *A* 33). The relation is not brought under the heading of reason, as Kant's text appears compelled to do.

Indeed, Derrida's bedazzlement is an "experience." This experience of awaiting a response ("attend[re] encore une réponse" [*A* 21]) is unending ("elle resterait pour moi interminable avec Emmanuel Lévinas" [*A* 22]). When Kant defines the ideal of "sainteté" [holiness] – loving God, wanting accord with the moral law – it is as an effort "ininterrompu, mais infini" (CRP 88). The context is certainly different but the structure of impossible yet attempted accord similar.

"Adieu" defines what operates the *éblouissement* as "une force très douce" (*A* 22). This very gentle force is, moreover, submitted to several conversions in Derrida's sentence: *éblouissement* occurs by necessity (*nécessité*), and this necessity is not a constraint (*contrainte*). Such necessity is rather the very gentle force. Such very gentle force is, as we saw just above, not to be taken as (discernibly) Kantian *respect*. In the *Triebfeder* section of

the *Critique of Practical Reason*, when Kant gives one of the numerous definitions of respect for the moral law (CRP 89), contrasting it with fanaticism, he defines it as the “joug” [yoke] that is “doux” [gentle]. Those who obey the moral law because they think they want to are prone to “un pur (*lauter*) fanatisme moral.” Such has nothing to do with “respect pour la loi,” since in it, they “*devraient* supporter le joug [of the law] (qui cependant est doux)” (CRP 89). This “doux joug” in Kant is virtually the same as the “douce force” in Derrida’s counter-signature (but “virtually” is a zone of difference difficult to reduce to sameness). Indeed, the “doux joug” is the term that is developed out of Kant’s derivation of respect from duty, which contains in its concept “une *contrainte* (Nötigung) pratique” (CRP 85). The feeling that results from such a constraint, Kant specifies, is not a pleasure, but, because this feeling, a “*soumission* à une loi,” is exerted by the “legislation de *notre propre* raison,” it contains something that elevates or sublimates (*quelque chose qui élève*). Although it is impossible to compare micro-textually Kant and Derrida here (despite the passage being one scrutinized in great deal and with serious implications by Derrida in his essay *Passions* – the passage in Kant here is the one Derrida there examines with precision in a decisively indecisive footnote²¹), suffice it to note Kant’s conversion of “contrainte” into “obligation”: “Pour des hommes et pour tous les êtres raisonnables créés, la nécessité morale est *contrainte* c’est-à-dire obligation (*Verbindlichkeit*)” (CRP 86). The point here is in no way to conflate Kant and Derrida; rather, it is to show how close to Kant is Derrida in this palimpsestic moment from “Adieu,” with the obvious caveat that precisely Derrida is separating his take from Kant’s, in the direction of Levinas, even if, were one to read Derrida’s own analysis of Kant (on this notion of respect), one would see how (in his daring reading of Kantian law, in its deconstruction) Derrida highlights precisely the place of desire, of what Kant would seem to want to diminish the importance of. Derrida salvages in and perhaps even for Kant what Kant

may not have wanted so much to expunge. In doing so, Derrida also detects a Levinasian influence *at work already in Kant*. Obsequent logic.²²

Or, another name for the “coup de donc” read earlier in the text “Tympan” that mimicked the rhetorical strategy of philosophy, i.e., its usage of the “therefore.” The French translation of Kant that Derrida read also abounds in this repetition. Taken almost at random, in the space of a few sentences one reads: “Donc la morale humilie inévitablement tout homme, quand il compare avec cette loi la tendance sensible de sa nature”; “Donc la loi morale est subjectivement un principe de respect”; “Donc de même que la loi morale est un principe formel de détermination de l’action par la raison pure pratique, de même que ...” (CRP 78-79). With its almost unnoticeable framing device of the *donc*, the passage in “Adieu” faintly echoes the Kantian deduction of the strange feeling of “respect,” even if “Adieu” will define the feeling as not respect but something more along Levinasian lines.

Second, *ce donc*: doublings and conversions

If there are such resonances at the terminological level – which does not imply identity at the philosophical argument level, i.e., Derrida’s text does not say or even echo the same thing as Kant’s – there are also doublings and conversions. Kant’s text is highly programmed by the capacity of one thing to turn into another, its opposite. This turning or troping capacity is essential to understanding morality, is the morality of a morality that would otherwise be supposed to be stable and unchanging. The thrust of Derrida’s reading of Kant bears on this convertability, on this tropicity of the law, such that at stake for Derrida in Kant is not some description of a moral law that would be universal, objective, but rather how the universal, the objective, the moral law is fully subjected to a linguistic capacity of turning, troping, naming, metonymy. The law of law is turning.

In trying to imagine a term that could mediate between the moral law and subjectivity, Kant opts for “respect,” all the while asking “mais quel nom s’adapterait mieux à ce sentiment

singulier” (*CRP* 80) which is *both* moral (not sensible) and *sensible* (i.e. not moral)? This term has something differential about it because it names more a structure of doubling and undecidable difference than does it allow Kant to secure a moral code. This structure engenders linguistic pairings.

Indeed, just as in Derrida’s text with its *éblouir* and *obliger*, there is in Kant’s text a high frequency of doubled terms, of paired terms, with each being the possibility of the other. The third chapter of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is an attempt to explain how one gets to and fro between the principles in the first chapter to the concepts in the second chapter. The *Triebfeder* is this relay. “Respect” (*Achtung*) is the name of this highly paradoxical non-pathological feeling of the moral law. Such “respect” is considered a “negative effect,” because a feeling of pain (*CRP* 82), but, because this feeling of harm to subjective inclinations is an awareness of the possibility of obeying the law, it is also “positive effect” of the law. “Respect” is also double because both subjective and objective while also being neither. In the Derridean sense of “difference,” Kant’s text expresses the differential doubleness of the term, and/ or quasi-phenomenon, when, insisting on the ambiguity of naming it, he remarks its simultaneously double aspect: the feeling can be called “*humiliation*” (*Verachtung*), but “at the same time” (*zugleich*) it can be “respect” (*Achtung*). The proximity of the German terms attests to an internal convertability of this paradoxical feeling, this contradiction in terms, i.e. this “moral feeling.”

This terminological blurring (*éblouir*, *obliger* in Derrida; subjective/ objective or *Verachtung/ Achtung* in Kant) structures the essential distinction about obeying the moral law: does one do so out of interest or in some somehow immediate way? *Gründung* and *Grundlage* are the two terms that turn up, the former to name the moral law, the latter to name the principle of interest *as* moral feeling (*CRP* 86). Interest, or moral feeling, is an effect of the moral law; this order cannot be reversed, according to Kant. It is here that Derrida in the “Le

Respect” seminar noted that Freud’s reading of the moral law, and categorical imperative, would derive on the contrary the law from psycho-anthropological motivations. My point here is to highlight how, in linchpin moments of the Kantian argument, for example here the moral law as objective and prior, and the moral feeling as effect and therefore secondary, a terminological proximity (*Gründung, Grundlage*) testifies, perhaps akin to *ébloui/ obligé*, to an originary complication, in other words to a differance and therefore to the impossibility of a discourse that holds to distinctions like aesthetic or ethic, Kantian or Levinasian, moral law or Oedipal complex (this being what Freud situates before the moral law).

These doublings are remarkable by dint of the flipflopping that characterizes them. Kant’s language of morality gives rather a morality of language that consists in troping, turning, conversion. Because “respect” exemplifies what Kant calls the *Triebfeder*, namely the spring or feather of impulse, of drive, of desire without which the moral law would not be operative (even if, for Kant, this *Triebfeder* would be an effect and not a cause of the moral law), the possibility for oscillation and conversion enables Derrida to isolate desire in the law, according to Kant, and thereby to proffer a reading of Kant that goes very much against the grain of the “severe” old Mr. Kant (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*) so deeply engrained in the study of philosophy over the past two hundred years. Derrida’s resuscitates desire, and sexual pleasure, in the law, and this resurrection appears to share with melancholy a rebelliousness or a feistiness that has nothing to do with mourning or with oblivion.

Third, wal/love — evol/law

The French translation of *Critique of Practical Reason* specifies that, for the will of a perfect being, the moral law is “une loi de sainteté” (CRP 86), whereas this law for a finite rational being is a law of duty. In the context of defining love and the command to love (“love God above all and your neighbour as yourself” which Kant inverts in a footnote as “Love yourself above all and God and your neighbour for love of yourself”), the French translation

of Kant's text inserts four times in a page the German "gerne" or "ungerne" (CRP 88) to gloss its translation as "volontiers" or "malgré (by volition, against one's will). The German term *gern* is etymologically related to the German word for desire, *Begehren*. Kant's text is about whether loving God means doing his commands desirously ("gerne" [CRP 87]), about what the status of desire is when it, desire, comes to responding to the law.

For Kant, the context of this "sainteté" is love of God and of one's neighbour. Despite inaccessibility, we strive toward it. Kant's text ponders whether obeying the law, even a law to love God, could ever be done out of love. If it were, it would cease to be an order, and morality, raised to holiness, would no longer be a virtue. The danger of fanaticism is clearly formulated here (CRP 88). So it is that Kant must keep an inner constraint ("contrainte interne") as what necessitates ("nécessite") (CRP 88). Throughout Kant's account, therefore, of such a love or law to love, desire can never occupy all the place of feeling. Constraint is a necessity. On this point, Derrida's brief riff in "Adieu" on the relation to the law or the other that is, respectively, found in Kant and in Levinas never evokes pain, sacrifice or humiliation – the "inner constraint," in short, so necessary for Kantian desired responsibility. We read earlier Derrida, in "Adieu," knocking out "constraint" (Kant's *Nötigung*), yet read him also holding onto obligation and *éblouissement*. An echo of "gern" in Kant's discussion of "sainteté" (the word *gern* occurring many times in the *Triebfeder* section, not only remarkable in the German by dint of relation to *Begehren* and *Begierde* but also often, but not always, inserted parenthetically after the French word for it in the French translation) may be heard in the development of *désir* in Derrida's discussion of "sainteté" for finite beings, and of the notion of "A-dieu," in *Adieu*. Pleasure, desire are part of it for him.

When "sainteté" is developed in *Adieu*, it is associated to "desire". For example, Derrida quotes Levinas ("Le Désirable se sépare de la relation du Désir qu'il appelle et, de par cette séparation ou sainteté, reste troisième personne" A 113). Derrida glosses, associating this

holiness with an *à-Dieu*: “quand il faut saluer la transcendance infinie d’une sainteté séparée, dire *oui* au moment de la séparation,” “n’est-ce pas cette déférence qui inspire le souffle d’un à-Dieu?” (*A* 113). The “à-Dieu” runs counter to “Dieu” in Kant (*CRP* 87-88). Whereas Kant has to get “desire” (*Begierde*) out of the command to love God (if a rational creature could ever accomplish willingly [*gerne*, also ‘desirously’] all the moral laws, which includes especially loving God, there would be found in him or her not even once the possibility of a desire [*Begierde*] [*CRP* 88; 149G]), or straightjacket it as “constraint” (*CRP* 88), Derrida’s discussion of “A-Dieu” is manifestly about “desire” not restrained: “[Le *à*] adresse son ‘*ad*’ à l’infini qui l’appelle et s’adresse à lui, il ouvre à l’infini de sa portée la référence-à, la relation-à. Il l’a depuis toujours, avant tout, avant de donner ou de pardonner à Dieu, avant d’appartenir à Dieu, avant quoi que ce soit, avant l’être même, avant tout présent, vouée à l’excès d’un désir – le désir dit À-Dieu. Il réside en cela, Dieu, qui *désire y résider* : le désir dit À-Dieu” (*A* 179). This desire is love of the stranger, of the foreign and foreigner (“Désir, amour de l’étranger” [*A* 181]). The *À-Dieu* resides in a desire that is more profound and archaic than the cogito (Levinas quoted, *A* 180). That desire of a rational being, which Kant has somehow to write out of any desire to love God or the law (all the while trying to define how the law is inconceivable without desire, how one can and must desire in order to detect at all the law), seems anamorphically relocated in the Levinas pinpointed here by Derrida, a point where Derrida, thanks in part to Levinas, reads an overturning already there in Kant.

Kant’s problem, studied by Derrida in the *Respect* seminar, is how can law excite desire (*Begehren*)?²³ How can law touch desire? How can the law be desirable (but not according to any self-serving search for pleasure, for benefit, social promotion, etc.)? If the law mobilizes itself, it makes itself desired. This is the problem to which Kant’s section of the *Triebfeder*, is designed to answer. The feeling of respect is part of that answer: “Dieses sonderbare Gefühl” [this singular feeling, *ce sentiment singulier*], i.e., “respect” or *Achtung*, names a feeling that

would be rational (*CRP* 81). It would be a desire not for pleasure, pain or something empirical, but for the law, even though law should not belong ever to the realm of desire. There is no way to solve the antinomy between the law and subjectivity other than by recourse to a contradiction in terms: “respect” is the name given to a mutation of desire operated by the law. The essence of Derrida’s *Respect* seminar is to tease out how Kant, in order to secure the moral law, must have recourse to what he seems to exclude, desire. For Derrida, it is not that Kant writes desire out of any “feeling” of the law but rather that Kant makes desire transmogrify, through the “feathers of drive,” these springs of desire, without which no moral law would ever be detected. Indeed, the moral law operates by dint of such springs, these “feathers of impulse.” Desire has in it always already something of this moral law.

Bedazzled and obligated: is Derrida in love and in respect? In Kant, pure and simple respect for the other is immoral, the abyss of morality. Likewise, love – attraction to the point of touching the other – also is the collapse of morality. In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant makes morality the tension between love and respect, attraction and repulsion. If only love existed, or if respect were dominant, this one-sidedness would spell the end of morality, for it would be dissolved like a drop of water in the abyssal mouth of a monstrous nothingness. The moral is not simple, but is rather the tension between two forces that are also each, by itself, abyssal:

The union of rational beings (on earth) work by *attraction* and *repulsion*. The principle of **mutual love** admonishes them constantly to *come closer* to one another; that of the **respect** [*Achtung*] they owe one another, to keep themselves *at a distance* from one another; and should one of these great ethical forces [*sittlichen Kräfte*] fail; ‘so then would nothingness [of immorality], with gaping throat [*Schlund*], drink the whole kingdom of (moral) beings [*Wesen*] like a drop of water’, if I may use the words of Haller here.²⁴

Ebloui and *obligé*.

Each by itself ethical, love and respect are however only ethical insofar as these strengths are supplements of the other. Each by itself is therefore not ethical but rather an abyss, each one of which is like the absence of pilings where pilings ought to support a bridge over the abyss separating them. Their difference is morality, for morality is conditioned by the

relation between these two opposable forces. Sexual love is bound to moral respect, moral respect is driven by love. Desire is moral. The double bind of love/ moral respect operates in sexual love, which first of all Kant does not absolutely distinguish from non-sexual, practical love (“practical” in the sense of practical reason) insofar as practical and sexual love are both experienced by finite, rational beings, and which secondly is based in sexual drive. Morality is impossible, for Kant, without a tight binding with sexual love, with sexual pleasure, with desire, with passion. In the “Doctrine of Virtue,” of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Article II, “On Defiling Oneself by Lust,” spells out why non-procreative sexual pleasure (including masturbation although it is not named as such, since it is “indecent” to call this vice by “its proper name”) is immoral and robs any perpetrator of it of any respect (*Achtung*). Yet the “Casuistical Question” that replies to this loss of respect, i.e. to this immorality of any non-procreative sexual pleasure, turns the argument right around.

Sexual inclination is also called *love* (in the narrowest [*engsten*] sense of the word) and is, in fact, the strongest possible sensible pleasure [*Sinnenlust*] in an object. It is not merely *sensitive pleasure*, as in objects that are pleasing in mere reflection [*Reflexion*] on them (the receptivity for which is called taste). It is rather pleasure from the *enjoyment* of another person, which therefore belongs to the *capacity for desire* and, indeed, to its highest stage, passion. But it cannot be classed with either the love that is mere delight or the love of benevolence (for both of these, instead, deter one from carnal enjoyment). It is a unique kind of pleasure (*sui generis*), and this ardor [*Brünstigsein*] has properly nothing in common [*eigentlich nichts gemein*] with moral love, even though [sexual inclination] can enter into close [*enge*] union with [moral love] when practical reason, with its limiting conditions, comes into it. (MM 222 t.m.; 426G).

* * *

It would be time to speak of tight bonds, of fittings and disjoined angles, of what happens when one imagines talking with someone known, but known to be gone, time to speak of the voice that touches, always from a distance, like the eye, and of the “caresse téléphonique, sinon du coup de téléphone” (*Le T*, 130). Let us not forget that our guideline came over the telephone line: “au téléphone par exemple” (*A* 22).

In French, “une oublie” is a sort of wafer-like biscuit also called “plaisir.”

In Derrida, would that be oubliss? the oublime?

¹ *Béliers* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), hereafter cited in the text with the abbreviation *B*. This text is in English entitled *Rams*, trans. Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski, and appears in Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question: the Poetics of Paul Celan*, eds. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Reading Derrida in this present paper depends on the letters of his French, and therefore quotations and references will be from the French texts. “Adieu,” in *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Galilée, 1998), hereafter cited in the text with the abbreviation *A*.

² Because this response reads it in its details, I quote here the passage in French that guides this issue. Before it, part of the paragraph that precedes it, and after it, the paragraph that follows it.

Je ne peux nommer l’interruption sans me rappeler, comme certains d’entre vous sans doute, cette angoisse de l’interruption que je sentais chez Emmanuel Lévinas quand, au téléphone par exemple, il semblait à chaque instant appréhender la coupure et le silence ou la disparition, le ‘sans-réponse’ de l’autre qu’il rappelait aussitôt et rattrapait d’un ‘allô, allô’ entre chaque phrase et parfois au milieu même de la phrase.

Que se passe-t-il donc quand se tait un grand penseur qu’on a connu vivant, qu’on a lu, et relu, entendu aussi, dont on attendait encore une réponse, comme si elle devait nous aider non seulement à penser autrement mais même à lire ce que nous avions cru déjà lire sous sa signature, et qui tenait tout en réserve, et tellement plus que ce qu’on croyait y avoir déjà reconnu.

C’est là une expérience dont j’ai déjà appris qu’elle resterait pour moi interminable avec Emmanuel Lévinas, comme avec ces pensées qui sont des sources, à savoir que je ne cesserai de commencer, de re-commencer à penser avec elles depuis le nouveau commencement qu’elles me donnent – et je commencerai encore et encore à les redécouvrir sur n’importe quel sujet. Chaque fois que je lis ou relis Emmanuel Lévinas, je suis ébloui de gratitude et d’admiration, ébloui par cette nécessité, qui n’est pas une contrainte mais une force très douce qui oblige et qui oblige non pas à courber autrement l’espace de la pensée dans son respect de l’autre, mais à se rendre à cette autre courbure hétéronomique qui nous rapporte au tout autre (c’est-à-dire à la justice, dit-il, quelque part, dans une puissante et formidable ellipse : le rapport à l’autre, dit-il, c’est-à-dire la justice), selon la loi qui appelle donc à se rendre à l’autre préséance infinie du tout autre. *A* 21-22.

³ The English translation, corresponding to the French above, reads:

I cannot speak of interruption without recalling, like many among you, no doubt, the anxiety of interruption I could feel in Emmanuel Levinas, when, on telephone, for example, he seemed at each moment to fear being cut off, to fear the silence or disappearance, the ‘without-response’, of the other, to whom he called out and held on with an ‘allo, allo’ between each sentence, sometimes even in mid-sentence.

What happens when a great thinker becomes silent, one whom we knew living, whom we read and reread, and also heard, one from whom we were still awaiting a response, as if such a response would help us not only to think otherwise but also to read what we thought we had already read under his signature, a response that held everything in reserve, and so much more than what we thought we had already recognized there?

This is an experience that, as I have learned, would remain for me interminable with Emmanuel Levinas, as with all thoughts that are sources, for I will never stop beginning or beginning anew to think with them on the basis of the new beginning they give me, and I will begin again and again to rediscover them on just about any subject. Each time I read or reread Emmanuel Levinas, I am overwhelmed with gratitude and admiration, over whelmed by this necessity, which is not a constraint but a very gentle force that obligates, and obligates us not to bend or curve otherwise the space of thought in its respect for the other, but to yield to this other, heteronymous curvature that relates us to the completely other (that is, to justice, as he says somewhere in a powerful and formidable ellipsis: the relation to the other, that is to say, justice), according to the law that thus calls us to yield to the other infinite precedence of the completely other. *Adieu. To Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9-10.

⁴ I refer to the English title of Kant’s work, but because this study is interested in the French translation used by Derrida, and occasionally the German original, the reference here is to *Critique de la raison pratique* (Paris: GIVE REFERENCE), hereafter cited in the text under the abbreviation *CRP*. Page numbers for the German, when given, are those of the *Akademie Ausgabe*, followed by *G*.

⁵ As Jean-François Lyotard put it: “Se moduler selon tous les tons, comme dirait Derrida,” in “Le sublime et l’avant-garde,” *L’Inhumain. Causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 104. Cf. *La Carte Postale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980) or *D’un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1983-2005), 26.

⁶ “Zigzag” and “mouvement en vrille” [spiraling movement], *Introduction à l’Origine de la Géométrie* (Paris: PUF, 1962), 36, 14.

⁷ “Tympan” in Jacques Derrida, *Marges – de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), xxv. Hereafter abbreviated as *Ty*. The threat of “oblivion” is explicitly thematized as of Derrida’s *Introduction à l’Origine de la Géométrie*.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974), 134b.

⁹ *Apprendre à vivre enfin* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 35.

¹⁰ In *Écriture et différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 117-228.

¹¹ In *Psyché. Invention de l’autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987-1998), vol. I: 159-202.

¹² (Paris: Galilée, 1999), hereafter cited in the text with the abbreviation *Le T*.

¹³ Given the importance of remembering and forgetting in Paul de Man’s work (cf. Timothy Bahti’s fine article “Lessons of Remembering and Forgetting” in *Reading de Man Reading* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989], 244-258), it is not surprising that the Derrida text in which we find most the “do not forget” injunction (e.g. “Mais n’oublions pas,” “nous nous sommes rappelé” “qu’il ne faut pas oublier Lethe [...]. Nous l’avons lu chez Baudelaire,” “N’oubliez pas les Mores”) is his *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 88-89, 94, see also 77, 81, devoted particularly to *not forgetting (about) forgetting*. De Man’s response paper “Murray Krieger: A Commentary” is relevant here for its analysis of the materiality of language, through the example of the material inscription of “forlorn” as *bell*, as ringing alarm clock, not in Keats’ “Ode to Melancholy” but in his “Ode to a Nightingale” about Lethe. Always in the context of Baudelaire: just “as Baudelaire claims,” “the tolling of a bell, an alarm clock” for Keats sets off “the very allegory of the non-symbolic, nonaesthetic character of poetic language” “in a system in which the difference between waking and dreaming cannot be decided.” See *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism. The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, ed. E.S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, Andrzej Warminski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), here 185-87.

¹⁴ There are two sub-sections numbered “3” since the fifth sub-section of section five is also numbered “3,” erroneously I presume.

¹⁵ Derrida, as can be localized in, say, *FORS*, sides with melancholy as opposed to mourning. The key quote from *Fors* on mourning versus melancholy is: speaking of incorporation versus introjection, “Je feins de prendre le mort vivant, intact, *sauf (fors) en moi*, mais c’est pour refuser, de manière nécessairement équivoque, de l’aimer comme partie vivante, mort *sauf en moi*, selon le processus d’introjection, comme ferait le deuil dit ‘normal’. Dont on pourra, bien sûr, se demander s’il garde ou non l’autre *comme autre* (vivant mort) en moi. Cette question de la garde ou de l’appropriation générale de l’autre comme autre fera toujours la décision, mais ne brouille-t-elle pas d’une équivoque essentielle la limite qu’elle fait passer entre l’introjection et l’incorporation ? Laissons à cette question de quoi se reposer,” *FORS*, preface to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *Cryptonomie. Le verbier de l’homme aux loups* (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1976), 17.

¹⁶ Given the phonic affinities in *Béliers* between “b” and “l” in words such as “rébellion” and “béliier,” it would be difficult not to link “bile” with the “béliier,” even the “bilaire” [biliary] with “bélière” [sheep or goat bell]. Bile is black, the color of anger, *colère*, is melanine. The other part of “melan-choly” is *kholos*, which means *colère*. The ram is wrathful (“la *colère* du béliier”; “la révolte infinie du béliier” *Béliers* 65), but his horns are turned into the *shofar* (*Béliers* 63). Belancholy is thus also poetic. Melancholy is wrath but also poetry as trope of melancholy, figured by the *shofar* (“les cornes du béliier deviennent cet instrument dont la musique prolonge un souffle et porte la voix” [B 63]). *Bel-* (war, violence, wrath) becomes *bell* (music).

¹⁷ In no other text by Derrida does the contrastive conjunction *mais* figure more frequently than in *Béliers*. The *mais*, the “but,” is the rhetorical and syntactic movement of contrast, of revolt, of butting, in *Béliers*. The phonetic transcription of *mais* is identical to that of *mé-* in the noun *mélancolie*. *Mé-* rhymes exactly with the first syllable of *Bé-liers*.

¹⁸ Cf. Hélène Cixous, “impossible d’oubéliier sa bonté, sa peur, son courage,” in “Le Bouc lié,” *Salut à Jacques Derrida, Rue Descartes* 48 (2005): 16-26, here 26.

¹⁹ Derrida’s essay “Préjugés : Comment juger – Jean-François Lyotard?” (in *La faculté de juger*, [Paris: Minuit, 1984], 87-140, which contains a long development on Kafka’s “Before the Law,” grew out of this seminar, *Le respect*.

²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 216, in French, *Totalité et infini* (Kluwer Academic, 1971-1987), livre de poche edition, 238.

²¹ *Passions* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 87n11.

²² Derrida’s remarks in “Adieu” are haunted by Schopenhauer’s critique of Kant, and by Derrida’s own “Le Respect” seminar that devoted part of one session to it. One can almost hear Schopenhauer behind Derrida’s describing himself “ébloui par cette *nécessité*, qui n’est pas une *contrainte* mais une force très douce qui oblige et qui oblige non pas à courber autrement l’espace de la pensée dans son *respect* [i.e. in an autonomous curving]” (A 22). Derrida discards the term “respect” in favor of heteronymy. Schopenhauer took Kant to task for employing the word “respect” where “submission” would be expected in any “good German,” a “respect” that occurs in relation to “necessity.” Here is Kant: “le devoir est la *nécessité* d’une action, quand cette *nécessité* résulte du respect de la loi.” Schopenhauer claims to detect beneath Kant’s “necessity” and “respect,” thus

beneath a language of autonomy and philosophy, the language of the Decalogue, a theological origin of the categorical imperative, and therefore a hidden *heteronomy*. Schopenhauer translates into “good German”, into “direct” language, giving: “le devoir signifie une action qui nécessairement doit arriver par soumission envers une loi” [SCHOPENHAUER REFERENCE]. Similarly, in “Adieu,” the slide is from “respect” to “heteronomy” in Derrida at the moment when he defines the very gentle force (*force très douce*). Schopenhauer identifies the Jewish basis of “respect” in Kant, by this heteronomy hidden behind autonomy, although Derrida did not wish to pursue Schopenhauer down that path. Derrida’s definition, however, of the necessity not as “constraint” does read somewhat as Kant’s own turning of the “submission” (something “negative”) into “elevation” (something “positive”), with the difference being that Derrida does not situate that “elevation” on the side of autonomy, since the *hauteur* is on the side of the other, of “Autrui,” in the passages from Levinas Derrida seems, according to Bitsoris’s notes, to be glossing.

²³ In English, the question is formulated, “Thus there remains nothing to do except to determine how the moral law becomes the drive (*Moralische Gesetz Triebfeder werde*), and, insofar as the law is drive, to determine what happens with the human faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*), as effect of that determining principle upon this faculty,” *Critique of Practical Reason*, my translation based on CRP 76, and *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1985), 85 [128], corrected from Lewis White Beck’s mis-translation, *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 75.

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 244 (448 German). Hereafter abbreviated as *MM*, with G after the German page number.