

DIFFÉRANCE OF THE “REAL”

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Revisiting the Husserlian slogan “To the things themselves!” and the Kantian idea of the thing in itself, we might ask, along with Derrida, What is inside the thing? What is encrypted in this seemingly vacuous notion and within the concrete thing itself? Yet, we may pose the first question only on condition that we do not pre-comprehend its meaning, nor any single word comprising it. An interrogation of the query’s every word will reveal that what the thing harbors includes not only a “what” but also a “who”; that its interiority incessantly turns inside out and outside in; that the thing is interchangeable with the athing; and that, eventually, the copula itself dissipates into a relation of non-identity. After outlining these *différential* qualities of thingly interiority, I will discuss how it shelters the event of expropriation in a re-configuration of Heideggerian *Ereignis*.

“WHAT” “IS” “INSIDE” “THE” “THING”?

The event occurs “inside” the thing itself, but how to approach the question of interiority at the level of effective virtuality, in the “place without place” of the *khôra* where “the distinction between phantasm and the so-called actual or external reality does not yet take place and has no place to be”?¹ The quasi-noumenal interiority of the thing is indistinguishable from its exteriority, from its adumbrated (i.e., forever incomplete) phenomenal appearance and fleeting apparition that gives one a sense of “the so-called actual and external reality” without being identifiable and without appearing as such. Nor is the posing of the ontological question “what is...”, *ti esti*, completely justified in this context, since “what” the thing harbors precedes the distinction between “who” and “what”. As regards its spatiality, if the thing “does not yet take place and has no place to be”, it is u-topic in a very precise sense of *utopia* signifying the non-place of the *khôra* that might (perhaps) give birth to the category of space within the thing itself. Finally, with reference to temporality, the “not yet” that pertains to the pending division between interiority and phenomenally external reality is a forerunner of the possible engenderment of time in the same placeless site and, thus, points toward something like the thingly *différance*.

Couched in terms of a receptacle, the thing as such “is” a fold effectuated and inhabited by *différance*—the differing, differed, deferring, and deferred spatialization of time and temporalization of space—which allows it to abide in its otherness to itself. (Parenthetically, I note that, as one of Derrida’s precursors, Nietzsche has already exposed the metaphysical myth of “identical things” overlaying a certain non-identity. For instance, in an aphorism from *Human, All Too Human* titled, as though in anticipation of Heidegger *avant la lettre*, “Fundamental Questions of Metaphysics”, Nietzsche writes: “To the plants all things are usually in repose, eternal, every thing identical with itself. It is from the period of the lower organisms that man has inherited the belief that there are *identical things*”². By situating the belief in identical things and, therefore, the very foundations of metaphysics in

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the midst of what could be termed “a vegetative state of thinking”, Nietzsche not only historicizes metaphysical notions and transgresses their conceptual boundaries, including the borders between plants and animals (in “lower organisms”), or between consciousness (“belief”) and the thing, but also brings to the boiling point of excessive literalness the *naturalized perspective* that shields this thinking.)

As Derrida himself puts it, “*différance*, which (is) nothing, is (in) the thing itself. It is (given) in the thing itself. It (is) in the thing itself. It, *différance*, the thing (itself) [*La différence, qui n’(est) rien, est (dans) la chose même. Elle est (donnée) dans la chose même. Elle (est) la chose même. Elle, la différence, la chose (même)*]”³. To translate this passage’s fast locution: the emptying of *différance* “which (is) nothing” virtually fills the thing to the point of merging with it above and beyond the copula, but the identity of the thing and *différance*—“It, *différance*, the thing (itself)”—is a non-identity, the congenital splitting of the thing that is never, strictly speaking, itself. The successive bracketing of the copula (is), the preposition (in), and the evidence (given) that culminates in the parenthesizing of identity (itself), draws inspiration from phenomenological reduction whose goal it is to extract from the thing itself its very essence, which, for Derrida, is nothing but non-essence, the nothing⁴. In this sense, the thing points toward a pre-ontological figure of the expropriation of essence and is, thus, prepares the event of such expropriation in everything it receives, welcomes, suffers, undergoes, experiences. Thus, *différance* affects and infects both the seemingly vacuous concept of the thing, which retains non-identity and the impossibility of arriving at the “thing itself” as well as concrete things that present themselves in the manner of adumbration (or what Nietzsche terms “perspectivalism”) without becoming fully given or present.

Différance is a mark of the mark or of the sign, and the problem of *différance* is, first and foremost, a problem of signification. According to the conventional model of signification outlined in *Margins of Philosophy*, the “sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, “thing” here standing equally for meaning or referent [*Le signe, dit-on couramment, se met à la place de la chose même, de la chose présente, ‘chose’ valant ici aussi bien pour le sens que pour le référent*]. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present”⁵. But when the thing no longer secures the production of meaning, when *différance* “which (is) nothing” in actuality internally afflicts it, when it gives place without occupying any, then the old model of signification becomes outdated and the thing supplants itself as other, signifies and remarks itself, disseminating the functions of “meaning or referent”. As long as the sequence of its self-remarking is ongoing, the thing will not coincide with itself, will not arrive at its proper, self-identical limit⁶. The thing impregnated with *différance* will contain, without delimiting it, the principle of signification. The bracketing of givenness that instantaneously gives and withdraws the given will allow itself to be internally supplanted, welcoming and non-synchronously coexisting with that which supplants it: “*What broaches the movement of signification is what makes its interruption impossible. The thing itself is a sign* [*La chose même est un signe*]”⁷. The thing in itself is ecstatic, outside itself in itself, other (even) to itself.

Whereas the thing remarks and retraces itself, it remains, for us, a “*sujet intraitable*”⁸, an untreatable, untraceable subject, or, colloquially, someone or something one finds impossible to deal with. Augmenting the deconstruction of the existential/categorical dualism, Derrida argues in a text as early as “Violence and Metaphysics” that what “the things share here with others, is that something within them too is always hidden, and is indicated only by anticipation, analogy, and appresentation [*que les choses partagent ici avec autrui, c’est que quelque chose en elles se cache aussi toujours et ne s’indique que par anticipation, analogie et apprésentation*]”⁹. Because both things and human others partake of this inaccessible, secret interiority¹⁰ infinitely deferred in time and space, Derrida levels a criticism against Levinasian “transcendental violence” that, despite Levinas’s own philosophical commitments, circumscribes the field of alterity to the otherness of another person. The alterity of the thing that remarks itself prior to the intervention of any “external” system of signification implies that the latter can indicate

things only obliquely if it is to respect its own quasi-transcendental condition of possibility, namely, that which is hidden and withdrawn in the thing itself (*différance*). As a result, this Kantian word, “respect” due to the other person, the word that frequently crops up in Derrida’s writings on Levinas, will describe, among other things, one’s practical, relational attitude to the alterity of the thing. The thing in itself is not a noumenal dead-end, but an end in itself¹.

This is not to say that, *mutatis mutandis*, the other is reducible to a thing, let alone to a transcendental Thing. The other is both a thing and not a thing: “the other as *res* is simultaneously less other (not absolutely other) and less ‘the same’ than I [*l’autre comme res est à la fois moins autre (non absolument autre) et moins ‘le même’ que moi*]¹². From a strictly phenomenological perspective, the quality common to others and to things is that, unlike objects, they do not—indeed, cannot—expose themselves to me in their entirety. The volume of the thing eclipses a considerable portion of its surface from my view and necessitates a completion of the given “by anticipation, analogy, and appresentation” of the yet invisible outlines. In the same argumentative vein, the interiority of the other is inaccessible to me from the unique standpoint available to this interiority alone, regardless of the exposure of his denuded face. It will be objected that whereas I can turn the thing around or change my spatial position in relation to it in order to inspect some, though not all, of its temporarily hidden dimensions, the other’s interiority defies all provisional visibility. But, having registered this objection, one would be unable either to exclude the thing from or to include it in the field of alterity without fatefully altering and, even, contravening this field. Less other than another person, the alterity of the thing might provide the materials for the operations and manipulations of consciousness. More other, or, in Derrida’s words, “less ‘the same’”, it is not another “I”, but something foreign to *the formal structure of consciousness* which, in each case, is filled with an infinite variety of heterogeneous contents, however inaccessible they are from the standpoint of a single subject. Both less other and less “the same”, the thing is the indwelling of *différance*.

Decades later, the “a” of *différance* will silently resurface in connection to the thing and its other who/that inhabits it. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida writes: “Nominalism, conceptualism, realism: all of this is routed by the Thing or the Athing called ghost [*Nominalisme, conceptualisme, réalisme, tout cela est mis en déroute par la Chose ou l’Achose nommée fantôme*]. The taxonomic order becomes too easy, at once arbitrary and impossible¹³. The “Thing or the Athing” impregnates with difference and non-identity the three mutually exclusive “-isms” that respond to the problem of universality. But how does it guide or direct them, if they branch off in contrary directions (e.g., nominalism could be justifiably called the “opposite” of realism)? The secret is that by properly routing these currents of thought, the thing—in its interchangeability with the athing—re-routes, diverts, and disconcerts them, makes them flee. And, indeed, the most noteworthy feature of this passage is that the thing is interchangeable with its other, with the athing which fetishistically substitutes for it thanks to the disjunctive conjunction “or” reminiscent of the “or” that has stood between the thing and the person on the indeterminate fork of the event of Francis Ponge. The ingenuity of this substitution is that it is, literally, imperceptible to the ear, since, in French, *la Chose* sounds exactly like *l’Achose* the moment the “a” of the definite article migrates into the privative “a” of the noun. Hence, with the phonic self-annulment of the article, the conceptual unity of *the* thing dissipates. “The” thing is not the thing itself; it, itself, is a non-thing.

We might ask what it would mean to follow Derrida’s indeterminate thing / athing emancipated from the order of knowledge there, where another indeterminacy comes to inscribe itself into the verb “to follow” (*suivre*), rendering it indistinguishable from the verb “to be” in the first person singular. How do we (how do *I*) come to accommodate *différance*, following or, indeed, becoming the double movement of thingification and a-thingification? In the *La Chose* seminar, Derrida playfully undermines the traditional humanist-idealistic contention, “*je ne suis pas une chose*”¹⁴ (JDP 13/1). This statement may be translated as “I am not a thing”, but

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also as “I do not follow a thing”, or “I cannot keep up with the thing”. I am unable to keep up with it because it constantly escapes from me by becoming-other to my intentional grasp, but also because it includes me in its virtual interiority that accommodates the “who” and the “what”, the animate and the inanimate. In line with the logic of de-distancing, the thing stands for the absolute nearness and proximity that remain the farthest, which means that the closer I come to it, the more briskly it flees from me. And, vice versa, the one who attempts to absolve or separate oneself from it, uttering, for instance, “I am *not* a thing”, is immediately incorporated into the thing, which is interchangeable with its other.

In the aural and conceptual registers, where *la Chose* is *la Chose* and *la Chose* is *l’Achose*, the opposition between the thing and its other assumes the veneer of a tautology. It does not subsist as an opposition, for, if it did, it would have immediately transformed the thing into another object standing against and available to consciousness¹⁵. At the same time and all the more imperceptibly, the thing indistinguishable from its opposite loses itself, disseminates the “principle” of its thinghood (e.g. causality) in objectivity and subjectivity alike. The non-identity of the Thing “itself” exposes itself only graphically, but the price paid for this exposure is a ghostly incarnation of the name in the nameless (the routing of nominalism) and, again, of the thing in the subject-object dyad. Cited directly, without detours, head-on, the indeterminate spatiality of thinghood passes into the most rigid and determinate opposition of objectivity¹⁶.

The singular event of the thing that virtually happens in these pages citing or naming the thing by the word “phantom” holds together but avoids synthesizing homophony and heterography, phonic sameness and graphic difference. Consequently, this event places its bets on—to paraphrase Hegel’s enunciation of the identity between identity and non-identity—the difference between difference and non-difference, on the same and the other said or uttered in the same breath, pronounced as the same and inscribed as the other. Circumventing and routing the *principium contradictionis* which subtends conceptualism, nominalism and realism, the thing continuously turns inside out and outside in to the extent that it internally accommodates its other (or even substitutes the athing for itself) and to the extent that it exteriorizes this internal unrest, producing virtual, phantomatic effects in the noematic reality of thought (the three “-isms”) and in the real actuality of the world. That the taxonomic order which, at the most basic level, is charged with the task of distinguishing between things and non-things becomes “at once arbitrary and impossible” may be explained by the dual effects of such an unrest demanding, simultaneously, the graphic acknowledgement of the thing *qua* the other of the thing and the phonic acceptance of its tautologous identity.

The annulment of opposition between the thing and its other (the athing) that perpetually supplants it does not amount to the disappearance of difference, but to its proliferation within the inopposable thing itself. Derrida lays out this logic that opposes opposition in *Politics of Friendship* a propos of the Schmittian enemy/friend dyad: “what is true of the enemy (I can or I must kill you, and vice versa) is the very thing that suspends, annuls, overturns... friendship, which is therefore, at once, the same (repressed) thing and *altogether different thing* [*l’amitié qui est donc à la fois la même chose (refoulée) et tout autre chose*]”¹⁷. In other words, enmity is born in the *différance*—delay, deferral, resistance—of friendship which is a thing at the same time (*à la fois*) the same as and completely different from enmity. The enemy-friend dyad is more than an example because it stands for any and every thing, which is always the same as and completely other than its other, thanks to *différance* immanently operative in it. Such *différential* non-oppositionality charges the thing with the task of providing the very opening for hospitality that receives the same as much as (and as) the other. The dehiscence of welcoming is, thus, a thing irreducible to “an object of knowledge”: “If we do not know what hospitality is, it is because this thing which is not something is not an object of knowledge...”¹⁸.

THE EVENT OF EXPROPRIATION, OR HOW THE THING “SPIRITS AWAY”

In light of the non-coincidence with itself of the thing wherein *différance* dwells, the syntagma “*Ereignis* in abyss”, featured in Derrida’s book on Ponge, ought to be read not so much in terms of the placement of the event in an abstract bottomless “place without place”, but in terms of its concrete consummation in the thing itself. It is, Derrida would ask us to imagine, as if the abyss opens in the thing that eventfully appropriates everything in the spacing that constitutes it as other, the spacing to which its “interiority” testifies. The fictional reality of the “as if” renders the thing virtually indeterminate when it yields the “effect of language (*fabula*), but such that only by means of it can the thing as other and as other thing come to pass with the allure of an inappropriable event (*Ereignis* in abyss) [*effet de langue (fabula) telle que par elle seule la chose en tant qu’autre et en tant qu’autre chose peut advenir dans l’allure d’un événement inappropriable (Ereignis en abîme)*].”¹⁹

Let us unpack this dense conditional statement. First, if the event of the thing is inappropriable, this is due to the fact that the thing itself is the immemorial (non)principle of appropriation virtually operative before and after any activity on the part of intentional subjectivity. The reality of *res* is the enabling limit of human possessiveness. Unlike its counterpart in traditional realism, though, Derrida’s thing and the event it announces come to pass thanks to and “only by means of” the “effect of language”, when the “as if” of fabulous and fabulating (i.e. ineluctably literary and textual, not purely conceptual) signification affords us a glimpse into and an approximation of the self-remarking itinerary of the thing. But the thing remarks itself as other and as the “other thing”, that is, without gathering itself up in the present. In coming to pass it bypasses the present, disperses and disseminates itself, and rejects the claims of self-identity that brings home and assimilates the other to the same.

Derrida links such bypassing of the present to the historical development of “tele-technology” which speeds up, or, even, makes phenomenologically accessible a “practical *deconstruction* of the traditional and dominant concepts”. Elaborating on this term, he writes:

I say ‘deconstruction’ because, ultimately, what I name and try to think under this word is, at bottom, nothing other than this very process [of the tele-technological], its ‘taking-place’ in such a way that its happening affects the very experience of place, and the recording...of this ‘thing’, the trace that traces (inscribes, preserves, carries, refers, or defers) the *différance* of this event which happens to place [*qui arrive au lieu*].²⁰

Before the experience of place, there is a tracing, inscribing, preserving, carrying, etc. recording of “this ‘thing’” which affects the taking-place of the place and, by implication, anything that might happen *to* it and *in* it. In other words, what pre-exists experience, not in actuality but in virtuality, entails 1) the *tele-* of distancing (diametrically opposed to the “proper” in the sense of “proximity”) and, therefore, detachment, separation, but also a possibility of relationality across the divide, 2) technique or originary artificiality (*techné*)²¹ and, therefore, nothing “natural”, and 3) the function of tracing which is compatible with “the effect of language” and which recovers the grammatological notion of archi-writing. These three criteria—relational distancing, originary artificiality, and archi-writing—outline the trajectories whereby the inappropriable event of the thing bypasses the present and escapes the possibility of manipulation on our part.

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Second, given that *Ereignis* is Heidegger’s word, his writings on the “event of appropriation” must inform any reading of Derrida. For instance, *Contributions to Philosophy* enframes the epochal withdrawal and donation of being within the context of such an event: “Be-ing as enowning (*Ereignis*) is hesitant refusal as (non-granting). Ripeness is *fruit* and *gifting*...Be-ing holds sway in *truth* and is clearing for self-sheltering”²². Derrida’s event analogously activates the “hesitant refusal as (non-granting)” and the “gifting” of meaning when it shelters and encrypts *différance* in the thing itself and, at the same time, clears the space or the spacing for “natural languages” that attempt, failingly but eventually, to retrace the self-remarking, self-expressive routine of the thing²³. The inappropriability of the thing that virtually appropriates everything de-subjectivizes *Ereignis* and comprises its negative moment, which is more Heideggerian than Heidegger’s own critique of Husserl’s psychologism would warrant²⁴.

Conversely, “gifting” appropriation is the positive dimension of the event, in which “the thing itself always escapes [*la chose même se dérobe toujours*]”²⁵, leaving in its wake, behind itself (and, hence, around us) a trail of what might constitute our environing “world”. This fugal movement, the flight of the thing itself, could be interpreted, in the first place, as its flight *from itself* (*la chose* flees from *le même*; it subtracts itself from its sameness, self-coincidence, or identity with itself²⁶) and, equally, as an instant of the thing’s self-appropriation and self-realization. The thing becomes other and renders itself inaccessible when it strips itself of its self-identity and, more interestingly still, when it is most “itself” in the internal unfolding of its otherness and *différance*. In both cases, the thing’s giving withdrawal spirits away a solid foundation, a fundamental basis, from the edifice that metaphysics predicates on it and on the distinction between the same and the other. “[C]ette chose *même* étant la chose *autre* en tant qu’elle se dérobe...son silence nous commande [*This thing itself being the thing other as far as it escapes...its silence commands us*]”²⁷: in other words, even though our approach to this non-ontological entity is always belated, even though it escapes from us as the other, what we inevitably stumble upon is not pure absence but the *after-event*, the *après-coup* of the thing’s being-there expressed in the pregnant silence that resonates for us as a “command”.

Third, the escape of the thing is a direct consequence of the event’s placement *in abyss*, but it is important to understand what Derrida means by this syntagma in order to flesh out the sense of thingly appropriation. A preliminary analysis will reveal that the placement of *Ereignis* in abyss does not annul the effects of the appropriative event but merely turns them against themselves in the spirit of what will be later called “auto-immunization”. The prime example for this development is the self-referential performativity of Ponge’s *Fable* whose first line proclaims: “With the word *with* begins, therefore, this text [*Par le mot par commence donc ce text*]”²⁸. What Ponge places in the abyss of a singular repetition is, certainly, nothing other than a small, monosyllabic word *par*—“by”, or “with”. To repeat, he deposits in the abyss this tiny word, not a thing. In “Psyche: Invention of the Other”, as well as in *Signsponge*, Derrida reads this utterance as a speech act that, in Austin’s felicitous terms, knows “how to do *things* with words”. Indeed, Ponge’s performative seems to have eliminated the thing *qua* a referent supplanted with the word “*par*” which is something other than the thing, if not the other of the thing. But, since the thing itself “is” its (own) other and the other thing, its withdrawal modulates the eventhood of *Ereignis* and projects outward, into the realm of self-referential signification, the spacing of *différance* encrypted in it²⁹. Hetero-affection ensconced in auto-affection, the thing is concealed in the “fabulous” repetition, folding, or complication³⁰ of a single word—whether it is “yes”, or “perhaps”, or any other—that infinitely reflects itself in a quasi-speculative fashion. This ostensible tautology is the primal scene of signification, which detaches itself from the alterity (and, by implication, from the detachment) of the thing, all the while straining to retrace its “proper” non-identity.

The two elements of the abyss—singular repetition and dissemination of sameness—grafted onto the event give it the structure of calendarizable datability and virtuality. *Ereignis* in abyss is a unique event “always already” handed over to iterability; mourned in the unique loss of its uniqueness, it retains the possibility of a surprising return. But in what sense does Derrida insert the thing into these abyssal dynamics? And how does this affect the thing’s dispossession?

It is imperative, once again, to begin with the de- or ex-propriation of the word, the signifier, the *representamen* whose property “is not to be *proper* [*propre*], that is to say absolutely *proximate* to itself (*prope, proprius*). The *represented* is always already a *representamen*”³¹. This properly improper property of the signifier, which, at a distance from itself, stands for the other is the key function of the signifying relation. But, assuming that this self-distancing connotes *différance* which (is) (in) the thing itself, the non-proximity of the *representamen* to itself is a borrowed property projected out of the depths of the thing. The act of bestowing meaning, which, as Derrida comments in the next sentence, is “nothing but signs” does not shed eidetic light onto the thing but transports, contrabands, shuttles, carries over, and, thus, translates and metaphorizes bits of non-identity that emerge out of it before they recede back into the abyss of the thing. To place the event of signification in abyss is to assign and consign it to the thing itself without erasing the distance between the two cases of “self-distancing”: that of the sign and that of the thing. In the latter, the former accomplishes its *telos* and, at the same time, loses itself *qua* a conventionally understood sign operative in a “natural language”³².

The second moment of the word’s expropriation has to do with its analyzability into letters, syllables, graphemes and phonemes that circulate within and between texts and create a different, subterranean economy of meaning, which sometimes erupts only to cause friction with the explicit, programmatic, conscious sense of the text³³. It is well known that Derrida’s own engagements with texts utilize this analyzability, but where does the thing fit? Playfully dividing his proper name into letters and syllables *Ja, Der, Da* in *Limited Inc.*, Derrida asks: “Is my name still ‘proper’, or my signature, when, in proximity to ‘There. J.D.’ (pronounced in French, approximately Der. J.D.)...they begin to function as integral or fragmented entities [*corps*, body], or as whole fragments of common nouns or even of things?”³⁴. The iterability of the fragmented entities or bodies that temporarily come together to form a particular word underpins the expropriation of its synthetic unity in a feat, whose consequences are all the more dire when the proper name itself is pulverized or disseminated. But what is the rationale behind the ostensibly insignificant addition of “or even of things” in the end of the question?

According to Derrida, the “fragmented entities” are already something other than words (he uses the term *corps*, body, to describe them) once they have undergone the process of fragmentation. It is conceivable that they could be transfigured into other units of sense “as whole fragments of common nouns” but, before achieving this transfiguration, they must be dispensed to the abyss of the thing that interiorizes their remains and temporarily holds them back prior to projecting a new *différential* unit. As usual, the supplementary option (“or even of things”) for the engenderment of word fragments must come first in order for that which is supplemented (“common nouns”) to materialize. But, more importantly, the treatment of the word’s divisibility achieves two interrelated objectives: 1) it proves that this semantic unit is incapable of sustaining the ideal unity of a concept and 2) betrays the materiality of language as a body, *corps, res extensa*. This two-fold achievement, then, deflates the metaphysical claims of language, exposes the divisible nature of its non-formal, material substratum and, with this, reveals its mortal, finite core.

The process of the word’s falling apart is not autotelic; rather, from the ruins of a word “whole fragments of common nouns or even of things” may be reborn. Regenerating out of the abyss of the thing, a new, post-deconstructive synthesis of the synthetic (“whole”) and the analytic (“fragments”) arises such that it would be

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no longer possible to decide whether the surviving entity is a word or a thing³⁵. Such indecision constitutes the eventhood of the event. For example, the fragment *gl* that traverses the field of ruins constituting *Glas* survives its extraction from a myriad of words such as *glycines*, *sanglot*, *seigle*, *Gleichgewicht*, *gladiolus*, *glaviol* and *glas* itself, as well as in a modified form of *cloche*, *éclosion*, *gicle*, *clou*, etc. Derrida, nevertheless, refuses to situate this remainder squarely within the limits of speech, signification and writing:

I do not say either the signifier GL, or the phoneme GL, or the grapheme GL. Mark would be better, if the word were well understood...That has no identity [*Cela n'a pas d'identité*], sex, gender, makes no sense, is neither a definite whole nor a part detached from the whole
gl remain(s) gl [*gl reste gl*]
falls (to the tomb) as must a pebble in the water...³⁶

The impossibility of saying or writing this combination of consonants is not empirical but quasi-transcendental: “gl” belongs on the side of arche-writing (of a “mark...if the word were well understood”) at the same time that it makes an appearance in a determined system of writing. Incompletely detached from particular words, empirical languages and systems of inscription, it ceases to name some thing and, thanks to this cessation, claims for itself the properties of things. First and foremost, the assemblage of these two letters possesses a certain material gravity, a certain thingly heaviness that draws it down, makes it fall, onomatopoeically, “as must a pebble in the water”³⁷. The downward movement warrants the mark’s *falling away* from the metaphysical fiction of language³⁸, from the dream of a word properly intended (in the phenomenological sense of empty intentionality) for a particular thing, which will have been conceptually subsumed in the word’s unity and unicity without a remainder..

Counteracting such metaphysical thrust, the heavy, thingly residue *gl* remains inappropriable by linguistic ideality: “gl remain(s) gl” devoid of identity and bereft of an identifiable reference³⁹. This free-standing proposition—“gl remain(s) gl”—marked off or detached from the rest of the text in *Glas* is untranslatable into a logical expression of identity in “S is P”, or its tautological expression, “A is A”. In its proximity to itself (the proximity which the formally tautological character of the proposition and the word “proper” itself indicate), *gl* remains forever distanced and detached from itself by the word and the thing “remains(s)”, *reste*, which is by no means synonymous with the purely synthetic function of the copula. “[N]either a definite whole nor a part detached from the whole”, it indeterminately mimes the ecstasis of the thing itself, substantiates the reference to “whole fragments” in *Limited Inc.*, and, thereby, preserves the openness of a spacing in the “new synthesis” of the synthetic and the analytic. This complex gesture of binding and unbinding, or, if one could refer to it thus, of post-deconstructive synthesis motivates the self-remarking iteration of the thing. (I should note in passing that what I call “post-deconstructive synthesis” does not invalidate Derrida’s own criticism of the synthetic and, potentially, totalizing activity of thought. In one sense, it stands for a certain “being-with” or co-positing (*synthesis*) of the “whole” and the “fragment” that maintains open the interstices within the former and permits the latter to persist in its singularity. In another sense, “post-deconstructive synthesis” glimpses the binding of the thing outside of a conglomeration of subjects and objects.)

The regenerative event of thingly survival drawn from the abyss of the unsayable and the un-inscribable expropriates the ideality of the phenomenon, breaking the unity of sense and sound and preventing a particular linguistic entity from becoming a “master-word”. In the Husserlian vein, the ideality of the phenomenon depends on the subject who, in the absolute proximity to himself, hears himself speak: “The phenomenon continues to be an object for the voice; indeed...the ideality of the object seems to depend on the voice”⁴⁰. But, faced with the mark *gl* (which is not a vocable), who would be able to hear himself speak this non-ideal non-

object, whose non-objectivity does not veer on the side of pure subjectivity, whatever it may be, but ought to be conceived as “language without language, the language become the thing itself [*le langage sans langage, le langage devenu la chose même*]”⁴¹. In and of itself, the sundering apart of the auto-affective sound or sounding of the voice signals an event of expropriation because I can no longer find myself close (proximate, *propius*) to myself as soon as I do not hear myself speak.

Despite the adjournment of the reference to a particular kind of externality—to the fiction of a non-textual signified—the expropriation of the voice admits language into the realm of the thing. Exteriority survives *within* the word’s disintegration and dispersal into a non-totalizable multiplicity of other “common nouns or even things”, each of which is a “whole fragment” (like *par*) and “neither a definite whole nor a part detached from the whole” (like *gl*). But, instead of succumbing to the temptation to interpret this adjournment of reference in terms of Derrida’s textual hyper-idealism, it would be more productive to locate the margin right in the text, that is to say, to pursue the material residue of exteriority (the thing) within language itself: “In my view, language has an outside...I do not call this, with ease, “the real” because the concept of reality is overloaded with a slew of metaphysical presuppositions...Something really exists beyond the confines of language... [namely]...the matter of traces derived from various texts...”⁴².

I would like to cite two reasons, due to which the existence of something “beyond the confines of language” neither contests nor compromises the famous and all-too-often misunderstood dictum, “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” [There is no outside-text]⁴³. First, textuality extends well beyond the confines of language, especially beyond the bounds of “natural” languages. Indeed, Derrida proceeds to specify that which exceeds languages in terms of textuality, “the matter of traces derived from various texts”, carrying something like reality-effects. General textuality, of which this excess forms a part, is also a condition of possibility for language, an unmarked mark of the arche-trace from which it derives. Second, even if language and text were interchangeable, there would remain an enormous difference between the “there is”, *il y a*, and “existence”. The former connotes pre-existential neutrality, which, in fact, anticipates the latter. It is in this difference between textuality and language that the event of the thing comes about. Those who wish to name it “the real” would have to make an infinitely complex detour through the thinking of paleonymy in general and its specific case, “the concept of reality... overloaded with a slew of metaphysical presuppositions”.

CONCLUSION: POST-DECONSTRUCTIVE REALISM

Post-deconstructive realism rearticulates the paleonymies of “the thing” and “the real”. But what exactly does this cryptic term entail? In *On Touching*, Derrida argues that “[f]or Nancy, touch remains the motif of an absolute, irredentist, and post-deconstructive realism [*réalisme...post-déconstructif*]...an absolute realism, but irreducible to any of the tradition’s realisms”⁴⁴. To insist on the ineluctable modulation of the thing by *différance* is to situate what Derrida terms “post-deconstructive realism” within deconstruction itself and to indicate how deconstructive events come to pass in the “real”, which no longer warrants the stability of the onto-metaphysical project, how they transpire in the non-identical thing whose escape from us eventuates the worldhood of the phenomenological world. It is undeniable that the “post-deconstructive within deconstruction” is an anachronism, a disordering of the temporality of “before”, “during”, and “after”, but it is an anachronistic disorder that the thing itself orders and commands before *and* after objectification. Above all, the question that ripens in this syntagma is: What does it mean to go through, to experience, or to suffer deconstruction and what remains to us of these goings-through, experiences, or sufferings?

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Derrida’s own deconstructive or post-deconstructive realism is, certainly, not the same as “any of the tradition’s realisms”, be they empirical or transcendental, since at its core we find the split thing, the indwelling of *différance*, the concrete figure without figure undermining and invalidating the logical principle of identity. The thing is not the same thing as what or who it is. Its non-identity with itself renders it interchangeable with any other thing and with the other of the thing (the athing); its absolute alterity does not allow the new realism to ossify in a determinate, cataloged definition, but necessitates its unfolding as a series of discontinuous beginnings and interim, provisional conjunctures. For, those who follow it are seduced and diverted away from it, while those who resist it are unwittingly drawn into its tight embrace.

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NOTES

1. Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say...* Trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrecter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 108.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.
3. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40 [59].
4. And yet, in this process, phenomenology itself fails to escape the kind of a reduction it advocates. This will be the position of Sean Gaston [*The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006)] who enunciates Derrida's "attempt to mark the difference (the almost nothing) between the *incomplete* as the *infinite* (phenomenology as a virtual presence, as anticipation...) and the *incomplete* as the *indefinite* (as writing, as *différance*, as the possibility and the ruin of phenomenology)" (55). This difference is housed "in the thing itself" where the distinction between "who" and "what" is still lacking, where time and space are still in the process of gestation, and where their infinite, indefinite deferral portends "the possibility and the ruin of phenomenology".
5. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 9 [9].
6. It is the possibility of such non-arrival, then, that constitutes the event of the thing. In other words, contrary to the Husserl of *Ideas I* (§52), Derrida implies that the self-remarking thing *not given in the flesh or in person* is "a sign of itself".
7. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 49 [72].
8. Jacques Derrida, *La Chose*, an unpublished seminar. *Jacques Derrida Papers*. MS-C01. Special Collections and Archives (Irvine, CA: The University of California Irvine Libraries), 13/1.
9. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 124 [182].
10. In this regard, note the subject of Peter Fenves' "hypothesis": "*Everything* acts in secret, and by disclosing that everything acts in this way, philosophy discloses itself" ["Out of the Blue: Secrecy, Radical Evil, and the Crypt of Faith", in Richard Rand (ed.), *Futures of Jacques Derrida* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 99, emphasis added].
11. Silvia Benso reaches a similar insight in her attempt to supplement the Levinasian "love without things" with the Heideggerian "things without love". See Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000).
12. Derrida, *Writing*, 127 [187].
13. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 138 [220].
14. Derrida, *La Chose*, 13/1.
15. In his early phenomenological works, Derrida breaks down the Husserlian object, *Gegenstand*, into *Gegen-stand*, "standing-against". (The same is true of *ob-jet* in French and of the Greek *αντικείμενον*). The oppositionality essential to the objectivity of the object disappears from the Derridian interchangeability of the thing and its other.
16. The difference between Hegelian and Derridian views on negation and contradiction has incited a long-standing debate. Formally, the truth of a statement such as the one I am about to cite is hardly in doubt: "Whereas for Hegel, the thinking that acknowledged a contradiction found, in that acknowledgement, the means to negate and overcome that contradiction, Levinas, Blanchot, and Derrida, among others, are drawn to what is not negated and so to what needs must be described in terms of a faltering or weakening of negation" [Paul Davies, "This Contradiction", in *Futures of Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Richard Rand (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 31]. But what is irretrievably lost in this formal correctness is the *concrete* aporetic quality of "what is *not* negated" (for instance, in the thing by the athing) that, in fact, strengthens negation in the midst of its "faltering". This aporetic quality may be said to characterize Hegel's "determinate negation".
17. Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*. Trans. George Collins (London & New York: Verso, 1997), 122 [144], translation modified.
18. Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality", *Angelaki* 5(3), December 2000, 10.

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19. Jacques Derrida, *Signésponge / Signsponge*. Trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 102-3. One such inappropriable and catastrophic event will have been a nuclear catastrophe: “‘Reality’, let us say the encompassing institution of the nuclear age, is constructed by a fable, on the basis of an event that has never happened (except in fantasy, and that is not nothing at all), an event of which one can only speak, an event whose advent remains an invention by men (in all senses of the word ‘invention’) or which, rather, remains to be invented” [Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)”, *Diacritics* 14, Summer 1984, 23-4.]
20. Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Ecographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*. (Oxford & Malden: Polity Press, 2002), 36.
21. On originary technicity see Bernard Stiegler’s *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Trans. Richard Beardsworth & George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
22. Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* Trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 21.
23. This double gesture is one of the factors precipitating Marian Hobson’s [Jacques Derrida: *Opening Lines* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998)] brief analysis of thinghood in Derrida, in which she writes that “‘la chose’ is both an unobtainable singular, and the possibility of common everyday things” (133)
24. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985).
25. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*. Trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 104 [117].
26. Like Heidegger’s Being, the thing is here placed “under erasure”.
27. Jacques Derrida, *Déplier Ponge: Entretien avec Gérard Farasse* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2005), 66. This is why David Willard is wrong in suggesting that Derrida’s “linguistic idealism” is expressed in allowing beings to gain presence through naming and predication that bestow identity and thinghood. *Au contraire*, withdrawing itself, the thing can only give a gift of non-identity to everything that supplants it. Cf. David Willard, “Predication as Originary Violence: A Phenomenological Critique of Derrida’s View of Intentionality”, in G. Madison (ed.), *Working Through Derrida* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993). In his retort, Timothy Mooney [“Derrida’s Empirical Realism, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25(5), 33-56] corrects Willard by noting that since *différance* is not a classical concept, it cannot stand for “productive or originary causality” (43).
28. Quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Psyché: Invention de L’Autre* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), 19.
29. This is a clear case where “language can...‘normally’ become its own ‘abnormal’ object” which “derive[s] from the structural iterability of the mark” (L. 82). One could also refer to Giorgio Agamben’s essay “The Thing Itself” [in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)], dedicated to Jacques Derrida. In this treatment of Plato’s esoteric doctrine, Agamben writes: “The thing itself therefore has its essential place in language, even if language is certainly not adequate to it, on account, Plato says, of what is weak in language” (31). This strong weakness or weak strength is, precisely, the language’s normal becoming its own abnormal object.
30. Derrida, *Psyché*, 58.
31. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 50.
32. Derrida writes: “A sign is never an event, if by event we mean an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular” (*Speech*, 50). By “event” Derrida does not mean “an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular”, but rather the difference inherent in every iteration, replacement, and reversal. Nonetheless, taking at face value this strategically schematized standoff between the “empirical particular” and “ideal signification”, one could conclude that, thanks to its placement in the abyss of the thing, signification absolves itself of its ties to ideality and, by implication, something like an event of the sign becomes plausible.
33. In other words, language gives us the world and, at the same time, expropriates signifying subjects. Along these lines, Sean Gaston [*Derrida and Disinterest* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005)] accentuates the fact that in Levinas’s philosophy, dispossession (which is synonymous with expropriation) is a hallmark of the other-oriented discourse, which yields the

“elemental non-possessive origin of the subject’s possession of itself and the world” (26).

34. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* Trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 33, emphasis added.

35. The indeterminacy of this unit’s survival is indebted to what in *Schibboleth: Pour Paul Celan* (Noisy-le-Sec: La Marelle, 2000) Derrida calls “la migration du mot partagé [the migration of a parted or shared word]. While “migration” straddles the transition from one word to another and from a word to the thing, “partagé”, meaning “division” and “sharing”, encompasses both the analytic moment and post-deconstructive synthesis. Such indeterminacy that accompanies “le retour aux choses mêmes” (*the return to the things themselves*) suggests that “[o]n n’a plus à choisir entre les mots et les choses [it is no longer necessary to choose between the words and the things]” (*Déplier* 29).

36. Jacques Derrida, *Glas*. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 119 [137], right.

37. The heaviness of the material remainder within language needs to be juxtaposed to “the thought of the trace”: “This thought has no weight. It is, in the play of the system that very thing which never has weight” (*Of Grammatology* 93). Overshadowed by the tension between the weightlessness of the thought of the trace, on one hand, and the weightiness of the material remainder, the fragile balance between idealism and realism is perpetually threatened.

38. One aspect of the metaphysical fiction is the postulation of meta-language, which Derrida vehemently rejects: “The poetic force of a word remains incalculable, all the more so, surely, when the unity of a word...is that of an *invented* composition, the inauguration of a new body” [*Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Trans. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 69]. In the absence of such language, the thing would lack all elevation and sublimity: “la chose chez Ponge manquerait d’élévation, de sublime [Nathalie Roelens, ‘La Chose Littéraire / La Chose Plastique’, in Michel Lisse (ed.), *Passions de la Littérature: Avec Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Galilée, 1996) 356].

39. The letters *gl* do not produce a non-expressive sign, in the indicative sense of signification, but a non-sign, which will not be digested in the “solitary discourse of the soul”. In so doing, they arrest the movement of reduction “to solitary mental discourse, to purely expressive discourse...[as]...a bracketing of all worldly and empirical existence” (Marrati, *Genesis and Trace*, p. 65).

40. Derrida, *Speech*, 78.

41. Derrida, *Margins*, 106 [125]. Timothy Clark [*Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida’s Notion and Practice of Literature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992)] expresses one facet of this becoming well: “As the thing given up to language, the language-thing or emergent poem becomes partly aerial, porous, urged out of its alien intransigence” (157). But, despite the proviso “partly”, this statement smacks of the kind of linguistic idealism, which is alien to Derrida and against which Derrida fights. Differently put, what Clark forgoes is the opposite pull of “gravity” that ties the “language-thing” to its material substratum.

42. Jacques Derrida, *Žhak Derrida v Moskve: Dekonstruktivna Puteshestviia* [Jacques Derrida in Moscow: Deconstruction of a Journey]. Ed. Valerii Podoroga (Moscow: RIK “Kul’tura”, 1993), pp. 154-5. My translation.

43. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158, 163.

44. Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. Trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 46 [60].