

**'I am the martyr (x)'**

Philosophical Reflections of Testimony and Martyrdom

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

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Historically, martyrdom and testimony have always been conjoined: martyrdom has always implied some form of witnessing, as testified to by the Greek and Arabic etymologies. Taking the locution ‘I am the martyr (x)’ (popularised in Lebanese martyr video-testimonies of the 1980s) as exemplary testimony, it is argued that in the thought of Jacques Derrida each and every singular instance of testimony implies an act of martyrdom, and that a generalised and constitutive thinking of the *testimoniality* and *passion* implicit in any performative event and in each and every instance of the ‘I’ traverses Derrida’s thought. Following Derrida, it is proposed that *différance* be translatable as *passion*, albeit in a paleonymic sense that is far from simply passive. In its quasi-suicidal logic, *passion* is shown to deconstruct the very possibility of the ‘sui-’ of suicide or the *telos* of sacrifice, instead affirming survival and the event of the other (for better or for worse). By probing the possibility of ‘I am the martyr (x)’, the ‘philosophical reflections’ indicated by the title pose the motifs of *passion* and *testimoniality* as philosophy’s deconstructive conditions of possibility.

By taking the ‘encounter’ between two historical testimonies – those of Derrida and the Lebanese communist martyr Jamal Satti (d. 1985) – as a starting point, and by demonstrating the sufferances of testimony and the archive, the thesis aims to reconcile Derrida’s philosophical thinking with historical enquiry. By supplementing these testimonies with further ‘performances’ of *passion* and encounters with other reader-writer-witnesses from the realms of philosophy, literature and art, the scandal that is ‘I am the martyr (x)’ becomes at once both extraordinary *and* the ordinary story of language. Reading this ‘*and*’ through the ‘x’ of repeatability and substitutability, the aporias of testimony are folded into the wider context of such tele-mediated martyr-testimonies and their terrifying force and effect.

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Extract from Jacques Derrida, <i>Demeure: Fiction and Testimony</i>	
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## List of Abbreviations

### Works by Derrida

A	<i>Aporias: Dying–Awaiting (One Another at) The Limits of Truth</i> (1993)
AANJ	‘Above All, No Journalists!’ (2001)
Abraham	‘Abraham, the Other’ (2007)
ACTS	‘ACTS: The Meaning of a Given Word’ (1989)
AF	<i>Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression</i> (1996)
Afterword	‘Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion’ (1988)
AIP	‘As If It Were Possible “Within Such Limits”...’ (2002)
AM	‘The Art of <i>Mémoires</i> ’ (1989)
Animal	<i>The Animal that Therefore I Am</i> (2008)
AT	‘On A Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy’ (1993)
ATVM	‘At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am’ (2007)
BS I	<i>The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I</i> (2009)
C	‘Circumfession’ (1993)
CAS	<i>Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography</i> (2010)
CC	‘Composing “Circumfession”’ (2005)
Che	‘ <i>Che Cos’è La Poesia?</i> ’ (1995)
Cinders	<i>Cinders</i> (1991)
Countersignature	‘Countersignature’ (2004)
D	<i>Demeure: Fiction and Testimony</i> (2000)
DI	‘Declarations of Independence’ (2002)
Diff.	‘Différance’ (1973)
Diss.	‘Dissemination’ (1981)
DP	‘Death Penalties’ (2002)
DRB	‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’ (2001)
DS	‘The Double Session’ (1981)
Ellipsis	‘Ellipsis’ (1978)
EO	<i>The Ear of the Other</i> (1985)
FK	‘Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of “Religion” at the Limits of Reason Alone’ (2002)
FL	‘Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority”’ (2002)
FM	‘By Force of Mourning’ (2001)
FSW	‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ (1978)
GD	<i>The Gift of Death</i> (1995)
G	<i>Glas</i> (1986)
H	‘Hospitality’ (2002)
HAS	‘How to Avoid Speaking: Denials’ (1989)
HC	<i>H.C. for Life, That Is to Say . . .</i> (2006)
HN	‘How to Name’ (2005)
Istrice	‘ <i>Istrice 2: Ich bünn all hier</i> ’ (1995)
K	‘Khōra’ (1995)
LG	‘The Law of Genre’ (1992)
LI	‘Limited Inc a b c’ (1988)
LLF	<i>Learning to Live, Finally</i> (2007)
LO	‘Living On / Border Lines’ (1979)
M	<i>Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin</i> (1998)
Majesties	‘Majesties’ (2005)
MB	<i>Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins</i> (1993)
MC	‘My chances/ <i>Mes chances</i> : A Rendezvous with Some Epicurian Stereoponies’ (1984)
Mnemosyne	‘Mnemosyne’ (1989)
Moscow	‘Back from Moscow, in the USSR’ (1993)



MP	<i>Margins of Philosophy</i> (1982)
NANN	'No Apocalypse, Not Now: Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives' (2007)
Negotiations	'Negotiations' (2002)
Nombre	'Nombre de oui' (1987)
Number	'A Number of Yes (Nombre de oui)' (2000)
OG	<i>Of Grammatology</i> (1997)
OH	<i>The Other Heading</i> (1992)
OS	<i>Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question</i> (1989)
Pas	'Pas' (1986)
Passions	'Passions: An Oblique Offering' (1995)
PC	<i>The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond</i> (1987)
PN	'Pace Not(s)' in <i>Parages</i> (2011)
Perf. P	'Performative Powerlessness – A Response to Simon Critchley' (2000)
PF	<i>Politics of Friendship</i> (1997)
Pl P	'Plato's Pharmacy' (1981)
Positions	<i>Positions</i> (1981)
PP	'Poetics and Politics of Witnessing' (2005)
Provocation	'Provocation: Forewords' (2002)
Psyche	'Psyche: Invention of the Other' (2007)
PS	'La parole soufflée' (1978)
Punctuations	'Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis' (2004)
R	<i>Rogues: Two Essays on Reason</i> (2005)
Rams	'Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem' (2005)
RDP	'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism' (1996)
Resistances	'Resistances' (1998)
S	Shibboleth' (2005)
SE	'A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event' (2007)
Sec	'Signature Event Context' (1988)
SM	<i>Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, &amp; the New International</i> (1994)
SN	'Sauf le nom (Post-Scriptum)' (1995)
SS	<i>Signésponge/ Signsponge</i> (1984)
TOJ	'The Time is Out of Joint' (1995)
TR	'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)' (2002)
UG	'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce' (1992)

#### Works by Derrida and others, including interviews

AIIWD	'As If I Were Dead: An Interview with Jacques Derrida' (1996)
BBI	'Between Brackets I' (interview with D. Kambouchner, J. Ristat & D. Sallenave) (1995)
C&C	'Confessions and "Circumfession": A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida' (2005)
Counterpath	Jacques Derrida & Catherine Malabou, <i>Counterpath</i> (2004)
DA	'The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview with Jacques Derrida' (2002)
DE	Jacques Derrida et al., <i>Deconstruction Engaged: The Sydney Seminars</i> (2001)
DO	'Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction and the Other' (interview with Richard Kearney) (1984)
E	Jacques Derrida & Bernard Stiegler, <i>Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews</i> (2002)
EW	Jacques Derrida & Jean-Luc Nancy, "'Eating Well," or the Calculation of the Subject' (1995)

HJR	'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida' (1999)
Hospitality	Jacques Derrida & Anne Dufourmantelle, <i>Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond</i> (2000)
Language of Others	Hélène Cixous & Jacques Derrida, in discussion with Jacqueline Rose, 'The Language of Others' (2004)
Madness	'A Madness Must Watch Over Thinking' (interview with François Ewald) (1995)
Narcissism	"There is No <i>One</i> Narcissism" (Autobiographies)' (interview with Didier Cahen) (1995)
LINO	'Language is Never Owned: An Interview' (interview with Évelyne Grossman) (2005)
Passages	'Passages—from Traumatism to Promise' (interview with Elisabeth Weber) (1995)
P&F	'Politics and Friendship' (interview with Michael Sprinker) (2002)
RSS	'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida' (interview with Giovanna Borradori) (2003)
SI	"This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida' (interview with Derek Attridge) (1992)
TG	'A Testimony Given ...' (interview with Elisabeth Weber) (2004)
TS	Jacques Derrida & Mauricio Ferraris, <i>A Taste for the Secret</i> (2002)
TTW	'The Truth That Wounds: From an Interview' (interview with Évelyne Grossman) (2005)
Unsealing	'Unsealing ("the old new language")' (interview with Catherine David) (1995)
V	Hélène Cixous & Jacques Derrida, <i>Veils</i> (2001)
Writing Body	'Between the writing body and writing . . .' (interview with Daniel Ferrer) (2001)
WTL	'From the Word to Life: A Dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous' (interview by Alette Armel) (2005)

#### Works by Roland Barthes

CL	<i>Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography</i> (1981)
SC	'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?' (2007)
TA	'Textual Analysis of a Tale by Edgar Allen Poe' (1988)

#### Works by Maurice Blanchot

ID	<i>The Instant of My Death</i> (2000)
SNB	<i>The Step Not Beyond</i> (1992)

#### Works by Paul Celan

Bremen	Speech on the occasion of receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen (2001)
Meridian	'The Meridian' (2005)

Works by Hélène Cixous

EB	<i>Entretien de la blessure: Sur Jean Genet</i> (2011)
Insister	<i>Insister of Jacques Derrida</i> (2007)
Stigmata	<i>Stigmata</i> (2005)
Portrait	<i>Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint</i> (2004)
Stranjew	'This Stranjew Body' (2007)

Works by Others, including anthologies

Derridabase	Geoffrey Bennington, 'Derridabase' (1993)
FT	Rabih Mroué, 'The Fabrication of Truth' (2002)
Instances	Hent de Vries, 'Instances: Temporal Modes from Augustine to Derrida and Lyotard' in (2005)
LA	Hent de Vries, "'Lapsus Absolu'": Notes on Maurice Blanchot's <i>The Instant of My Death</i> (1998)
Lapsus	Eduardo Cadava, ' <i>Lapsus Imaginis</i> : The Image in Ruins' (2001)
Matchbook	David Wills, <i>Matchbook</i> (2005)
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> (1989)
PTR	Hent de Vries, <i>Philosophy and the Turn to Religion</i> (1999)
RV	Hent de Vries, <i>Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida</i> (2002)
Tain	Rodolphe Gasché, <i>The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection</i> (1986)
Three Posters	Transcription of Elias Khoury & Rabih Mroué, <i>Three Posters</i> (2002)
TM	Samuel Weber, <i>Theatricality as Medium</i> (2004)
X	Geoffrey Bennington, 'X' (1996)
YC	Elisabeth Weber, 'Introduction: The Youngest Children of the Republic' (2004)

**passion** *sb.* [ad. L. *passiōn-em* suffering, n. of action f. *pati*, *pass-* to suffer. In L. chiefly a word of Christian theology, which was also its earliest use in Fr. And Eng., being very frequent in the earliest ME.]

**I.** The suffering of pain. **1.a.** (Now used with capital.) The sufferings of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Formerly in the plural. [...] **1.c.** The narrative of the sufferings of Christ from the Gospels; also, a musical or dramatic setting of this. **2.a.** The sufferings of a martyr, martyrdom. **2.b.** A narrative or account of the passion of a martyr. **3.** Suffering or affliction generally. **4.a.** A painful affection or disorder of the body or of some part of it. **4.b.** A violent access, attack, or fit of disease.

**II.** The fact of being acted upon, the being passive [Late L. *passio* = Gr. *πάθος*]. **5.a.** The fact or condition of being acted upon or affected by external agency; subjection to external force = AFFECTION *sb* 1; an effect or impression produced from without. Now *rare* or *Obs.* **5.b.** A way in which a thing is or may be affected by external agency; a passive quality, property, or attribute; = AFFECTION 11, 12. *Obs.*

**III.** An affection of the mind. [L. *passio* = Gr. *πάθος*]. **6.a.** Any kind of feeling by which the mind is powerfully affected or moved; a vehement, commanding, or overpowering emotion; in psychology and art, any mode in which the mind is affected or acted upon (whether vehemently or not), as ambition, avarice, desire, hope, fear, love, hatred, joy, grief, anger, revenge. Sometimes personified. **6.b.** Without article or *pl.*: Commanding, vehement, or overpowering feeling or emotion. **6.c.** A fit or mood marked by stress of feeling or abandonment to emotion; a transport of excited feeling; an outburst of feeling. **6.d.** A poem, literary composition, or passage marked by deep or strong emotion; a passionate speech or outburst. *Obs.* or *arch.* **7.a.** An outburst of anger or bad temper. **7.b.** Without *a*: Impassioned anger, angry feeling. **8.a.** Amorous feeling; strong sexual affection; love; also in *pl.*, amorous feelings or desires. Often *tender passion*. **8.b.** *transf.* An object of love, a beloved person. **9.** Sexual desire or impulse. **10.a.** An eager outreaching of the mind towards something; an overmastering zeal or enthusiasm for a special object; a vehement predilection. **10.b.** *transf.* An aim or object pursued with zeal.

**passion** *v.* [a. OF. *passioner*, f. *passion* PASSION *sb.*] **1.** *trans.* To affect or imbue with passion. **1.b.** To move or impel by passion. *Obs.* *rare*. **1.c.** To express with passion or deep feeling. **2.** To affect with suffering, to afflict. *Obs.* **3.** *intr.* To show, express, or be affected by passion or deep feeling; formerly *esp.* to sorrow.

—*Oxford English Dictionary* (1989)

## Introduction

*Ce que je voudrais être* : Une poète.

–Jacques Derrida, unpublished interview<sup>1</sup>

I dream of being a historian. [...] the only thing I'm interested in is history.

–Jacques Derrida, 'Confessions and "Circumfession"'<sup>2</sup>

This is a study about truth. Not the essence of truth, but its enigma and its madness. About the *passion* for truth that reveals itself in a singular martyrdom. About desire and the sufferances borne for a truth that impassions us in its impossibility; for the truth of testimony, as a promise of truth (a martyrological engagement to 'make truth'), that bears witness to a memory that always risks obliteration, or that perhaps never even was. About the philosophical, historical and political problem of truth and the 'fabrication of truth' borne witness to by the poetico-performative of the work of art. About the 'truth that wounds', insofar as it is a site of trauma that is simultaneously the condition of possibility for any truth to be promised. About the *passion of and for* testimony, *as* its truth, and the passion of a testimony borne by some 'I'; by someone, you or me, who steps forward and says: I would like to learn to say 'I'. Would that ever be possible?

•

I therefore venture to present myself to you here, *ecce homo*, in parody, as the exemplary Franco-Maghrebian, but disarmed, with accents that are more naïve, less controlled, and less polished. *Ecce homo*, and do not smile, for a "passion" would indeed appear to be at stake here, the martyrdom of the Franco-Maghrebian who from birth, since his birth but also from his birth on the other coast, his coast, has, at bottom, chosen and understood nothing, and who still suffers and testifies.

–Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*<sup>3</sup>

Throughout a text entitled *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (first published in 1996),<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida presents himself as a martyr figure, precisely in his attempts to testify both to his past experience of growing up in colonial Algeria as a Franco-Maghrebian Jew, and to his ongoing relation to and experience of 'his' language, as the only language through which such a

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished interview with Osvaldo Muñoz (1992), quoted in Benoît Peeters, *Derrida* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), p. 510. Quoted (in English translation) in Sarah Wood, 'Editorial: "It will have blood"', *The Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2011), pp. v-xi (p. v).

<sup>2</sup> 'C&C' 31.

<sup>3</sup> 'M' 19.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout what follows, years indicated in brackets refer to the first publication of the text in question, which may not be the English text cited from herein. When two years are given, the latter indicates the edition cited from. For full bibliographic information, see the Bibliography. In cases where the chronology of texts referred to is of relevance to the argument, additional notes are offered regarding the first presentation details, in addition to the dates of publication.

testimony might be proffered. What exactly, I wondered upon first encountering this text, is at stake here in this elusive association between testimony and martyrdom? Upon what grounds might Derrida nominate himself as such, likening himself to some exemplary Christ-figure? By what right? For a writer who alleges to be concerned above all with history, justice and responsibility, is not to claim this seemingly parodic and metaphorical Christ-like status an insult to the countless ‘real’ martyrdoms of history?

It is with this question in mind that we move to a second instance in which someone claims, *testifies* in fact, to being a ‘martyr’. Whilst the following study is comprised of several named protagonists and many more unnamed, two voices rise above the cacophony: that of Derrida and that of Jamal Satti, a martyr for the Lebanese Communist Party who in 1985 died in a suicidal operation against the Israeli army that was occupying Southern Lebanon. Before carrying out his operation, Satti recorded his last-will and testament that was to be shown on national television that evening, opening his filmed testimony with the words ‘I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti’, before proceeding to offer a narrative of the injustices he had witnessed and a justification for his imminent operation, hoping to inspire others to follow his example. Despite the singularity of and contextual disparity between each instance, might we not read these two martyr-testimonies together without committing the above-mentioned potential injustice? And might not something in fact be gained by doing so; something that accounts, precisely, for the potential substitutability and precariousness – for the *impossibility*, even – of any given testimony or martyrdom?

Whereas historically martyrdom – be it religious or secular – has always implied some form of testimony and witnessing, the central claim of this study is that what each of these two martyr-testimonies demonstrates exemplarily, above all when each read in light of (or reflected against) the other, is that in the philosophical thinking of Derrida the reverse can also be postulated: that *every* instance of testimony implies a singular martyrdom and that, structurally, *every* instance of the ‘I’ – which must in itself be *testimonial* – implies a *passion*. As such, the argument is that Satti’s ‘I am the martyr’ becomes *at once* the extraordinary *and* the utterly ordinary tale of language. Recalling our title, what follows is thus not only a philosophical reflection *upon* the relationship between testimony and martyrdom but also a meditation on the reflections *of* testimony and martyrdom, as the bi-directional movement that takes place between the two.

Whilst what we will be calling ‘the passion *of* and *for* testimony’ is legible across Derrida’s oeuvre, above all in his *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (first published soon after *Monolingualism*, in 1996<sup>5</sup>) and his many so-called ‘autobiographical’ ‘performance’-texts or oblique offerings, it is argued that Satti’s testimony brings this to light more vividly, revealing its contours and

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<sup>5</sup> A first version of *Demeure* (2000) was presented in 1995 at a conference at the Catholic University of Louvain, the proceedings of which were published as Michel Lisse, ed., *Passions de la littérature: avec Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), and a French monograph was published as *Demeure: Maurice Blanchot* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1998). Whilst *Monolingualism* (1998) was first published in French in 1996, as *Le monolinguisme de l’autre: ou la prothèse d’origine* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), a first version was presented at a colloquium at the Louisiana State University in 1992.

complexities all the more sharply. Moving in the other direction, from Derrida's testimony to Satti's, it is argued that Derrida's deconstructive thinking takes into account, without ever resolving, the *passion* suffered by any singular, historical act of testimony or act of resistance (Satti's, for instance), exposing and engaging with the paradoxically necessary risks and failures of any such act and demanding that, each time, we read and respond with a more attentive ear. In this manner, when read and re-read both within the logic of *Monolingualism* itself and the wider context of Derrida's corpus, what at first appears to be the sententious and hyperbolic mere dramatic technique of this parodic *Ecce homo* is argued to in fact be a carefully crafted 'demonstration' or 'enactment' of (a) the *passion* of testimony that we must all bear and (b) the necessary violences, betrayals and double binds of any responsible act of reading. 'Do not smile', Derrida tells us. For, without falling too far into pathos and the self-righteousness of so-called 'ethics', the matter is deadly serious.

This thesis is structured by five chapters, which can be summarised as follows: Chapter 1 serves as an extended Introduction, situating the study within existing discourses and literature surrounding martyrdom, contemporary suicidal operations, testimony and performativity, and setting out a 'methodological' and conceptual framework of sorts. Beginning with a survey of the age-old conjunction between martyrdom and witnessing and how this might be reversed in Derrida's thinking, a summary is then offered of *Three Posters* (first performed in 2000), a performance-video by Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroué that is constructed around the found-footage of Satti's testimony, followed by a résumé of the phenomenon of the martyr-testimony, in its various forms. Following this, the concept of 'martyrdom' is explored, with it being proposed that the 'meaning' of 'martyrdom' is inherently testimonial, insofar as it can only ever be promised and believed, rather than stable or assured. Recalling the potential injustices committed towards the historical archive signalled towards above, the question is introduced here as to whether the motifs of *passion* and *testimony* might function *between* the historical or empirical and the transcendental, in the mode of a *quasi*-transcendental which both sets philosophical thinking in motion and allows for the reconciliation between Derrida's deconstructive and poetic thinking and the task of the historian.

Whilst our central concern throughout lies with what comes to pass and is beckoned to be thought in the encounter between Derrida's and Satti's martyr-testimonies, the idea of the 'encounter' itself – in all its *passional* and *testimonial* dimensions – is a recurring motif, with each of the chapters from Chapter 2 onwards taking place across the encounter between Derrida and at least one other reader-writer-poet-witness. In Chapter 2 we propose that, insofar as it functions as the signing of an oath from which the soon-to-be martyr can no longer turn back, Satti's 'I am the martyr' is translatable by 'I am dead', as famously uttered by both Edgar Allan Poe's M. Valdemar and by Shakespeare's Hamlet. Here it is asked whether 'I am dead' is *possible* as an act of language, with this question unfolding across a series of encounters between Derrida and Roland Barthes,

beginning at a conference in Baltimore in 1966 and passing through Derrida's mourning text for Barthes in 1981 and beyond, all the time taking place across readings *of* and *with* Edgar Allen Poe and Edmund Husserl. Through exploring the *possibility of* (to be heard in the double genitive) the sentence 'I am dead' and proposing this to be not the extraordinary utterance of Poe's tale but the ordinary story of language, we set out some of the main conceptual 'apparatuses' that will guide us through what follows: for instance, the Derridean 'logics' of *différance*, the 'trace' and hauntology.

In exploring the aporias and *passions* of the performative act of testimony and the 'I am the martyr (x)' that we will be arguing is implicit in any testimonial 'I', Chapter 3 – divided into parts A and B – forms the theoretical 'backbone' of the thesis. Whilst in Chapter 2 one of the main reasons for the *possibility of* 'I am dead' is the im-possible uniqueness and irreplaceability of the 'present instant', in Chapter 3A this (temporal) repeatability and (spatial) substitutability of both the testimonial signature and the witness is prioritised in its threatening the 'authenticity' of any given testimony, exposing its necessary potential fictionality. Beginning with a juxtaposition of the testimonies of Maurice Blanchot and Satti, it is proposed, following Derrida, that testimony is never provable but rather only ever believable. As such, what is crucial is the act of fiduciary engagement of a promissory engagement and affirmation, which Derrida inherits from Martin Heidegger and Paul de Man. If bearing witness (as with martyrdom) must be a performative act, we here turn to Derrida's deconstructive countersignature of the 'speech act theory' of J. L. Austin and his call for an altogether other, unheard-of performative; a call which will be responded to in differing ways in each of the chapters that follow but that, ultimately, is responded to through the generalised *passion* and *testimoniality* that we are following throughout. Here, 'I am the martyr (x)' is demonstrated to bear witness to and enact the *auto*-deconstruction both of the 'I' (as a self-bracketing 'x') and of the text in general, as such functioning as the paradoxical condition of possibility for any act of language or testimony. Emphasising the 'theatricality' of testimony that is exemplified by *Three Posters*, we supplement Derrida's conception of the impossible 'actuality' of the performative act with Samuel Weber's reading of the Derridean 'performative' as a generalised 'theatricality'.

Chapter 3B continues to probe the 'passion of testimony', turning to a close reading of Derrida's *Monolingualism* and the violences of his 'autobiographical' experience that are in fact revealed to be a universal sufferance that, paradoxically, is necessary for any testimonial act. Whilst this chapter is supplemented by various secondary voices, the encounter here takes place not with an identifiable other *per se*, but with *the* other, whoever or whatever that may be. How, it is asked, following Derrida, is one to testify if one's relationship to one's 'only' language is always dislocated and if 'my' testimony is always *of* and *from* the other? And hence the *passion* to be borne. Whilst Derrida's 'situation' appears to be far divorced from Satti's, we begin here to think the linguistic mark in corporeal terms, reading the marks and scars of what Derrida names 're-markability' (i.e. substitutability and supplementability) through the body of the 'martyred mark'.



Chapter 4 presents a Derridean paleonymic re-invention of the traditional understanding of *passion* as a possible translation of both *différance* and of Derrida's re-inflection of the Blanchotian *neuter*, insofar as this spells an 'act' before and beyond the dichotomy between activity and passivity, and a heteronomy that in fact is the very condition of freedom and responsibility, as will have already become quite apparent even from Chapter 2. Here the discussion is broadened, proposing *passion* and *testimony* to be generative for responding to the theologico-political context of suicidal attacks, above all post-11 September. Following Derrida's responses to this 'exemplary' event, *passion* is read through the *quasi*-suicidal logic of autoimmune hospitality, whereby some 'concept' or 'act' (of the 'sovereign subject') is only possible in its exposure to that which threatens it, as such defeating the very *sui-* of suicide or the *telos* of sacrifice and any defence systems against foreign aggressions. Whilst in Chapter 3A a certain *différential* arche-engagement or arche-promise is presented as resembling an arche-performative, here we elaborate upon this by looking to the *passional* and *testimonial* dimensions of this arche-performative of the 'mighty *might*' that is given to Derrida to be read by Hélène Cixous. In its *quasi*-suicidal in-operativity or *im-puissance*, the 'passive resistance' of the 'act' of this *passion* is presented as perhaps more forceful than any intentional suicide or sacrifice. Continuing with the prioritisation of the body of the 'martyred mark' and a necessary caesura or incision for any event or act of language to be possible, the event of *passion* is considered through the biomedical trope of autoimmunity and through the *operation of the other* that is exemplified in the event of circumcision.

In Chapter 3B, we follow Derrida's proposal that in order to testify, one must engage in an impossible act of poetic invention. In Chapter 5, the corporeality of the event emphasised in Chapters 3B and 4 is continued by looking to Derrida's countersignature of the poetico-testimony of Paul Celan and the autoimmune wounding that punctuates the Celanian corpus, both as a trauma and a blessing. Continuing to probe the task of philosophy in a 'time of terror', it is proposed that Celan's poetic mark exemplifies the 'terror of time' (the 'time is out of joint' of *Hamlet* or the 'madness of the date' at work across the Celanian corpus), as a machinic anachrony, dislocation and seriality that threatens any archival testimony and hence any truth to be revealed. Here the *passional* and *testimonial* event is re-inflected once again, this time through a reading of what Celan names the 'secret of the encounter' and the 'majesty of the present', leading to a virtual 'duel' between the 'I am the martyr' of Satti, as 'political actor', and the 'passive resistance' of the 'poetic counter-word' that for Celan is exemplified by the suicidal exclamation, 'Long live the King!', of Lucile Duplessis in Georg Büchner's 1835 play *Danton's Death*. Finally, the potentially fatal anachrony of Celan's poetic date is taken, via the tele-mediated and virtual milieu of addresses such as Satti's, to a consideration of apocalyptic revelation – as the 'truth without truth' of testimony – through which we return to the seven trajectories – or 'seven seals', as we shall be calling them – of 'passion' that Derrida presents in *Demeure* (for the seven trajectories, see Appendix).

## Chapter 1: Martyrdom and Testimony

In memory of its Christian-Roman meaning, “passion” always implies martyrdom, that is – as its name indicates – testimony. A passion always testifies.

–Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*<sup>6</sup>

Upon a brief survey of historical and religious studies, as well as etymological analyses, it quickly becomes apparent that the concept of martyrdom entails or implies some form of witnessing and/or testifying (i.e. bearing witness); that (very schematically for the time being) the martyr is a witness and that his/her martyrdom testifies and is subsequently witnessed by an audience, with the witnessing and bearing witness of the audience being necessary for the martyrdom to be recognised and authenticated as such; in other words, for the ‘martyrdom’ to take place. True to this, the martyrdom or *passion* of this exemplary Franco-Maghrebian (*Ecce homo*) involves a suffering and testimony, as is stated in the epigraph cited in our Introduction and on another instances across *Monolingualism*, which we will be reading in Chapter 3B. Whilst we will be tracing the polysemy (or rather, ‘dissemination’) of the word *passion*, in time reaching a paleonymic re-invention of this term which nonetheless *continues to bear the trace* of its history, for the sake of clarity let us for the moment take this to signify the sufferings of a martyr, or martyrdom (OED).

However, to reiterate the questions posed in the Introduction, might the insinuation of Derrida’s provocation be that there is *also* always some martyrdom or passion at work in testimony? And thus that this implication is bi-directional? And hence the ‘reflections of’ of our title, which we will in time be thinking further in terms of a generalised *passion* and *testimony* which, when thought together in their bi-directional ‘conjugation’, function as what Rodolphe Gasché describes as ‘the tain of the mirror’: as the non-reflecting surface which backs the glass in a mirror and which makes the (self-)reflection that has always been the object of philosophy possible?<sup>7</sup> This is the question from which this study takes its point of departure. In *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, Derrida offers a reading of Maurice Blanchot’s *récit*, *The Instant of My Death* (1994) in which the narrator (who may possibly be Blanchot ‘himself’; we will never know) testifies to his having narrowly escaped death by Nazi firing squad. Reading this text as exemplary of the *passion(s) of literature*, Derrida proposes that traversing Blanchot’s text can be found at least seven ‘knotted trajectories’ of the ‘lines of force’ (we note that Derrida’s does not say ‘the meaning’) that semantically traverse the word ‘passion’ (D 25; see Appendix). *At least* seven trajectories, then, around which this study

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<sup>6</sup> ‘D’ 27.

<sup>7</sup> As Gasché relates, the word *tain* is an altered word from the French *étain* and, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, refers to ‘the tinfoil, the silver lining, the lustreless back of the mirror.’ Derrida’s work, for Gasché, does not refute reflection and reflexivity in favour of a dream of immediacy, but rather his work ‘questions reflections unthought, and hence the limits of its possibility’ (Gasché, *Tain* 6).

weaves, in turn multiplying and translating them in the context of each chapter, across historical spans and in differing situations.<sup>8</sup>

Recalling the emphasis on truth with which we began, we can begin to follow Derrida's proposal, in trajectory 6 (see Appendix), that there is an inherent *passion of testimony*, insofar as testimony suffers, undecidably, a connection to fiction, perjury and lie, and is never able or obligated to become proof (D 27-8). Whereas what Derrida suggests here is that testimony 'itself both 'is' and suffers from a passion, this study takes this further by following the passion suffered by the witness *in* and *for* testifying, in turn proposing that a generalised *passion* can be found to colour the experience of the 'I' *per se*. Probing this experience of *passion* in various dimensions, and conjugating it with a generalised *testimoniality* that we will be arguing is, for Derrida, the experience of any relation to the other, it is argued that any responsibility and any (performative) event requires a paradoxical affirmation of this combination of *passion* and *testimoniality*, made in the space of what we will be naming a 'poethics of the event'. Furthermore, if, as we will see, a crucial aspect of the *passion* of testimony is its very repeatability – a repeatability and alterability which allows both the witness and the 'referent' of their testimony to become substitutable, and which in turn allows for the above-mentioned generalising and formalising moves – it is argued that this 'structural' and universal condition of *passion*, as another name for Derridean *différance*, is what accounts for this formalisation and *a priori* substitutability; that it accounts for the seeming crime it commits, with this violation or betrayal in fact serving as the only possibility of testimony or the promise of truth. In short, to use an idiom often recited both by Derrida and his readers, it is argued that this differential *passion* makes testimony possible only in its impossibility. And thus the sufferance that *must*, paradoxically, be borne and responded to at every turn.

Whilst never proposing to reduce philosophy to literature (see RDP 78-9), for Derrida it is where the frontier between philosophy and literature trembles that philosophy is most called to thought.<sup>9</sup> Or, we might add, as this thesis sets out to demonstrate, between philosophy and testimony. Whilst this claim will be central for our thinking of the deeply unsettling and yet simultaneously immensely productive relationship between testimony and fiction, the proposition here is that it is through the notion of a generalised *testimoniality* and *passion*, both of which are deeply imbued with this inherent parasitism of philosophy by literature, that philosophy finds its deconstructive condition.

Whilst countless studies exist regarding martyrdom – both as a philosophical, historical, religious and political phenomenon within determined geographies and on a wider conceptual plane that transcends such specificities – and whilst there has been an identifiable renaissance in interest in the passions across the humanities and social sciences, this study for the most part limits itself to drawing from the oeuvre of Derrida, across which references to P/passion, in its various tenors,

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<sup>8</sup> Having said this, we will not be paying equal attention to all of the trajectories, as will become apparent.

<sup>9</sup> 'Pas' 10. As cited in Geoffrey Bennington, 'On Transcendental Fiction', *Discourse*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 169-188 (p. 169).

abound.<sup>10</sup> Rather than offering an exhaustive ‘inventory’ of these occurrences, we merely point out that whilst at the beginning of his oeuvre the term ‘passion’ is used in the conventional sense, denoting a *passivity* as the experience of being acted upon by external agency (for instance, by an impression from without) or of *affect* (see Diff. 137 & OED), by thinking *passion* as the experience of what Derrida coins as ‘*différance*’ – by which, in short, we mean experience *per se* – *passion* comes to be paleonymically re-invented, maintaining the old term but re-inflecting the seeming mere passivity with what we will be thinking as a certain ‘constitutive’ force (what others have named a ‘radical passivity’<sup>11</sup>), as a paradoxical condition of possibility through which we will also be thinking *desire* and the experience of being *impassioned*.<sup>12</sup> Both standing ‘inside’ and remaining ‘outside’ the tradition, then, this paleonymic gesture (as with Derrida’s thought in general) perpetuates the tradition whilst also breaking with it, remaining faithful to it precisely in a gesture of betrayal in which inheritance takes the form of countersigning *otherwise*.<sup>13</sup>

Following a Derridean line of thinking, testimony requires *exemplarity*, which means *absolute singularity*. But this exemplarity is fraught with contradiction, for in order for something (the testimony) or someone (the witness) to be exemplary, it/they must be at once opposed to its/their contrary; it/they must be replaceable (by *anyone*) in the very place where it/they are irreplaceable. Thus all of a sudden the unique becomes universal; *universalisable*. It is this *tension* or *re-marking* between the singular and the universal – between the empirical and the formal, the unique and the substitutable, the ontical and the ontological – which will come to form one of the main reasons for the suffering of a passion both on the part of testimony and the witness, as is played out exemplarily in *Monolingualism*.

Whilst the object of our enquiry is the relationship between testimony and martyrdom on a conceptual level, it would not have been possible to reach the claims herein without the testimonies of determined, historical examples; notably those of Derrida and Satti. In other words, without what is *revealed* by the testimonial singularity of autobiographical anamnesis. As Derrida

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<sup>10</sup> We will cite from examples of such studies, above all in relation to religious and theologico-political of martyrdom, shortly. For an informative overview of the passions in political and philosophical thought, see Victoria Kahn, Neil Saccamano & Daniela Coli, eds., *Politics and the Passions: 1500-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Regarding the ‘radical passivity’ in Levinas and Blanchot to which Derrida’s understanding of *passion* is heavily indebted, see Thomas Carl Wall, *Radical Passivity: Lévinas, Blanchot, and Agamben* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> For reasons that will become clear, as far as I am aware, Derrida only uses the term ‘radical passivity’ on one occasion, and within quotation marks, citing a comment made by Richard Beardsworth (see NM 254). Whilst the term will not be used in what follows, the impossible experience of what we are here naming *passion* is described in much the same way by a readers of Derrida such as Richard Beardsworth in his *Derrida and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1996), albeit (at times also citing Levinas) under the name of ‘radical passivity’ (see pp. 129, 130, 131).

Having said this, as we will see, Derrida is never entirely consistent in his use of terminology across his oeuvre (although this is often attributable to the risks inherent in translation), and despite his wariness of the term ‘radical’ and assertion that its value must be deconstructed (see N 15-6) he nevertheless uses it on several occasions, even associating radicality with the criticality of deconstruction (see P&F 152; see also PF 67; SM 20, 42; EO 69; and NM 232, 233).

<sup>13</sup> Regarding the gesture of paleonymy see ‘Positions’ 71.

writes in *Monolingualism*, ‘certain individuals in certain situations testify to the features of a structure nevertheless universal, revealing it, showing it, and allowing it to be read “more vividly”’ (M 20). With this in mind, let us turn to the ‘uncommon “situation”’ (M 19), as Derrida calls it in *Monolingualism* (there speaking of himself), of Jamal Satti (1962-1985). Although it has taken several pages to reach Satti, it must be made clear that it was only upon learning of his story, through the performance-video *Three Posters*, that I revisited Derrida’s enigmatic testimony in *Monolingualism*; that, in effect, this research began with the testimony of this singular, unique individual.

### **‘I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti’**

*Three Posters: A Performance-Video* by Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroué was first performed at the Ayloul Festival in Beirut in 2000, and subsequently toured various European venues and festivals in the years that followed.<sup>14</sup> As we will be arguing is the case with any given testimony (above all when we think this in its poetico-performative dimensions), there was no insurance against the mistranslation and misunderstanding of the work.<sup>15</sup> Created with a Beirut audience in mind, rather than a foreign audience who could not be expected to be aware of the nuances of the history addressed, the two eventually ceased performing the piece, due to its being readily appropriated by

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<sup>14</sup> Elias Khoury (b. Lebanon, 1948) is a journalist, literary critic, novelist and dramaturg. Khoury is considered one of the leading contemporary Arabic intellectuals and writers. Rabih Mroué (b. Lebanon, 1966) is a stage and film actor, visual artist and director/writer of several plays, performances and videos which have been performed worldwide. In recent years he has exhibited his work, rooted in theatre but including videos and installation pieces, as well as ‘performance lectures’, internationally. Across various mediums, Mroué’s work insistently probes the problem of representation and performativity and the questions of ‘truth versus fiction’ and ‘the fabrication of truth’. The representation of the martyr-figure and the questioning of the status of testimony recur across Mroué’s works. Regarding the ‘documentary’ status of the works, see Hila Peleg and Stella Bruzzi, ‘Towards “Approximation”’, in *Rabih Mroué (A BAK Critical Reader in Artists’ Practice)*, ed. Maria Hlavajova & Jill Wender (Utrecht & Rotterdam: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst & post editions, 2012), pp. 46-71.

It appears that the inclusion of Satti’s video-testimony in *Three Posters* sparked off a debate within the Lebanese contemporary art milieu and its international audience regarding the representation of the martyr-figure, which in turn provoked reflections on representation in general, in particular in relation to the documentary, violence, the temporality of the image, and death. Artists to have responded to *Three Posters* and Satti’s testimony include the film-maker and theorist Jalal Toufic, as well as the duo Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

Published responses to *Three Posters* include: Jalal Toufic, ‘I am the Martyr Sanâ’Yusif Muhaydlî’, *Discourse*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Winter 2002), pp. 76-84; Joanna Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, ‘A State of Latency’, in Bruno Latour & Peter Weibel, eds., *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image in Science, Religion and Art* (London: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 242-47; Chantal Pontbriand, ‘Rabih Mroué: Langage, performativité, violence’/‘Rabih Mroué: Language, Performance, Violence’, *Parachute* 124: ‘Violence Unlimited’ (October-December 2006), pp. 100-117; Anna Hiddleston, ‘Rabih Mroué’, *Les Inquiets: Cinq artistes sous la pression de la guerre/The Anxious: Five artists under the pressure of war* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2008), pp. 42-51; and Juan A. Gaitán, ‘Conciliations: Witness and Spectator’, *Afterall* 25 (Autumn/Winter 2010), pp. 81-5. This study will limit itself for the most part to its own reading of *Three Posters*, however, supplemented by the commentary offered by Mroué, for instance in ‘The Fabrication of Truth’, an article that accompanied the publication of the transcript of *Three Posters* in *Tamás: Contemporary Arab Representations: Beirut/Lebanon*, ed. Catherine David & Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (Rotterdam: Witte de Witt, 2002), pp. 114-17. See also Mroué and Khoury’s reflections on the work in ‘Three Posters a performance/video’ in *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Fall 2006), pp. 182-91.

<sup>15</sup> Having ceased to perform *Three Posters*, Mroué instead developed *On Three Posters: Reflections on a Video Performance by Rabih Mroué* (2004), a 17 minute video-lecture which reflects upon both *Three Posters* and its reception. This work is also occasionally performed as a lecture-performance of approximately 45 minutes.

the media for its own agenda. Whilst for Mroué ‘the fate of every artwork is to be appropriated by the authorities that are in power – no matter which authorities’, in this case the post-11 September normalisation of the ‘war on terror’ caused readings of the piece to be so decisively determined that it became impossible to continue performing it as before.<sup>16</sup> I offer a brief summary of the piece:



Still from *Three Posters*. Image © the artists

On the stage, a television monitor hanging midway from the ceiling shows a chair behind which is a poster made up of photographs of Lebanese martyrs and a communist Lebanese flag. A man clad in khaki enters the frame, sits on the chair and addresses the camera:

**‘I am the martyr comrade Khalil Ahmad Rahhal.’**

He then proceeds to tell his story, repeating his name, and stating: ‘I am now here to declare my last call before committing tomorrow morning a suicidal operation upon which the Front Command has agreed. I have a couple of words that I want to state before I depart, words which summarize my personal beliefs.’ He continues by offering autobiographical details that go some way to explaining his motives for choosing to commit his suicidal operation. Following this, two further takes are shown, in which ‘the comrade martyr Khaled Ahmad Rahhal’ repeats his message. Although many sentences are repeated, the format of each testimony differs slightly.

**‘I am the martyr comrade Khaled Rahhal.’**

**‘I am Khaled Ahmad Rahhal.’**

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<sup>16</sup> See Cosmin Costinas, Maria Hlavajova & Jill Wender, ‘In Place of a Foreword: A Conversation with Rabih Mroué’, in *Rabih Mroué (A BAK Critical Reader in Artists’ Practice)*, op. cit., pp. 10-23 (pp. 14-5).



Still from *Three Posters*. Image © the artists

Following the three takes, he takes off his military T-shirt and beret and is left wearing regular clothing. At this point a door under the monitor opens, through which a second man (Khoury) appears on the stage. Moving across the stage, he takes a seat. Through the open door, the room that is seen on the monitor is visible, along with the first man (now in his regular clothing) – ‘the comrade martyr Khaled Ahmad Rahhal’ – and the camera that is videotaping him.

‘Taking a sheet of paper from his trousers’ pocket, the first man reads the following: ‘My name is Rabih Mroué, born in 1966, Beirut, became a member of the Lebanese Communist Party in 1983.’ He proceeds to offer information regarding his involvement in operations of the Lebanese National Resistance, up until his last, cancelled operation against the Israeli Occupation. ‘I greet with respect the martyr comrade Khaled Rahhal who fell in the clashes of western Beirut, 1987 [...] Now, as the liberation of southern Lebanon has been achieved, I cannot find anything worth to offer [*sic*] to the memory of all the martyrs of the Lebanese National Resistance Front, other than the following show.’ Leaving the room, Mroué enters the stage and takes a seat next to the second figure, places a video-cassette into the player and presses play. The two men watch the monitor.



Recording of the final testimony of Jamal Satti. Broadcast on Lebanese National Television (Tele-Liban), 6 August, 1985

What the audience now sees on the screen is the video-testimony, recorded on 6 August 1985, of Jamal Satti, a member of the Lebanese Communist Party and a combatant for the National Resistance Front. This testimony was recorded just a few hours before the suicidal operation he carried out against the headquarters of the Israeli Military governor in Hasbayya in Southern Lebanon, which the Israeli army was at the time occupying. By chance, Khoury and Mroué came across the original, uncut videotape, which they decided to show without any editing. Here, Satti repeats his testimony three times in front of the camera before deciding upon the best version to present to the public; the version that would appear as an incontestable, unequivocal document.

**‘I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti.’**

**‘I, the martyr comrade Jamal Satti.’**

**‘I, the martyr comrade Jamal Satti.’**

Like the fabricated testimony of Khaled Ahmad Rahhal, the difference between these three versions is minimal. A definitive version was chosen and subsequently broadcasted on the 8 pm news programme of the Lebanese national television channel (Tele-Liban), as was often the case for this kind of operation.

Following the screening of the video-testimonies, the second actor (Khoury) reads from a paper, describing the events that took place surrounding Satti’s martyrdom operation. This is followed by a screening of an interview with Elias Atallah, a member of the Communist Party’s National Council, in which the politician alludes to ‘the deep meaning of the notion of a suicidal operation and its justification and endorsement,’ and describes his attempts to dissuade Satti: ‘I tried to make clear to him how his contribution would be more efficacious without his suicidal operation. But I felt that he was adamant.’ He enlarges on what were, in his view, the mistakes of the Communist party in relation to the activity of resistance, stating that ‘the fear of speaking out about the threatening party is what destroyed the resistance.’ Actor # 1 (Mroué) then gathers together the props from the stage and turns the camera off, at which point the monitor goes off. Actor # 2 (Khoury) turns the lights out. The performance is over.

Just as Khoury and Mroué happened by chance to stumble upon this video-tape, so I too found the documentation of this performance piece by chance (and this aleatory element will be vital in what follows). And just as they immediately fell beneath the spell of Satti’s repeated attempts to testify to his ‘martyrdom’,<sup>17</sup> I was confounded by the enigma of this brief yet

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<sup>17</sup> ‘We gave in to temptation despite ourselves, and we decided to present the tape to the public as it is, without editing’ (Mroué, FT 114). Khoury and Mroué relate how, when they first received Satti’s unedited video, their initial idea was simply to show the videotape alone. It seemed that the footage spoke by itself and did not require assistance from them. Having considered a few possible ways to present the tape, they finally decided upon the framework summarised above. Khoury & Mroué, statement accompanying a performance of *Three Posters* at Kunsten Festival des Arts, Belguim, May 2002. <<http://www.kunstenfestivaldesarts.be/archief/en/2002/spect/stl18.html>>.



overcharged and seemingly miraculous utterance – **‘I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti’** – and its inclusion within this performance, and began by wishing to read it and ask, principally, what it was; what it could possibly mean and what its consequences were. And if, indeed, it was *possible*.

### **The emergence of ‘I am the martyr’**

The first ‘martyrdom operation’ (*‘amaliyyāt istishbādīyya*) in Lebanon aimed at the Israeli army took place on 11 November 1982, following a major Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June of that year.<sup>18</sup> Nowadays, most spectacular suicidal attacks (whether perceived as terroristic or heroic) have been accompanied by pre-recorded video messages sent to the visual media which show the subjects of the attacks informing their audience, explaining and justifying their actions, embracing the audience, and attempting to inspire their audience to follow their example.<sup>19</sup> Whilst the Bassidji martyrs in Iran often left written testimonies and audio cassettes and, more rarely, video cassettes, it was the Lebanese martyrs who popularised the use of video cassettes.<sup>20</sup> In *Three Posters*, both ‘Khaled Rahhal’ (Mroué) and Jamal Satti start their video-testimonies with the words **‘I am the comrade martyr...’** and then state their name. According to the Lebanese writer and filmmaker Jalal Toufic, it seems that it was the 17 year-old Sanâ’ Yûsif Muhaydlî who, on 4 September 1985, was the first to use such a locution, which became a recurring motif in subsequent televised testimonies of Lebanese resistance fighters who died in martyring operations against the Israeli army and the South Lebanon Army (SLA; an Israeli surrogate force).<sup>21</sup> In fact, for Toufic, ‘[t]his locution may be

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<sup>18</sup> Farhad Khrosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah’s New Martyrs*, trans. David Macey (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 146. See also Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 135. As Pape relates, on 6 June 1982, Israel launched a major invasion of Lebanon. Within days, six and a half divisions of the Israeli Defence Forces occupied large parts of the country up to Beirut. Having succeeded in ousting the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) to Tunisia, Israel began to implement a long-term plan to stabilise Maronite Christian control over the government in Beirut (p. 131).

<sup>19</sup> Studies that deal with the role of the media spectacle and audience’s receptions of suicidal operations and martyr-videos that have informed this study include: Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2005) (see esp. the chapters ‘Media and Martyrdom’ and ‘Seeing is Believing’); and Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York & Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Khrosrokhavar, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> That morning, at 11 a.m., Muhaydlî had crashed her explosives-filled car into an Israeli military convoy at Batir gate, Jizzin. According to the Israeli military spokesman, she killed two officers and wounded two soldiers. *Martyring Operations: Documents and Images; The Lebanese National Resistance, 1982-1985* (Beirut: Al-Marqaz al-‘Arabî lil-Ma’lûmât, 1985), p. 123. As cited in Toufic, ‘I am the Martyr Sanâ’Yusif Muhaydlî’, pp. 77-8. Toufic continues by listing six examples of martyrs who used this locution, along with the dates and details of their operations.

Prior to her martyrdom, Muhaydlî worked in a video store in West Beirut, and during this time she recorded 36 videotapes of the martyr Wadji as Sayigh, who performed his martyrdom operation against enemy forces in an area close to that where Muhaydli performed her own operation. It is in that video store that she herself videotaped her testimony using a VHS camera. For Toufic, Muhaydli can be considered as the first Lebanese video artist (p. 81 n. 4). See also Khrosrokhavar, pp. 146-47.

Khrosrokhavar gives further information regarding Muhaydlî: ‘Born into a Shi’ite family from southern Lebanon in 1968, she belonged to the Syrian Social National Party, a non-confessional party calling for the establishment of a greater Syria which would unite Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Cyprus. Its martyrs claimed to be fighting to free Palestine and southern Lebanon from the Israeli yoke’ (pp. 146-147).

one of the major inventions of the Lebanese war.<sup>22</sup>

As stated above, it was upon learning of Satti's testimony that I returned to Derrida's presentation of himself as a martyr figure. So let us trace our way (along a far from direct route) back from *Three Posters* and Satti's testimony, via the historical concept of martyrdom, to this perhaps still somewhat elusive reference to the martyr figure in *Monolingualism of the Other* with which we began.

### **Martyrdom and testimony**

Although Satti's operation was carried out in the name of the Lebanese Communist Party and the Lebanese National Resistance Front, both suicidal operations and video-recordings such as Satti's are nowadays commonly associated with Islamic militant groups, and these videos have become a staple part of the rituals surrounding the executing of such attacks. Whilst post-11 September conceptions tend to associate such attacks with 'radical' or 'fundamentalist' Islamic groups, studies point out that the roots of these operations are in fact secular, and that the motivations for such attacks, even amongst the religiously active, lie closer to geo-political issues rather than being motivated purely by religious beliefs (although I would argue, following Derrida and a host of other thinkers who probe the theologico-political, that the possibility of delimiting the religious and the geo-political is questionable; see esp. FK and AANJ).<sup>23</sup> Rather than entering into a debate surrounding this phenomenon, what is significant for this study is that these videos are commonly referred to as video-*testimonies* and that in his video-testimony, Satti (like others) refers to himself as a *martyr*, an appellation that would be accepted both within the communities 'in whose name he speaks' and other sympathetic communities. Whilst Satti's operation was carried out in the name of the Lebanese Communist party, neither the term *testimony* nor *martyrdom* can be dissociated from the religious and, even if this appears to mark a betrayal of the ethos behind Satti's act, we will return repeatedly to the religious throughout what ensues (this will be addressed most explicitly in Chapter 3, where we will stress the importance of what we can call a 'religion without religion' in Derrida's

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<sup>22</sup> Toufic, 'I am the Martyr Sanâ'Yusif Muhaydlî', p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Pape, *Dying To Win*, and Joseph Croitoru, *Der Märtyrer als Waffe. Die historischen Wurzeln des Selbstmordattentats* [The Martyr as a Weapon: The Historical Roots of Suicide Bombing] (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003), downloadable English extract available at <<http://www.litrix.de/buecher/sachbuecher/jahr/2004/maertyrerwaffe/leseproben/enindex.htm>>.

Croitoru references the Japanese Kamikazes of World War II as the first to use suicide attacks systematically as a weapon. Already the spectacular aspect was central, insofar as the deeds of Kamikaze pilots were staged for the media (both print and film) to enhance psychological warfare. Croitoru traces the historical evolution of suicide attacks, noting how the Japanese soon found imitators in National Socialist Germany and Korea, and how the tactic of suicide attacks also found its way to the Middle East (by way of North Korea, which had supported terrorist organisations around the world since the 1970s), where it mutated into suicide bombing. The date of the birth of suicide bombing, according to Croitoru, can be traced to May 30, 1972, when a somewhat improvised suicide attack by the Japanese Red Army at Lod Airport in Israel stunned the world. This event proved to be the decisive trigger for Palestinian groups to put this weapon to systematic use (online pdf, pp. 5-6).

thought).<sup>24</sup> Since 11 September, the terms ‘martyr’ and ‘martyrdom’ have spread from being popular on a localised level to being part of the global vocabulary.<sup>25</sup> Looking to Satti’s testimony, we see that his discourse is trapped in images of the hereafter that, as Joseph Croitoru notes, ‘are still widely held in their traditional societies, whether or not they themselves are strictly religious.’<sup>26</sup> The terminology, rhetorical devices, semantics and iconography of the martyr figure are deeply rooted in the religious and it is in religious discourses, predominantly those of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, that the martyr figure him/herself originates.<sup>27</sup>

Having stated this, the scope of this study does not allow for a consideration of the historical and religious figuration of the martyr. Therefore, I limit what follows to an exploration of the conjunction between martyrdom and testimony. What is vital here is that, before arriving at the specificities of any given religion, martyrdom means witness (we will be looking to the etymological conjunction imminently). As David Cook writes in *Martyrdom in Islam*:

‘Witness is the most powerful form of advertisement, because it communicates personal credibility and experience to an audience. Therefore, it is not surprising that the world’s missionary religions have developed the art of promotional martyrdom into a process that is identifiable and fairly constant through different faiths.’<sup>28</sup>

For martyrdom to occur, there must be an audience; there must be some testimony borne which is in turn witnessed and subsequently borne witness to. Nobody is born a martyr. Rather, and like the formation of a ‘hero’ as an exemplary role model in society, ‘the martyr figure is based on the common agreement reached by groups that shape the views and opinions of a community.’<sup>29</sup> In other words, it can be said to be based on a system of beliefs in which the power of testimony is central. Rather than being verifiable, one can only ever be *believed* to be a martyr; one only *becomes* a

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<sup>24</sup> Another thinker to have stressed the impossibility of separating the (geo-)political and the religious, often drawing from Derrida’s writings, and above all where this concerns the media of which Satti’s testimony is a part, is Hent de Vries. For instance, as is of pertinence in relation to Satti’s tele-mediated testimony: ‘Most analytical and empirically informed studies on the recent transformations of the information based economy, society, and culture, on the one hand, and of the contemporary role of religion in the public sphere, on the other, have a common blind spot. What they fail to see is that it is precisely an intrinsic and structural relationship between the new media and the renewed manifestation of religion that enables a comprehension of the ways in which socio-cultural identity, diversity, a certain commonality and universality as well as adversity and violence, are constructed *and*, so to speak, *diffused*.’ De Vries, ‘Of Miracles and Special Effects’, *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 50, Issues 1-3 (December 2001), pp. 41-56 (p. 41).

<sup>25</sup> Croitoru writes the following with regards to the Palestinian experience, but this is nonetheless relevant for the secular Lebanese and Syrian resistance groups of the 1980s: ‘Although it may be the general opinion that suicide bombers are always religious fanatics, this is contradicted by the much earlier experience of Palestinian suicide bombers in the 1970s, who portrayed themselves as leftist anti-imperialist guerrillas, and not as Islamic holy warriors. This did not deter their sponsors from characterizing them as martyrs, however, in the process making use of the Islamic tradition of warrior martyrs, albeit in secularized form’ (online pdf, p. 6).

<sup>26</sup> Croituro, online pdf p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> For a summary of the earliest martyrdom narratives from Islam, Christianity and Judaism that continue to influence our contemporary era, see David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. Chapters 1 & 2.

<sup>28</sup> Cook, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Friederike Pannewick, ‘Introduction’ to Friederike Pannewick, ed., *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity* (Wiesbaden: Reichart, 2004), pp. 1-21 (p. 1).

martyr upon being authenticated as such by an audience. This audience ‘need not be physically present at either the pre-martyrdom suffering or the act of martyrdom, but must have access to information concerning them.’ In the case of audiences which witnesses a martyrdom for themselves, it needs to coalesce around the collective memory of this traumatic event. If, on the other hand, the audience is not present, ‘then there has to be a communicative agent, who will either shape the narrative or narrate the events to one who will transmit them [i.e. bear witness, on an indirect level] to the outer, secondary audience.’<sup>30</sup>

Whilst this ‘communicative agent’ has historically taken the form of oral narratives, literary and pictorial representations, passion plays and dramatic re-enactments, today such means of representation take what is arguably their most powerful and wide-reaching form through the mediation of television and the internet.<sup>31</sup> As will be our argument in the case of Satti’s operation, this communicative stage is crucial; indeed, ‘perhaps even more crucial than the actual suffering and martyrdom itself.’<sup>32</sup>

In his published ruminations upon *Three Posters*, Mroué asks us to consider whether the ‘martyrdom’ consists in the moment of the actual physical operation (the moment of Satti’s death), or whether it takes place at another moment. In effect, what Mroué proposes is that the singularity of the ‘event of martyrdom’ is shattered, and we are faced with three possible moments at which the ‘martyrdom’ takes place. If such operations were supposed to cause great damage to the Israeli Occupying Forces, is it not in fact the broadcasting of the video-testimonies themselves that do the most damage? Is the media image thus not more efficient than the physical death? Does the ‘martyrdom’ then take place directly before the viewer of such testimonies, through the filmic image? Or does it take place at the moment of the testimony’s articulation; the moment at which Satti sat down before the camera and started to speak? Or could it take place more than once? (see Mroué, FT 115).

In terms of the moment of the video’s being broadcast, here the bearing witness of the martyr and the witnessing and subsequent bearing witness of the audience is bound up with the notion of *exemplarity* and *legacy*. Tremendous importance was placed on how the community would understand and remember the actions of the soon-to-be-deceased, and this community support played a pivotal role in encouraging individuals to follow the example of ‘martyrs’ such as Satti.<sup>33</sup> As

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<sup>30</sup> Cook, pp. 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> For an extensive treatment of the historical figuration of the martyr in literature and drama, see Pannewick, ed., *Martyrdom in Literature*.

<sup>32</sup> Cook, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> It perhaps goes without saying that these videos would not have been made if it was not felt that they were effective in encouraging individuals to carry out similar operations. Robert Pape’s studies show that of 41 Lebanese martyrdom operations examined, at least 31 left public testimonials. We might compare death through martyrdom attacks with cases of suicide where, according to Pape, less than 20 per cent leave suicide notes and virtually none of these are directed at the community at large. Pape states that the ‘martyr’ statements did not fall on deaf ears, and that the trajectory of the number of suicide operations increased markedly over time: from 1 in 1982 to 8 in 1983 and 1984, and 32 in 1985 and 1986 (pp. 133-34). For a questioning of Pape’s study, see Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, pp. 54-5.

Ross Birrell writes, 'Suicide bombing is not simply a challenge to Israeli terror, a challenge to Israel to do its worst [...] Suicide bombing is a challenge directed also towards oneself, towards fellow Arabs to match the ostentatious display of the gift of death, the revolutionary challenge of martyrdom.'<sup>34</sup> Satti, for instance, states that it was his sacred duty towards his party and his country to *follow the example* of 'the great Farajallah El Helou and other heroes of the party: those who chose the most noble death, the death for the sake of the existence of the nation.'<sup>35</sup> According to one source, Satti's operation in fact caused no fatal injuries to the Israeli Army, thus suggesting that the mediated image is more 'effective' if the aim is to inspire sympathisers and strike terror into adversaries.<sup>36</sup>

Of these three 'moments of martyrdom', it is primarily around the first – the utterance of the words '**I am the martyr**' – that this study revolves, attempting to move to the very heart of this moment, as if laying it out on an operating table and performing an autopsy, and looking to the conjunction between testimony and martyrdom that takes place 'there', 'within' it (were such a thing as a 'there' and a 'within' of the instant possible). But to say *this* 'instant' is already problematic, for what is *re(-)markable* about Satti's video-testimony is the fact that this instant occurs thrice, thus immediately shattering its stigmatic singularity. It will be precisely this divisibility of the instant and the inherent *lapsus* between life and death, as Derridean *différance*, that lies at the heart of our proposition that in every testimony lies some passion, and that this is instantiated in determinate instances, each time as 'the exemplary or testimonial singularity of a martyred existence'.

In short, our thesis is that it is in this first moment that the testimony in effect 'brings about' the martyrdom. And thus, in the long run, it is this instant that causes so many philosophical presuppositions to shudder. By recording the video-testimony, the 'soon-to-be martyr' in effect signs a contract with the organisation with which he is allied, and the words '**I am the martyr**' come to take the form of an oath or pledge. According to the economist Mark Harrison, once the video has been recorded – once 'the contract has been signed' – the martyr is from that moment on 'gloriously dead, only temporarily still alive.' The risk of a broken contract, Harrison suggests, is covered (or insured against) by the widespread promotion of the 'living martyr'. Once the 'final statement of joy at becoming a martyr' has been sent out (here Harrison also refers to photographs

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<sup>34</sup> Ross Birrell, 'The Gift of Terror: Suicide Bombing as Potlach', in Graham Coulter-Smith & Maurice Owen, eds., *Art in the Age of Terrorism* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), pp. 96-113 (p. 103).

<sup>35</sup> Satti also cites the revolutionary and altruistic rhetoric of Che Guevara as an example, as well as saluting 'the martyrs who were killed in this holy resistance, sacrificing in their noble blood to enlighten our way to freedom and dignity.' Following this, he lists many names of martyrs, including Muhaydli (see Three Posters 107, 109). See also Muhaydli's testimony: 'I am from the South of the martyrs, the South of Sheikh Raghav Harb [...] the South of the hero Wajdi al-Sayegh'. Cited in Khrosrokhavar, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> Pape, p. 266 (Appendix 1).

and letters to friends and family), ‘the volunteer can no longer draw back since she [or he] will now lose more by breaking the contract than by implementing it.’<sup>37</sup> In Mroué’s words:

‘Indeed, it seems that the martyrdom is actualised at the very instant when the young man announces his martyrdom before the camera, through the fact of this announcement. This is why it is so natural for him to introduce himself by saying: **“I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti...”** and not **“I am Jamal Satti, soon to be martyr...”** The martyrdom has taken place before the suicide mission, and therefore, whether this operation has effectively taken place or not no longer makes any difference’ (Mroué, FT 115).

For Mroué, if, having signed the oath and broadcast his testimony, the martyr decided not to carry out his operation, he ‘would have no other choice than isolation and withdrawal from life.’

‘That is what actually happened in May 1968 with one of the resistance fighters: after the broadcast of his testimony on an official TV station, the rumour went out in the country that the operation had not taken place, that the martyr was not dead. What is more, Israel had announced that no incident had taken place inside the Lebanese territories that it was occupying at the time. What happened? We will never know. But, and this is what is most important, we know the body of the fighter will never be found. He has disappeared, and even today no one can say what became of him or what actually happened’ (Mroué, FT 117).<sup>38</sup>

### **‘*Anū as-shabīd*’**

Before launching into our argument regarding the necessary *passion* and instances of martyrdom implied in any testimony, let us set the scene with regard to the history of martyrdom and the implicit witnessing or testimony with which this concept emerged and took shape. We have just made clear how even a stringently secular operation such as Satti’s cannot be so swiftly removed from its religious martyrological heritage. Here, we might say, is an exemplary operation (‘martyrdom’) that, whilst radically cutting itself off from or *interrupting* some undeniable heritage (religion), even going so far as to overturn it or cause it to tremble, nevertheless at the same time acknowledges its indebtedness to it and in doing so, paradoxically, maintains a relation to it. This is a gesture that we will see at work time and again throughout this study, whether it be in Derrida’s paleonymic re-invention of traditional metaphysical concepts (‘passion’, for instance, or ‘performativity’) – in which, as with the religious and communist ‘martyr’, *the same name* is used, both with and against its genealogy and semantic filiations – or in his faithful betrayal of the writers whom he reads or inherits from.

In Arabic, the term for martyrdom (*shabāda*) is carefully distinguished from terms signifying suicide (*al-intihār*) and sacrifice (*a-dabīyya*).<sup>39</sup> (By referring to these operations as ‘martyrdom’ this is not to offer a personal endorsement of such acts being deemed ‘martyrdom’ as opposed to

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Harrison, ‘An Economist Looks at Suicide Terrorism’ in *World Economics* Vol. 7, No. 4 (2006), pp. 1-15 (p. 11).

<sup>38</sup> For both Mroué and the present study, ‘it is unimportant to know the degree to which this story is true’ (Mroué, FT 117).

<sup>39</sup> See Nader el Bizri, ‘Being-towards-Death: on Martyrdom and Islam’, *Cristianesimo nella storia* 27 (2006), pp. 249-279 (p. 250).

‘suicide’; such judgements are not the aim of this study.) However, to say that the linguistic significations of ‘martyrdom’ in the Arabic language are intricate would be an understatement, and the question regarding how to define martyrdom and the grounds upon which to distinguish between martyrdom, suicide and murder – although arguably one of the most pressing questions of our contemporary global society – is one that we can only begin to broach.<sup>40</sup> Martyrdom of any sort, be it Islamic or otherwise, defies easy categorisation and, as noted above, it merits emphasising that whether Jamal Satti can justifiably be called a martyr or not is not a question that this study seeks to answer. In what follows I simply offer some introductory comments regarding the etymological conjunction between martyrdom and testimony, in both Arabic and the Indo-European languages. Taking this conjunction as a common denominator, we can ask whether the two ‘martyr-testimonies’ – that of Satti and that of Derrida – are in fact as far apart as it might appear. In sketching out the outlines of the historical and religious convergences of martyrdom and testimony, we do so not with the aim of ‘proving’ some inherent ‘truth’ of a conjunction but rather in order to begin to get a sense of the manner in which this formal alliance is *revealed* and *borne witness to* in lived experiences, each time singular, of events of history. And, moreover, as will be our contention in examining the biographical ‘encounters’ of Derrida and the series of philosophical testimonies in which his corpus is inscribed, in the *lived experiences* of the act of ‘doing’ philosophy.

The English word ‘martyr’ originates from Old English *martir*, via the ecclesiastical Latin *martyr*, from the Greek *martur*, meaning ‘witness’; an expression used in Greek courts.<sup>41</sup> It was not until the second century AD that the word acquired the technical signification within Christian discourse of dying for a cause; choosing to suffer death rather than renouncing one’s beliefs; of one whose suffering and death bore witness to the truth of Jesus’ passion and resurrection. With this new meaning, the old sense of bearing witness (testifying) in a court gradually became blurred.<sup>42</sup> This same conjunction is evident in Arabic, in which the word *shabīd* (pl. *shuhadā*), meaning ‘martyr’ (Satti uses this term: ‘*ana a-shabīd...*’, literally ‘**I, the martyr**’, for the verb ‘to be’ in the present tense is not used in Arabic<sup>43</sup>), also – albeit with a slight diacritical mark of distinction –

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<sup>40</sup> As Pannewick writes: ‘The often fluid border between suicide and martyrdom – the former strictly rejected in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, while the latter is commended as the strongest proof of faith and an honourable act of sacrifice for the sake of God – is one of the most disturbing aspects of this cultural figure’ (p. 2). Any attempt to define the term *martyrdom* by distinguishing it from the terms *self-sacrifice* or *suicide* ‘faces the difficulty that we are not dealing with supra-temporal ontological facts, but with historically shifting social-moral criteria, which each community establishes for itself’ (p. 1).

<sup>41</sup> This etymological link is referenced by Derrida (see PP 75, 79).

<sup>42</sup> See ‘OED’; Khrosrokhavar, p. 6; and Keith Lewinstein, ‘The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam’, in Margaret Cormack, ed., *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 78-91 (p. 78). As Khrosrokhavar points out, this does not mean that the wish to die as a martyr did not exist among Christians until this point. Whilst Khrosrokhavar writes that this meaning of martyrdom did not emerge until the second century AD, Lewinstein dates this shift as being in the fourth century AD.

<sup>43</sup> See Fadlou Delmar, *Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Caravan Books, 1982), p. v and Chapter 1: ‘Arabic and “To Be”’ (pp. 1-17). The fact that there is no verb ‘to be’ in Arabic raises enormous ontological questions which cannot be addressed here. Rather, the discussions that follow are limited – unnaturally, admittedly, but due to spatial constraints – to considerations of languages of the Indo-European family.

refers to witnessing and testifying (*shāhid*): ‘*Shāhid* and *Shahīd*: One who tells, or gives information of, what he has witnessed, or seen or beheld with his eye; one who declares what he knows; a witness, as meaning one who gives testimony, or evidence.’<sup>44</sup>

And thus the noun *shahāda* consequently refers to ‘testimony’ as well as ‘martyrdom’. Despite the fact, as stated above, that Satti was not acting either in the name of Islam or any religious militant group, the Arabic vocabulary employed in the narrative of his video-testimony cannot be addressed in isolation from Islamic discourses. Regarding the etymological conjunctions between the two and the place of this within Islam, we can cite from the work of Nader el-Bizri, where we also begin to acquire a sense of the various dimensions that the testimony on the part of the martyr might take:

‘[T]he root of the terms “*shāhid*” (witness of the one having testimony) and “*shahīd*” (martyr) is to be found in the utterance “*shahd*”, which, in its derivational forms, points to an act of bearing witness, of giving testimony, of asserting an attestation or evidence, as well as confessing a particular acquired knowledge. A derivative from the root term “*shahd*” acts also as a designator that makes reference to the uttering of the “*shahādātayn*” in Islam; namely, the foundational declarations of one’s own belief in divine unity, by professing that: “*There is no deity but God*” [“*Ashadu anna lâ ilâha illâ‘Llâh...*”] and that “*Muhammad is God’s Messenger*” [“*...wa anna Muhammad rasûlu‘Llâh*”]. Moreover, the family of Arabic terms associated with the root “*shahd*” refer to the experience of being present in a spectacle and assembly, or to having evidential attestation of the happening of an event, while also being a literal manner of affirming the beholding of an incident with one’s own eyes. Etymologically, the designation “*shahāda*” relates to *testament*; namely, to confessing one’s own belief, and to bearing tribute to its veracity with sincerity and conviction (in this context, voluntary martyrdom becomes itself the most sacrificial form of this affirmation of faith and the furtherance of its cause, with an unsparing sense of altruism till death).<sup>45</sup>

Thus we begin to get a sense of the proposition made at the outset that the martyr figure him-/herself is a witness and that his/her martyrdom testifies. *What* exactly it is that the martyr witnesses and *how* exactly it is that the act of martyrdom testifies, however, would require a further clarification which would have to take into account Islamic, Christian and Jewish discourses, at the very least. Given that the scope of this study does not allow for this, I limit what follows to a brief continuation with regards to Islam as an example. As Cook writes: ‘From the genesis of Islam at the time when the first revelations came to the Prophet Muhammed (approx. 610 CE) Muslims have been certain that suffering for the faith constituted a powerful testimonial.’<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), entry *shin-bā-dāl* [sh-h-d]. Cited in Jalal Toufic, *‘Ashbūrā’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (Beirut: Forthcoming Books, 2005), p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, “*mashhad*”, which is a word that relates to the appellation “*shahāda*”, designates a place of assembly, a situational spectacle, a scene or *locus* of testimony, as well as being a topological mode of demarcating the location where martyrs were slain, or a reference to the shrines venerating them (namely as: *martyr*). El-Bizri, ‘Being-towards-Death’, pp. 250-52.

<sup>46</sup> Cook, p. 12. See also *The Qur’an*, 3:140, where *shahid* is translated as ‘martyr’: ‘if you have suffered a blow, they too have suffered one like it. We deal out such days among people in turn, for God to find out who truly believes, for Him to choose *martyrs* from among you...’ [emphasis added]. The translators of the Oxford World Classics 2004 edition of *The Qur’an* include the following footnote: ‘The noun *shahid* is much more complex than the term “martyr” chosen to render it in this context. The root *sh-h-d* conveys “to witness, to be present, to attend,” but also “to testify” or “to give evidence.” Thus the “martyrs” here are chosen by God to



Having spoken above of the manner in which the conjunction between witnessing and martyrdom is *borne witness to* in certain acts and usages, let us stress that it is not our contention that there exists some ‘meaning’ of either ‘martyrdom’ or ‘testimony’ that exists before or outside of these words, even though this question of the ‘meaning’ (i.e. significance and value) of martyrdom – if this hasn’t already been made clear – is arguably one of the most prescient and controversial, indeed violent and deadly, debates of our time.<sup>47</sup> (Whilst we will be speaking of the *passion* of the witness *for* testimony, how many lives have been lost and ruined in the attempt to bear witness to the significance and truth of ‘martyrdom’?) Rather, our question will be that of ‘the meaning of a given word’ insofar as this be understood not as the (hermeneutic) ‘meaning’ of some word but as the *significance* (understood in the sense of import, consequence or gravity) and *possibility* of the act of giving one’s word, as a promissory commitment (to some ‘truth’, perhaps) and as demonstrated by the oath of Satti’s first ‘moment’ of martyrdom. In what follows, then, whilst we draw from etymological sources as a catalyst for readings to follow, the authority of etymology is always regarded with some degree of suspicion.<sup>48</sup>

In reevaluating martyrdom, some scholars argue that this testimonial-martyrological conjunction had to be invented, since it did not originally exist. Whilst acknowledging the parallels in terminology and similarities in understanding of martyrdom in both Islam and Christianity, Keith Lewinston, for instance, proposes that there is one major difference: ‘for Muslims one earns the title of martyr [*shahīd*] without any apparent act of witnessing. The martyr’s sacrifice does not generally attest to anything specific, nor does it symbolise much beyond the obvious sense of death in the service of God’s plan.’<sup>49</sup> According to Lewinstein’s argument, the earliest Muslim testimony, the *Qur’an*, does not know the term *shahīd* in the sense of ‘martyr’, although the later exegetical tradition has sought to read ‘martyr’ into a few passages where the word appears.<sup>50</sup> He points out that generally Muslim scripture conveys the notion of martyrdom not through the root *sh-h-d*, but through circumlocutions such as ‘those slain in the path of God’, and proposes that *shahīd* ‘most likely acquired its classical sense of “martyr” not because of any intrinsic connection in Muslim minds between witnessing and self-sacrifice, but as a reflex of late antique Christian usage [Greek

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witness Him in heaven, are given the opportunity to give evidence of the depth of their faith by sacrificing their worldly lives, and will testify with the prophets on the Day of Judgement’ (note b, p. 44). *Qur’an*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Jalal Toufic, *‘Ashūrā’*.

<sup>47</sup> Derrida addresses this question of the manner in which any given word *testifies to* a usage, institutional practice, social organisation or *pragmatics* precisely in a discussion of the etymologies of testimony and martyrdom, questioning the implicit suggestion in the analyses of Emile Benveniste that there might exist any meaning of ‘witnessing’, for instance, before or outside of these words (PP 73).

Regarding the ongoing debate regarding what constitutes ‘martyrdom’, see for instance Loay Mudhoon, ‘When Is a Martyr a Martyr? (Arab and Western Media 10 Years after 9/11)’, *Qantara*, 26 August 2011. <<http://en.qantara.de/When-Is-a-Martyr-a-Martyr/17294c17799i1p464/index.html>>.

<sup>48</sup> As Derrida, famed for his playful use of etymology, writes, ‘etymology never provides a law and only provides material for thinking on the condition that it allows itself to be thought as well’ (FK 71).

<sup>49</sup> Lewinstein, p. 78.

<sup>50</sup> Lewinstein, pp. 78-79, esp. p. 79 n. 3.

*martyrs* = Syriac *sābdā* = Arabic *shahād*.<sup>51</sup> It is not the intention here, however, to fully reconstruct this debate, but rather to hint towards the complexities and discrepancies that surround the understanding of martyrdom, and towards the inherent instability of this testimonial act which always demands the *belief* of the audience-reader in order to be deemed ('certified') an act of martyrdom.<sup>52</sup> Looking to the vocabulary of testimony in other languages, it soon becomes apparent that for a start the etymological conjunctions between martyrdom and testimony reach a limit.

In one of his major texts on witnessing, 'Poetics and Politics of Witnessing' (2004), Derrida probes precisely the etymological chains of witnessing, with one of his major claims both here and in other texts being that, unlike the Greek *marturion* and the Latin *testimonium* ('testimony', 'deposition', 'attestation'), 'bearing witness is not *proving*', an axiom which '*we ought to respect* [emphasis added]' and which will be vital for this study (PP 75). Delving further, we see that the English 'testimony [*témoignage*]' and 'to testify [*témoigner*]' derive from the Latin *testimonium* and *testificari*, both from *testis* ('witness') with no reference to martyrdom (OED). 'Witness [*témoin*]', on the other hand, stems from the English 'wit', from the Old English *witan*, of Germanic origin (related to the Dutch *weten* and German *wissen*), from an Indo-European root shared by the Sanskrit *veda* 'knowledge' and Latin *videre* 'see', thus privileging ocular witnessing and the presence implied by this. Throughout the study we will be privileging Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence and the assurances that accompany it, including those of the sovereign 'subject', as testifying 'I' – demonstrating these to in fact be reassuring fantasies. In the Latin and Arabic, witnessing is conjoined to presence: the *testis* is the one who is present as a third (*terstis*), and *superstes*, which can mean 'witness' (*témoin* in French) – someone who, having been present and then having survived, plays the role of the one who testifies (PP 73) – and the family of Arabic terms associated with the root *shahd* refer to the experience of being present in a spectacle or assembly.<sup>53</sup> Although not etymologically implying the presence of the survivor (*superstes*) or the 'third' (*terstis*) of the Latin root *testis*, through its privileging of ocular witnessing, the English 'witness' – and, we can add, the Arabic *shahād*; the one who gives information of what he has witnessed or seen or beheld with his eye<sup>54</sup> – opens onto the 'irreducible *sense-perceptual* dimension of presence and past presence' that is implied by any claim to bear witness (see PP 75-6). Furthermore, to add to the discrepancies (or 'vertiginous' crossovers; PP 74) between genealogical and generational semantics, the German *Zeugen* ('witness'), *bezeugen* ('to bear witness'), *Bezeugung* ('testimony') and *Zeugnis* ('attestation') belong to a completely different semantic network (one that refers to 'generation', 'tool', 'procreation' and 'engendering'), with reference neither to presence nor the martyrdom implied in the Greek (PP 74).

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<sup>51</sup> For example, *Qur'an* 2:154 and 3:169. As cited in Lewinstein, p. 79.

<sup>52</sup> See El-Bizri, 'Being-towards-Death: on Martyrdom and Islam', p. 252.

<sup>53</sup> El-Bizri, p. 251.

<sup>54</sup> OED & Toufic, *Āshūrā*, p. 57.

### Testimony and *testimoniality*

Having sketched out an initial scene regarding martyrdom, it is worth clarifying how we will be approaching testimony. For the sake of clarity, we can delineate our handling of testimony in three strands which will be woven together, at times undecidably, in what follows. Firstly, there is the traditional and juridical concept of testimony, whereby some thing is *witnessed* (the injustices and heroic feats witnessed by Satti, for instance) and subsequently *borne witness to*. What is generally shared between the countless studies regarding witnessing is the inherent precariousness, trauma and indeed even impossibility of witnessing (all of which we will be thinking as the *passion*, or *wound*, of testimony), together with larger questions surrounding the instability of the archive and indeed the ‘principle of ruin’ inherent to representation in general, all of which will be our concern.<sup>55</sup> In this respect, we can take the following, to cite but a few, as examples of studies with which both this research and Derrida’s writings on testimony share a similar spirit: Giorgio Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1999) (above all where Agamben responds to the work of Primo Levi), Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1983), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s seminal *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Kelly Oliver’s *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001) and, more obliquely, Maurice Blanchot’s *The Writing of Disaster* (1980)<sup>56</sup>; as well as the recent move ‘beyond’ the so-called ‘age or era of the witness’ in the form of what Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman name the ‘advent’ of ‘Forensic Aesthetics’, an ongoing research that shows how the status of the object as evidence cannot be so easily delimited from the ambiguities and precariousness of the ‘human’ witness (with respect to this, our argument will be that there is always some ‘non-organic’ matter to thwart the ‘pure’ testimony of the so-called ‘human subject’).<sup>57</sup>

It is in the second trajectory that this study begins to differ from, while never entirely divorced from, traditional discourses regarding testimony. Whilst our reading of *Monolingualism* will show up the problematics of testimony as a form of autobiographical and historical anamnesis, and whilst our reading of the poetics of Paul Celan is concerned with the terrifying force of a principle of ruin at the heart of memorialisation and commemoration, our primary interest lies in testimony as a ‘present’ or ‘instantaneous’ act that one might call a ‘performative’, of which Satti’s ‘signing of the oath’ and the opening line, **‘I am the martyr’**, would be exemplary, subsequently folding this

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<sup>55</sup> Regarding the ‘principle of ruin’ at the heart of, but not limited to, the photographic image, see Cadava, ‘Lapsus’.

<sup>56</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Deen Abbeele (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992); Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995 [1986]). See also Ulrich Baer, *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Keenan & Eyal Weizman, *Mengele’s Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012). See esp. pp. 10-12. Regarding the ‘human’ versus ‘inanimate’, or ‘organic’ versus ‘inorganic’, this study will show how such a distinction cannot so easily be upheld.

back into considerations of the traditionally conceived temporality of testimony. In other words, both Satti's testimony and the *testimonial* 'I' in general are considered as an 'instantaneous' act which testifies to its own impossibility in a movement of impossibly pure and unmediated self-referentiality and self-reflection. As such, the temporality of testimony is more akin to that of religious testimony, prayer or confession, with the latter being prioritised in Chapters 2 and 3, following the Augustinian conception of confession as a performative and instantaneous promise to 'make truth', which Derrida likens to the martyr's self-offering.<sup>58</sup> In other words, our interest lies in an 'instantaneous act' which testifies to what we will be calling 'the *passion* of the instant'. In this respect, whilst many of the studies listed above consider the 'performativity' and 'dramatization' of testimony, we here take testimony as exemplary of a certain *passion* of the performative act *per se*, thus extending our considerations beyond the traditional genre of testimony.<sup>59</sup> As such, we move, following Derrida, both with and against the initial proponent of 'speech act theory' inaugurated in the 1960s, by J. L. Austin, and, although not citing from her work, come close to the writings of Judith Butler, whose theories are heavily indebted to Derrida.<sup>60</sup> Following Derrida's call for a re-invention of 'the performative', beyond existing theories, and bringing together the various threads that he leaves across his texts, we arrive at a conception of *passion* as the Derridean 'arche-performative'; as an utterly unheard of performative that, as with many studies on testimony and witnessing, demands that we reconsider the notion of subjectivity, mastery and sovereignty.

It is in this re-conceptualisation of *passion* – as a 'performative' act that is borne witness to exemplarily by *I am the martyr* and that exposes the impossible sovereignty and mastery of both suicide and the political and performative act, as an act of resistance *per se* – that this study speaks to, albeit *differently*, responses to the phenomenon of suicide bombing such as that of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for whom the suicide bomber radically throws into question the absolute power of sovereignty.<sup>61</sup> Whereas for Hardt and Negri the suicide bomber appears 'as a symbol of the inevitable limitation and vulnerability of sovereign power' and brings to light 'the ontological limits of biopower in its most tragic and revolting form', our interest lies not so much with what is revealed by the 'actual' attack of the suicide bomber as with the *operation* of the testimony and the structural *passion of testimony* that this seemingly exceptional act bears witness to; a *passion* the 'unpower' of which *appears* to in turn reveal, perhaps reflexively, the potential redundancy and

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<sup>58</sup> In this respect, the work of Hent de Vries, in his attentiveness to the overlaps between the philosophical and the theological, is instructive. De Vries stresses the pertinence of re-reading Augustine – as 'Derrida's witness' – *today*, and of Derrida's presentation of Augustine as 'the father of the classical, most pervasive and transgressive model for all testimony, notably in the form of confession, which has come to dominate the Western theological and literary canon' (de Vries, PTR 29).

<sup>59</sup> For a consideration of martyrdom and witnessing from within 'Performance Studies', see Dominika Laster, 'Bearing Witness to the (In)visible: Activism and the performance of witness in Islamic Orthopraxy', *Performance Research*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2008), pp. 64-76.

<sup>60</sup> See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>61</sup> Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, 'Sovereignty' in Ed Emery, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri & Danilo Zolo, *Reflections on Empire* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), pp. 49-59 (see esp. pp. 54-5).

powerlessness of suicidal operations such as Satti's.<sup>62</sup> But let us leave this question of the greater of two resistances, if we can even word it is such, open. What is important for the moment is that, unlike Hardt and Negri's propositions, the line we are following allows for this question of the relationship between a certain structural 'force' and empirical acts of violence (be they 'aggressive' or 'defensive') to be played out.

Thirdly, following Derrida, the *testimonial* experience, con-joined with the experience of *passion*, is extended beyond the confines of the genre of 'testimony' and, as 'a general and radical form of testimoniality' (TR 111), is prioritised as the impossibly 'non-prescriptive condition' of the responsible relation to the other, the dimensions of which we will unravel across this study; whether this 'other' be the 'who' of an addressee or 'interlocutor' (however threatening they may be), or the 'what' of a never fully masterable *tekhne* (see E, esp. 57) and the unknowable future. Or, even, of the event of a readable-unreadable text or work of art that appeals for our response. Moreover, insofar as this *testimoniality* is premised upon an inherent promise and act of faith, this becomes the condition of both (the future of) 'the political' and of the (historical, political, for instance) 'event' (as an event of history, of democracy or even justice). Together with *passion*, it is argued that this *testimoniality* functions as philosophy's deconstructive condition. Here, insofar as we can view this *passion* as a thinking of *responsibility*, we come close to various secondary readings of Derrida, above all where what Derrida names 'the passion of literature' (see D, Passions) is revealed to figure exemplarily in calling for a re-thinking of responsibility, justice and democracy.<sup>63</sup> Without reducing what one might want to name 'subjectivity' to testimony, the proposal is that it is in the *testimonial* experience that the aporetic and terrifying experience of responsibility (for this is by no means a pacifistic scene) is revealed most vividly.<sup>64</sup>

### **Martyrdom, today**

In the *today* of 2012, amidst the rhetoric of 'terror' that since the events of 11 September 2001 has been a prominent feature of our common political life, the necessity to respond to the question concerning martyrdom – its meaning, causes, justification and impact within political upheaval and religious self-sacrifice – remains just as prescient as when I first encountered both *Three Posters* and

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<sup>62</sup> Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), p. 54. Cited in Kathleen Biddick, 'Unbinding the Flesh in the Time that Remains: Crusader Martyrdom Then and Now', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 12, Issues 2-3 (2007), pp. 197-225 (p. 217).

<sup>63</sup> Examples of readers who have informed this study include but are not limited to Gil Anidjar, Geoffrey Bennington, Eduardo Cadava, Alexander Düttmann, Peggy Kamuf, Thomas Keenan, Michael Naas, Nicholas Royle and Hent de Vries.

<sup>64</sup> With regard to the 'subject', this study situated itself within what has come to be known as 'the deconstruction of the subject', without claiming to have moved beyond this into some 'post-subjectivity'. Exemplary of this deconstruction of the 'subject' or 'subjectivity' (as an *event* in the history of philosophical thinking) are the texts collected within Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991). With respect to this 'after', see Jean-Luc Nancy's 'Introduction' therein, pp. 1-8 (esp. p. 4).

*Monolingualism* in 2006. Around the world, suicidal attacks, self-immolations and political sacrifices on a wider scale continue, seemingly unabated.<sup>65</sup> Whereas there has been a wealth of journalistic reports, as well as responses from the arts and from political, social and religious sciences, as well as from the realms of political philosophy (which is not to say that Derrida's philosophy is not political through and through), the very ethos of this study is that *another* approach is *also* necessary, one that is slower and more oblique and which asks us to reconsider the very conceptual apparatus with which we might respond to such a phenomenon, as well as to the possibility of the historical event *per se*, of the archiving of such events (*as event*) and, chiefly, to the possibility of any testimony to the event, *as event*. Above all when what is testified to is an act of martyrdom. In short, what is necessary is what we might call a 'deconstructive history' which is 'suspicious of the metaphysical concept of history' (see SI 54) and which questions the main assumptions of historiography and the political or social scientists, doing so in the name of what Derrida calls 'some other concept of history' (see C&C 31-2). Whereas, as we will see, Derrida by no means failed to engage with and respond to the event of 11 September 2001, it appears that he never (to my knowledge) encountered the particular phenomenon of the martyr-testimony, let alone the martyr-video.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, this study proposes that it is through his oeuvre that we can find precisely this abovementioned patient, and yet nonetheless supremely urgent, approach.

For a start, whilst we begin with analyses of seemingly 'private' acts of testimony, continuing through the study to considerations of seemingly personal events such as that of confession, a child's circumcision, the autopsy and surgical operation on the body of a writer, or a poet's personal history to which he attempts to bear witness, it is argued that such scenes and analyses are always already political through and through. By tracing this route *with* Derrida, any claims to locate a political 'turn' in his oeuvre are swiftly refuted. Secondly, whilst at times it may appear that we are straying far from the determined instance of Satti's, or even Derrida's, martyr-testimony and the question of how to respond to this as *historical* event, one of the points of departure here is Derrida's claim that, at heart, he had always dreamed of being a historian, or even that 'the only thing I'm interested in is history', even if he feels himself incapable of this role (C&C 31; see also SI 53-5 & M 53). Can Derrida's thinking – abstract, metaphorical and tropical as it may appear – be reconciled with 'doing history'? And, moreover, how to reconcile this claim with the 'What I would have liked to be: A poet' with which we began? Such is one of the major preoccupations of this study. In his attentiveness to given events, to proper names, dates, biographies and autobiography, as well as to the conditions of the 'event' and the unfolding and documenting of historical time, is 'doing history' not in fact what Derrida 'does', all the time? And is not the seeming abstraction and de-historicisation of a formal 'logic' – for instance, of a generalised *passion* and *testimony* that we

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<sup>65</sup> Let us not forget that the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010 became the catalyst not only for the Tunisian Revolution but also the wider so-called 'Arab Spring'.

<sup>66</sup> Derrida does however speak of the 'on line' dissemination the 'last statements' of prisoners on death row in the United States (see DP 154-55).

will be tracing – in fact necessary, precisely in order to expose the very precariousness or ‘principle of ruin’ at the very heart of any attempt to ‘do history’?

In the 1995 ‘Faith and Knowledge’, a text which will be vital for us, Derrida proposed that instead of concentrating on etymologies, genealogies, and historico-semantic lines of filiation, one should privilege the signs of what in the world, *today*, singularises the use of the word ‘religion’, as well as the experience of ‘religion’ associated with that word, ‘where no memory and no history could suffice to announce or gather it, not least at first sight’ (FK 72). This does not, as Hent de Vries, points out, prevent him from risking a ‘pre-definition’ of the meaning of ‘religion’,

‘one that is sufficiently general and formal – or perhaps, formally indicative, in Heidegger’s sense – so as to capture “religion” both as a historical phenomenon and as a contemporary force to be reckoned with in the most unexpected of contexts, as well as in the very destitution of all context, a meaning that may very well be regulative of all others’ (de Vries, PTR 10).

Is what we are proposing here that, ‘in the destitution of all context’, there may be some meaning of ‘martyrdom’, ‘passion’ or ‘testimony’ that is regulative of all others? Let us not be so fast or so sure. What we will take from this is that, firstly, etymologies and historico-semantic lines of filiation are legitimate and productive, serving as catalysts of sorts, yet limited, and that they by no means ‘capture’ martyrdom or testimony; that they do not bear witness to or prove some regulative or even transcendental truth. Rather, what is borne witness to is the modes of interpretation that have shaped such terms as such over history: the meaning of a word such as ‘martyrdom’ or ‘testimony’ does not exist outside of the word, but rather such terms *testify* to a usage and variable set of beliefs (see PP 73). Secondly, were what singularises martyrdom itself – as a political or religious phenomenon – *today* to be the object of our enquiry, our seeming detour through the desert of abstraction would nonetheless be necessary, and the phenomenon of martyr-testimonies, in its very dependence on telematic media, would be a privileged place from which to begin.

### **‘Doing history’?**

Whilst across his writings Derrida evokes and invokes the ‘classical’ sense of testimony described above, considering it in terms of the possibility of testifying to the trauma and destruction of various historical events – most notably the Holocaust and what is metonymically designated by the name Auschwitz, as both singular and exemplary (TG 52) – and in relation to the imperative to resist the efforts of revisionism, to my knowledge, he has never taken a singular historical testimony or document such as Satti’s as the subject of a reading.<sup>67</sup> Is this not surprising, given his repeatedly stating that deconstruction is about the singularity of the event and what it retains that is ultimately

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<sup>67</sup> Regarding testimony and the threat of revisionism, see, for example, Derrida’s readings of Paul Celan across *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, eds. Thomas Dutoit & Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), as well as ‘Cinders’, ‘MB’, ‘E’ and ‘D’. See also ‘TG’.

*irreducible* (DA 88), and given his tireless engagement with, for instance, the question of the signature and the proper name?

Or so it seems. For is not *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* a consideration of the testimony of Maurice Blanchot? Or 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)' (1998/2000) a reading of the confessions to theft of Augustine and Rousseau? (And these are just examples.) Are these texts being read as historical documents? Or are they 'merely' cases of fiction or literature? Where does one draw the boundary defining the testimonial document, and if it exists, can it be located? And above all, is not Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other* both a historical document in itself that testifies to the determined experience of growing up under colonial rule in French Algeria *and* a document of 'the deconstruction of history' that *demonstrates* the very aporetic sufferances of genealogy, narrative, anamnesis and, chiefly, testimony and autobiography, that are our concern? Or is Derrida's 'Circonfession' (1991) not a confession or autobiography that *enacts* the ruinous and scarring logic of the impossible 'one time' or *hapax legomenon* (Gr. '(thing) once said'; OED) of the event through which the very task of 'doing history' must be re-thought? Is Derrida not 'doing history', then, precisely by *simultaneously* 'enacting' and thematising both what we are calling 'the *passion* of the witness' and 'the *passion* of testimony'? And is this not revealed all the more vividly when his testimony is placed beside that of Satti's; when the two testimonies virtually collide and Satti's '**I am the martyr x**' is placed, as violent as this may seem, in Derrida's pen or mouth?

And yet, in speaking of Blanchot's *récit* or the literary genre in general, whilst this study will explore the inextricable relationship between testimony and fiction, as well as reading Satti's testimony in terms of a certain generalised 'theatricality' and 'poematicity', and whilst videos such as Satti's can, and have been, read in terms of performance and video-art,<sup>68</sup> let us include something of a caveat here: whilst all of these artistic forms of (self-)representation are probed precisely for the light that they shed upon the reading of any historical document or event, Satti's testimony cannot and must not simply be reduced to the status of mere fiction. And whilst we will follow Derrida's proposals regarding the inexhaustibility of meaning and the incompatibility of testimony with proof, this is *not* to dismiss science and the necessity of historical documents or 'facts', but rather to re-position ourselves in relation to the 'and' of the post-Enlightenment 'faith and knowledge'. For as Derrida states (in relation to Auschwitz and the resistance to revisionism, but this applies across historical examples), 'We need science! Beyond testimony, we need to do everything that can be done to bring proofs, so as to leave the scientific debate open by responding to it as scientifically as possible, without interrupting it in the name of some authority or dogma. And we need to struggle scientifically against the revisionists. And yet, before the law (in the court

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<sup>68</sup> Other recent studies which consider video-addresses such as those of Osama bin Laden and hostage videos in terms of theatricality, performance and video art include: Boris Groys, 'The Fate of Art in the Age of Terror', in Maria Hlavajova & Jill Wender, eds., *Concerning War: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Utrecht & Rotterdam: BAK & post editions, 2010 [2006]), pp. 92-107; and Sigrid Weisel, 'The Martyr and the Sovereign: Scenes from a Contemporary Tragic Drama, Read Through Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt', *New Centennial Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Winter 2004), pp. 109-23.



room, or before the law of the other), the decision will never be the result of a proof (in that case revisionism might win), but rather of a speaking commitment. And, as we will be prioritising, this commitment is one that ‘goes beyond seeing’. Testifying, both against the revisionist desire and the ‘absence of attestation’ spoken about by Blanchot, Celan, Primo Levi and Agamben, would mean ‘a certain way of putting yourself in this paradox that comes from the divorce between seeing and saying. From this point of view faith is blind’, however irresponsible that might seem. As Derrida proposes:

‘We certainly should not yield to obscurantism, we should not give up on seeing, give up science and knowledge, but we need to know that there is also that which is beyond science and knowledge and, therefore, a speech that is all the more telling for not being tied to sight’ (TG 52).

In a similar vein, continuing with the ‘caveat’, whilst we will argue that tele-mediated videos such as Satti’s, nowadays broadcast in ‘real time,’ can be deconstructed so as to display their openness to manipulation and impurity, this ‘deconstruction of artifactuality’ should never be allowed to turn into an alibi, excuse or critical neo-idealism; ‘a denial of events, by which everything – even violence and suffering, war and death – is said to be constructed and fictive, and constituted by and for the media, so that nothing really ever happens, only images, simulacra, and delusions’ (DA 88).

Returning to the question of Derrida’s engagement with specific historical events, let us turn briefly to the context of Satti’s operation. Although this lies beyond the scope of this study, Satti’s testimony can and should be read both as a consequence and determining agent of a specific historical and political situation – that of the Lebanon of the 1980s and the invasion of its southern Bekaa Valley by the Israeli military – and the ramifications of such a situation; notably the creation of and growth in influence and power of the political and paramilitary organisation Hezbollah and its media apparatus (especially its television channel *Al-Manar*). Although I am not aware of any texts by Derrida or his commentators which address this particular situation explicitly, two oblique references in Derrida’s writings should not be overlooked, each of which signalling that this particular situation – the larger context of the Lebanon of which Satti’s act was a consequence, and which continues to engender both suicidal operations and a hitherto unprecedented relationship between religion and media – was not far from Derrida’s mind, both in the 1970s and 1990s. The first reference is to be found in *Glas* (1974), where the ‘signatory’ of the middle column writes the following of Jean Genet:

‘Yesterday he let me know that he was in Beirut, among the Palestinians at war, encircled outcasts. I know that what interests me always takes (its/his) place over there, but how to show that?’ (G 36).

The second reference is to be found in the afterword to ‘Faith and Knowledge’ (1996/2002), one of the central texts in Chapter 4, where the following text is included – a paragraph of text enclosed by parentheses which, together with its positioning as an afterword, at least in the present context betrays its import:

*(This, perhaps, is what I would have liked to say of a certain Mount Moriah – while going to Capri, last year, close by the Vesuvius of Gradiva. Today I remember what I had just finished reading in Genet at Chatila, of which so many of the premises deserve to be remembered here, in so many languages, the actors and victims, and the eyes and the consequences, all the landscapes and all the spectres: “One of the questions I will not avoid is that of religion.” Laguna, 26 April 1995) (FK 101).*

### Singularity, exemplarity and ‘an ethics of form’

[S]ubstitution is in progress; it has already taken effect.  
–Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*<sup>69</sup>

In the absence of any direct confrontation with the context of Satti’s testimony, or with the milieu in which it took place, our argument will be that Derrida nevertheless engaged with countless *almost*, but never *entirely*, analogous situations and experiences, the traits of which can help us to read and respond to the specificity of this phenomenon and, within it, of the event of Satti’s martyr-testimony. In speaking of analogy, however, are we not already committing a violence towards the singularity of each of the experiences in question? Or is this analogous and fabulistic *as if* not part and parcel of responding to what (the) singularity (of the event) ‘means’? And if the event of Satti’s ‘three-times’ martyr-testimony can be described, without being hyperbolic, as what Maurice Blanchot terms ‘one of those decisive moments in history when everything seems put in question’, is this not at least in part because of its being-‘fabulous’; because of its being perhaps, as suggested by Blanchot, a moment in which a fable becomes action?<sup>70</sup>

In supplementing and reversing the martyrdom-testimony implication related above, the main argument here, let us repeat, is that, ultimately, not only every instance of the ‘I’ but every relation to the other – be it the ‘who’ or the ‘what’ of a ‘you’ or of *tekhne* or even the unknowable future, for instance – is both *testimonial* and an instantiation of *passion* that takes the form of a singular martyrdom. Moreover, it will be argued that this *testimonial* and *passion* implies an inherent violence – committed both towards the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, *before* any intentional violence – that, *scandalously*, is the necessary condition for any act of testimony, any archival inscription (as memorialisation, commemoration, even dedication) or attempt at representation, in fact for any performative act *per se*, including any responsible relation to the other. (And therefore, any act of responsibility must always imply a sacrifice of ethics.) Thus, the violence and sufferance of Satti’s ‘**I am the martyr**’ becomes at once *exceptional* and *utterly mundane*. Is not to say this, however, to commit an injustice to given instances of testimony and martyrdom, in all their violence(s) and trauma(s)? Is it not, as Hent de Vries warns us in a discussion of the implicit martyrdom in testimony in Kierkegaard’s thought, to dismiss the exceptionality and gravity of specific instances of

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<sup>69</sup> M’ 20.

<sup>70</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *La part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 309. As cited in Kas Saghafi, ‘Derrida, Blanchot, and “Living Death”’, Derrida Seminars Translation Project IMEC Workshop, The Death Penalty (1999-2000), Session 4, 8 July 2010.  
<<http://derridaseminars.org/pdfs/2010/2010%20Presentation%20Saghafi.pdf>>.

‘martyrdom’, positing the ‘meaning’ of such acts as a mere *factum brutum* that strips such acts of their historical, political, anthropological and empirical determinants? (de Vries, RV 168; see also xvii). As will be argued, it is this simultaneous exceptionality and mundanity that is, precisely, the scandal – as a *passion* – that demands to be negotiated. Moreover, insofar as the question of *singularity* – as the paradoxical relationship between the unique and the repeatable – and *exemplarity* is at the heart of Derrida’s oeuvre, it will be argued that these risks are one of Derrida’s central preoccupations and that what we can gain by *thinking with* Derrida is precisely an attempt to account for the *possibility* of the singular event.

This balancing act between the formal and the empirical will be played out through the aporetic logic of *exemplarity*, as is exemplified in testimony and, by yet one degree further, by the series of martyr-testimonies (could there be an example more exemplary of exemplarity?), as what appear to be the global tele-mediated ‘modern day’ equivalent of the Passion plays. Insofar as it is a matter of the example, this is a place to ask whether this study ‘uses’ the example of Satti’s martyr-testimony to ‘demonstrate’, confirm or even ‘prove’ our hypothesis regarding the relationship between testimony and martyrdom. I would hope that this is not the case and would argue that, were it to be, this entire study would be a misguided endeavour. Rather, we pose the following questions: What does Satti’s martyr-testimony and its inclusion within Mroué and Khoury’s performance *do* to both the Derridean corpus and the philosophical tradition? If a testimony and a martyrdom are about the revelation of some truth, what does the event of this act *reveal*? What happens at the intersection between a general structure of revealability and given instances of revelation?

### **‘Applied deconstruction’?**

In speaking above of the ‘use’ of the example (Satti’s martyr-testimony, for example), and of the possibility of reading a historical document through a philosophical and literary oeuvre, the question of ‘application’ arises. As Geoffrey Bennington writes, the demand for application presupposes a distinction between something like ‘theory’ and ‘praxis’, or ‘philosophy’ and the ‘real world’. But, just as the distinction between metaphysics and non-metaphysics ‘just is metaphysics’, so ‘the demand for application typically ends up being the least applicable of all (this is why it can be permanently self-righteous), the pretext for smuggling in what Derrida calls transcendental contraband of sorts’ (Bennington, X 6). In short, as Derrida demonstrates across his oeuvre, and as will become clear throughout the chapters that follow, the paradox is that whilst on the one hand deconstruction *cannot* be applied (insofar as it cannot be the following of a program or ‘technique’), on the other hand, and simultaneously, deconstruction *can only ever* be applied (insofar as, as we shall see, the text or subject in question necessarily auto-deconstructs, in a movement that we will be reading through the quasi-suicidal logic of *passion* and the auto-matic bracketing of the ‘x’ of ‘**I am the martyr x**’). This paradox has been the subject of countless debates and, as Derrida himself

notes, this debate is a matter that is exhausted, and all that is left to do is to negotiate the aporia (AIIWD 218).

Whilst we can adhere to Bennington's warnings regarding the demand for applicability, insofar as this study aims to read a particular event *with* Derrida's deconstructive oeuvre, the question remains pertinent, and what remains is the matter of how to approach and deal with this aporia. For Derrida, 'doing' deconstruction means performing something new, in one's own idiomaticity and singular situation, with one's own signature, as a matter of invention which breaks with application in the technical, neutral sense of the word (i.e. 'the event'). And yet, the mechanical repeatability of the Derridean trace structure (in shorthand, 'the machine') means that the supposedly unique and unrepeatable is *always already* programmable and machine-like, and hence generalisable (see AIIWD, *passim*). If this is the case, rather than rehearsing the debates surrounding applicability, can we not in fact 'perform' this aporia precisely by asking whether, and if so *how*, one might 'perform' the im-possible invention that is necessary for the act of 'authentic' and 'meaningful' testimony?

Or, can we not approach this aporia by asking how one might *respond to* a testimony such as Satti's, by thinking this response through the paradox of the phrase 'to learn by heart' (*hafīza 'an zahri qalb*); and this is one of the few occasions upon which we see an Arabic reference in Derrida's texts), as Derrida evokes in a text regarding the 'essence' of poetry, 'Che cos'è la poesia?' (1988).<sup>71</sup> As Derrida suggests, 'to learn by heart' at once evokes the desire to protect a poem (testimony) in the event of its integrity and uniqueness, internalising it and learning from it as a matter of the heart, immunising its enigma against ever being reduced to a thematisable object of knowledge. And yet, simultaneously and unavoidably, one *cannot but* 'learn' it by learning 'by rote', repeating it auto-matically without ever being fully touched by it or knowing what its significance and effects. In speaking of Satti's testimony as such, echoing Derrida's reading of the '**No one / bears witness for the / witness**' of Celan's 'Ash-glory [*Aschenglorie*]', what is ultimately at stake here throughout this study is *the possibility of* this poetic 'watchword' or 'magisterial locution' (SM xvii), '**I am the martyr x**', and the possibility of ever getting to the heart of its significance. Whilst we can read this poetico-testimony, 'borrowing its force' and its 'virtue', as Derrida says of Celan's poem, and succumbing to the desire or 'irresistible compulsion' to cite it and re-cite it, will we ever truly know to *who* or to *what* it *bears witness*? (see PP 87).

### The *quasi*-transcendental

In *Monolingualism*, Derrida speaks of the experience of language as that which 'gives rise' to the 'articulation between transcendental or ontological universality, and the exemplary or testimonial singularity of a martyred existence' (M 27). Between the transcendental and the empirical or

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<sup>71</sup> Regarding the Arabic, see Gil Anidjar, 'Introduction: Once More, Once More', in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-39 (p. 31 n. 87).

historical, can the question of ‘application’ not also be phrased through thinking the ‘*quasi-transcendental*’, as a translation of *différance* and its substitutions: among them the ‘trace’ – which we will be reading in terms of the body of the martyr(ed mark) – and the ‘supplement’ – through which we will be reading the repeatability of the ‘x’ of ‘I am the martyr x’ and the re-markability that *cuts across* or ‘applies to’ the particular or empirical – and, above all, *passion*? In short, our proposal is that it is the ‘limitless generality’ (SI 71) of this *differential* and *passional quasi-transcendental* which, as Derrida writes in *Monolingualism*, ‘gives rise’ to this *articulation* upon which this entire study unfolds.

For it is here, in the ‘tain of the mirror’ of the *quasi-transcendental*, that we situate ourselves, and it is ‘from’ this ‘dull surface’ which never presents itself *as such* that the possibility of sight, revelation and (self-)reflection arises (see Gasché, *Tain* 6). And all of this, we are arguing, is *revealed exemplarily* by the testimony ‘**I am the martyr x**’. Whilst the contours of this assertion will need to be patiently sketched out across what follows, it is worth at least signalling at the outset that what follows of this study should be read with the following in mind: that this ‘articulation’ of *passion* and *différance* (read through the double genitive), whilst bypassing the order of apprehension in general and having no essence and no determinable site (Diff. 132, 134), can be thought in terms of the *kbōratic* hyphen *between* the transcendental and the empirical, or the transcendental and the historical, and that this hyphen, as the re-markability and re-citability of the trace, must also be thought in terms of a *wound*: of the ‘literal’ wound upon the body of the martyr-witness and the wound of an arche-secret which no testimony will ever fully reveal.<sup>72</sup> Violent and traumatic as this wound may be, when thought of as the *quasi-transcendental* that both *enables* the existence of some phenomenon (testimony, for instance) *and* serves as the prerequisite for its impossibility, the wound is revealed to potentially be both a wound (an ‘unhappy’ performative, to borrow language from ‘speech act theory’) *and* a blessing. And this is the *passion* to be suffered, above all for the exemplary witnesses, names, dates and events that we will encounter in what follows.

### **Responding: to Derrida**

Finally, a word is due regarding the position that this study takes with regard to its main theoretical protagonist, Jacques Derrida. Whilst this has to some degree been addressed above, some further comments are warranted. Recalling the question posed above regarding the paradox of the ‘learning by heart’ of the poetico-testimony, this question of ‘application’ also relates to this study’s relation and, above all, *response*, to the Derridean corpus. For whilst we can read the Derridean (poetic) text, ‘borrowing its force’, will we ever really ‘apply’ it? Or is all we are doing citing and re-citing, learning the oft-quoted ‘watchwords’ and catchphrases ‘by heart’, without ever really knowing what

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<sup>72</sup> We think ‘articulation’ here both in terms of the communication of some testimony and in terms of a simultaneous division and connection of the hyphen between the empirico-transcendental. As will become clear, it is specifically upon this hyphen that this study unravels. *articulate*, v. 1. to pronounce (something) clearly and distinctly; to express (an idea or feeling) fluently or coherently; 2. to form a joint. From L. *articulare* ‘divide into joints, utter distinctly’, from *articulus* ‘small connecting part’ (diminutive of *artus* ‘joint’) (OED).

they mean? Whilst the enormity, richness and nuances of Derrida's oeuvre mean that – as with a given testimony – there will always necessarily remain some enigma, and that each reading of a certain text reveals something that had previously been overlooked, it is hoped that the 'application' enacted in this study does not fall into the camp of the latter. But having said this, what Derrida teaches us is that both in testifying, performing and responding to any given text, some form of machine-like 'application' is inevitable, and something of the text will always escape, remaining readable-unreadable. This, precisely, is the aporia of the 'prescription without prescription' alluded to above.

In stating from the outset that we will take Derrida as our lead voice, this is not to say that this is necessarily simply a reading *of* Derrida, as an exercise in exegesis. Rather, whilst the close and at times laborious reading of certain texts and passages will be necessary, can we not think of what follows more as a reading *with* Derrida? A reading *with* Derrida of Satti's text and, simultaneously, a reading of Derrida *with* Satti. For what will become obvious is that 'Derrida' can only ever be read in light of his 'encounters' with others, with his signature functioning as a *mis-en-oeuvre* of the logic of the 'event' and the 'encounter' that we will be tracing in terms of *passion* and *testimony*. 'Mapping out' what we might call a topo-graphy (or 'aporetography'; see A 15) of certain Derridean 'quasi-concepts' and the relation and *passional* supplementability or substitutability that takes place both between them and between 'genres', we see how the signature of Derrida only 'takes place' in a 'participatory' series of countersignatures and 'applications', thus bringing about a general 'counterfeiting' of signatures that we will be exploring in relation to the 'authenticity' of testimony (see Bennington, X 19).<sup>73</sup>

Thus, are we not being faithful to Derrida's provocations precisely in our infidelity and, to a certain degree, betrayal; insofar as his (poetico-)testimony is lifted from its 'original context' and placed in a series of virtual, spectral, destituent and anachronistic 'encounters' with Satti, thus *at once* taking his address beyond its originally intended destination or addressees (could there have been such a thing), always at the risk of the worst kind of misunderstanding, and following the logic of what Derrida calls the 'fabulous retroactivity' of the signature whereby the event of a signature or (poetico-)testimony only takes place in the future (see DI 50, Rams 148, TTW 166-67), *and* in doing so pushing various 'quasi-concepts' and propositions to places, situations and conclusions that remain hitherto unarticulated within his published corpus.

As is the common consensus among a number of secondary readings and colloquia engaged in responding to the work of Derrida, what is primarily at stake is the question of 'Derrida today' and 'the futures of Jacques Derrida'. Thus, it is a question of an impossibly active inheritance and of the response to what is given to be read as in itself producing effects. Above all, this study takes as its point of departure the wager set by Derrida in a reading of Paul de Man as to whether, *one day*,

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<sup>73</sup> Regarding Derrida's notion of the countersignature and participation, see Alexander García Düttmann, 'On Participation in Art: A conversation with Alexander García Düttmann' (interview by Karoline Gritzner), *Performance Research*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2011), pp.136-140 (pp. 138-39).

'we' (but who is this 'we?') will ever be able to think, *together*, the irreducible 'one time' of the 'event' and the technical repeatability ('applicability') of the 'machine', with all the risks that this might entail.

Having sketched out a contextual and 'methodological' scene, let us approach and begin to read the martyr-testimonies of Jamal Satti and Jacques Derrida.

## Chapter 2: 'I am dead'

Actor #1: I am just an ordinary struggler, and there are thousands fighters like me, and my decision to commit a suicidal operation doesn't mean that I chose death, no, I chose life. We die defending life, to give people hope of victory and freedom.

–*Three Posters*

I am not dead, but alive amidst you . . .

–Video-testimony of Sanâ' Muhaydlî<sup>74</sup>

And call not those who are slain in the way of Allāh “dead.” Nay, they are living, only ye perceive not.

–*Qur'ān* 3:169

### Introduction

For Derrida, testimony, testament and survival (*testis – testis – superstes*) are inescapably conjoined, and to think this we need not simply rely on etymology. As is ‘revealed’ or ‘demonstrated’ not only in Satti’s testimony but also in that of Maurice Blanchot’s *récit*, *The Instant of My Death* (1994), in which Blanchot narrates having narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Nazis, ‘the question of *testimonium* [testimony] is no different from that of the *testamentum*, of all the testaments, in other words, of surviving in dying, of *sur-viving* before and beyond the opposition between living and dying’ (PP 66). Insofar as both testimonies speak both *of* and *from* death, the **‘I am the martyr’** of Satti’s testimony and the **‘I am alive. No, you are dead’** of Blanchot’s *récit* (Blanchot, ID 9) are potentially translatable as **‘I am dead’** (see Blanchot, ID 9, D 45). In the case of Satti, we situate his testimony within the various possible temporal schemas of testimony, focusing on the first of the ‘instants’ – the signing of the ‘oath’ – as the moment of martyrdom from which he cannot return, thus making his video-testimony a *last will and testament*. In a sense (certainly according to the discourse of martyrdom in Lebanon at the time) Satti at this moment becomes a ‘living martyr’, living on beyond the ‘moment of death’. But can one testify to one’s own death? Or even to the death of the other? (see D 46). And does the witness (Satti) from this moment become immortal, as discourses (above all religious) surrounding martyrdom might stress? Or is it not, rather, a case of a finite being who *survives* and *lives on*, precisely *through* and *in* his testimony and testament? In this sense, Satti’s testimony exemplifies a generalised logic of survival, spectrality, ‘originary’ mourning, legacy and inheritance that will haunt us throughout this study. In translating Satti and Blanchot’s testimonies by **‘I am dead’**, we ask whether, in their testamentary structure, these *remarkable* cases are in fact so *exceptional*.

What ensues is a questioning of the possibility of the sentence **‘I am dead’** as an act of language, with the *of* to be heard as a double genitive: *is it possible* to say or write this sentence and,

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<sup>74</sup> Cited in Toufic, ‘I am the martyr Sanâ' Muhaydlî’, p. 78.



in its possibility or impossibility, *what might this sentence make possible?* In short, the argument will be that this sentence is the condition for any act of language *per se*, and that it implies the graphological time or implicit tempo of all writing, all painting, every trace and even of the presumed present of every *cogito ergo sum* (and with this *cogito* we are also thinking of the reflection of our title as self-reflection and, by inference, self-relation) (FM 158).

Whilst the present chapter presents the relationship between language and death as constitutive, it warrants stressing that this must be thought in the context of a certain *affirmation* of life, as the logic of ‘survival’ or ‘life-death’ of the *finitude* of the Derridean trace structure, as the general structure of experience. In his last interview, Derrida states that this logic of survival [*survivance*] is ‘the affirmation of a living being who prefers living and thus surviving to death’ (LLF 51-2): a proposal which we can juxtapose with the seemingly implied affirmation of death, sacrifice and the ‘beyond’ of the martyr-testimony suggested by our epigraphs above. By beginning to consider here the question of mastery and intentionality vis-à-vis the temporality and structure of language, we are preparing the way for a consideration of Mroué’s proposal that the powerful effect of Satti’s repetitions

‘stems from the fact that they refuse life and announce the “departure” of the announcer even while they put off the act of death to a later, undetermined date. I don’t think the emotion is due only to a calculated desire to gain the sympathy of the audience, nor only to a belated consciousness of what will become of him after his death, but above all to the unformulated and “unformulable” desire both to defer death and withdraw from life. And the repetition is the sign of this twofold desire for deferral and withdrawal’ (T’amass 115).

Shifting back to a broader plane, if we are to think of the structure of language and experience in general, then repetition and unintentionality are always already unavoidable and, as we will see in time, as the unmasterable graphematic *lapsus* that is exemplified in both Satti’s and Blanchot’s ‘death(s)’, are part and parcel of the *passion* of the testifying ‘I’.

By examining the possibility of the (testimonial/testamentary) sentence **‘I am dead’**, this chapter lays out a theoretical framework for what follows, fleshing out a summary of Derridean *différance* and the graphematic trace. Having sketched the contours of a generalised ‘writing’ that we will soon be calling *passion* and which in fact covers *all* fields of representation and even all experience, we will see how the central propositions and protagonists of the present chapter will return and recur, as if spectrally, albeit each time differently, in each of the chapters that follow. Rather than simply offering a theoretical *résumé* as an aside of sorts, which we can in turn ‘apply’ to the texts and testimonies in question, by tracing the question of the possibility of **‘I am dead’** through an ongoing encounter between, primarily, Derrida and Roland Barthes, we begin to see how the various structural logics through which we will be reading Satti’s testimony and the wider phenomenon of such video-testimonies are *already at work within* Derrida’s own writings and his chance biographical encounters. Most notable is the manner in which this ongoing Derrida-Barthes ‘encounter’ that centres around the **‘I am dead’** unfolds through a logic of contingency, of

responding to and being signed *by* the other, of invention coming *from* the other, and of the repeated and unforeseeable spectral return of the other, as event.

In examining the manner in which this sentence circulates back and forth between the two writers, we prepare for a discussion in Chapter 3B regarding ‘source’ or ‘origin’: as with **‘I am the martyr x’**, we argue that **‘I am dead’** always ‘emanates’ from more than one voice. More than one, or rather, following a Derridean ‘formula’,  $n + 1$ : always exceeding, but nonetheless ‘rooted in’, countability and calculation. And hence the **‘x’** of **‘I am the martyr x’**. How then to testify if the ‘I’ is always metonymised and more than one? Or if the ‘I’ is already divided and spectral, neither fully absent nor fully present, neither quite here nor there?

Although it may at times appear that Satti’s testimony is left on the sidelines, by allowing this theoretical framework to unfold through a biographical narrative, we are pre-empting our discussion in Chapter 3 of the manner in which we can read Satti’s and Derrida’s testimonies together, and what each reveals about the other. In terms of reading Satti’s testimony in itself as a historical document and narrative, and as part of a wider narrative, we also begin to see here how the time of historical narrative circumscribed by linguists such as Emile Benveniste in fact falls prey to the very same paradoxes and sufferances of what had been deemed, in distinction, discursive time. As we shall see in Chapter 3A, bearing witness, according to Derrida, does not consist of giving narrative but rather should *do* what it *says*, instantaneously, as a present ‘act’ which we will address therein as a ‘performative’. If the historical archive be thought as an ensemble of such performative ‘enactments’, then in addressing the impossibility of the present, performative testimony **‘I am dead’** as in fact being the condition of possibility of any act of language, we therefore also prepare here for a later discussion of a certain suicidal logic of the archive that must be taken into account in reading any historical text or document.

In short, whereas for Barthes ‘I cannot say **“I am dead”**’, for Derrida the condition for a true act of language is my being able to say precisely this, and significantly. As we will see in later chapters, this ‘being able’ is always thwarted (and hence the *passion*). In demonstrating the impossibility of the unique ‘one time’ of the ‘here-now’ and of the ‘I’, we already begin to see the outlines of this nonmastery. Thus we begin to see how not only is Satti’s **‘I am the martyr x’** translatable by **‘I am dead’**, but how a structural and implicit *I am dead* is always already translatable by a similarly structural *I am the martyr x*, and how these two ‘extraordinary’ utterances are in fact (and this is the scandal) the *ordinary* tale of language, self-consciousness (of the *cogito*) and experience. Rather than simply viewing Derrida’s and Barthes’s readings of **‘I am dead’** as antagonistic, however, we see how the texts in which Barthes dismisses the possibility of this sentence are actually closer to the Derridean reading being followed here than they might at first appear, and how these texts in fact, perhaps inadvertently, give something to be thought that will inform our discussions in later chapters. Unintentionally, it seems, Barthes’s readings of **‘I am dead’** and his later discussion of the singularity of the photographic *punctum* in fact set up our

discussions-to-come of the active intentionality and impossible singularity of the ‘act’ of testimony and the manner in which, in its incalculability and *passion*, testimony might be thought in terms of the ‘poignant’ and enigmatic effect of ‘that which escapes’ but nevertheless holds our attention in a way that exceeds mere ‘interest’.

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• **‘I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti’ – ‘I am dead’**

‘Am’. When is ‘am’: this small and ghostly word that the Arabic lacks but that we, with our Greco-Latin inheritance, lay out here, as if for an autopsy (from the Greek *autoptēs* ‘eyewitness’), in order to try to understand this act of Satti’s and its consequences for philosophical thinking?

At what moment does Jamal Satti *become* ‘the comrade martyr Jamal Satti’? When does the experience *testified to* take place? Let us look again to Satti’s testimony. At a specific moment in time (a few hours before his martyrdom operation on **6 August 1985**) and in a specific location (an unidentifiable domestic setting), Satti sat before the camera to record his final message. This video was recorded with a clear, predetermined purpose: to *re-present* that singular moment when Satti ‘testified’ before the camera to a specific, geographically determined audience (the people of Lebanon; the video was broadcast on a national, terrestrial television channel, Télé Liban) at a specific time (the **8 p.m.** news; Satti having carried out his operation that same afternoon), and to be shown only *once*. Whilst we will look to the reception of such videos – their being broadcast for the public (‘friend’ and ‘enemy’) to witness – in later parts of this study, we will presently limit our consideration to the moment in which Satti signs the contract, so to speak, as the moment that brings about the martyrdom. Or, that in effect brings about his ‘death’. But then – and this would be seemingly ridiculous – there would be three deaths. In speaking of ‘*the instant of my death*’, what Blanchot’s *récit* makes us ask is whether there can be *an* instant of (my) death, and whether I can testify to it. But to pose such a question here would be jumping ahead too fast. What we can ask, however, and what the possibility of ‘**I am dead**’ makes us ask, is whether there can be an instant, *per se*. Is there such a thing as *an* indivisible, unique and punctual instant? Turning back to Satti, the question regarding the *instant* of his martyrdom is best posed by Mroué, and is worth citing at length:

“The young man begins by introducing himself: **“I am the martyred comrade Jamal Satti...”** In an uncertain non-place, antagonistic to both of the known worlds, those of the living and the dead, he presents himself as a martyr through the image. But in reality his martyrdom has not yet been actualized and only will be after a certain lapse of time whose duration is unknown to us, but which stretches from the instant of filming to the instant of his mission’s fulfilment [and let us think here of both the *lapsus* of Blanchot’s *récit*, and of the graphematic trace *per se*].

‘Does the martyrdom then take place directly before us, through the filmic image of the videotape?’

‘Indeed, it seems that the martyrdom is actualized at the very instant when the young man announces his martyrdom before the camera, through the very fact of this

announcement. This is why it is so natural for him to introduce himself by saying: **“I am the martyred comrade Jamal Satti...”** and not **“I am Jamal Satti, soon to be martyr...”** The martyrdom has taken place before the suicide mission, and therefore, whether this operation has effectively taken place or not no longer makes any real difference.

‘When I say **“I am the martyred...”** it means **“I am the dead man...”**. But I am not yet dead, and it is possible that I will not become a martyr. Despite this, the viewers accept the declaration of the martyr’s death, without casting it into doubt. But if I repeat this declaration three times, doubt undoubtedly arises’ (Mroué, FT 115).

‘Doubt arises’. Undoubtedly, indeed, for can one *really* say **‘I am the dead man’** or **‘I am dead’**? By articulating this testimony, Satti, like so many other ‘martyrs’, delivers himself into ‘an uncertain non-place, antagonistic to both of the known worlds, those of the living and the dead’ (Mroué, FT 115). Neither fully ‘here’ nor ‘there,’ this ‘uncertain non-place’ occupied by the ‘living martyr’ – this ‘elsewhere’ – will be central in the consideration of spectrality and survival that follows. In the case of martyrs, death is never quite ‘death’ insofar as they are kept alive, at least mythically, both by their audience-witnesses and by the appellations that they endow themselves with. Rather, they inhabit a space of the ‘living-dead’ or ‘undead’.<sup>75</sup>

For Derrida, both the (testimonial/testamentary) signature and the proper name always carry death (see DRB 34, AM 49), in effect spelling the ‘already’ of the **‘I am already dead’** that Derrida, tellingly, mis-remembers from Poe’s tale (BBI 20) or the **‘when I sign, I am already dead’** of the 1974 *Glas* (G 19).<sup>76</sup> Against this, we can at least signal towards the various rituals, representations and re-enactments used, both in the Lebanon and beyond, in the attempt to ‘keep the martyr alive’: customs which are successful to a certain degree, but which do not prevent the ‘identity’ of the martyr from more often than not being effaced, taken over rather by myth and metonymy, by some ‘in the name of’.<sup>77</sup> Whereas the question of ‘identity’ will be central to Chapter 3, in addressing the possibility of **‘I am dead’** we will begin to see that the *I* in general is necessarily always already substitutable or metonymised.

In the classically accepted notion of testimony, the witness *bears witness* to some ‘thing’ which *was* present to him/her (which he/she *witnesses*), but which is no longer present in the mode of perception at the moment of the act of bearing witness. Rather, ‘it is present to him, if he alleges this presence, as presently *re-presented* in memory’ (PP 77; see also HN 206) (as, for instance, in Blanchot’s **‘I remember a young man...’**, ID 3). And, according to the logic of the singular

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<sup>75</sup> Satti, take # 2: ‘...as I am going to depart my land, bodily, I will be living in soul and will dwell in the souls of all the honest compatriots...’; take # 3: ‘Now, as I am departing my country by body only, I will still exist in the souls of all the honest patriots in Lebanon’ (Three Posters 108, 109). Cf. the epigraph above. Regarding the ‘undead’, see the writings of Toufic, in particular ‘I am the martyr Sanâ’ Muhaydlî’, *passim*, and *Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Films* (Sausalito, California: Post-Apollo Press, 2003 [1993]).

<sup>76</sup> In *Glas*, the ‘*déjà* (dead)’ is a recurrent *siglum*. Cf. Mroué’s tale of the ‘disappearance’ of the martyr who changed his mind after having signed his testimony, as related above in Chapter 1.

<sup>77</sup> As Mroué writes, ‘In the Arab countries, political powers, parties, religious communities and various official institutions continue still today to celebrate and praise martyrdom and collective death. This is done in the name “of the fatherland,” “of the soil,” “of liberation,” “of Islam”... Yet these societies swiftly forget their heroes, who are relegated to the status of mere names lengthening the list of the martyrs’ (Mroué, FT 114).

instant that will be this chapter's concern, 'a testimony takes place *once* on the subject of what takes place *once*' (TS 73). But Satti testifies not only *twice* (as, for instance, with Hamlet's two-times '**I am dead**') but *three times*.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the classical conception of testimony from which we take our leave requires that the testimony must always be made in the first person singular: testimony must always involve an '**I**' and is in essence autobiography (D 38, 43). Whilst the *passion* of the '**I**' will preoccupy us in Chapter 3, in examining the repeatability of the instance of the '**I**' in '**I am dead**', we will already be moving towards the substitutability of this '**I**' that is designated by the '**x**' of the '**I am the martyr x**'. Leaving aside the temporal instant and the instance of the '**I**' momentarily however, let us first focus on the temporal relation between these two acts: *witnessing* and *bearing witness*.

As Derrida tells us in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (1998/2000), his reading of Blanchot's *The Instant of my Death* (1994/2000), the witness *is always a survivor*. Whether or not one takes examples 'as tragic or full of pathos as the survivors of the death camps', one bears witness when one has lived longer than what *has come to pass* or has been 'actualised', following a structure of survival that is universal and for Derrida covers the whole elementary field of experience (D 45). But how is this survival at play 'within' the instant?

As set out in the Introduction, there are three possible experiences or events that constitute the 'martyrdom' that Satti testifies to: (1) the '*signing* of the oath', (2) the physical operation and death, and (3) the broadcasting of the testimony on national television. In none of these options, however, does the 'thing' testified to occur in the past, subsequently *re-presented* to the witness, who subsequently *re-presents* this to his audience. Rather, in the first option, the thing witnessed and the bearing witness take place simultaneously (or at least *appear* to, for this possibility of contemporaneity will be, precisely, our sufferance). In addition to the sense-perceptual dimension of presence and past presence introduced above, Derrida acknowledges the admissibility of the possibility of this 'thing' (*sic*) *still being present* at the moment of testifying, but nevertheless deems this particular situation to be 'something unusual and improbable' (PP 77). But it is precisely the 'unusual and improbable' that interest us here, above all when the improbable – the unbelievable, even – is demonstrated to in fact be more mundane than one might think. In this sense, Derrida's claim regarding this improbability seems somewhat surprising given his emphasis, both in the texts that focus on testimony and beyond, on the 'performative' act of testimony and confession that we will be discussing further in Chapter 3 onwards, insofar as a testimony must *make truth*, 'at that very moment', so to speak. As we will be asking in Chapter 3, is not Derrida saying, without necessarily saying it *explicitly*, that it is precisely the impossibility of ever fully 'succeeding' in the performative act that is both *witnessed* and *borne witness to*, as a *passion*, and in the instant?

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<sup>78</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thomson & Neil Taylor (London: Arden, 2007 [2006]), Act V, Scene 2, Lines 317 & 322.

In the latter two of the three moments of martyrdom, the ‘experience’ testified to takes place in the future (**‘I am Jamal Satti, soon to be martyr...’**). Again, although not thematised at length, this is not ruled out by Derrida, who in the 1969 ‘Dissemination’ writes of ‘some signifying martyrdom that testifies to a truth past or a truth to come’ (Dis 350) and in *Demeure* tells us that Blanchot’s ‘testimony’ (*sic*) *promises us*, ‘at this instant’, ‘a narrative or a testimony – signed by someone who tells us in many ways and according to every possible tense: ***I am dead***, or ***I will be dead in an instant***, or ***an instant ago I was going to be dead***’ (D 45). What merits emphasising here is that despite Derrida’s making it quite clear that he regards the experience of testimony as promissory (as we will see in Chapter 3A), what is not necessarily explicit is that testimony, in a Derridean mode of thinking, *always* involves a futural element.

For the moment, though, our interest lies with the instant in which the witnessing and bearing witness might potentially coincide. With the *instant*, moreover, that is impossible to think in isolation from the past and future, as is revealed when looking to the possibility of **‘I am dead’**.<sup>79</sup> Although this seeming simultaneity between the two ‘acts’ is not explicitly thematised by Derrida as a temporal schema of testimony, is this not the very thing that Derrida and Satti testify to, impossibly, in *Monolingualism* and **‘I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti?’**

#### • **‘I am dead’**

Whilst we have already introduced the possibility that the *spoken* utterance recorded in Satti’s video-testimony is potentially translatable as **‘I am dead’**, and whilst we will be arriving shortly at a discussion of a notable *spoken* utterance of this sentence within the realm of literature, in what follows we will consider this sentence as a linguistic act, in terms of its ‘structural’ possibility, but without limiting this to the spoken. For as shall become clear, what will soon become prevalent and will serve to carry the study forwards is a thinking of a generalised writing (*écriture, arche-écriture, arche-writing, protonwriting*) – of *différance* or the structure of the *trace* – as set forth by Derrida in his early texts of the late 1960s and henceforth forming the backbone, so to speak, of his corpus.<sup>80</sup>

Blocking our ears to the potential contextual connotations of the *sentence* **‘I am dead’**, a first question: is this sentence (even) linguistically possible?<sup>81</sup> As with **‘I am the martyr’**, what, in its (im)possibility, does this sentence (what linguists would term *l’énoncé*) *bear witness to*? Unlike **‘I am the martyr’**, **‘I am dead’** makes an appearance in the Derridean corpus on several occasions as an

<sup>79</sup> The undecidability between the past and present is emphasised when we consider that the French, *je suis mort*, can either be translated as **‘I am dead’** or the *passé composé* **‘I have died’** or **‘I died’**. This is made evident in the English in ‘By Force of Mourning’, where Derrida speaks both of **‘I died’** and **‘I am dead’** (FM 157-58).

<sup>80</sup> In considering this sentence as spoken or written, we are suspending – very much artificially, and simply for the sake of clarity – the possibility of other forms of communication, for instance, the pictorial, musical or gestural. It merits emphasizing that the graphematic trace of which we speak encompasses all modes of communication and representation, and this is precisely its strength. For instance, Derrida speaks of an ‘originary’ mourning or spectrality that occurs even in the gesture of touching (DE 44).

<sup>81</sup> By this we mean all the possible allusions that the word ‘sentence’ carries, for instance, the act of (juridical) (self-)sentencing, as the passing of a death sentence.

example of what Derrida names as ‘certain utterances [énoncés] that control everything’ (BBI 20). In what follows, we will track these appearances of **‘I am dead’** through the course of Derrida’s texts, following the *revenant* nature of this sentence in its repeated and unexpected spectral returns and sightings.<sup>82</sup>

#### • **‘I can’t say “I am dead”**’

The first scene of this story of **‘I am dead’** occurs not in a published text of Derrida’s, but in his response to a paper presented by Roland Barthes, a figure who will also return revenantly to Derrida and his texts. The year is 1966 and both Barthes and Derrida are taking part in what was to become a landmark international and interdisciplinary conference, *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (a title subsequently prefixed by what was initially the subtitle, *The Structuralist Controversy*) at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. In his presentation, ‘To Write: An Intransitive Verb?’, Barthes affirms: **‘I can’t say “I am dead”**’ (Barthes, SC 143). This, in fact, is the only instance in Barthes’s paper of **‘I am dead’**; this **‘I am dead’** which appears ‘merely’ in passing, in an aside between brackets, easily passed over, but which, in the present context, is the focus of our interest. In other words, the hypothesis that we will be advancing in what follows is that this ‘merely’ is far from inconsequential and that this seemingly inadvertent instance of **‘I am dead’** may potentially act as the aleatory trigger for a phantasmatic drama that will continue throughout Derrida’s oeuvre. The context of this ‘mention’, as speech act theorists would term it (in distinction to ‘use’), is a discussion regarding the active and passive dimensions of the verb ‘to write’, a discussion which we can only enter into briefly here but which pre-empts a question that will be vital in what follows, albeit rephrased and approached through the Derridean text and in the vocabulary of *testimony* and *passion*: that of the activity and passivity of a generalised writing, and of the middle voice. Without jumping ahead too fast – for we will not arrive at a consideration of the ‘performativity’ of the ‘acts’ of testimony or of martyrdom and suicide, as intentional acts of self-effacement and sacrifice, vis-à-vis the ‘acti/passivity’ of a generalised ‘writing’ until Chapter 3 – we can at least bear in mind these discussions-to-come as we proceed with our reading of Barthes’s comments.<sup>83</sup>

Whilst Barthes’s Baltimore paper is entitled ‘To Write: Intransitive Verb?’, for Barthes it is not so much a question of tracing the point at which the verb ‘to write’ came to gain an intransitive

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<sup>82</sup> As a gerund, *revenant* means ‘returning’ or ‘coming back’. As a noun it means ‘ghost’ or ‘phantom’ (DRB 64 n. 16, Trans.). The term *revenant* is intentionally evoked here since, unlike *spectre* or *phantom*, which carry etymological references to visibility and appearing in the light (‘phantasme’, relating to *phainesthai*, Greek ‘to appear’ and *phenomenality*), the *revenant* arises where there is no horizon of (fore)seeability (DP 230-31 n. 4, M 25). This notion of the unforeseeability of the *revenant* – as opposed to the *spectre* who, in a repetitive fashion, ‘arrives by returning’ – will be central throughout this study in our reading of the (*passionate*) event of the other that eludes ‘the very watch of consciousness’ (as Derrida names it in a reading of *Hamlet* and ‘the vigilance of the watching guard’ in Act I, Scene 1) (FOJ 19).

<sup>83</sup> The term ‘acti/passivity’, through which we will be thinking *passion*, is used in the recent English translation of one of the last interviews with Derrida: *Copy, Archive, Signature* (CAS 6-17, esp. 11-12).

sense (i.e., **'I am writing'**, with no specified object), even though this is 'certainly the sign of an important change in mentality' regarding the nature of writing and the activity of 'the writer' (who has now become 'one who writes, absolutely'). Rather, we must look on the side of the linguistic notion of *diathesis* or, in classical grammar, 'voice' (active, passive, middle): the designation of 'the way in which the subject of the verb is affected by the action [*procès*]' (Barthes, SC 141-42). By thinking writing in terms of the middle voice, transitivity is not excluded: 'today to write is to make oneself the center of the action of speech [*parole*]; it is to effect writing in being affected oneself' (Barthes, SC 142). Here Barthes calls upon the example given by the linguists Antoine Meillet and Emile Benveniste: that of the verb *to sacrifice*. (And with this chance encounter between sacrifice and writing here at this early stage, our efforts to completely suspend the 'act' of **'I am the martyr'** from that of **'I am dead'** are already shown to be in vain.<sup>84</sup>) By drawing from this example, Barthes argues that the diathetical opposition is not between the active and the passive, but rather between the active and the middle, for the verb *to sacrifice* (ritually) can be both active (if the priest, for example, sacrifices the victim in my place for me, in which case he is not affected by it) *and* middle (if, taking the knife from the priest's hand, I make the sacrifice for myself, in which case I, as subject, *affect myself*). Returning to the notion of 'effecting writing' in 'affecting oneself' cited above, Barthes continues by stating that to write 'is to leave the writer [*scripteur*] inside the writing, not as psychological subject (the Indo-European priest could very well overflow with subjectivity in actively sacrificing for his client), but as the agent of the action' (Barthes, SC 142). Leaving these Barthesian intricacies aside, let us simply note that we will return to this question of the subjectivity of the 'actor-agent' when we come to discuss the sacrifice of a generalised *passion* that is implicit in any act of writing and, by implication, of testimony.

Barthes continues by giving examples of certain French verbs which have an active meaning in the simple form (for instance, *aller*, *arriver*: to go, to arrive) but which, 'curiously', take the passive auxiliary, the verb *être* (to be) in the form of the *passé composé* (the compound past tense). Drawing from the linguist Gustave Guillaume's distinction between two types of *passé composé* – *diriment* ('separated'; those verbs that take the auxiliary *avoir*) and *intégrant* ('integral'; those that take *être*) – in order to explain 'this bifurcation peculiar to the middle voice', Barthes writes of the latter: 'it designates a sort of semantic entity which *cannot be delivered by the simple initiative of the subject*' (Barthes, SC 143, emphasis added). And it is here that **'I am dead'** appears. Whereas the verb *mourir* has until this point not appeared in Barthes's paper, either in the list of verbs that take the auxiliary *être* or before this, here Barthes gives the examples of "*Je suis sorti*" or "*il est mort*" [**"I went out"** or **"he died"**] as never referring to 'an interruption that would be at all like the *diriment* of the going

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<sup>84</sup> Given our concerns regarding the act of sacrifice and of **'I am dead'** in relation to the *passion* of a generalised writing, it is striking that although neither are the subject of Barthes's paper, both are taken as examples to illustrate his point regarding the verb (i.e. the 'act') 'to write', and appear in consecutive paragraphs (Barthes, SC 142).



out or the dying.’ And it is here, after the *‘il est mort’*, that he adds, *between brackets*: **‘(for I can’t say “I am dead”)’** (Barthes, SC 143).<sup>85</sup>

Before coming to Derrida’s response, however, let us look to some further assertions by Barthes, bearing in mind also that in his response Derrida states that he ‘entirely’ agrees with ‘everything you have said about writing’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 156). Everything, apart from what Barthes says about **‘I am dead’**, where ‘I wondered if underneath my agreement with you there wasn’t something that I would like to formulate, which would perhaps be a question or a disagreement’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 155). For Barthes, ‘in our literature [...], the verb [*to write*] is changing status, if not form, and [...] is becoming a middle verb with an *intégrant* past. [...] So that if language followed literature – which, for once perhaps, has the lead – I would say that we should no longer say today *“j’ai écrit”* but, rather *“je suis écrit,”* just as we say *“je suis né, il est mort [I was born, he died]”* (Barthes, SC 143), a proposal that we will follow, albeit somewhat *otherwise*. Despite taking the verb *to be*, however, there is no passive idea in these examples. For just as for Barthes it is impossible to say **‘I am dead’**, similarly,

‘it is impossible to transform *“je suis écrit”* (without forcing things, and supposing I dare to use this expression at all) into *“on m’a écrit”* [**‘I have been written’** or **‘somebody wrote me’**]. It is my opinion that in the middle verb *to write* the distance between the writer and the language diminishes asymptotically. [...] In the modern vern of middle voice *to write*, [...] the subject is immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it’ (Barthes, SC 143).

Whilst for Barthes this status is changing, and his analyses here concern the circumscribed field of literature and genres within it, our proposal is that by reading *with* Derrida, we can go where Barthes doesn’t quite ‘dare’, proposing that whilst **‘I write’**, simultaneously **‘I am written’**, by ‘somebody’ (Barthes’s word) or quite simply, some ‘other’; that the *‘on m’a écrit’* is in fact both *possible* and moreover *necessary*, and that what we are about to lay out regarding writing can in fact be extended to a consideration of any act, or any experience, ‘before and beyond’ any historical or regional shifts (even while we will nevertheless call upon certain literary traits that will help to elucidate the argument as we proceed).

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<sup>85</sup> Without archival consultation, we cannot know whether this parenthesis existed in the ‘original’ text (the *‘inédit’*) or whether it was improvised as Barthes read his paper (and in which case, was it whispered under his breath, as an aside to himself, or lingered upon and stressed in volume and emphasis?) and subsequently included in the published text due to its importance in the discussion that ensued.

Curiously (above all given our interest in the precariousness of the archive), the parenthesis that contains the **‘for I can’t say “I am dead”’** does not appear in the subsequent re-publications of Barthes’s texts, thus in effect placing this present reading of what we are proposing to be one of the major ‘events’ of the Baltimore conference under erasure. See Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984), pp. 21-31 (p. 29) and *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (California: California University Press, 1986), pp. 11-21 (p. 19). Also striking is that the published paper from Baltimore reads **‘I am dead’**, rather than **‘I died’** or the **‘he died’** of the other examples, as would have been more pertinent to the discussion that is not about the present tense but the past compound. However, it is as a ‘present’, as an articulation or testimony of my *present* status, that we are currently addressing this sentence, and it is in this sense that Derrida picks up on this parenthesis in his response.

So let us turn to Derrida's response, which he begins by stating his accordance with Barthes (clarifying, if the selective reading above has so far not implied this, that Barthes is not endorsing some return to classical linguistic constructs, but rather is concerned with the present, and future, of literature and writing):

'I also think, as Barthes said, that present-day literature is an attempt, not really to return to *a buried experience* under the name of the middle voice, but to *think* the adventure (voluntarist, if you will) that was Western history, the history of metaphysics. It cannot be a factual re-creation, but *an effort to think history*, and I think that history is less than ever neglected in that experiment'" (Derrida's response to Barthes, SC 155, emphasis modified).

Departing here from Barthes (who will nonetheless be returning us) and taking Derrida as our lead voice, it is precisely this 'adventure' of the history of Western metaphysics that we will explore, in order to reach Derrida's proposal that whereas Barthes was 'reticent about saying **"I am dead"**, Derrida, on the other hand (but the two hands are not as distinct as they may appear), believes 'that the condition for a true act of language is my being able to say **"I am dead"**' (Derrida's response to Barthes, SC 155-56).

When we say the 'adventure', a better term would perhaps be 'fantasy', as a '*phantasy*', moreover, given that what is at stake in this 'adventure' of metaphysics is precisely the attempt to deny, suppress or bury the *undesirable* threat posed to (self-)presence and mastery, will or agency (the 'voluntarism' of which Derrida speaks) by what we will be calling the *passion of différance*, as, moreover, a *phantomaticity* (the 'hauntology' with which Derrida proposes replacing ontology).<sup>86</sup> A *passion* the threat of which, as will become clear as we proceed, is paradoxically (quasi-suicidally) *desirable*. As Derrida writes in the seminal 'Différance' essay, first published in 1968 (two years after the Baltimore discussion) and later published with the 1973 English translation of *La Voix et la Phénomène*, which will be central in what follows, 'philosophy has perhaps commenced by distributing the middle voice, expressing a certain intransitiveness, into the active and passive voice, and has itself been constituted in this repression' (Diff. 137).<sup>87</sup> Rather than returning to a classical conception of the middle voice, our reading of testimony through *passion* and *différance* will take us towards a paleonymic 're-invention' of the middle voice and intransitiveness (we note the '*certain intransitiveness*' of which Derrida speaks), arriving at Derrida's proposal, in the 1998 *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, that 'the entire history without history of the middle voice [...] is opened in passion' and that 'a *différance* can only be written in the grammar of a certain middle voice, even if

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<sup>86</sup> Insofar as we speak of the undesirable, as will become clear, the *passion* of which we speak, as an impossibility, is in fact *desirable*; albeit in a paradoxical, autoimmune and quasi-suicidal manner. In this respect, we follow to some degree the arguments set out by Martin Hägglund in his *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008). Whereas Hägglund's argument is perhaps too 'direct' and lacks the nuances provided by what is given to be thought by reading the 'autobiographical' in Derrida (above all where this cut across 'the religious') precisely as a striving for a singularity that *marks* and *interrupts* formal logic, his stress on the infinite finitude of the Derridean trace and on the impossible as an undeniable reality of the 'here and now', is instructive. Regarding the desirability of this 'impossible' (what we will be calling *passion*), see, for example, p. 121.

<sup>87</sup> Whilst citing from the translation of 'Différance' in *Speech and Phenomena*, we will at times draw from the vocabulary of the later *Margins of Philosophy* version where this appears more appropriate.

it cannot be confined by such a historical grammar', a suggestion from which Derrida in turn deduces – and this is one of this study's central claims – that 'one might be able to reduce "différance" to another name for "passion"' (D 27). In other words, that a 'certain middle voice' can be extended beyond its traditional grammatical or linguistic definition, a move that we are proposing that Barthes sets up here in this Baltimore paper but does not follow through (at least in the texts which we limit ourselves to reading here), coming to encompass the entire 'field', so to speak, of language and experience, insofar as it is the Derridean arche-trace that gives rise to (that 'effects', in Barthes's vocabulary) all experience, as we shall imminently be elaborating upon. As Derrida writes in the earlier essay, 'Differance is not simply active (any more than it is a subjective accomplishment); it rather indicates the [or again, 'a certain', 'reinvented'] middle voice, it precedes and sets up the opposition between activity and passivity' (Diff. 130).<sup>88</sup>

(Thus, whilst it will be a while before we reach a nuanced examination of *passion*, we can at least begin to see how, insofar as it is already a matter of re-considering the opposition between active and passive, whereas the present chapter presents Satti's '**I am the martyr**' as potentially also implying an '**I am dead**', on a generalisable level the articulation of '**I am dead**' already implies an instance of a certain *passion* – an '**I am the martyr**' – the dimensions of which we have yet to fully unravel.)

Returning to the Baltimore responses, Derrida (who appears to have the last word, at least in the published discussion, were such a thing possible) states: 'I wouldn't have spoken except that what was said about "**je suis mort**" [in French] reminded me of that extraordinary story of Poe about M. Valdemar, who awakens at a certain moment and says, "**I am dead.**"'<sup>89</sup> The story in question is 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', by the very same Edgar Allan Poe who *just so happens* to be buried in Baltimore, and whose tomb Derrida visited, ritualistically, every time he visited the city.<sup>90</sup> Thus when Barthes's '**je suis mort**' reminds Derrida of Valdemar's (or perhaps Poe's) '**I am dead**', was this the first time it had crossed his mind during this visit, or was it something already (silently) informing the trajectory of his oeuvre? Without the resources of telepathy, clairvoyance and unfettered access to the archive, we can only speculate. But to pose the question alerts us to the necessity of chance and to the question of propriety, originality (as the

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<sup>88</sup> The passage in which this quotation occurs is not included in the *Margins of Philosophy* edition, which lacks roughly the first two pages of the *Speech and Phenomena* edition.

<sup>89</sup> Just as the 'magesterial locution' '**I am the martyr x**' is inspired in part by Toufic's article 'I am the martyr Sanâ' Muhaydlî', so the choice to read Satti's '**I am the martyr**' through Poe's '**I am dead**' came in part from this text which makes much of this sentence. Here Toufic states that nowhere except in this short story had he come across the sentence '**I am dead**' (pp. 78-9). In 2007, however, he also cites the testamentary '**I am dead**' at the end of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon* (Beirut: Forthcoming Books, 2007), p. 71. Where the present chapter differs significantly from Toufic's reading is in *the possibility of 'I am dead'*. Even whilst citing extensively from Derrida's 'Signature Event Context', for Toufic, '[e]ven if it be true that a condition of possibility of writing is that it be able to function in the radical absence, "death," or the possibility of the "death" of every empirically determined addressor in general, I cannot write: "I am dead."' Toufic, 'I am the martyr Sanâ' Muhaydlî', p. 82 n. 15.

<sup>90</sup> See Benoît Peeters, *Derrida*, pp. 252 & 529. See also Malabou, 'Counterpath' 274-75.

*inédit* that we will shortly be discussing) and recitation. Whose sentence is this **'I am dead'**, and from where did it originate?

### **Form and Meaning**

Against logical appearances, for Derrida **"I am dead"** is not only a possible proposition for one who is known to be living, but *the very condition* for the living person to be able to speak is for him to be able to say, *significantly*, **"I am dead"** (Derrida's response to Barthes, SC 156, emphasis added). '*Significantly*', for it is a question of meaning and intelligibility: a question probed at length throughout Derrida's reading of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl in *La voix et le phénomène* (translated as *Speech and Phenomena*), above all in the chapter 'Form and Meaning'. Unable to enter fully into the complexity of this text here, a summary of the discussion of (non)sense and (un)intelligibility, precisely where this concerns **'I am dead'**, must suffice. Following which we will draw further from the text in order to elucidate the other parts of Derrida's response to Barthes.

Already, we begin to see the overlap between the comments made here, in Baltimore in 1966, and the arguments set out in Derrida's 1967 reading of Husserl (without consulting the archive, we can only speculate, but it at least appears that the script of *La voix et le phénomène* was in preparation during the period in which the Baltimore conference took place). As in Derrida's 1962 Introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, one of the questions of *Speech and Phenomena* is that of phenomenological parentheses and bracketing – the reduction or *epoché* necessary for eidetic and transcendental thinking, as the ascertaining of 'essences' as opposed to (empirical) 'facts' (**'he died'**, for instance). (Whilst we cannot enter into this here, this question of phenomenological bracketing, in its relation to Barthes's seemingly inconsequential bracketing of **'I am dead'**, is at least implied – even if only obliquely – throughout what follows, above all where this concerns the historicity of the Derridean trace structure. In fact, as with the question posed at the outset regarding the existential analysis as footnote to the historical or vice versa, is not this parenthetical question in fact, perhaps, *the very heart of the matter* in our reading of **'I am the martyr'**? We leave this question open.<sup>91</sup>)

As Derrida relates in both *Speech and Phenomena* (in precisely the two main instances in which he speaks of the *I am* in its relation to *I am present*, *I am mortal* and *I am immortal*, as we are working towards; see SP 53-4) and during the Baltimore discussion, Husserl distinguished two kinds of lack of meaning in language. In the first kind, a sentence such as **'the worm is off'** does not make sense because 'it is not in accordance with what Husserl called the rules of pure logical grammar', and so for Husserl is not language. On the other hand, 'when I say **"the circle is square"**', for instance, this sentence 'respects the rules of grammaticality' and, just as with **'I am dead'**, 'if it is a *contre-sens*, at least it is not nonsense. The *proof* is that I can say that the sentence is

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<sup>91</sup> Regarding the impact of Derrida's readings of Husserl for the rest of Derrida's oeuvre, across genres and in terms of *history*, see 'Punctuations' 118.

*false* [and let us not forget the ‘truth’ of testimony here], that there is no such object. That means that the power of meaning in language is, to a point, independent of the possibility of its object’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 156, emphasis modified) or, to use another term that will be vital in our imminent reading of the photograph, of its ‘referent’. Independent, then, of the (presence of an) ‘**I**’. As such, ‘**I am dead**’ serves exemplarily to illustrate this point: “‘**I am dead**’ has a meaning if it is obviously false. “‘**I am dead**’ is an intelligible sentence’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 156). And hence the arrival at the conclusion with which we began: that to be able to say ‘**I am dead**’, significantly, is the very condition for the living person (the ‘**I**’) to be able not only to write, as we are coming to, but also to speak.

Before working our way through the remainder of Derrida’s response here in Baltimore, we can look to an extended consideration of this in *Speech and Phenomena*, in which Derrida discusses not only the intelligibility of ‘**I am dead**’ but also proposes not only that the *I*, as a functioning mark, already implies *I am dead*, but also that the *I am dead* is implied in the *I am* of the Cartesian and Husserlian *cogito*.

As with Barthes’s assertions regarding the possibility of ‘**I am dead**’ (both in his Baltimore paper and the subsequent reading of Poe’s tale, which we will arrive at shortly), what Derrida locates within the Husserlian texts are contradictions and ‘*premises which should sanction our saying exactly the contrary*’ (SP 96), a logic which we will come to in our reading of the possible readings of any given testimony. And here, once again, we touch upon the question of meaning, as we began with in our reading of Derrida’s Baltimore response. On the one hand, Husserl states that ‘[t]he word “**I**” names a different person from case to case, and does so by way of an ever altering meaning (*Bedeutung*)’. Whereas on the other hand his proposals regarding speech and the ideal nature of every *Bedeutung* simultaneously exclude the possibility that a *Bedeutung* is ‘ever altering’ (SP 95). Derrida cites the following passage from the First Investigation of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, the second sentence of which, importantly, forms the first of *Speech and Phenomena*’s epigraphs, thus implicating even more forcefully, we are arguing, the structural *I am dead* lodged (silently and invisibly) within each and every *instance* of the *I*, as ‘**I**’ (and we are beginning to see the logic of the graphic alterations between the structural *I* and the empirical instances of an ‘**I**’ – Derrida’s, Satti’s or Valdemar’s, for instance – markings whose distinction will not stand for long but which are used, where possible, as a form of indication). Of ‘**I**’, Husserl writes:

‘What its meaning [*Bedeutung* – that of the word “**I**”] is at the moment can be gleaned only from the living utterance and from the intuitive circumstances which surround it. If we read this word without knowing who wrote it, it is perhaps not meaningless (*bedeutungslos*) but is at least estranged from its normal meaning (*Bedeutung*) (cited in SP 96).<sup>92</sup>

For Derrida, there is no need to intuit the object *I* in order to understand the word *I*, and it is this possibility of nonintuition which constitutes the (normal) *Bedeutung* as such. In each

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<sup>92</sup> The epigraph reads slightly differently, as follows: ‘When we read this word “**I**” without knowing who wrote it, it is perhaps not meaningless, but is at least estranged from its normal meaning.’

appearance of the word **I**, the ideality of its *Bedeutung*, in its distinction from its ‘object’, puts us in what for Husserl would be an *abnormal* situation, *as if I* were written by someone unknown. From this it follows that ‘we understand the word **I** not only when its “author” is unknown but when he is quite fictitious. *And when he is dead.*’ For ‘[t]he ideality of the *Bedeutung* here has by virtue of its structure *the value of a testament*’ (SP 96, emphasis added). The signifying function of the *I* does not depend on the life, as self-presence, of the speaking ‘subject’ or *I*:

**‘My death** is structurally necessary to the pronouncing [*prononcé*] of the **I**. That **I am also “alive”** and certain about it figures as something that comes over and above the appearance of the meaning. And this structure is *operative* [*active*], it retains its original efficiency [*efficience*], even when I say **“I am alive”** at the very moment when, if such a thing is possible, I have a full and actual intuition of it. The *Bedeutung* **“I am”** or **“I am alive”** or **“my living present is”** is what it is, has the ideal identity proper to all *Bedeutung*, only if it is not *impaired* with falsity [*si elle ne laisse pas entamer par la fausseté*], that is, if I can be dead at the moment when it is functioning. No doubt this will be different from the *Bedeutung* **“I am dead,”** but not necessarily from the *fact* that **“I am dead.”** The statement [*l’annoncé*] **“I am alive”** is accompanied by my being dead, and its possibility requires the possibility that I be dead; and conversely. *This is not an extraordinary tale by Poe but the ordinary story of language.* Earlier we reached the **“I am mortal”** from the **“I am”**; here we understand the **“I am”** out of the **“I am dead.”** The *anonymity* of the written **I** [the ‘**x**’ of **‘I am the martyr x’**], the impropriety of the *I am writing*, is, contrary to what Husserl says, the “normal situation.” The autonomy of meaning with regard to intuitive cognition [...] has its norm in writing and in the relationship with death’ (SP 96-7, emphasis modified; see also 98-9).

Returning to the Baltimore response, following the claim of the intelligibility of **‘I am dead’**, Derrida arrives at the conclusion that the security of what Barthes names the ‘dissymmetry of language’, which is linked to the *pacte de la parole* (the linguistic pact which unites the writer and the other) would be ‘somewhat effaced or held at distance’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 156); another instance of a reassuring ph/fantasy. For, as Derrida asks, has not everything Barthes has stated regarding writing not in fact implied (again, perhaps against himself), that this ‘*pacte*’ between writer and ‘other’ (which we will soon be thinking of the *gage* of a testimonial oath) is not a *living* pact, but one that cannot be distinguished from the structure of life-death and survival of *the phantasm?* (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 156).

• **‘Ego = ghost. “I am” would mean “I am haunted”’**

It is through the *phantasmatic* structure of the graphematic trace (a structure which also, as we shall see, encompasses speech) that we can frame Derrida’s deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence. Earlier in his response, Derrida references Barthes’s invocation of Benveniste’s distinction between discursive time (a temporal system ‘adapted to the temporality of the speaker [*énonciateur*] and for which the *énonciation* is always the point of origin [*moment générateur*]’) and historical time (‘the system of history or of narrative, which is adapted to the recounting of past events without any intervention of the speaker and which is consequently deprived of present and future’) (Barthes, SC 137). For Derrida, however, the *present* in discursive time is unlocatable.

Rather, this present is taken ‘not from the time of the *énonciation* but from a movement of temporalization which poses the difference and consequently makes the present something more complicated, the product of an original synthesis which also means that the present cannot be produced except in the movement which retains and effaces it’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 155). And hence, if there is no ‘pure present’, as tense of the ‘pure *énonciation*’, ‘then the distinction between discursive time and historical time becomes fragile, perhaps. Historical time is already implied in the discursive time of the *énonciation*’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 155).

Recalling the motif of ‘the tain of the mirror’, it is through this *complication* of the ‘living present’ – as a *folding* or *haunting* (*complicare* ‘folded together’) or a *co-implication* of and *between* the living and the dead, absence and presence; the quasi-anonymous ‘operation’, ‘without act’ (*sic*), of the subject- and object-less *es spukt*, ‘it spooks’ (SM 133) – that both Barthes’s text and Husserlian phenomenology do not account for yet nonetheless demand to be thought, that we can reach the ‘**I am dead**’ as the condition for a ‘true act of language’.<sup>93</sup> As noted at the outset, in both the case of *witnessing* and *bearing witness* (for instance, in the testimony ‘**I am dead**’ or ‘**I am the martyr x**’), what at least *seems* to be required, both for the ‘true act’ of testimony in the classical conception and for Barthes’s ‘true act’ of language, is *the instant*: not an *instance of*, as a ‘*for instance*’, which would imply repeatability as substitutability (the ‘**x**’ of the testimony), but a new (what Barthes calls ‘*inédit*’) and undivided, unrepeated and unrepeatable, unique and irreplaceable instant; an instant as source or origin.<sup>94</sup> In other words, a ‘pure’ self-same instant that is fully present to itself. Since what is at stake here is both testimony and an ‘act’ of language *per se*, before arriving at the specificity of a particular *instance* of the testimonial ‘**I am the martyr**’ or ‘**I am dead**’, let us first of all think the experience of *I am dead* more broadly. Through examining the Derridean trace, *différance*, spacing and iterability, what will become apparent is the manner in which the distinctions between experience and language (the two ‘instants’ of testimony: the experience *witnessed* and the linguistic experience of *bearing witness*) can not be so easily demarcated.

If we are to reflect on any experience in general, this reflection must be based on experience as conditioned by time. And it is precisely the *instant* of experience, this instantaneousness which resists division, which has been one of the primary targets of Derrida’s oeuvre. As is the repeated point across numerous works, most notably a triad from 1967 – *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Writing and Difference* – the traditional concept of experience in the philosophical tradition of the West has been the experience of presence: an absolute proximity to consciousness

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<sup>93</sup> Just as we will be proposing that, following Derrida, the Husserlian and Cartesian *cogito* be translatable by **I am dead**, we read in the later *Specters of Marx* (1993) that “‘**I am**’ would mean “**I am haunted**”: I am haunted by myself who am (haunted by myself who am haunted by myself who am... and so forth). Wherever there is Ego, *es spukt*, “**it spooks**” [...]. The essential mode of self-presence of the *cogito* would be the haunting obsession of this “**es spukt**.” Although speaking here of the Stirnerian *cogito*, Derrida asks (referring the reader back to *Speech and Phenomena*): ‘Can one not extend this hypothesis to any *cogito*? The Cartesian *cogito*, the Kantian “**I think**,” the phenomenological *ego cogito*?’ (SM 133).

<sup>94</sup> As noted above, for Barthes, following Benveniste, the *énonciation* (the ‘act of language’) ‘is always the point of origin [*moment générateur*]’ (Barthes, SC 137).

of that which is experienced, as the self-presence of reflective consciousness upon which Cartesian or Husserlian philosophy are premised. In what follows, however, we will focus predominantly (although not solely) on *Speech and Phenomena*, mainly for the privileged position which this text holds here in our reading of **'I am dead'**. Tellingly, the last of the three epigraphs of the exergue reads as follows:

« J'ai parlé à la fois de son et de voix. Je veux dire que le son était d'une syllabisation distincte, et même terriblement, effroyablement distincte. M. Valdemar *parlait*, évidemment pour répondre à la question... Il disait maintenant :  
**« – Oui, – non, – j'ai dormi, – et maintenant, – maintenant, je suis mort. »**  
*Histoires extraordinaires*

I have spoken both of “sound” and “voice.” I mean to say that the sound was one of distinct, of even wonderfully, thrillingly distinct, syllabification. M. Valdemar *spoke*, obviously in reply to the question. . . . He now said:  
**“Yes; – no; – I have been sleeping – and now – now – I am dead.”**  
 Poe, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”

In the French, the only clue given regarding the source of this epigraph is *Histoires extraordinaires*, and it is not until chapter VII, ‘Le supplement d'origine’, that Poe’s name appears.<sup>95</sup> Alerting us to questions of the suppression of signature, of the ‘original’ context of any given mark, and of archival provenance that will later be our concerns, the tale in question, however, is never named. The English translation, on the other hand, names both Poe and the tale of Valdemar’s ‘case’ here in the exergue and, like the French, refers to ‘an extraordinary tale by Poe’ in ‘The Supplement of Origin’, whilst continuing to withhold any further bibliographic reference. Whilst we also will not have the opportunity to pass beyond this quotation and into the rest of the text, what is significant within the quotation is the emphasis on sound and voice, and the placement and function of this sentence which arguably ‘control[s] everything’ ‘within’ both the text of *Speech and Phenomena* and, we might add, by inference, given the centrality of this book for the trajectory of Derrida’s work thereafter, the entire Derridean oeuvre.<sup>96</sup>

In a 1975 interview, not fortuitously titled ‘Between Brackets I’, the interviewer proposes to Derrida that ‘[i]n *Speech and Phenomena*, the **“I am”** as in **“I am dead”** appears in its phantasmatic dimensions, and it is this dimension that is exposed as such in your later work’ (BBI 20). ‘Exposed’, certainly, perhaps *more vividly*, especially in works that were written subsequently even to this interview, namely *Specters of Marx* of 1993. But our argument is that this phantasmatic dimension of writing was *always already* at work (and let us emphasise from the outset the ‘operativity’ of this ‘at work’, which we will later be reading in terms of the paradoxical ‘inoperativity’ or ‘*désouvement*’ of

<sup>95</sup> Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène: introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), p. 108.

<sup>96</sup> As Derrida states in 1967, *Speech and Phenomena* is the ‘essay I value the most’ (Positions 4). This interview was first published in *Lettres françaises* no. 1211, December 1967. Cited in John P. Leavy’s Preface to Derrida, *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavy (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 7.



*passion*), perhaps more vividly than ever here in this parasitic functioning of the epigraph and the *revenant* countersignatures between Barthes, Derrida, Poe and, by inference, Satti. Starting in Baltimore in 1966 and passing through 1981, when Derrida first published his eulogy for Barthes, ‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’, these countersignatures and hauntings continue through to 1993, when Derrida wrote his mourning text for Louis Marin (a text in which the ‘**I am dead**’, together with the force of the *revenant* or spectral structure of the image – a structure which will perhaps always have been accompanied, if only silently, by the signature Roland Barthes – returns, yet again; see esp. FM 142, 157-58).

To the interviewer, Derrida responds: ‘In *Speech and Phenomena*, the philosophical shaking up of phenomenology gets moving within Poe’s tales, somewhat like a fragmentary oscillation within the hors d’oeuvre, the epigraph’ (BBI 20). ‘Husserl inside the epigraph’ then, so to speak, but an ‘inside’ that ‘does not mean that a so-called fantastic tale borders or exceeds the borders, frames a philosophical critique’ (BBI 20). Rather (and this passage also has much to say about the trembling limit between literature and philosophy, and by inference between literature and testimony evoked at the outset),

‘[t]he *fantastic* epigraph makes an angle from the edge towards the inside; it also “analyses” philosophical power in its domestic regime, first penetrating it by effraction and then grinding it down to the point where the epigraph alone can render an account – in a philosophical or quasi-philosophical manner, both with and without philosophy – of certain utterances that control everything: the “**I am dead**,” for example, implied by the Husserlian and Cartesian **cogito** in the last chapter on “The Supplement of (the) Origin”’ (BBI 20, emphasis added).

As with Barthes’s parentheses, the ‘**I am dead**’ of the epigraph is simultaneously included *and* excluded, ‘within’ *and* ‘without’, following the logic of the law of excess and overflow of the trace that we shall shortly be outlining; a supplementation that in fact functions at the very heart of the (body of the) text proper (the law of supplementarity without which the text, in fact, would not ‘function’ at all), setting both the philosophical text and our present reading in motion. There, in ‘The Supplement of Origin’, ‘the epigraph *returns*, this time within and against the philosophical argument’ (BBI 20, emphasis added), just as the themes introduced herein, above all regarding ‘the supplement of origin’, will be returning in each of the chapters that follow. But, Derrida continues: ‘[t]his does not get closed off in a book’, just as our reading of ‘**I am dead**’ takes us way beyond the confines of the book, extending to the ‘**I am the martyr**’ of Jamal Satti’s video-text-testimony, to the current virtual dissemination of such addresses, encounters and testimonies, and beyond. Derrida neither offers us a reading *of* Valdemar’s extraordinary case, nor of a case so extraordinary as that of Satti’s testimony. And yet, Derrida reads *with* the ‘reading operator’ that is Poe.<sup>97</sup> Just as

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<sup>97</sup> ‘With: it is not a reading of Poe, but other texts read with the aid of Poe, based on this reading operator or this head of a magnetic reading device which is, in its turn, Poe’s reading, Poe reading Husserl or Lacan’ (BBI 21).

we are reading Satti's testimony *with* Derrida (and hence *with* Poe, and *with* Barthes), and Derrida *with* Satti's testimony.

Returning to *Speech and Phenomena*, we read that the value of primordial presence to intuition as source of sense and evidence, as the *a priori* of *a prioris*, 'signifies the *certainty*, itself ideal and absolute, that the universal form of all experience (*Erlebnis*), and therefore all life, has always been and will always be the present. The present alone is and ever will be. Being is presence or the modification of presence' (SP 53, emphasis added). Within philosophy, 'there is no possible objection concerning this privilege of the present-now; it defines the very element of philosophical thought, it is *evidence* itself, conscious thought itself, it governs every possible concept of truth and sense' (SP 62, Derrida's emphasis). 'Certainty' or 'evidence', however, are revealed as part of the ph/fantasy already encountered above. Rather, as we shall come to in Chapter 3 in our discussion of the scene of testimony, the thinking of the trace structure and *écriture* that we will advance here as spectral and testamentary is that which gives rise to the necessary possibility of pervertibility, of a lie or injustice, or of a promise unfulfilled. Or, and this will be the *passion* of testimony, of fiction.

As noted, for testimony, as for Barthes's classical conception of the discursive act, there must be the 'here-now' of the instant: unique and irreplaceable, and as 'origin'. Without separating himself from it entirely (i.e. without claiming to construct another conception of time), Derrida, however, wishes to make tremble the conception of experience formulated merely in terms of presence.<sup>98</sup> Deconstructing the metaphysical *assurance* par excellence – the presupposition of the simple self-identity of the present and of experience instantaneously present to itself, of the instant as a *point* (*stigmē*) (SP 60-1, 64) – Derrida insists on the 'now' as being a 'myth, a spatial or mechanical metaphor', a fiction which would threaten, in its very principle, the whole of Husserl's argumentation (SP 61) (and let us take note of this *stigmatic* and *punctuating* or *piercing* value, which will be vital in what follows). Although Husserl recognises that no 'now' can be taken as a *pure punctuality*, he nevertheless retains the idea of the self-identity of the now as perceptual source-point. Temporality, for Husserl, has 'a nondisplaceable centre, an eye or *living core* ['the blink of an eye,' *im selben Augenblick*], the *punctuality* of the *real now*' (SP 62, emphasis added). Despite this, Derrida demonstrates how the body of Husserl's *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* and beyond in fact prohibits our speaking of a simple self-identity of the present – of an '**I am alive**' that is totally devoid of absence, and hence death (SP 64). Rather, 'the presence of the perceived present can appear only inasmuch as it is continuously compounded with a nonpresence and nonperception'; a nonpresence ('**I am dead**') and nonperception (what we might call a certain 'blindness') that are not added to the actually perceived now, but rather 'are essentially and indispensably involved *in its possibility*' (SP 64, emphasis added). In admitting the continuity of the

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<sup>98</sup> Derrida's continued meditation on non-presence is not contrary to philosophy, which is always a philosophy of presence; it is not 'a meditation on a negative absence, or a theory of nonpresence *qua* unconsciousness' (SP 63), just as Derrida's deconstructive project does not entail a 'throwing out' of the metaphysical tradition to which he is the heir (see also OG 60).

now and the not-now, perception and nonperception, *the other* is admitted into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*; ‘nonpresence and *nonevidence* are admitted back into *the blink of the instant*. There is duration to the blink, and it closes the eye’ (SP 65, emphasis modified). Nonpresence and otherness are *internal* to, *at the heart of*, presence and the graphematic instant, and this alterity is in fact the condition for presence (SP 65-66; see also Resistances 27, Diss. 304).

For Husserl, being is determined as ideality. In his 1962 *Introduction to Husserl's Origin of Geometry*, Derrida had shown that the origin of ideality depends upon the possibility of the infinite reproduction of a productive act. But Husserl's determination of being as ideality is paradoxically one with the determination of being as presence. For Husserl, ‘only a temporality determined on the basis of the “living present” as its source (the now as “source-point”) can ensure the purity of ideality, that is, openness for the infinite repeatability of the same’ (SP 53). This primordial presence to intuition as source of sense and evidence is referred to by Derrida as ‘phenomenology’s “principle of principles”’, the ‘*a priori* of *a prioris*’ (SP 53). For Derrida, however, it is the constitution of what he terms *the trace*, as the possibility of repetition (for instance of the ‘**I**’) in its most general form (the possibility of *infinite* repetition, a return *ad infinitum*) which ‘not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the very movement of *différance* it introduces’ (SP 67). In both *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that working behind and founding the logic of presence lies the buried logic of this trace: ‘more “primordial” than what is phenomenologically primordial’ (SP 67), this trace or *différance* is always older than presence, and procures for it its openness to ideality. Repetition and re-presentation must belong to the very essence of experience, and the experience of presence is an experience of the trace (SP 85). Returning to our discussion of the intelligibility of ‘**I am dead**’, it is this ‘protowriting’ that ‘is at work in the origin of sense. Sense, being temporal in nature, as Husserl recognized, is never simply present; it is always engaged in the “movement” of the trace, that is, in the order of signification.’ It has always already issued forth from itself into the “expressive stratum” of lived experience’ (SP 85-6).

Let us pause to elaborate a little further on the notion of the trace, for it is the trace, in all its *passional* aspects, which shall be *haunting* us throughout. Within a Derridean lexicon we find ourselves returning time and time again to this term; a repeating that is not fortuitous given that the trace is the origin of all repetition and constitutes precisely the minimal *repeatability* (rather than repetition) to be found in every experience (see OG 65). The ‘structure’ of the trace, which follows from the constitution of time, introduces a ‘spacing’ (an interval or difference) which makes the trace the intimate relation of the ‘living present’ with its outside, ‘the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not “one’s own”’ (SP 86). As such, there can no longer be any pure, absolute inside (and here we are also thinking of the ‘**I am dead**’ of Barthes’s parenthesis and of the supplementary exergue that lies ‘outside’ the philosophical text, both of which we are proposing to be the not only the ‘ordinary story’ of language but also its *necessary condition* of

*possibility*).<sup>99</sup> Through this movement of the temporalisation and spacing of the trace, the ‘outside’ insinuates itself into time (the nonspatial) and thus space is ‘in’ time, as the self-relation of time’s pure leaving itself (SP 86); space is ‘in’ the body of the *stigmē* of the ‘living present’.

Let us now turn to *différance*, which is already both visibly and invisibly legible in *Speech and Phenomena*, most notably at the beginning of ‘The Supplement of Origin’, the chapter in which ‘**I am dead**’ is also visibly inscribed (but our argument is that both *différance* and the **I am dead** are ‘at work’, even if not *explicitly* legibly so, in every trace).<sup>100</sup> Recalling the mention of the law of supplementarity above, we read:

[W]hat is supplementary is in reality *différance*, the operation of differing which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay. *Différance* is also to be conceived prior to the separation between deferring as delay and differing as the active work of difference. Of course this is inconceivable if one begins on the basis of consciousness, that is, presence, or on the basis of its simple contrary, absence or nonconsciousness’ (SP 88).

This last line is paramount in our consideration of ‘**I am dead**’ and spectrality, which must be conceived of as *neither* present *nor* absent – before and beyond the dichotomy – and thus in terms of what, in his 1993 reading of *Hamlet*, Derrida names ‘hauntology’: a logic of haunting that would be ‘larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being (of the “to be,” assuming that it is a matter of Being in the “**to be or not to be,**” but nothing is less certain)’ (SM 10; see also 202). In order to elucidate this, let us work our way through an at least preliminary resumé of *différance*, all the time bearing in mind in any attempt to write about it that *différance* ‘is neither a word nor a concept’ (Diff. 136) (as such, we note that the *passion* of which we are speaking, as a potential translation for *différance*, can only take the form of an *indication*. As with the ‘T’, if there ‘is’ some proper name here, it can only be thought in terms of metonymy and figuration).<sup>101</sup> Turning to the 1968 essay entitled ‘Différance’, we read how, although making possible the presentation of any being-present, *différance* is never offered to the present. As such (and here Derrida follows the gesture of Heidegger in his *Zur Seinsfrage*), any attempt to state (to write or say) ‘*différance* is...’ must

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<sup>99</sup> Since this epigraph is comprised of a quotation from a literary work, this leads to the recurring question across Derrida’s oeuvre regarding the ‘contagion’ of the philosophical text by the literary, as yet another example of the law of overflow of the graphematic mark and what Derrida refers to as ‘the law of the law of genre’, as a principle of contamination lodged within the heart of the law itself which enables us to extend the ‘literary’ beyond the confines of the institutionally legitimated genre of Literature, the ‘poematic’ beyond Poetry, ‘fictionality’ beyond Fiction, the ‘photographic’ beyond Photography, and ‘theatricality’ beyond the traditional confines of Theatre (see LG esp. 225).

<sup>100</sup> Whenever we speak of ‘explicitness’, we are also thinking the movement of an ‘unfolding’ or ‘folding out’ (*ex + plicare*) and of ‘unfolding’ as a revelation of truth and meaning that we will be questioning, above all in Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>101</sup> As in ‘Différance’, we are nonetheless attempting ‘a simple and approximative semantic analysis which will bring us in view of what is at stake [*en vue de l’enjeu*]’ (Diff. 136). As with ‘the martyr’ (Jamal Satti, for instance), it is a case of meaning: the name, above all the proper name, is always caught in a chain of differences, becoming an appellation only by inscribing itself within a figuration. For the proper-ness of the name does not escape the spacing described above, and is shaped and undermined by metaphor: ‘The literal [*propre*] meaning does not exist, its “appearance” is a necessary function – and must be analyzed as such – in the system of differences and metaphors’ (OG 89).

necessarily strictly imply a crossing out of the 'is' (*différance is...*) (Diff. 134, MP 6).<sup>102</sup> For *différance*, having neither existence nor essence, does not derive from any category of being (*on*), whether present or absent (Diff. 134). As with 'T/testimony' and 'L/literature', unappropriable in its name or its appearing, *différance* has no essence (Diff. 158, OG 75). And hence the *passion* (see D trajectory 7).

The French *différer*, from the Latin *differre*, holds two quite distinct meanings; a polysemy that Derrida capitalises upon.<sup>103</sup> Firstly, there is what in English would be 'to defer' – the action of putting off until later, to 'temporize' (from which comes the term *temporization*), to take recourse. And secondly – as in the English 'to differ' – there is 'to not be identical, to be other, discernible, etc.' In this sense of differing (*differends* or disputes), 'whether referring to the alterity of dissimilarity or the alterity of allergy or polemics, it is necessary that interval, distance, *spacing* occur among the different elements and occur actively, dynamically, and with a certain perseverance in repetition' (Diff. 136-37). Unlike the verb *différer*, however, the French noun *différance* can never refer either to *différer* as temporization or to *differends* as *polemos*. The noun never conveys the active sense of the verb, unlike the neologism (or neographism) *différance*, whose *a* derives from *différant*, the present participle of the verb *différer*, and thereby 'brings us closer to the action of "differing" that is in progress, even before it has produced the effect that is constituted as different or resulted in difference (with an *e*)', with *différance* being the gerund of *différer*. Thus *différance* brings us closer to the infinitive and active kernel of *différer*, yet at the same time neutralising what the infinitive denotes as simply active (and here the event at Baltimore *returns*): the *-ance* of the French language remains suspended, *undecidably*, *between* the active and the passive, recalling 'something like the middle voice' and 'a certain intransitiveness' (Diff. 137, emphasis added). Put in terms of the trace, the *présent-trace* is 'tracing and traced [*il est traçant et tracé*]'<sup>104</sup> – simultaneously active and passive, with each 'present moment' constituting itself by *returning* [*renvoir*] to another time (past or future) or another present.

Returning to the possibility of the instant, we see that, following the movement of *différance*, each 'present instant' must be related to another instant, *other than itself*; a movement of relation, referral, reference (the *-férance* of *différance*) and nonevidence that we are thinking throughout this study in terms of both testimony and testament. Testamentary and testimonial, for each 'present' moment keeps within itself a mark (a trace) of a past 'instant' and already *lets itself be* vitiated by the mark of its relation to a future 'instant' that itself 'is not' and will never take the form of a modified

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<sup>102</sup> This graphic crossing out is carried out in the *Margins of Philosophy* (1982) translation (MP 6). Following the deconstruction of metaphysics, the terms employed and placed under erasure no longer have their full meaning or the status of a purely signified content, whilst nonetheless retaining a vestigial and ineradicable trace of sense (see Diff. 143 n. 7 & OG, *passim*).

<sup>103</sup> In fact, this 'polysemy' is better put as a 'dissemination', insofar as this opens up uncountable given meanings, beyond even the 'poly-', and as such allows for the reading, potentially unforeseeable to Derrida, that we are embarking on here by introducing Satti (see Diss., *passim*).

<sup>104</sup> 'Jacques Derrida: penseur de l'événement.' Interview with Derrida in *L'Humanité*, 28 January 2004 (URL no longer available).

present (Diff. 142-43). The present is coming to pass, ‘conjoined witness’, as we read in the later *Specters of Marx*. This interval divides the present in and of itself, ‘thus dividing, along with the present, everything that can be conceived on its basis, that is, every being – in particular, for our metaphysical language, the substance’ or, as is crucial for our thinking of the *passion* of the testifying ‘I’, ‘the subject’ (Diff. 143).

In terms of the ‘origin’, as discussed above in terms of the supposed necessity of the origin of the act of *énonciation*, there is nowhere to begin in tracing ‘the sheaf’ of *différance*, for what *différance* puts into question is ‘the requirement that there be a *de jure* commencement, an absolute point of departure, a responsibility arising from a principle’ (Diff. 135). Thus if we were to use the language of metaphysics or transcendental phenomenology – the very language that is being criticised and displaced here – we would say that the ‘originary constitution’ of space and time is precisely this ‘becoming-temporal’ of space and this ‘becoming-spatial’ of time (Diff. 136), although we would no longer be able to use this term ‘originary’ in the extent to which the values of origin, *arche-*, *telos*, *eschaton*, etc. have always denoted presence – *ousia*, *parousia* (Diff. 138). Rather than the myth or fantasy of the pure, uncontaminated unicity of the originary instant, the present is constituted (as ‘originary’, but in the sense of, *stricto sensu*, *nonoriginary*) as an irreducibly nonsimple synthesis of marks or traces that Derrida proposes to call *arche-writing*, *arche-trace*, or *différance*, which ‘(is) (both) spacing (and) temporalizing’ (Diff. 143).

In Baltimore, Derrida states that it is *writing* that ‘can only function in the opening of **“I am dead”**’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 156), whilst nevertheless speaking of the condition for a true act of language as ‘my being able *to say* **“I am dead”**’.<sup>105</sup> But this *archi-writing* of which we are speaking is not limited to the common, circumscribed practice in which graphic marks are employed to convey meaning. Rather, it extends to ‘nondiscursive corpora’ (Punctuations 118), including, as noted above, the totality of experience: to ‘all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural writing’ (OG 9). For as Derrida tells us in ‘Signature Event Context’ (1972), *no form of language* – including even speech, as shall be our concern in *reading* these *spoken* testimonies – can be separated from the field of the mark, which is made up of units of what he calls ‘iterability’ (repeatability and alterability) (LI 10). To say this is not to reduce everything to language (a claim which would risk denying the event of the second possible moment of Satti’s ‘martyrdom’ which resulted in his death), or to propose that there is nothing beyond language, but rather to emphasise ‘a certain irreducibility of the textual or discursive dimension of language’ whilst simultaneously recalling that in the ‘textual’ there is always something non-discursive, some trace that is not linguistic (Negotiations 33) which, in the

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<sup>105</sup> Barthes: ‘I can’t *say* **“I am dead”**’. Derrida: ‘the condition for a true act of language is my being able *to say* **“I am dead”**’; ‘the very condition for the living person to be able *to speak* is for him to be able *to say*, significantly, **“I am dead”**’. Poe/Valdemar: ‘He now *said*: **“Yes; – no; – I have been sleeping – and now – now – I am dead”**’ (emphases modified throughout).

chapters that follow, we will be thinking in terms of the ‘performative’ and corporeal *engagement* of the trace; of the body of the martyred mark.

• **‘I mourn therefore I am’**

Even before the death of the other, the inscription in me of her or his mortality constitutes me. I mourn therefore I am, I am – dead with the death of the other, my relation to myself is first of all plunged into mourning, a mourning that is moreover impossible.

–Derrida, ‘Istrice 2: *Ick bünn all hier*’<sup>106</sup>

Lingering a while with this notion of the folding of spacing, we note how *logocentrism* – the metaphysics of phonetic writing which ‘always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos (OG 3; see also SP 74) – has always prioritised *auto-affection* (and let us not forget the *affect* of *passion* here) as the pure presence to oneself in the experience of hearing-oneself-speak (*s’entendre parler*) and through which the subject experiences consciousness of self (the ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ being exemplary here). By thinking the spacing of the graphematic mark, this *auto-affection* is ‘revealed’ to be necessarily always *exposed* to an alterity ‘beyond’ (a perilous exposure that will be one of the main features of *passion*; a certain nonmastery and ‘openness’ to *who* or *what comes*, unforeseeably and *revenantially*, as is by now a familiar line within the Derridean readership), and is therefore ‘exposed’ to be a *hetero-affection*.<sup>107</sup> (In speaking of auto-affection as being ‘revealed’ or ‘exposed’ as *something else*, what is at stake here, as will be the case throughout, is not only the *passion* of the testifying ‘I’ in its exposure but also of familiar metaphysical and logocentric concepts, as is ‘revealed’ or ‘testified to’ *more vividly* by these very much singular instances of both ‘**I am dead**’ and ‘**I am the martyr**’, which in turn give to be thought a general logic of *I am dead* and *I am the martyr*.) Moreover, not only is auto-affection revealed to be a hetero-affection (with all the consequences this will have for ‘my’ signature, testimony or autobiography) but an auto-hetero-*thanato*-affection: the ‘**I am**’ understood out of the ‘**I am dead**’ (SP 97).

When we watch the video of Satti, it is as if he speaks to us from beyond the grave, in a speech that appears almost to be dictated by some other. And yet, what his ‘**I am dead**’ bears witness to is a structure whereby, as Derrida writes in one of several mourning texts for Paul de Man, ‘everything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of *memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave*’. Here, there is already more than one voice in each and every ‘I’. The ‘self’ appears to itself – *affects* and ‘sees’ itself – in the movement of a *specular reflection* which never closes on itself; in a movement of ‘bereaved allegory’ or ‘hallucinatory prosopopeia’ (‘even before the death of the other *actually* happens, as we say, “in reality”’) in which the other (the friend, for instance) (only) exists ‘in us’ (AM 28-9). And thus, whilst we have spoken

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<sup>106</sup> ‘Istrice’ 321.

<sup>107</sup> This auto- or hetero-*affect*ion will be vital in the chapters that follow, insofar as we will be thinking *passion* in terms of *affect* from ‘without’ (see dictionary entry in frontispiece).

of the *revenant* ‘other’, (the) ‘I’ (‘myself’) also ‘live(s)’ as *revenant*, moving outside myself and returning to myself, *always already* testimonial and testamentary even in ‘simply’ (but this is not a case of the ‘simple’ as ‘single’) being conscious and experiencing my existence (index: the *cogito*), before I have even come to say ‘I’, let alone formulate and proffer some determined testimony. As we read in *The Post Card* (1980):

‘Before all else one must affect oneself with one’s own proper death (and the self does not exist before all else, before this movement of auto-affection), make certain that death is the auto-affection of life or life the auto-affection of death. All the *différance* is lodged in the desire (desire is nothing but this) for this auto-tely’ (PC 359).

Otherness – not simply the ‘who’ of an other ‘I’, but also the ‘what’ of the future, the past or the non-living as technical prosthesis or the machine-like – is introduced, already, into the heart of the living. All the while considering the experience of viewing Satti’s video-testimony, we note how, speaking of the *specular dispossession* which both institutes and deconstitutes me, Derrida writes: ‘It operates as a power of death in the heart of living speech: a power all the more redoubtable because it opens as much as it threatens the possibility of the spoken word’ (OG 141; see also OG 39). And, returning to *Speech and Phenomena*: ‘The appearing of the *I* to itself in the *I am* is thus originally a relation with its possible disappearance. Therefore, *I am* originally means *I am mortal*. *I am immortal* is an impossible proposition’ (SP 54).

It is with the above in mind that we can return to Derrida’s Baltimore response regarding *the possibility of ‘I am dead’*. Unlike Barthes’s conception of the *énonciation* as the ‘point of origin’ (Barthes, SC 137), for Derrida the *je* is always already repeated, and consequently, contrary to what Barthes is searching for, ‘when I pronounce the *je* I am not dealing with absolutely original singularity’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 155).<sup>108</sup> For Derrida, even when I am speaking, for instance in a ‘live’ recording or broadcast, ‘I am already absent from my language.’ Or, as we see in Satti’s ‘three times’, ‘I am absent from this supposed experience of the new, of singularity.’ He continues:

‘That would mean that in order for my pronunciation of the word *je* to be an act of language, it must be a signal word [the ‘*x*’ of ‘*I am the martyr x*’, for instance], that is, it must be originally repeated. If it were not already constituted by the possibility of repetition, it would not function as an act of language. If the repetition is original, that means that I am not dealing with the new (*inédit*) in language’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 155).<sup>109</sup>

Again, *I am mortal*; in other words, I am *necessarily* finite. *Différance* becomes ‘the finitude of life as an essential relation with oneself and one’s death’. Earlier we spoke of the infinite repeatability of the trace, but this warrants clarification: ‘[t]he appearance of the infinite *différance* is

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<sup>108</sup> In Barthes’s words: ‘We are all trying, with different methods, styles, perhaps even prejudices, to get to the core of this linguistic pact [*pacte de la parole*] which unites the writer and the other, so that [...] *each moment of discourse is both absolutely new and absolutely understood*’ (Barthes, SC 144).

<sup>109</sup> Recalling that Barthes’s argument had been that this *je* is always new (*inédit*) for me but not the reader/hearer, and hence the ‘irreducible dissymmetry’ of language mentioned above (Barthes, SC 137-38), this experience of originary repeatability stands as much for the witness and the addressee(s).



itself finite', and it is within this relation (with oneself and one's death) that the aforementioned relation must be thought. Whence the oft-quoted 'catchphrase', '*The infinite difference is finite*' (SP 102), for were *différance* infinite it would become eternal presence. '[L]ife itself would be returned to an impassive, intangible and eternal presence: infinite difference, God of death' (OG 131). No longer conceivable within the opposition of finiteness and infinity, absence and presence, negation and affirmation (SP 102), these oppositions become fluid, undecidable and ghostly. And hence the affirmation of finitude – as the paradoxical logic of autoimmunity and *passion* – as the affirmation of life, as *survival (surviv-ance)* ('life is living on, life is survival [la vie est survie]') that was always at work across Derrida's corpus, even if this is only given to be read *more legibly* during the later span of his oeuvre, precisely as his 'own' instances of '**I am dead**' increase (see LLF 26, 51-2).

Speaking both *from* and *of* a space of living-death, what Satti's haunting testimony bears witness to is this *sur-viv-ance*, as the law of an 'originary' supplement ('The Supplement of Origin' of *Speech and Phenomena* or 'The Supplement of (at) the Origin' of *Of Grammatology*), as 'an original concept that constitutes the very structure itself of what we call existence, *Dasein*, if you will' (LLF 51). As an excess of life whose 'grammar' and 'voice' – *surviv-ance*: recalling our discussion of the middle voice above – must be thought in the very same terms as *passion* and of *differ-ance*. Whether or not the martyr commits his act in the name of death or life, we are all already survivors, 'marked by this structure of the trace, of the testament'. This interpretation is not to be situated on the side of death and the past, however, but rather, as with the testimonial promise which will take central stage in Chapter 3A, on the side of life and the future (LLF 51). Both *against* and, paradoxically, *with* the sacrificial or suicidal drive, this excess of life 'resists annihilation' (AF 60).

### The scandal of utterance

With this 'living-on', we continue through this 'drama' of the '**I am dead**' that passes between (and beyond) Derrida and Barthes; this 'scene of "**I am dead**"' that serves as the 'locus' of their *revenant* encounters.<sup>110</sup> This '**I am dead**' that we might say, following the logic of the Barthesian *punctum* that will soon enter the stage, *pierces* or *punctuates* both, insofar as for each of them this sentence is inscribed in so many works of mourning. Despite all that Derrida has to say regarding a general applicability and the impossibility of the unique and irreplaceable mark, in each case an event *does* happen (even if spectrally and virtually, rather than 'actually') and this sentence or testimony can never be fully assimilated. Somehow, despite the lengthy analyses on the parts of both (what we might call the Barthesian *studium*, or the Derridean 'program'), this sentence nevertheless retains its enigma. Somehow, it continues to hold some 'unqualifiable' and 'unreadable'

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<sup>110</sup> Regarding this 'scene' ('the scene of writing'), which in Chapter 2 we will think in terms of theatricality, we note that Derrida speaks of 'the scene of presence' (Diff., in MP 13) and 'the scene' of the text in general (Diff., in MP 26 n. 26), as well as the 'being outside itself' of time's spacing as an 'arche-stage [*archi-scène*]' (SP 84 n. 9) (the *Speech and Phenomena* translation of 'Difference' renders the French *scène* as 'stage').

trait, some blind spot. Or what we will later be describing as some ‘testimonial’ trait; as the *secret* of testimony.

Following the episodes of Baltimore and *Speech and Phenomena*, **‘I am dead’** returns yet again, this time in the Barthesian corpus. Whereas it had been Derrida who had been reminded of Poe’s tale during Barthes’s paper in Baltimore, this time both Poe and Valdemar are named by Barthes, the graphic or intonational brackets are removed, and the tale itself becomes the ‘object’ of an entire text: ‘Textual Analysis of a Tale by Edgar Allan Poe’ (1973). Whereas the Baltimore discussion is not explicitly referred to, *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), however, is:

‘Other commentaries are possible, notably that of Jacques Derrida. I have limited myself to those which can be derived from a structural analysis, attempting to show that the unheard-of sentence **‘I am dead’** is not at all the incredible statement [*énoncé*], but much more radically, the *impossible utterance of that statement* [*énonciation*].’ (Barthes, TA 287).

Indeed, it is the ‘act’ of *uttering* this statement (what Barthes names the *énonciation*) that is, predominantly, the focus of the passages in which Barthes reads these words of Valdemar’s. This ‘act’ will be one of the foci of Chapter 3 where, through Satti’s testimony, we will examine Derrida’s reinvention of the ‘performative’ (speech act), as an act which, precisely, undoes the dichotomies between the *énoncé* (the ‘said’) and *énonciation* (the ‘saying’), signifier and signified, form and content. Rather than entering into Barthes’s text, we will briefly summarise his position and in turn move to Derrida’s countersignature.

As both *énonciation* and *énoncé*, Barthes, it appears, remains unconvinced about the *possibility* of the sentence **‘I am dead’**. Whereas he concedes that the connotation of the phrase ‘is of inexhaustible richness’ (Barthes, TA 285) (as we are proposing of **‘I am the martyr x’**), he nevertheless, despite everything that Derrida has by this time argued to the contrary, continues to view the phrase as a *hapax* [*legomenon*] of narrative grammar, a staging of *speech impossible as speech* (Barthes, TA 285). This *hapax* is a ‘scandal of utterance’ insofar as it is the return of metaphor to its literal sense (as a metaphor **‘I’m dead’**, as in ‘dead beat’, is mundane), a reversal which for Barthes ‘is impossible, *precisely in the case of this metaphor*: the utterance **‘I am dead,’** *literally, is foreclosed*’ (Barthes, TA 286, emphasis added). As shall become clear in our discussion of ‘identity’ in Chapter 3B, however (and as we could argue against potential accusations of the very approach of this study being dangerously figurative or metaphorical), insofar as literality implies the ‘proper’, this is demonstrated to be yet another ph/fantasy and metaphor is demonstrated to be no less derivative or ancillary than literality.

Whilst we have neither the space nor the need here to either reinforce or attempt to reconcile the divergences between these two seemingly opposing positions, with all the intricate readings of surrounding texts that would need to be taken into account, one passage in particular is worth lingering upon, for it is here that we might propose that Barthes’s reading *gives something to be read* which is in turn (some eight years later) countersigned, re-cited, even if not explicitly, by Derrida:

‘We are also concerned with a scandal of language (and no longer of discourse or utterance). In the ideal total of all the possible utterances of language, the juxtaposition of the first person (*I*) and of the attribute “*dead*” is precisely the one which is radically impossible: it is the blank, *the blind spot* of language, which the tale comes to occupy. What is said is nothing but this impossibility: the sentence is not descriptive, not constative: it affords no other message than that of its own utterance: one might say in a sense that it is a performative, but such as neither Austin nor Benveniste had foreseen in their analyses [...]; here, the unwarranted sentence performs an impossibility’ (Barthes, TA 286, emphasis modified).

Performing an impossibility, an unforeseen ‘performative’: such shall be our reading of these ‘certain utterances’, both scandalous *and* mundane, that control everything. Of these sentences that both *offer* themselves and make philosophy shudder (the ‘performative’) *and* teach us something theorisable (the ‘constative’). Or, that function *both* in the logic of the Barthesian *punctum* and *studium*.

### **S is P**

To repeat, for Barthes the juxtaposition of the ‘I’ and the attribute ‘dead’, in its radical impossibility, ‘is the blank, *the blind spot* of language, which the tale comes to occupy’. ‘*The tale*’, Poe’s tale, but also, as is our wager, far more, beginning with the ‘extraordinary’ testimonial utterances that we take as our subject here. To venture into what this ‘blind spot’ means in the Barthesian corpus would be to lead us too off-track,<sup>111</sup> and thus we will simply take hold of this ‘image of blindness’, so to speak, and translate it into the idiom of the discussions that will follow, thinking this in light of Derrida’s reading of Barthes’s *punctum* that we are approaching: in terms of *singularity* and that which remains (testimonial) unknowable and unqualifiable; that which *escapes* in its *remaining secret*, and yet which nevertheless *insists*; that which *marks, punctuates* and *interrupts* (both ‘me’ and ‘us’ or even history). We speak allusively here, admittedly, and what remains of this chapter should be read as something of an open question or wager, to which we will attempt to respond throughout the chapters that follow.

In ‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’, first published in 1981 but written in around September 1980, roughly six months after ‘*the*’ death of Barthes (see DRB 62 n. 13), Derrida writes that ‘Roland Barthes is the name of someone who can no longer hear or bear’ Derrida’s writing ‘*for* him’: ‘he will receive nothing of what I say here’ (DRB 45). And yet, following the logic of the *revenant* that is haunting us here, it is *as if* Derrida might well, *perhaps*, be demanding (at least *willing*, were such a thing possible) ‘Roland Barthes’ to respond, proleptically, in the grammar of the future anterior; of an ‘**I will have died**’ that Derrida reminds us of, without saying it aloud, in yet another entry in this corpus of inscriptions of ‘**I am dead**’, his 1993 work of mourning for Louis Marin (a

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<sup>111</sup> See, for instance, ‘What Becomes of the Signifier’ in *The Rustle of Language*, op. cit., pp. 236-37. Here Barthes speaks of the ‘blind spot’ of language as ‘that recess’ or ‘abyss’ in which a text is free of any subject, any object, or any symbol. Regarding blindness in relation to photography and the experience of finitude in Barthes’s writings, see Eduardo Cadava & Paola Cortés-Rocca, ‘Notes on Love and Photography’, *October*, No. 116 (Spring 2006), pp. 3-34 (see esp. pp. 4, 16, 32-3).

text from which Barthes is not absent) (FM 157-58). As if Derrida is holding him to ‘the promise of return’ that the trace *cannot but* promise. Who had the first word (were such a thing to be possible)? Such was our speculative question, both here and in our reading of the series of martyr-testimonies. And who will have the last word? What new responses will yet more readings bring?

Here Derrida ‘confesses’ that, looking at Barthes’s photographs and handwriting, scanning them in order to find some ‘detail’ that Barthes himself could not *see* in his own writing, ‘I do not know what I am [...] looking for’ (DRB 63). Rather than *looking for* or *making* some detail come, we might instead think of a *letting come*: of an unforeseen and unforeseeable visitation from and of (*de*) the other, the *revenant*, for instance, who or which, foreign to the order of visibility, like death itself, ‘comes and comes back (since singularity *as such* implies repetition)’ without ever being dominated by a ‘performative act of language’ (DP 230-1 n 34). *Letting come*, as in the arrival of the accident, or the coincidental, unsolicited receipt of a letter which carried the good fortune of having arrived safely. Whilst writing this text Derrida receives from a friend a photocopy of Barthes’s ‘Textual Analysis’ of Poe’s tale, which (surprisingly, perhaps) he confesses to not having read. Derrida, it seems, is hastily trying to complete his text, still searching for that ‘something’. ‘I will read it later’, he says. (A promise we do not know if he kept. What, since we are embroiled in the episodes of this ongoing encounter, would have been his response?) And yet, ‘while “leafing” through it,’ Derrida ‘picks out’ a selection of propositions regarding ‘**I am dead**’, largely cited above. As if ‘scanning’ the text, the graphic markings of this sentence – with its easily recognisable (and yet never quite knowable) ‘form’ (a form that our eye becomes all the more accustomed to in the bold punctuations herein), shrouded either in quotation marks or slanted into italics – jumps out of the text, *piercing* the reader, rather like the Barthesian (and then Barthesian-Derridean) *punctum* that we shall soon encounter.

Rather than slowly reciting Derrida’s response to these passages of Barthes’s surrounding Valdemar’s ‘**I am dead**’, however, we will take a detour (the displacement of metonymy, which will be our subject) through the Barthesian distinction between the *punctum* and the *studium*, reading this *punctum* in light of the ‘blind spot of language’ cited above – which, surprisingly, and perhaps crucially for our reading, Derrida omits from the passage that he quotes (as if, *perhaps*, he does not see it or does not want to see it) –, proposing that it is this blind spot, *beyond sovereignty*, that *testimoniality* and *passion* comes to occupy. Following this, we will conclude by returning to the ‘**I am dead**’ and the impossible unicity and irreplaceability of the ‘I’ (as referent) as the ‘site’ of a sufferance when responding to the singularity of the (deceased) other.

In his seminal study on photography, *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes speaks of two elements whose co-presence seem to establish his interest in the photographs he is reading therein: the first, the *studium*, is the ‘always coded’ (Barthes, CL 51, cited in Derrida, DRB 41) which refers to a classical body of information and which, unlike the *punctum*, which we will be later thinking in terms

of *passion*, ‘is never my delight or my pain’ (Barthes, CL 28).<sup>112</sup> *Studium*, from the Latin, which doesn’t immediately mean ‘study’, but rather ‘application to a thing’ (we might think here of ‘applied deconstruction’), a ‘taste’ for something, but as an ‘enthusiastic commitment’ that nonetheless lacks a special acuity (Barthes, CL 26). *Studium*, as what we will be calling, in the Derridean idiom, the ‘program’ or the *calculable*. Through the *studium* ‘I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them *as political testimony* or enjoy them as *good historical scenes*’ (Barthes, CL 26, emphasis added). The second element, the *punctum*, is the ‘subtle beyond’ (Barthes, CL 57, cited in DRB 41) that ‘attracts or distresses me’ (Barthes, CL 40), that organises and gives force to the work. The ‘blind field’ (Barthes, CL 57).<sup>113</sup> And already *punctum* is potentially translatable as what we will be calling the *incalculable*, *passion* or *différance*, as we are coming to. And let us stress this *potentially*. Or, potentially, ‘the *testimonial*’, even though for Barthes it is through the *studium* that one ‘receives’ a photograph as a (political) testimony. In such a narrative, we speak of *S* and *P*. *Studium/punctum*, recalling the *S is P* formula of predication that swings us back to Husserl and to *Speech and Phenomena* (‘Barthes does in fact appeal to phenomenology in [*Camera Lucida*]’; ‘[*Camera Lucida*] also presents itself as a phenomenology’, DRB 53, 57). But, insofar as it is a matter of the *singularity* of testimony and the event are we not in fact closer to *S is P*? This will be our question throughout. For can we not propose that a thinking of testimony *must* take into account, equally, both the *studium* and the *punctum*; that a testimony such as Sattis’s must be read *both* in its cultural, sociological and political dimensions, as Barthes (‘reasonably’) reads the photographs of rebellion in Nicaragua here in *Camera Lucida*, and with respect to that unqualifiable (*différential*, textual) element that *pierces* the viewer-listener-reader-witness?

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<sup>112</sup> Had we the time to consider in detail the phenomenon of the ‘martyr poster’, comprised of (now digitally manipulated) collages of photographs, as opposed to the moving video with its accompanying speech, we would have to begin by ‘inhabiting’ *Camera Lucida* and this response of Derrida’s, with all that it says about photography and the implied “‘return of the dead” in the very structure of both its image and the phenomenon of its image’ that ‘does not happen in other types of images or discourses, or indeed of marks in general, *at least not in the same way*’ (DRB 53-4, emphasis added). See, for example: ‘Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same, the *punctum* in the *studium*, the completely other, dead, living in me. This concept of the photograph *photographs* every conceptual opposition; it captures a relationship of haunting that us perhaps constitutive of every “logic”’ (DRB 42).

Having said that we will not be addressing the photograph, at least in detail, let us not forget that the performance piece with which we began is entitled *Three Posters*. Three ‘takes’, three ‘actors’, three ‘witnesses’, three (+*n*) ‘deaths’, three pieces of political propaganda, all bearing some relation to the ‘still’, ‘fixed’, instantaneous image of death, to the ‘return of the dead’ of the photographic image?

The phenomenon of the martyr-poster is probed across many of Mroué’s works, as well as in the works of artists such as Toufic and the pair Hadjithomas and Joreige (see ‘A State of Latency’), and also in literature, for example in Khoury’s *White Masks*, trans. Maia Tabet (Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2010) and Mahmoud Darwish’s, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982* (1986), trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1995). It is worth citing Darwish here with regards to the technical reproducibility (or ‘paper machine’) we are stressing: ‘[Beirut] was no doubt the first city in the world to upgrade the making of posters to the level of the daily paper. [...] Thus the poster became a recurrent term; in poems and stories it was used to convey the sense of something special. Faces on the walls – *martyrs freshly emerging from life and the printing presses, a death which is a remake of itself. One martyr replacing the face of another, taking his place on the wall, until displaced by yet another, or rain*’ (p. 53, emphasis added).

<sup>113</sup> ‘Ultimately – or at the limit – in order to see a photograph well, it is better to look away or close your eyes’ (Barthes, CL 53).

Bearing in mind the graphic **'I am dead'** that Derrida 'picked out' of Barthes text, or which we are proposing may well have 'picked *him* out', we read Barthes's description: 'The second element will break (or scan) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element that rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists . . . *punctum*' (Barthes, CL 26, cited in Derrida, DRB 42). For Barthes, in Derrida's words, the *punctum* 'seems to say, to let Barthes himself say, *the point of singularity*, the traversal of discourse towards the unique, the "referent" as the irreplaceable other, the one who will be and will no longer be, who returns like that which will never come back, who marks the return of the dead right on the reproductive image' (DRB 56-7, emphasis added).<sup>114</sup> The referent as the irreplaceable other, the one who will be and will no longer be, who returns like that which will never come back: is this not one way of describing the 'I' of **'I am dead'**?

'A Latin word exists . . . *punctum*': this is all that Derrida cites. But looking to *Camera Lucida*, we find more, which we cite here and then leave suspended, awaiting our return to this in the discussions-to-come regarding testimony, martyrdom and the wounding of the body *of* the martyr-witness and *of* the graphematic (re-)mark:

'A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of [but can we not also say this of testimony?] are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely these marks, these wounds are so many *points*. This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. The photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)' (Barthes, CL 26-7).

An open question to carry through this study: whilst acknowledging the risk of giving such a Derridean inflection to the Barthesian corpus, can we not fold together a thinking of the *punctum* and *différance*? Or, rather – and this will be the *passion* – of the **S is P** of *différance*? Not in order to reduce the two discourses or signatures to the 'same', but to ask what each gives to be thought or *reveals more vividly* about the other, and above all about *passion* and *testimony* through which we are thinking *différance*? Can we not think both, *together*, as 'the unqualifiable' (a word Derrida borrows from Barthes and which, even when transposed and modified, remains *marked* by what is designated by the term in Barthes's *Camera Lucida*: 'a way of life [...] that already resembled death, one death before the other, more than one, which it imitated in advance' [DRB 47]); as that which, never appearing *as such*, 'escapes every determination, every *name* it might receive in the metaphysical text' (Derrida's 'definition', were such a thing possible, of the trace [MP 25/SP 158]). Or as that which 'is not *comprehended* [...] by intuitions or presentations' (as Derrida says of the 'originary' labyrinthal gallery – *différance*, in short – evoked by Husserl in the first epigraph of *Speech*

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<sup>114</sup> Continuing with our emphasis on that which Barthes *gives* to Derrida, following the 'evental' logic of the *punctum*: 'I return to this because Roland Barthes is the name of that which "points" me, or "points" (to) what I am awkwardly trying to say here' (DRB 57).

and *Phenomena*'s exergue [SP 104])? '[C]ontrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing', Derrida tells us in *Speech and Phenomena*, 'the thing itself [and this will be our contention with regard to testimony] *always escapes*' (SP 104). Escapes, or remains hidden, as we will come to read in a discussion of testimony and the arche-secret of *différance*.

Unable to embark upon a lengthy reading here, we merely point towards Derrida's reading of the relation between the *studium/punctum* as no longer being one of simple exclusion but rather as closer to hyphenated, with this hyphen itself in time coming to designate the (non-)place of a wound. '[S]ince the punctual *supplement* parasites the haunted space of the *studium*, one would discretely suggest, parenthetically, that the *punctum* gives rhythm to the *studium*, that it "scans" it' (DRB 42). And this permeability between the two is primarily, given our interest herein regarding the unique and unrepeatable 'I' of the '**I am dead**', due to the fact that whereas for Barthes the *punctum* is irreducible and, in Derrida's words, 'its originality can bear neither contamination nor concession' (RDB 57), in Derrida's reading on the other hand, just as with the differential mark discussed above, it is always already divided and metonymised. Once again, Barthes can be read otherwise, for 'in other places, at other times', he accedes to a demand that could be called *phenomenological*, acceding to the *punctum* as *contrapuntal*. Despite highlighting its irreducibility, Barthes in fact himself says that the *punctum* can accommodate 'a certain latency [the deferral of *différance*] (but never any examination)' (Barthes, CL 53, cited in Derrida, DRB 57) and that it 'has, more or less potentially, a power of expansion'; a power that 'is often metonymic' (Barthes, CL 45, cited in Derrida, DRB 57). Thus, it is necessary to recognise that 'the *punctum* is not what it is' but that, rather, that this absolute other composes – complicates or implicates, *differentially* – with the same: the *studium* (DRB 57). The relationship between the two is 'neither tautological nor oppositional, neither dialectical nor in any sense symmetrical', but rather, supplementary ('**I am the martyr x**') and ghostly ('**I am dead**') (DRB 56, 58). Just as in order to think singularity (of the 'I', of a testimony, of a historical text, *for instance*), we will need to think *together* the 'punctual one time' (Barthes's *hapax*, or indeed the *punctum*) and the repeatable (the 'always coded' of the *studium*). Or, as we will come to in a discussion of testimony in the chapter that follows, *physis* and *tekhnē*; what we will be calling *the (performative) event* and *the machine*. And this, as we will come to in a discussion of responsibility, is the *scandal*, to use a word that punctuates not only Derrida's oeuvre but also Barthes's. Supposedly located 'outside' all fields and codes, 'as the place of irreplaceable singularity and of the unique referential', the *punctum* nonetheless lends itself to metonymy; a unique death (Satti's, for instance) 'immediately repeats itself, as such, and is itself *elsewhere*' (emphasis added).<sup>115</sup> Or rather, it *induces* metonymy (the substitutability of the 'I'), 'and this is its *force*, or rather than its

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<sup>115</sup> Metonymy 'is already at work on the *I* in its relation to itself, the *I* when it refers to nothing else but the one who is *presently* speaking' (DRB 65). We refer here Barthes's assertion regarding the self-referentiality of the 'performative' of '**I am dead**': that it 'affords no other message than that of its own utterance', and that 'before saying "**I am dead,**" the voice simply says "**I am speaking**"' (Barthes, TA 286).

force [...], its *dynamis*’; ‘its power, potentiality, virtuality, even its dissimulation, its latency’ (DRB 57).

Therein lies the *sufferance*, what we shall soon be calling ‘the passion of the singular mark’, ‘the passion of origin’, or ‘the passion *of* and *for* testimony’: the impossibility of the ‘**I**’ of ‘**I am dead**’, literally, ‘according to the letter [*à la lettre*]: ‘the inability to say *I* in the present: a punctual *I*, punctuating in the instant a reference to the self as to a unique referent, this autoaffective reference that defines the very heart of the living’ (DRB 65). The *à la lettre* of literality becomes a *revenant à la lettre*: undecidably and untranslatably caught between ‘returning to the letter’, ‘literally returning’, ‘ghost to the letter’ and even ‘literally a ghost’ (DRB 64 n 16). Continuing with this *sufferance*, which we will in time be reading as the wound of the metonymic ‘more than one’ of the poetico-testimony of Paul Celan, we read:

‘For at the heart of the sadness felt for the friend who dies, there is perhaps this point: that after having been able to speak of death as plural, after having said so often “**I am dead**” metaphorically or metonymically, he was never able to say “**I am dead**” literally or according to the letter. Were he have to have done so, he would have again given in to metonymy’ (DRB 65).<sup>116</sup>

*But*, ‘metonymy is no mistake or falsehood; it does not speak untruths. And literally, according to the letter, there is perhaps no *punctum*’. *As such*, we might add, which is not to deny the *effects* of the *punctum*. Does this statement not recall Derrida’s ‘definition’ of *différance*? ‘Which makes all utterances possible but does not reduce the suffering in the least; indeed, it is even a source, the unpunctual, illimitable source of suffering’ (DRB 65). With this *sufferance* of singularity and substitutability, we return to ‘**I am dead**’ and the interview cited above:

‘The scene of “**I am dead**” – with all of its movements – maintains for a long time a very general value. Universal structures are interpreted through it. But somewhere – and hence the signature effect – they “shift gears” not just into my readable proper name but into a particular, if not absolutely singular phantasmatic organization. Even if I had many things of an idiomatic sort to say about the “**I am dead**” that manipulate me, or which I try to outsmart, *something of them remains absolutely unreadable*, on the side of what I call timbre or style in “Qual Quelle”: accessible only from the place of the other’ (BBI 21).

Of such texts, Derrida continues, the reader(-witness) will only be *interested* if ‘beyond all cunning and all the impregnable calculations, he or she is certain that after a certain point I don’t know what I am doing and cannot see what is staring me in the face’ (BBI 21). Already, in our addressing general, ‘originary’ structures, we have been unable (should we have ever wanted to) to stay clear of singular, determined instances (‘autobiographical’, we might say: Satti’s, Poe’s, Valdemar’s, Barthes’s or Derrida’s, *for instance*). And there will be more to come. How to respond, singularly, each time? As we shall elaborate upon as we proceed, in thinking singularity, it will be a case of thinking *together* the singular and the generalizable, without each of which singularity would not be possible. And,

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<sup>116</sup> Just as with the repeatability of iterability that will be the subject of Chapter 3 and beyond, this ‘metonymic force’ is a *necessary* betrayal: it ‘thus divides the referential trait, suspends the referent and *leaves it to be desired*, while still maintaining the reference. It is at work in the most loyal of friendships; it plunges the destination into mourning while at the same time engaging it’ (DRB 61, emphasis added).



we are proposing here, of thinking together the *punctum* and the *studium*, and reading the intertwining of the two together with *différance* and the enmeshing between the singular and the universal that it entails; what *Monolingualism* describes as ‘the replica or re-application of the quasi-transcendental or quasi-ontological within the phenomenal, ontical, or empirical example’ (M 26).

Again: how to respond to each utterance, testimony, or text? In all its phantasmatic dimensions, in the legacy it leaves for us to respond to, each time singularly? “‘Each time’” – a phrase that we now see both marks a site of iteration and substitution and *punctuates* a singular time and place – one must speak so as to give voice to the friend’s singularity, so as to respond both for and to the alterity that first makes one’s response possible’ (WM 25). How to respond, ‘adequately’, to the marking of singularity? How to respond to the *punctum*, ‘making the *punctum studium* without its ceasing to be *punctum*’? And how, following the questions with which we began (see Chapter 1) regarding ‘applying deconstruction’ or ‘doing history’, to retain the ‘that which escapes’ of *différance* and the Derridean event (which we will be describing through the lens of *passion*) without falling back into prescriptivity, were such a thing to be possible? As shall be the case throughout, it will be a matter of thinking *together* both the incalculable *and* the calculable or, framed in the terminology of testimony, the knowable (or ‘evidential’) *and* that which remains as unbelievable as a miracle. And hence, as we are coming to, only *believable*.

It is with this notion of the *only ever believable* that we enter into the next chapter, where we will probe the passion *of* and *for* testimony in its never being amountable to proof, and hence always potentially being deemed unreliable or inauthentic. As such, just as ‘**I am dead**’ was seen here to haunt every ‘living’ ‘**I**’, so ‘**I am the martyr**’ inflects every testimonial utterance, spelling its impossibility. This, as we will see, is its unsettling and paradoxical only condition of possibility. As such, we continue the discussions herein regarding the unsettling of age-old assurances and ph/fantasies of certitude (regarding either of some piece of factual, empirical and ‘meaningful’ knowledge, or regarding the knowledge of the self of the *cogito ergo sum*), with this unsettling taking place in the following chapter in the space of the courtroom or historical archive.

As we have seen through our reading of the ‘logics’ unfolding from the sentence ‘**I am dead**’ – most notably the logics of an ‘originary’ haunting and supplementability of the ‘living present’ – the act of any invention is always *of* and *from* the other. This ‘invention of the other’ (as the ‘**I am written/signed by the other**’ witnessed above) is continued in Chapter 3B, where we look to ‘my language’ and ‘my testimony’ as always being *of* and *from* the other, and in Chapter 4, where ‘my’ performative act, invention or endeavour is shown to always be the (corporeal) *operation of the other*. Whilst in Chapters 4 and 5 the ‘felicitous’ accidents of Derrida’s encounters with Barthes and Poe culminate in discussions of the logic of autoimmunity, by which we mean a necessary exposure to accident and ruin, this is developed in Chapter 3A in terms of a *necessary* pervertibility of testimony, as a performative speech act. Whereas for Barthes the performative act ‘**I am dead**’ is impossible, for Derrida, as we have already begun to see, it is on the very condition of this (non-

negative) im-possibility that any performative act bears its chance. This logic is probed further in the next chapter in a reading of Derrida's unsettling of the 'speech act theory' of J. L. Austin and John Searle and his calling instead for an altogether other performative that is always *haunted* by that which, strictly speaking, renders it impossible: for instance, the fictionality of Valdemar's incredible utterance, and a generalised 'theatricality' that is epitomised by *Three Posters* but that we have already hinted towards with our descriptions of 'the scene' of **'I am dead'** and of writing in general.

Continuing to read in terms of the 'hauntology' set out herein, we see in the following chapter how it is the *tekhmē*, absence and otherness 'at the heart of' the living present that render impossible the supposedly necessary *hapax* of any given testimony, as well as of death and martyrdom. This impossible *hapax* is in turn (above all in Chapters 4 and 5) thought in terms not only of the 'scandal' or '*contre-sense*' of language witnessed herein, but also in terms of what Derrida names the 'scandal' or 'madness' of responsibility. Proceeding with the question of 'the grammar of the event' introduced herein, we see in the following chapter how, as with a line by François Ponge, 'the fabulous economy of a very simple little sentence', **'I am the martyr x'**, 'perfectly regular in its grammar, spontaneously deconstructs the oppositional logic that relies on an untouchable distinction between the performative and the constative and so many other related distinctions' (Psyche 13). On an untouchable border, then, that must allow itself to be parasited and haunted. Whilst the hauntology developed herein will be supplemented in the following chapter by what we will be calling a 'limitrophy', this will be considered in Chapter 4 as an autoimmune hospitality, wherein any 'concept' or 'I' can only ever allow itself to be haunted by that which threatens to destroy it, in effect signalling its own martyrological self-destruction that is borne witness to by the auto-matic bracketing (placing in parentheses), auto-erasure or auto-deconstruction of the **'x'** of **'I am the martyr (x)'**.

### Chapter 3A: 'I am the martyr (x)'

No one / bears witness for the / witness  
–Paul Celan, 'Ash Glory [*Aschenglorie*]

The Neuter, the gentle prohibition against dying, there where, from threshold to threshold, eye without gaze, silence carries us into the proximity of the distant. Word still to be spoken beyond the living and the dead, *testifying for the absence of attestation*.

–Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*<sup>117</sup>

I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti.

#### Introduction

The present chapter takes as its central concern the passion *of* and *for* testimony. The chapter is divided into two parts (A and B), with Satti and Derrida each taking the centre stage, respectively. In each case, their testimonies are considered as historical testimonies that reveal exemplarily the *necessary* haunting of any archival document by the parasitism of fictionality (as exemplified by Derrida's reading of Blanchot's *récit*), theatricality (*Three Posters*) and even self-destruction and self-effacement (**'I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti'**). With this quasi-suicidal logic, the chapter is silently haunted by the threatening possibility of the total annihilation of both the witness and testimony, a possibility which we will confront in Chapter 5 in terms of the responsibility of the reader-witness-historian and the *enigma* and *punctum* (as the *passion* of a secret and a wound) of testimony. Exposing the instability of testimony, what remains is the necessary structural faith of a linguistic promise, the structure of which sets up discussions in later chapters of the necessary faith that structures any relation with and to the other and of the politico(-theological) and tele-technological stage in which suicidal operations such as Satti's are enacted; a space which for Derrida entails thinking a certain messianic and emancipatory promise which 'remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction' (SM 74).

In Part A, as with the **'I am dead'** of Chapter 2, the question is posed as to whether **'I am the martyr'** *is possible* as an act of testimony, and what Satti's testimony gives to be read, exemplarily, about testimony and the performative act *per se*. By looking to the texts in which Derrida most 'explicitly' engages with testimony, and by supplementing this with a reading of a certain *testimonial arche*-promise that infiltrates his entire oeuvre, once again *the possibility of 'I am the martyr'* is read as a double genitive, with its impossibility serving, paradoxically, as its very condition of possibility, and 'the *possibility of*' is translated as 'the *passion of*'. Here, in this impossibility, the 'itself' (the **x** or the 'sui-' of *suicide*, for instance) *deconstructs itself* or *erases itself*,

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<sup>117</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. Lynette Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 76 (cited in D 31).

places itself in parentheses, hence making the *I am the martyr* that silently haunts any testimonial instance of the *I* translatable as *I am the martyr (x)*. By shuttling undecidably between a ‘given’ testimony or promise and a structural *testimoniality* or *arche-promise*, it is proposed that the aporia of testimony (and indeed any singular instance of the ‘I’) and of the exemplarity that is necessary for both P/passion and testimony (the aporia of the *example* or *instance* that must simultaneously be unique *and* repeatable) can be located *on* or *in* the hyphen of what, in *Monolingualism*, is named the ‘empirico-transcendental’. Here it becomes apparent that the aporia of exemplarity plays a central role, with it being argued that *I am the martyr (x)* functions as the exemplary possibility of the law – indeed the *passion* – to which it bears witness.

As such, we can say that whilst there can be no testimony that is not about a certain martyrdom and passion, this enigmatic relationship between testimony and martyrdom is exemplified, seemingly ‘self-referentially’, by Satti’s martyr-testimony, ‘**I am the martyr**’. If a testimony can tell us anything at all, it tells us that what is martyred and sacrificed in the testimony is the testimony itself. Paraphrasing and re-inflecting the words of Eduardo Cadava regarding ‘the image of ruin’ and the ruin to which all images bear witness, the testimony announces its inability ‘to show, to represent, to address and evoke the persons, events, things, truths, histories, lives and deaths to which it would refer’ (Cadava, *Lapsus* 35-6). (As such, our reading of the *passion* of testimony is inscribed within studies regarding the impossibility and injustices of testimony evoked in Chapter 1.) If we are to speak of truth, we might say that this *passion* is the truth of testimony. Likewise, as will be elaborated further in Chapter 4, this *passion* of testimony *bears witness* to the fact that what is sacrificed in an act of martyrdom is the very possibility of martyrdom, as a willed and intentional act of sacrifice; just as the image speaks of ‘the ruin of ruin’, this *passion*, in its own way, announced ‘the sacrifice of sacrifice’. Thus, if we are to speak of ‘possibility’ as ‘success’, what the testimony succeeds in doing, if anything, is to reveal a certain threat and failure (at times injurious and fatal, as we shall see above all in Chapter 5) which, nonetheless, can be regarded as its only chance.

In Part B, a reading is given of Derrida’s self-presentation as a martyr figure in his *Monolingualism of the Other*, precisely in his attempts to testify. ‘Demonstrating’, ‘enacting’ or ‘performing’, *exemplarily*, the aporias of testimony, it is proposed that in this text the entire problematic of exemplarity ‘reveals itself in the place of the *wound*, both of the body of the graphematic mark and the ‘body proper’ (were such a thing possible) of the martyr-witness. Through closely reading the drama and theatricality of the aporia of exemplarity and re-markability as it is played out here in *Monolingualism*, once again the above-mentioned hyphen is prioritised, with it being *on* or *in* the wound of this hyphen, and of the hyphenated identity of any ‘I’ that is exemplified by Derrida’s Judeo-Franco-Maghrebi experience, that this aporia ‘takes place’. Thus, in effect, it is around the parenthetical (*x*) and/of the wound-hyphen that the entire chapter revolves, with it being *from* these two graphematic markings that we consider the scandal of Satti’s testimony

being *at once* extraordinary (index: ‘event’) *and* the ordinary story of language (‘machine’). If there is some ‘at once’, it is ‘here’, in the space of this ‘at once...and...’, in this paradoxical marking and re-marking of repeatability and substitutability.

In Chapter 4, we will be outlining the contours of *différance* as *passion*, taking the experience of passion as a *nonpassive endurance* – a *bearing* (*porter*, for instance *porter témoignage* ‘to bear witness’) or *suffering* – of the *aporia*, and as the very condition of responsibility and decision (see A 16). In other words, as what Derrida in the later *Aporias* names ‘the aporetology or aporetography *in which* I have not ceased to struggle’ (A 15, emphasis added). How to think this ‘in’? Our argument will be that this scene of aporetography is the dislocated space of a wound-hyphen and the re-markability that this ‘gives rise’ to (*donne lieu*, literally ‘gives place’). This aporetography is also a ‘paradoxical limitrophy’ (again, to be thought through the  $\times$  and the hyphen) that inhabits ‘the interminable list of all the so-called undecidable quasi-concepts that are so many aporetic places or dislocations’ (A 15), of which we focus on the ‘quasi-concepts’ of testimony, the promise and the ‘saying the event’ of performativity.

Through examining the aporias of exemplarity, it is demonstrated how the re-markings of a universal passion take place across the body of a singular and idiosyncratic martyrdom. Whilst various senses of *passion* are inscribed across the chapter, for the most part Part A focuses on *passion* as the experience of non-mastery and an ‘arche-passivity’, and Part B the experience of corporeal affect and wounding. In both cases, as we began to see in Chapter 2, any event, above all that of testimony, is shown to always be *of* and *from* the other, with this being exemplified by Derrida’s impossible testimony in *Monolingualism*, **‘I have only one language; it is not mine’**.

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## I: The passion of and for testimony

Whereas the central dichotomy complicated in Chapter 2 was that of the presence/absence of **'I am alive'/'I am dead'**, here, in thinking the supposed 'presence' of the body of the martyr and his 'live' testimony together with the distancing and dislocation of the tele-technical mediation of the video format, we can rephrase this in terms of *physis/tekhne*, with *tekhne* being that 'other' that contaminates the *punctuality* and uniqueness of the 'here-now' and the supposed 'authenticity' of the performative (testimonial) event, as an event that ought to be devoid of the inorganic or automaticity. What Derrida demonstrates, however, is that this *punctuality* has in fact always been constituted by mechanical reproducibility, just as the 'corpus' (of both the witness and the signatory mark) is always already prosthetised, as exemplified in Satti's video-testimony.

Once again, what is at stake is Derrida's 'revealing' of supposed dichotomies upon which the ph/fantasies not only of metaphysics but also of juridical systems, and even institutional archives with all their various motivations, are premised to in fact be enmeshed, spectral, supplementary or undecidable, thus *displacing* these traditions and their supposed foundations. Or, to use a term that does not appear in *Demeure* – our lead text for the section that follows – but through which we can read everything therein and which will allow us to think the autoimmune hospitality that we will address in our reading of the suicidal operation against foreign aggressors in Chapter 4, 'limitrophic'. Although not introduced until 1997, the term *limitrophy* can be folded or traced back across the Derridean corpus, designating 'in both a general and a strict sense' not only 'what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it' (Animal 29); for example, the limit as the border, threshold or line of defence, and (with a nod here to the entire oeuvre of Blanchot) as a threshold to be stepped *beyond* in death (see A).<sup>118</sup>

Before confronting testimony, let us take the time to set the scene and a 'methodology', so to speak, that will carry us through the following chapters. It is through the *differential* logic of this limitrophy that we can think all the traditional dichotomies through which we will unpick Satti's and Derrida's testimonies: *for instance*, fiction/testimony, active/passive, action/passion, performative/constative, singular/universal, empirical/formal. Looking ahead to the motifs of passage through which we will come to understand the linguistic experience of *passion*, *différance*, as already demonstrated in Chapter 2, 'operates' as the 'displaced' or 'diverted' (*détourné*) and equivocal passage of one different thing, *across* a limit, to another, from one term of an opposition to another (Diff. 148/MP 17). (And whenever we hear the word 'operation' in what follows, let us also think of an operation upon some body, as will be our theme in Part B.) As such, 'each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same,

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<sup>118</sup> To my knowledge, the term 'limitrophy' was first introduced in a discussion regarding the *limit* between 'Man' and 'Animal' in 'L'animal donc je suis (à suivre)', presented at a colloquium in Cerisy in 1997.

all the others of *physis* [i.e. the ‘live’ testimony and the body of the martyr] – *tekhne*, *nomos*, *thesis*, society, freedom, history, mind, etc. – as *physis* different and deferred, or as *physis* differing and deferring. *Physis* in *différance*’ (Diff. 17/SP 148-49). In short, our argument throughout will be that *passion* can be translated by *différance* insofar as it signifies the suffering of the undecidability of limitrophy; insofar as the experience of *passion*, in the self’s circular return to itself and against itself, in the encounter with itself and countering of itself, *precedes* the opposition between *physis* and its others, or ‘life’ (*bios* or *zōē*) and its others (spirit, culture, the symbolic, specter, or death) (R 109). Recalling the middle voice and the acti/passivity already introduced in Chapter 2, which we will in time be reading in light of the Blanchotian *neuter*, we read the following in *Demeure*:

‘Because this passion, which is not active, is not simply passive either, the entire history without history of the middle voice – and perhaps of the neuter of the narrative voice – is opened in passion’ (D 27, trajectory 5; see also D 26-7, trajectory 3).

Let us stress, however, that in each case the limit is not effaced. Moreover, as we will see when we come to consider testimony, it *must not* be effaced, negated or denied, for the one needs the other and this impossibility of purity (the *passion*) is a structural necessity. Recalling the discussion of the *studium* and *punctum*, it is not so much a matter of thinking *S as P* but rather of thinking the fold (*pli*) of the hyphen between the two: of thinking a ‘crisis of *versus*’ (Diss. 25) in which the limit is multiplied, delinearised, thickened and divided (Animal 29). Whilst this is evident in the aporetic logic of each of the ‘quasi-concepts’ that Derrida takes as his subject, our focus herein lies on the ‘enmeshing’ of testimony and fiction, which *Demeure* presents as ‘interior to each other’: ‘[t]he net’s texture remains loose, unstable, permeable’ (D 56). In this ‘this *transgressal* and *transgressive* experience’ (Animal 29) we follow a logic of what in the 1971 ‘Positions’ Derrida describes as ‘[n]either/nor: that is *simultaneously* either *or*’ (Positions 43): a logic that comes to the fore in Derrida’s reading of the Blanchotian conception of the *neuter* (as what in *The Step Not Beyond* he names the ‘**he/it**’ [*le “il”*] of the ‘narrative voice’ that *substitutes* for the ‘**I**’) as a language that is no longer governed by the primacy of the ‘subject’ and, ultimately, as ‘the singular place of a passion beyond the opposition of passive and active’ (see D esp. 27, 31, 89). In other words, a *passion* that defies dialectic and dichotomy in general, including that of the opposition between *passion* and *action*. *Ne uter, neither-nor, neither...nor...: beyond all dialectic but also beyond the negative grammar that the word might imply, this Blanchotian-Derridean neuter ‘is the experience or passion of a thinking that cannot stop at either opposite without also overcoming the opposition’* (D 90).<sup>119</sup>

Thus, this aporetic limitrophy signals the *sufferance* of an experience of undecidability in which, as Derrida reads in the work of Paul de Man, it ‘is impossible to *stand*, to maintain oneself in a stable or stationary way. One thus finds oneself in a fatal and double impossibility: the

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<sup>119</sup> In this sense of ‘non-negativity’, the *neuter* can be thought in terms of the Blanchotian *pas* (as both a ‘step’ and a ‘not’) that is not simply negative. Had we the space of another study, we might read the ‘beyond’ of the discourses surrounding martyrdom in relation not only to Derrida’s *survivance* but also to everything that the Blanchotian ‘*pas au-delà*’ has to say to both the Heideggerian existential analysis of being-towards-death and to the notion of an after-life as ‘beyond’.

impossibility of deciding, but the impossibility of *remaining* [*demeurer*] in the undecidable' (D 16). Which is not to say that indecision and deferral rule, far from it. As Derrida asks, can *aporia* 'ever concern, precisely (in all the domains where the questions of decision and of responsibility that concern the border – ethics, law, politics, etc. – are posed), surpassing an aporia, crossing an oppositional line *or else* apprehending, enduring, and putting, in a different way, the experience of the aporia to a test?' (A 14-15; see also HJR 73 & LI 116). Or is, perhaps, this impossibility of finding one's way out of the aporia, paradoxically, the 'condition' of responsibility? Such is one of the principle questions posed by this thesis. 'Here', in this aporetic space, we *inhabit* philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganising it, without ever constituting a third term (see Positions 43 & ACTS 137). Without, we might say, the assuredness of the witness (*testis*) as *third party* (*terstis*) (God, traditionally; but also some program, law or rule) to whom we might turn for objective guidance. As Paul Celan's poem 'Aschenglorie' famously performs, **'No one / bears witness / for the witness'**. Testifying for, deciding for, dying for, sacrificing for: what is the meaning of this *for*?

Returning to testimony, it will be a matter of *physis-technē* and *event-machine* as *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; fiction *and* testimony; fiction *and* autobiographical truth; promise *and* threat, as are exemplarily problematised before the classical, juridical conception of testimony. How to think, *together*, these seemingly irreconcilable concepts? Is this not what the testimonial experience demands? In a wager set out in the 1998 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)', and arguably set out *by the other* (here, Paul de Man; but also, we might say, by Blanchot), Derrida asks: Will we be able to think them together, in a single gesture? Will we be able to think this *one day, in the future*, indeed *as the condition of the future* (TR 72-3)? But *must* we not also think this, *today*, urgently and 'without alibi'? *Today*, as violent operations of which Satti's *is but an example* continue to escalate (and by this 'operation' we do not *simply* mean the physical attack). Such is the impossible wager that Derrida sets us and which this study takes as its task to follow: the passion for the impossible, not as some impossible and desirable utopia of tomorrow, but the negotiation with the im-possible, not as a regulative *idea* or *ideal* but as that which – like the 'irreducible and nonappropriable *différance* of the other' – is 'most undeniably *real*' (R 84, RSS 134). *Here and now, today*.

#### • **'I am the martyr (x)'**

Reading *with* Derrida's meditations on testimony, what Satti's testimony *reveals more vividly* is an implicit *I am the martyr (x)* which inhabits each and every testimonial instantiation of the **'P'**, whether that be an explicit **'I am the martyr'** or not. For our argument is that every instance of the **'P'**, insofar as it is an address to an/the other, is structurally *testimonial*. But besides testifying, might not the **'P'** is also the possible author or narrator of literature? Might not this testimony, **'I am the martyr (x)'**, be productively read as an *act of literature*? Not the literature that encompasses narrative for, excluding the narrative that ensues, there is little or no narrative in this sentence 'itself' (if anything, this sentence, inscribed within a series of martyr-testimonies, generates a potential



narrative to-come), but in the sense of the *fictional* ('non-serious' even, as the theorists of 'speech acts' might say), and hence also incorporating what we will be calling a generalised *theatricality* (as exemplified in *Three Posters*) in which a character 'acts' the words, scripted or encapsulated in quotation marks, **'I am the martyr (x)'**; or in which the narrator recounts, for instance, **'He said: "I am the martyr"'**, with the 'I' here signalling 'he'. Or, as we will ask in due course, as a poético-performative act: as a poem comprised of a single line.

As is demonstrated in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, our lead text for the moment, the choice to regard this testimony as literary is far from arbitrary. Here Derrida probes precisely this 'lasting' or 'abiding' [*à demeure*] relationship *between* fiction and autobiographical truth. For *Demeure*, let us not forget, is a reading of Blanchot's *The Instant of My Death*, a recounting 'not only of his life but also his death, his quasi-resurrection, a sort of Passion – at the limits of literature' (D 16-17). The outcome of a colloquium entitled 'Passions of Literature', this text presents an argument for precisely this: the passions (in the plural) that literature suffers (the passions *of* literature), and also the passions suffered *for* literature by various writers (see D 22).<sup>120</sup> Here Derrida presents seven 'knotted trajectories' binding the 'lines of force that semantically traverse the word "passion"' which, according to his reading, traverse Blanchot's text. Looking to the last, trajectory 7, we read:

'Finally and above all "passion" implies the endurance of *an indeterminate or undecidable limit* where something, some X – for example, literature – must bear or tolerate everything, *suffer everything precisely because it is not itself*, because it has no essence but only functions. This at least is the hypothesis I would like to test and submit to your discussion' (D 28, emphasis modified).

As with the bracketed '(is)' of *différance*, literature has 'no essence or substance': 'literature does not exist' (D 28). Rather, what we will be following throughout will be 'the literary *trait*', a 'remarking trait' that can belong to more than one 'genre' (LG 230), beyond the institutional confines of Literature (with a capital L); the *trait* (or *trace*) of the *as if* or of the *perhaps* that parasites the supposed evidentiality of the testimony.<sup>121</sup> As with the event of the 'I' which, as we are coming to, is inextricably trapped in the law of overflow or excess, the *passion of literature* consists in the fact that 'it receives its determination from something other than itself' (D 28), from some 'without', and that (as in testimony) its 'intentions' can always be passed off as the irresponsibilisation of deceit (D 36). Prior to this trajectory comes the following:

'In memory of its Christian-Roman meaning, "passion" always implies martyrdom, that is – as its name indicates – testimony. A passion always testifies' (D 27).

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<sup>120</sup> 'Passions of Literature' (Catholic University of Louvain, July 1995), the proceedings of which were subsequently published as Michel Lisse, ed., *Passions de la littérature: Avec Jacques Derrida*. See note 5.

<sup>121</sup> Whilst we cannot, for lack of space, address in due detail the relationship between L/literature and L/law as it is pursued, engaged with and reformulated by Derrida across his *corpus*, this will be one of the questions that silently haunts this thesis, just as is the case for the wider question of L/literature's haunting of P/philosophy. What we will do, however, is read the manner in which this question takes on a particularly pertinent tone when Derrida comes to consider the juridical through the specificity of testimony here in *Demeure*.

A passion always testifies. Certainly, as we have seen in our discussion of religious and political passion the General Introduction above. But is there always passion in testimony? Derrida speaks explicitly of ‘the passion(s) of literature’, but does not this text, *Demeure*, also testify to *the passion of testimony*, above all insofar as the passion advanced herein is a passion ‘for the experience of what arrives’, ‘exposure to what one does not see coming and could not predict, master, calculate or program’ (D 91)? A *passion* which is, moreover, ‘literary’.

### *As if*

In its classical conception, testimony must be made in the first person singular, i.e. it must be ‘autobiographical’ (D 38), and in the ‘living present’ (D 43): a requirement which is already thwarted by the auto-hetero-bio-thanatography of Chapter 2 and by Blanchot’s testimony to or from his death, ‘from the grave’. We will come to the troublesome status, or ‘the old and inexhaustible question’ of the ‘I’ (Provocation 282 n. 5; note to xxiii), as witness, in Part B, and for the moment will think the ‘I’ in terms of its *instance* and the possibility of a unique and ‘authentic’ signature.

As noted above, testimony should, according to our European juridical system, exclude literature, which poses a threat to it in its *unconditional right*, to the point even of disobedience or the feigning of a trap, to say anything (see D 29). Returning to our introductory etymological discussions and recalling the discussion in Chapter 2 of the reassuring fantasy of certainty and evidentiality in the *cogito ergo sum*, we can turn to ‘Poetics and Politics of Witnessing’ (2004), one of several of Derrida’s responses to the testimonial force of the poetics of Paul Celan. Following institutional usage, the Greek *marturion* refers not only to ‘bearing witness’ but also ‘proof’<sup>122</sup>:

‘Here we touch on a sensitive and deeply problematic distinction: between bearing witness, the act or experience of bearing witness as “we” understand it, on the one hand, *and*, on the other hand, proof – theoretical-constative certitude. This conceptual distinction is as essential as it is unsurpassable in principle, *de jure*. But the confusion always remains *de facto* possible, so fragile and easily crossed can the limit sometimes appear, whatever the language and word may be’ (PP 75).

In fact, it is not only the Greek *martur*, but also the Latin *testimonium* and the Arabic *shahād* that, traditionally and/or institutionally, designate proof.<sup>123</sup> Of itself alone, however, language cannot be the guardian or guarantor of a usage, as a lexicon or dictionary would. Rather, ‘pragmatic’ slippages may always occur from one sense to another (PP 75). Inherently unprovable, as with Satti’s claims to be a martyr or Blanchot’s claim to having survived death, testimonies in which the ‘truth value’ remains (*demeure*) forever inaccessible, testimony must always be a promise to ‘make truth’:

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<sup>122</sup> It is worth recalling Descartes’ conviction regarding the truth of ‘**I think, therefore I am**’ that is ‘so *firm* and *certain* that all the most extravagant assumptions of the sceptics were unable to shake it’, against which we set our consideration of the inherent *testimoniality* of all (testimony *of* and *to*) self-knowledge. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Related Writings* (1637), trans. & with an Introduction by Desmond M. Clarke (London & New York: Penguin, 1999), Part IV, p. 25, emphasis added. We recall here also that one definition of the word *act* is ‘any instrument in writing to verify facts’ (OED).

<sup>123</sup> See Toufic, ‘*Āshbārā*’, p. 57.

‘But if the testimony always claims to testify in truth to the truth for the truth, it does not consist, for the most part, in making known, in informing, in speaking true. As a *promise to make truth*, according to Augustine’s expression, where the witness alone is capable of dying his own death, testimony always goes hand in hand with at least the possibility of fiction, perjury and lie. Were this possibility to be eliminated, no testimony would be possible any longer; it could no longer have the meaning of testimony. If testimony is passion, that is because it will always *suffer* both having, undecidably, a connection to fiction, perjury, or lie and never being able or obligated – without ceasing to testify – to become proof’ (D 27-28, emphasis modified).

As such, there is no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the *possibility* of fiction (D 29; see also E 90-99) (again, we hear the double genitive), and no testimonial ‘**I**’ that does not imply a spectral, and thus fictional, ‘**I am dead**’; a haunting, as contamination, that is itself a *passion*:

‘The possibility of literary fiction haunts so called truthful, responsible, serious, real testimony *as its proper possibility*. This haunting is perhaps the passion itself, the passionate place of literary writing, as the project to say everything – and wherever it is autobiographical, that is to say, everywhere, and everywhere autobio-thanatographical’ (D 72).

In order to maintain its function, testimony must quasi-suicidally allow itself to be parasited by that which it should exclude from its inner depths; it must suffer the passion of never being able to fully dissociate itself from ‘the innocent or perverse literature that innocently plays at *perverting* all of these distinctions’ (emphasis added), following a logic of ‘perversion’ – as a ‘setting off course’ (we recall here the ‘displacement’ or ‘diversion’ of *différance*) and as ‘corruption’, ‘turning to error or ruin’ or ‘undoing’ (of some fantasy of original purity, truth or unicity) – that will be crucial throughout what follows (see D 29-30).<sup>124</sup> Here, then, is the undecidable limit upon which both *Demeure* and the present thesis remains (*demeure*) (D 30).

#### • ‘Believe me’

If testimony is never provable, what remains is a promise. As such, testimony is exemplary of the element of faith – of the *fiduciary* relation – which, as we shall see, spans Derrida’s oeuvre and which can also be read as a response to Heidegger’s declaration, in his translation of ‘The Anaximander Fragment’, that ‘**Belief has no place in the act of thinking**’ (see esp. PP 84-5).

Beyond all ‘objective truth’ and proof, what remains is a promise. There where I am the only one able to bear witness, where equivocation is ineffaceable and perjury always possible, ‘I’, in both testimony or my address to the other in general, must always ask for faith or confidence, even if I lie or perjure (TR 111, FK 98). Just as one will never be able to prove that false testimony has taken place, since the witness always has recourse to saying ‘**What I said is perhaps false, I was mistaken, but I did so in good faith.**’ That being so, there is no perjury, no false testimony, and no lie. Without the *intention* to deceive (and this intentionality will be crucial in what follows), there is no lie, and one will never be able to ‘prove’ that someone is in bad faith or intended to deceive

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<sup>124</sup> *Pervert*, from Latin *pervert-ere* ‘to turn round or about, turn the wrong way, overturn, turn to error or ruin, undo, corrupt’ (OED).

(ITW 165; HL 35). As we will enlarge upon shortly in an examination of the ‘arche-promise’, I can lie, perjure or betray (and this is yet another scandal) ‘*only* by promising, under oath (be it implicit or explicit) to say what I believe to be the truth, only by pretending to be faithful to my promise’ (PP 83, emphasis added). This promise (the ‘*pacte de la parole*’ of Chapter 2) is an *axiomatic performative*, both on the part of the witness and of the addressee, and amounts to an ‘invincible’ **‘Believe what I say as one believes in a miracle’** (PP 83, FK 98). To which the addressee can only respond – far from the accepted norms of the court and trapped in the space of what in Chapter 4 we will be calling the night of non-knowledge of the ‘passive and passionate decision’ (D 91) – **‘I believe you [*je te crois*]’** (PP 83). For ‘testimony belongs, a priori, to the order of the miraculous’ (D 75): the **‘I am dead’** of the ‘facts’ in the extraordinary case of M. Valdemar, for instance; or the televised miracles, transmitted ‘live’, that Derrida comes to address in later texts and which simultaneously *inform* and, more than the photograph, *demand* that we suspend our disbelief (AANJ 60, 62-5; see also FK 62 n. 17 & E esp. 40, 90).<sup>125</sup> And hence the paradox: the only thing that one can testify to is the unbelievable; ‘what is only “believable” and hence as unbelievable as a miracle. Unbelievable because merely “credible”’ (M 20).<sup>126</sup> This is the truth that the one who testifies appeals to, and which must be believed, even, and especially, when they are lying or betraying their oath (M 21).

Whether or not he is explicitly under oath, and without being able or obligated to prove anything, the testifying witness ‘appeals to the faith of the other by *engaging himself* to tell the truth’ (D 29, emphasis added). Only ever able to promise, the witness always runs the risk that he will not be believed; that the judge in court will deem him guilty and to be condemned, or that the addressee of his testimony (beyond the court) will believe him to be lying, or will believe that what he says is of no sense, and thus that he will be condemned, by the other, to suffer for his beliefs; to the extent of suffering persecution and the passion of martyrdom. Or, that his **‘I am the martyr’** will not be believed, but rather understood as **‘I am the murderer’** or **‘I am the suicidal’**.

“**What is believing?**” – what are we doing when we *believe* (which is to say all the time, and as soon as we enter into a relationship with the other): this is one of the questions that cannot be avoided when one tries to think about bearing witness’ (PP 77).

How, Derrida asks, can this belief, which ‘is implied everywhere one participates in what are called scenes of bearing witness’, be thought? ‘Where should we situate this faith, which does not necessarily have to take on the grand appearance of so-called religious faith?’ (PP 83).<sup>127</sup> Such are

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<sup>125</sup> Television ‘is distinguished by the claim to restore the perception of the thing itself, whereas all other media present themselves as deferred reproductives’ (AANJ 62). ‘On the soil of this bare belief, media construct themselves, while striving incessantly to reconstitute the zero perception of this experience of the **“believe me”**’ (AANJ 65). See also de Vries, ‘Of Miracles and Special Effects’.

<sup>126</sup> ‘The order of attestation itself testifies to the miraculous, to the unbelievable believable: to what must be believed all the same, whether believable or not’ (M 20).

<sup>127</sup> For the sake of clarity, we can distinguish between ‘belief [*croissance*]’ and ‘faith [*foi*]’, insofar as one might ‘believe *in*’ some determinate thing. Whereas with the faith that we are pursuing, there is no determinable object. See Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas, ‘Better Believing It: Translating Skepticism in “Memoirs of

the questions we will be following, above all with regard to the secular promise of Satti's testimony and the desert-like abstraction of what Derrida calls the messianic promise, far from any determined messianism or religious dogma. Of this **'for my part, I believe in faith'** of Derrida's that, far from reassuring, signals the possibility of 'disastrous and deserted' equivocation (AANJ 69).

• **'As for me...'**

For Derrida, there exists 'a singular testimonial alliance of the secret and the instant' (D 30). Firstly, the secret: to bear witness should always be to render public, in the phenomenality of broad daylight, and thus the idea of a secret testimony would appear a contradiction, above all when this implies 'some inner witness, some third party in oneself that one calls to witness' (D 30-1). And yet testimony is nevertheless always sworn to secrecy, always involving the absolute secret of what happened to me alone and of which only I was 'in a position to live, see, hear, touch, sense, and feel' (D 43). Since the I who speaks (or writes) is never fully accessible, no one will be able to demonstrate or prove that a perjury or lie – a fiction – has taken place. 'Even admission will not be enough' (D 30). And hence the 'general and radical [*generale et radicale*] form of testimoniality' (TR 111).<sup>128</sup> For the secret of which we have already spoken is 'the very essence of otherness', *per se* (ITW 165), and hence of every responsible relation. 'I cannot be in the other's place, in the head of the other. I will never be equal to the secret of otherness' (ITW 165). Unable to be *in the other's place*, for the witness is irreplaceable (unsubstitutable and unsupplementable). And whence the paradox, or *passion*, of the instant (of the singular mark) that we will soon be arriving at: a witness and a testimony must be singular ('exemplary'), since 'I am the only one to have experienced this unique thing, and **'you must believe me because I am [...] unique and irreplaceable'** (D 40). What 'I' testify to is, 'at that very instant, my secret; it remains reserved for me. I must be able to keep secret precisely what I testify to; it is the condition of the testimony in a strict sense' (D 30). No one else can testify *for* the witness (D 30); no one can bear witness *for* a bearing witness without taking from it its worth as bearing witness (PP 88).

And yet, **'I have to be replaceable in the very place where I am irreplaceable'** (TS 73). But let us defer this passion of (ir)replaceability momentarily. This necessity of being *believed* 'is nothing other than the solitude, the singularity, the inaccessibility of the **"as for me,"** the impossibility of having an originary and internal intuition of the proper experience of the other ego,

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the Blind" in Michael Naas, *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 117-35.

<sup>128</sup> The adjectives 'generale et radicale' are used in the original, French text, just as Derrida writes that 'every constative is rooted in the presupposition of an at least implicit performative [*tout constative s'enracine dans la présupposition d'un performative au moins implicite*]', but this use of 'radical' needs qualifying. See 'Le ruban de machine à écrire (Limited Ink II)', in *Papier machine: le ruban de machine à écrire et autres réponses* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2001), pp. 33-147 (p. 82). For Derrida, 'deconstruction cannot simply be radical [...] because the value of radicality itself must be deconstructed'. For a start, it communicates with values such as those of fundamentality and origin which are foreign to Derrida's oeuvre (Negotiations 15-6).

of the alter ego' (TR 111; see also PP 76). And not only of the *experience*, but also the *intention*, of the other, as will be central in our discussions to-come of the intentionality of a given 'speech act'. For 'I cannot – as Husserl would put it – have any intuitive access to another's intention' (TS 73). And thus the undecidable and untenable limit which 'permanently [*à demeure*] swears testimony to secrecy, to a secret that is both sharable and unsharable (D 43); it enjoins testimony to remain [*demeurer*] secret, even where it makes manifest and public' (D 30). However contradictory this may appear, the experience of the secret is 'a testimonial experience' (D 32). Never provable, with a meaning and content that is never saturable: such is the shibboleth-effect of testimony in its always necessarily *exceeding* meaning and pure discursivity (see A 10). The shibboleth, as the 'revealing without revealing' of the secret that is exemplified both in the poetic mark and the wound, as we will come to discuss in due course. The *enigma* of the *punctum* of testimony as that which, in its unknowability, fascinates and impassions.

• **'I promise. Believe me'**

For Derrida, 'the bifid structure [*la structure feuilletée*] in some sense of all testimony' (D 38, Fr. 42) is that testimony should not merely be a recounting, telling, informing, describing, remarking (which it can of course do as well) but that it should *do* what it *says*. In other words, that it should be both 'constative' and 'performative', following the distinctions adhered to by proponents of 'speech act theory', as initially set out by J. L. Austin. Moreover, it should be both *at once*, insofar as it should do what it says, *at this very instant*, and as such cannot be reduced to a narrative or descriptive ('constative') relation, for instance as in the narration that ensues from '**I am the martyr**' in Satti's testimonies or the narratives offered by Mroué and the politician. Rather (and this is why we are taking the opening sentence of the video-testimony, '**I am the martyr**', as exemplary) 'it is an act': a *present*, 'performative' act (D 38). Here, fittingly, Derrida offers the figure of the martyr as exemplary:

'When he testifies the martyr does not tell a story, he offers himself. He testifies to his faith by offering himself or offering his life or his body, and this act of testimony is not only an engagement, *but his passion does not refer to anything other than its present moment*' (D 38, emphasis added).

And let us not lose sight of Satti's testimony. As Mroué writes: 'It seems that the martyrdom is actualised *at the very instant* when the young man announces his martyrdom before the camera, *through the very fact of this announcement*' (Mroué, FT 115, emphasis added).

Referring only to 'its present moment' (were such a thing possible; but this is precisely the point), the 'instantaneous' testimony consists in the intertwining of the *énoncé/énonciation*, of informing/demonstrating (index: 'machine/event'), and of the act and its archiving, the event and its becoming-legend. In other words, our argument is that the 'informing' of this testimony *is* the passionate, martyrological experience of the 'demonstration' that the 'I' has not chosen and yet,

in the words of Derrida in *Monolingualism*, ‘suffers and testifies’ (M 19): that this testimony *bears witness to the passion of testimony*.

Although we will postpone until Chapter 4 a discussion the necessary *structural blindness of testimoniality*, it is worth at least acknowledging the following crucial passage from the earlier *Memoirs of the Blind* (1990), in which witnessing is also allied with martyrdom, and in which we glimpse the *threat* of historical revisionism with which the impossible *promise* of reliable testimony is always necessarily coupled. Whilst this potential for historical revisionism has been addressed to such length by a writer such as Lyotard in his *The Differend* (a study which is staked on the plight of a phrase whose regimen, as with the sense of testimony herein, ‘excludes cognitive verification’<sup>129</sup>), our proposal is that this is one of the major threats to which Derrida’s thinking responds.<sup>130</sup>

Reiterating much of what we have covered so far, we read:

“Turning into martyrdom, and thus into witnessing, blindness is often the price to pay for anyone who must finally open some eyes, his own or another’s, in order to recover a natural sight or gain access to a spiritual light. The paradox stems from the fact that the blind man thus becomes the best witness, a chosen witness. In fact, a witness, as such, is always blind. Witnessing substitutes narrative for perception. The witness cannot see, show, and speak at the same time, and the interest of the attestation, like that of the testament, stems from this dissociation. No authentication can show in the present what the most reliable of witnesses sees, or rather, has seen and now keeps in memory – provided that he has not been borne away by fire. (And as for the witnesses of Auschwitz, like those of all extermination camps, there is here an abominable resource for all “revisionist” denials)’ (MB 102-3).

Continuing with this indissociability of the performative and the constative within the testimonial ‘instant’, we see how for Derrida, not only does a seemingly *constative* testimony always imply the *performative* act of a promise and an appeal to be believed, but rather a whole host of implied (speech) acts, which we will summarise in what follows. Following which, we will turn to the manner in which this implication works in both directions: how a seemingly performative act (‘the event’, the *punctum*, the ‘one time’, *physis*) cannot, and must not – as paradoxical and self-defeating as this may seem – *not* also include some constativity (‘the machine’, the *studium*, machine-like repeatability, *tekhne*).

#### • ‘I confess, forgive me’

In addition to the implicit performative of an ‘**I myself think...**’ or ‘**I myself believe...**’ of *any* constative utterance (TR 111), we can say that in a ‘radical’ sense, the only possibility of my

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<sup>129</sup> Avital Ronell, ‘The Testamentary Whimper’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 103, Issue 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2004), pp. 489-99 (p. 490).

<sup>130</sup> For Derrida’s discussions of revisionism, see for example ‘TG’ 52. See also *Specters of Marx*, where Derrida discusses the ‘abyssal perversity of all “revisionisms”’ and a symmetrical perversity of those who claim to protect against revisionism; those who claim that ‘whoever calls for vigilance in the reading of history, whoever complicates a little the schemas accredited by the *doxa*, or demands a reconsideration of the concepts, procedures, and productions of historical truth or the presuppositions of historiography, and so forth, risks being accused today, through amalgamation, contagion, or confusion, of “revisionism” or at least of playing into some “revisionism”’ (SM 185-86 n. 5).

speaking to the other – of ‘making the truth’ – is my always ‘beginning’, ‘at least implicitly, by confessing a possible fault, abuse, or violence, an elementary perjury, an original betrayal’, and by asking forgiveness, *even if* ‘it is in order to say to him or her things that are as constative as, for example: **“You know, it’s raining”**’ (TR 111-12). The passion of any given ‘speech act’, a passion which makes, structurally at least, **‘you know, it’s raining’** suffer the same impossibility of veracity as **‘I am the martyr x’**; of this **‘I am the martyr x’** that is both exceptional and utterly mundane. Dare we compare the two as such? Is this not a grave violence towards the exceptionality of such a testimony? Such, precisely, is the scandal that this study aims to confront.

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## II: The promise

### • ‘I promise’

So the witness-‘I’ ‘begins’ by promising, begging forgiveness and revealing, *without* revealing, a potential secret (to use a formulation of the Blanchotian ‘X without X’ which will later become central). In what follows, we will examine more closely the Derridean conception of the promise: both on the level of determinate, particular (historical and thus archivable) instances (for instance, **‘I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti’** as, precisely, a promise to a community of sympathisers present and to-come); and on a structural level, as an *a priori* of sorts that is one of the central aspects of a generalised *testimoniality*. Moreover, following Derrida, not only is *any* (linguistic, performative) act a promise, but it is also an affirmation, a *yes, I promise*, with Satti’s **‘I am the martyr’** functioning yet again exemplarily insofar as we might translate his testimony as a **‘yes, I am, and I give my life so that you will believe it’**.

### *Yes*

In reading Satti’s testimony as in effect bringing about the event of his martyrdom, one of our principle questions throughout this study is that of *whether saying the event is possible* (see SE 442 & passim) and, by inference, whether the unicity and properness of the instant of the event is possible; questions which we are asking both on a formal and ‘empirical’ level, with this (im)possibility in turn being read in light of *passion*. (On the subject of this instant of the event of ‘my martyrdom’, as the instant of ‘my death’, whilst we cannot enter into the nuanced reading that would be required of Blanchot’s ‘testimony’, *The Instant of My Death*, as an unsettling of the long tradition of the *memento mori* and as a conversation with Heidegger’s formulation from *Being and Time* that death is the ‘possibility of impossibility’, insofar as what is at stake in our questioning of the possibility of testimony is precisely the possibility of the instant, what is covered herein at least ‘implicitly’ begins to respond to this, with the paradoxically necessary *lapsus* and nonpresentability of *différance* that we will be addressing as the *pervertibility* of the promise in turn being translatable into the *lapsus absolu* of ‘my death’.<sup>131</sup>)

Here, in beginning to think the *testimonial* and *passional* experience of the event, as that which exceeds the determined experience of ‘testimony’, we begin to depart from circumscribed studies regarding the genre of testimony – be they historical, juridical, psychoanalytical, for instance – and P/passion, in all its various forms. Beginning this time with the formal, we see how before coming to the ‘content’ (*énoncé*) of a question, we must first recognise that before the (act of the) question,

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<sup>131</sup> Regarding the ‘*lapsus absolu*’ of Blanchot’s *The Instant of My Death*, Hent de Vries writes that Blanchot’s  *récit* ‘provides us with a meditation on the meaning of death, of its impossibility and of its necessity, its irreplaceability and its apparent universality.’ De Vries stresses Derrida’s reading of this ‘testimony’ which enacts precisely the nondialectical negativity of death and the singular mode of our relation – dying (*le mourir*) – to this death which, as with *différance*, ‘never gives or presents itself to us, here and now; in any experience, or as such’ (de Vries, LA 31-2).

*per se*, there is the possibility – as signalled by a *certain* moment in the thought of ‘a *certain* Heidegger’ – of a *certain yes*, a *certain acquiescence* (index: ‘passion’ as ‘passivity’) that Heidegger named the *Zusage*: ‘a consentment or affirmation of sorts (SE 442 & OS 129); a promissory affirmation over which the ‘subject’ nonetheless has no mastery and which we can read as yet but another ‘translation’ of the differential trace and the acti/passivity ‘therein’.<sup>132</sup> In this sense, Heidegger had already ‘prepared the ground’ for the questioning of philosophy’s self-definition as ‘the art, experience, and history of the question’ (SE 442).

• **‘I will speak of a promise’**

Whereas in the present section we began with Satti’s exemplary testimony, reading formal structures *with* Satti and vice-versa, in Part B we will look to the exemplary status of Derrida’s martyr-testimony in *Monolingualism*. However, our argument is that the role of protagonist can never be so easily allocated (in Chapter 5 we will address this through the impersonal *It is happening* that is testified to by the (arche-)trace), and already in the present section we are never quite sure *who* is testifying. As Derrida himself ‘promises’ (or seems to) in the 1987 ‘How to Avoid Speaking: Denials’, **‘I will speak of a promise, then, but also within the promise’** (HAS 14).<sup>133</sup> *Of* (de) the promise, but also *from* (de) the promise.

As we read in Derrida’s *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (1987), ‘Language always, before any question, and in the very question, comes down to [*revient à*] the promise’ (OS 94).<sup>134</sup> Whilst this is detailed explicitly in numerous other texts from the 1984 reading of de Man in ‘ACTS: The Meaning of a Given Word’ onwards, once again this is something which, ‘implicitly’, can be said to ‘underlie’ (so to speak, for we cannot speak of this as ‘radical’ or transcendental) Derrida’s entire oeuvre.<sup>135</sup> This *fore-coming address* of language (and let us emphasise this destinator and topographical aspect) is *already* there, in a *be-fore* or *in advance* which, always *exceeding* the question, is ‘a sort of promise of originary alliance to which we must have in some sense *already acquiesced* [index: *passion*], already said *yes*, given a pledge [*gage*]’; in which ‘I’ *will have already* given the (‘performative?’) engagement of a response (OS 130 n. 5), as we will address further (above all in Chapter 5) in relation to the series of testimonies, as appeals, *given words* and responses – amidst the milieu of ‘the frantic call, the distress of a signature that is asking for a *yes* from the other, the pleading injunction for a counter-signature’ (Ulysses 282-83) – both of the martyrs in Lebanon and of the various

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<sup>132</sup> We leave *Zusage* untranslated since, as Derrida tells us, ‘it brings together meanings which in general we keep separate: promise, agreement or consent, originary abandonment to what is given in the promise itself’ (OS 129-30 n. 5).

<sup>133</sup> It is here that Derrida states ‘This promise is older than I am’ (HAS 14).

<sup>134</sup> Continuing with the motif of the countersignature and Derrida’s inheritance from those he reads, we note that among those who have spoken of this ‘originary’ *yes* are also Emmanuel Lévinas and Franz Rosenzweig, each of whom Derrida devotes texts to (SE 443).

<sup>135</sup> See ‘ACTS’, ‘HAS’, ‘Ulysses’, ‘Number’, ‘Passages’, ‘SE’ & ‘Abraham’. As Derrida writes in 1998, this originary and affirmatory response ‘has unceasingly permeated everything that I say and write’ (AIP 355).

writer-reader-actors herein.<sup>136</sup> But before being inscribed within any given context, before even deciding or intending to make some given promise, this promise, which is ‘older than I am’, ‘has seized the I’, and I ‘will not be able to keep any metalinguistic distance in regard to this’ (HAS 14; see also Passages 383-84, ACTS 96ff. & PP 83).

• *‘La promesse que je suis’*

‘Yes’, then, as both Abraham’s and every ‘I’s ‘yes, here I am’ or a ‘yes, I respond’ (Abraham 3). Thus ‘I am always already responding (I ‘begin’ by responding to the *yes* of some other), as well as bearing witness and bearing testament (index: ‘I am dead’) (see Ulysses 300-01). For it is always a case of a relay through *an other*, a breaching of time and space; the ‘gramophonizing’ ‘hearsay (*ouï dire*)’ of a ‘saying yes (*ouï dire*)’ (Ulysses 254); auto-affection as hetero-affection, once again. And *in advance*, as in the *always already* (déjà) of ‘I am (*already*) dead’: the promissory gage of the ‘displaced’ origin of the (graphematic) mark that both ‘precedes’ and ‘exceeds’ (that ‘lives on’) as a promissory *return* (renvoi). This ‘yes’ precedes ‘me’; precedes the ‘I am’, the ‘*je suis*’ as ‘I am (following)’, as ‘I am dead’, let us not forget. ‘And if,’ as we read in the earlier *Glas* (1974), ‘as I have demonstrated elsewhere (*Speech and Phenomena*, *Glas* [(death-)knell] *in Phenomen* in its Slovene translation), *I am* and *I am dead* are two statements indistinguishable in their sense, then the *already* [déjà] that I am (following) [*je suis*] sounds its own proper *glas*, signs itself its own death sentence [*arrêt de mort*]’ (Glas 79, right column). Certainly, the ‘I’ sounds its own death-knell. Such was our argument in Chapter 2, and will be so once again in Chapters 4 and 5. What for the moment is vital, however, is that this ‘déjà-I’ (DJ, the reverse of JD; Derrida’s ‘I am dead’) also ‘signs itself its own death sentence’; *before*, moreover, even considering – let alone intending or willing – to do so, should that ever be the case.

*Die Sprache (ver)spricht (sich)*

[L]anguage itself dissociates the cognition from the act. *Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*: to the extent that it is necessarily misleading, language just as necessarily conveys the promise of its own truth. This is also why textual allegories on this level of rhetorical complexity generate history.

–Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*<sup>137</sup>

<sup>136</sup> It is worth clarifying the use of the word ‘given’ throughout. Used primarily to designate a determined instance (for instance ‘a given testimony’), we should also hear resonate the act of giving – as a *promise* – which, for Derrida, is thwarted by the same logic of the im-possible. For instance, we note that that ‘[n]o path is possible without the aporia of the gift, which does not occur without the aporia of the promise. [...] there is no gift except on the aporetic condition that nothing is given that is *present* and that *presents* itself as such. The gift is only a promise and a promised memory’ (ACTS 147). We will continue to play on the notion of ‘revelation’ as what is ‘given to be thought’.

<sup>137</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 277. As cited in ‘ACTS’ 94-5.

For Derrida, this ‘arche-originary’ promise is closer to the essence of an *authentic* promise because, unlike a determinable, everyday ‘speech act’, it ‘poses nothing, pro-mises nothing, it does not put forward’ (*promise*, from Latin *pro* ‘forward’ + *mitere* ‘put’ or ‘send’, OED). Rather, ‘it speaks’ (OS 93). As such, one could say (somewhat untranslatably) that this *Sprache verspricht*: that this ‘language, or speech, promises’ (ACTS 97).<sup>138</sup> Once again, however (but is this not always the case?), this ‘invention’ is a counter-signature, for it is but a re-invention or re-translation of Heidegger’s ‘celebrated and so misunderstood’ *Die Sprache spricht* (language/speech speaks). And, moreover, it is a re-invention twice removed, for it is Paul de Man who, ‘pretending to play without playing with Heidegger’s famous formula’, wrote *Die Sprache verspricht* (language or speech promises), thus miming the *spricht*, but *otherwise*, ‘speaking’ with ‘promises’ (ACTS 97). De Man was most certainly not playing, however, for ‘the game is at work in language itself’ (OS 93). The ‘game’ or, shall we say, ‘wager’ or ‘gage’. Or, as we will address in Chapters 4 and 5, the ‘scandal’ of responsibility. Which is no laughing matter.

For both de Man and Derrida this saying of Heidegger’s must be taken seriously (*deadly* seriously, even): it is not, as so many would say, ‘with a sneer’, ‘an empty and intransitive tautology which would have the supplementary weakness of hypostasizing speech (*parole*), general language (*le langage*) or language (*langue*)’ (ACTS 96). Rather, as Derrida writes in ‘ACTS: The Meaning of a Given Word’ (a play on Austin’s 1961 ‘The Meaning of a Word’):

‘In truth, it is a question, guided by the most necessary movement, of *taking note* (*prendre acte*) of the *fact* that language is not the governable instrument of a speaking being (or subject) and that its essence cannot appear through any other instance than that of the very language which names it, says it, *gives it to be thought*, speaks it. We cannot even say that language is or does something, nor even that it “acts”; all of these values (being, doing, acting) are insufficient to construct a metalanguage on the subject of language. Language speaks *of and by itself*, which is something quite different from a specular tautology’ (ACTS 96-7, emphasis modified).

### *Die Sprach verspricht*

So Heidegger’s *spricht* becomes complicated, as *verspricht*. De Man, however, takes this displacement of the citation yet further (thus, in a sense, ‘enacting’ the very pervertibility and possible deformation of the mark; of ‘truthful’ citation and re-citation), transforming the *verspricht* to *verspricht (sich)*: ‘language, or speech, promises (*itself*)’. In what follows, we will focus firstly on the addition of the ‘ver-’, reading this in light of the ‘destination’ of the promise (*pro-mitere*); and then on the parenthetical *sich* (‘itself’), which we will propose reveals the *auto[sich]*-deconstruction of speaking (*spricht*) into promising (*verspricht*), and in turn the quasi-suicidal auto-deconstruction of the ‘self’ or *autos*. In brief, might we not take this double deformation yet further and propose that *Die Sprache verspricht (sich)* be yet another translation or *articulation* of *I am the martyr (x)*?

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<sup>138</sup> As Derrida notes, *Sprache* remains a difficult word to translate simply by language (*langue*), general language (*langage*), or speech (*parole*) (ACTS 97).

Earlier we spoke of Satti's testimony as an exemplarily inherently unprovable promise. If we are to read the moment of broadcast of Satti's testimony as that which does most 'damage' or is the most 'effective' moment of 'martyrdom', insofar as it strikes fear in the 'enemy', the testimony is also a threat; deadly even. Switching back to the formal level, we now look to the potential threat that is *necessarily* lodged 'at the heart of' any promise; this necessary pervertibility through which we will translate the 'performative' as the 'perperformative'. Whilst we will shift back to 'given', determinate promises or testimonies in our discussion of Derrida's response to the speech act theory of J. L. Austin and John R. Searle in Part III, let us for the moment linger a while longer upon this arche-promise; this *versprechen* which is, 'if we can say this', an *Ur-sprechen* (ACTS 98). As with the 'messianicity *without* messianism' that will be central in Chapter 4 (a *kehōratic* messianicity that is also 'more originary' than all given messianisms), this formal 'Ur-promise', 'before' any contract, poses or sends forward no determinable content (OS 93, 129 n. 5). Promising only the possibility of truth and meaning, this *arche-promise* is simultaneously 'neither true nor meaningful in its proper and originary moment' but rather it is 'the moment of *the given word*, this before all else' (emphasis added); a moment which calls for and promises new conventions which did not exist prior to it, and hence upon whose authority it cannot reassuringly found its authority (ACTS 119). *An invention, perhaps?*

In continuing to speak of this *arche-promise*, let us allow the outlines of *différance* sketched out in Chapter 2 to sound in the background. For whilst our proposal is that *différance* be translatable as *passion*, by reading the *affirmative, promissory* nature of *différance* and the arche-trace in light of the promise and engagement that Satti's martyr-testimony gives us to think, not only are we introducing into our understanding of *différance* a certain *passional non-mastery* but also the *testimonicity* and the *perhaps* that is *given* to Derrida by Nietzsche (the necessary spectrality and pervertibility of the *S is P*) of the promise or given word and which is nonetheless allied to a *yes*. The *testimonicity* which, as an irreducible pervertibility, deprives us of all assurance and 'would cause the authority [*instance*] of the "last word" to tremble.' This 'dangerous "*perhaps*"' which, in its testimonial non-assurance and radical abeyance (a *lapsus* which we will soon be reading as a *lapsus linguae*), makes it impossible for the series of responses to arrive at a closure and, as such, keeps the question alive – 'allows it to breathe' – and ensures its survival (AIP 344).

As with *différance*, which is not conceivable within the opposition between negation and affirmation, this *yes* – as a *yes* before all oppositions – heralds the dissymmetry of an affirmation (SP 102, OS 94, Saying the Event 443; Number 98). This 'originary word', 'implied by all the other words whose source it figures', belongs to language, and moreover to *a* language, since it is a word (and thus translatable) (Number 101, OS 130 n. 5). *Belonging to* and *engaging in* language, there is a pact or an alliance with the 'living' language (see Otobiographies 81). And yet it simultaneously *is* and *is not* of language, 'belonging *without* belonging' (and the Blanchotian *neuter* is never out of

earshot here) to that totality which it simultaneously *institutes* and *opens* (the ‘generation’ of our double genitive), merging and not merging with its utterance in a natural language.

Implied by all the other words whose source it figures, this seemingly tautological *yes* through which we are translating but one aspect of *I am the martyr* also remains silent; it is a ‘wordless word’, somewhat like the *I think* which for Kant accompanies all of our representations, and hence, following Derrida’s graph(ematic) indications, our writing *yes (I am the martyr)* rather than ‘**yes (I am the martyr)**’ (OS 130, Number 101, Ulysses 299-300).<sup>139</sup> For although it has no reference outside the marking of language, the gesture of this engagement can do without words (or at least the words *yes* or *I am the martyr*), just as the performative act of testimony – as a martyrological offering – or even of the lie, need not involve words (Ulysses 297-98, D 37-8).<sup>140</sup> As soon as the silent ‘non-presence’ of this arche-originary *yes* is translated into the act of a ‘present’ ‘**yes**’ (Satti’s, for instance), it is dissimulated in the very motion which reveals it (Number 103) and as such, despite our efforts, this *yes*, as with *différance* and *passion*, cannot be thematised.<sup>141</sup> And yet (mirroring the initial statement that whilst there is no ‘actuality’ or ‘pure’ uniqueness, this does not mean that there are not *effects* of the two) to state that it is retracted from any linguistic theory is not to say from any theory of its linguistic *effects*. In its non-thematisability, *I am the martyr*, as *yes*, is *torn* from the grasp of all knowledge and in particular all history, ‘[p]recisely because it is implied in all writing of history’ (Number 103). In fact, ‘as a past which has never been present’, the *faktum* of the promise

‘is historicity itself – a historicity which cannot be historical, an “ancientness” without history, without anteriority, but which *produces* history. Before the act there is no speech; nor before speech is there an act. There is this *fact* to which we are recalled by a strange recollection which does not recall any memory’ (ACTS 95, emphasis modified).

Whilst we may at least appear to have drifted far from Derrida’s discussions of testimony, this is in fact not the case. First of all, this lingering upon the logic of the *yes* has been necessary in order to prepare us for our reading both of Derrida’s testimony in *Monolingualism*, and for the

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<sup>139</sup> ‘I say the word *yes* and not the word “**yes,**” because there can be a *yes* without a word’ (Ulysses 296; see also 297-98). The promissory *yes* that ‘is equivalent to the “**I will,**” illustrating the hetero-tautology of the *yes* implied in every *cogito* as thought, self-positing and will to self-positing’ (Ulysses 300). Whilst it appears that for the large part Derrida uses the italicised font to distinguish a formal or general ‘structure’ from those ‘given’ utterances or declarations in quotation marks, this is not entirely consistent across his texts, above all where translators have needed to exploit italics to indicate French text. Once again, we treat such markings as mere *indication*, as opposed to law. We will explore the undecidable presence of quotation marks in Section III.

<sup>140</sup> On the level of determinate ‘performatives’, we read: ‘[I]t is a matter of all the codes involved in a pragmatics, of the gestures of the body that accompany, surround, and determine a speech act, indeed any given speech. It may be a matter of the gaze, the hand, any silent movement in the space of the so-called body proper. But also, above all, the pragmatic conventions that surround a discursive act’ (D 37). See also: ‘bearing witness is not through and through and necessarily discursive. It is sometimes silent. It has to engage something of the body, who has no right to speak. We should not say, or believe, that bearing witness is entirely discursive, through and through a matter of language’ (PP 77).

<sup>141</sup> Just as *différance* is ‘older than presence’, this *yes* ‘tips over into the memory of a language, of an experience of language “older” than it, always anterior and presupposed, old enough never to have been present in an “experience” of a “speech act” – in the usual sense of these words’ (OS 129 n. 5).

coming chapters' discussions of the irreducible promise and faith through which the political theatre of martyr-testimonies such as Satti's must be thought. For the present moment, it is worth emphasising that this seeming digression is in fact necessary for understanding further Derrida's assertion that testimony must always be a performative engagement, as in the exemplary case of the martyr who, as Derrida writes in *Demeure*, performatively *offers himself* (D 38), and that the testimonial act (as with the act of 'applying deconstruction' or 'doing history'; *reading* and *responding*, in short) must 'invent its language and form itself *in an incommensurable performative*' (D 83, emphasis added); the incommensurable performative of an impossible invention that, as we will be reading in Part B through *Monolingualism*, 'did not happen', insofar as it did not 'take place', and yet nonetheless leaves traces of itself in *what makes history*, even if such traces are negative (M 61).

In what follows, we will address this performative affirmation as *passion*, asking what light is shed by the '**yes, I promise**' of Satti's martyr-testimony, in turn showing how the Derridean re-invention of the performative is one based on non-mastery and 'un-power'; on a certain *necessary* potential for failure, perversion or 'going-astray'. In short, whilst several 'names' are given to this re-invention (we will be encountering more in Chapter 4), our proposal is that what remains unsaid in Derrida's oeuvre is that *passion* designates, telegraphically and economically, the various names that Derrida had the occasion to give this arche-engagement that, at bottom, sets into motion his entire oeuvre and makes philosophy tremble. Moreover, as will become clear, what *passion* (as the *offering* of the martyr) gives to be thought *more vividly* than the legible names for this arche-engagement is its necessary corporeality.

Presupposed as the condition of possibility for all other performatives, this (*passional*) arche-engagement 'is not one performative among others.' Although in its 'radically non-constative or non-descriptive dimension' it *appears* to be a performative '*par excellence*', we must not rush in too fast, for Derrida is quite specific about it being a 'sort of performative: it can only 'resemble' an 'absolute performative' (above all if we are to continue to think of both the 'performative' and the 'absolute' as premised upon presence and the metaphysics of subjective will) (Number 103, Ulysses 297-8). Nonetheless, in this 'quasi-ness', it is a '*pre*-performative force' that is 'the condition of any signature and any performative' (Ulysses 298, emphasis added; see also 302).<sup>142</sup> As a 'preontology', this *quasi*-transcendental 'is removed from any science of the utterance or from any speech act theory' (Number 103). '[A]ny science': might that mean the *studium*, the 'constative' or the 'program'? The 'knowledge' of 'faith *and* knowledge'? Or – as with the particular and the general, the empirical and the transcendental – do we not need to think the two together, allowing them to become enmeshed

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<sup>142</sup> This '*sort of* performative implied in all statements: **yes, I am stating, it is stated**, etc.' (Ulysses 297, emphasis added). '[I]t is not yet performative, not yet transcendental, although it remains presupposed in any performativity, *a priori* in any constative theoricity, in any knowledge, in any transcendentality. For the same reason, it is preontological, if ontology expresses what is or the being of what is...' (Ulysses 302). This 'sort of' also appears in *Demeure*, where Derrida speaks of the unbelievability of 'the imminence of what has taken place' in Blanchot's 'testimony' and of testimony's essential appeal to the unbelievable and 'a *certain* system of belief [...], to the act of faith summoned by a *kind of* transcendental oath' (D 49, emphasis added).

but simultaneously never entirely disabling the distinctions?<sup>143</sup> And might it be just the *quasi*-transcendentality of this *passion* that allows us to do this?

Whereas in a classical philosophical code one might name this *yes* ‘the transcendental condition of all performative dimensions’ (Ulysses 298), we should rather think of it as ‘*quasi*-transcendental’ or ‘*quasi*-ontological’, allying ourselves with this ‘cumbersome’, yet vital, “‘quasi’ that I take on so often’ (AIP 353 n. 8). ‘Quasi-’, signalling the ‘**as if**’ that ‘affects all language and all experience with *possible* fictionality, fantasmaticity, spectrality’ and which distance it (albeit without ever radically separating it) from the metaphysics of the subjective will that Derrida is the inheritor of (AIP 354). From the metaphysics of the ‘I’ who/which would be capable of saying – as all modernity, at least from Descartes to Hegel and Nietzsche would have it – ‘**I will [volo]**’ (Number 101-02).<sup>144</sup> Or, rather than ‘distancing’, we might say a ‘re-situating’ (to use a term employed by Derrida in describing his approach towards the ‘subject’<sup>145</sup>), for ‘*one must* – yes – uphold the ontological-transcendental exigency in order to uncover the dimensions of a *yes*’ (Number 103).

The notion of the ‘quasi-transcendental’ in Derrida’s thinking continues to spark debate, above all where it is a question of the ongoing demand for the ‘applicability’ of deconstruction. Thus, this study allies itself with those (we can think of Geoffrey Bennington as a prime example) who prioritise its ‘deliberately equivocal, yet determinant role’, as Derrida says of it himself (AIP 354; see also Bennington, X). Recalling the ‘reflections of’ of our title, might we not say, following Rodolphe Gasché in his study, *The Tain of the Mirror*, that it is precisely this ‘*quasi*-transcendental’ that allows us to think *passion* and *testimony* as the ‘tain of the mirror’ between the empirical or historical on the one hand and the transcendental on the other?<sup>146</sup> As the tain which ‘takes place’ *in* or *on* the hyphen of the ‘empirico-transcendental’ or the ‘historico-transcendental’, as the ‘meshes of the net’ *between* the two?<sup>147</sup> As the limitrophic fold of *complication* that we have stressed above and the ‘re-mark’ (and logic of exemplarity of the ‘**x**’ of ‘**I am the martyr x**’ that will be so central in Part B)? As the *passion* that is neither empirical or ontic, nor transcendental or ontological (and again we think of the playing out of the ontic and ontological in Heideggerian’s *Being and Time*)? This is vital to think since it is the ‘**as if**’ of this ‘quasi-’ that ‘saves’ the *passion* that we are presenting

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<sup>143</sup> Regarding this disabling-maintaining of the distinction between the ‘performative’ and the ‘constative’, Derrida speaks of the necessity of never entirely disabling this distinction, insofar as it is needed in order to ‘detonate’ (and we are thinking all the while of the martyr-operation) the speech event (Psyche 13).

<sup>144</sup> This remark is inscribed in a reading of the *volo* of Michel de Certeau in ‘A Number of Yes’.

<sup>145</sup> As Derrida states in the discussion following his presentation in Baltimore in 1966 regarding the ‘subject’ and the philosophical notion of the ‘centre’, and which we can here ‘apply’ to the transcendental, ‘I don’t destroy the subject; I situate it’ (Derrida’s response to Barthes, SC 271-2).

<sup>146</sup> See Gasché’s *The Tain of the Mirror*. Derrida speaks highly of Gasché’s reading of the quasi-transcendental (AIP 354).

<sup>147</sup> We note how in both the original French and the English translation of ‘A Number of Yes [*Nombre de oui*]’ the hyphen is at times inscribed, and others not. For instance, ‘performative *quasi* transcendental’, ‘une *quasi-analytique* ontologico-transcendentale’, ‘une *quasi analytique*’ (Nombre 647-48). Regarding the historico-transcendental (and the historico-anthropological), given our spatial limitations we can only point towards the necessity of a nuanced reading of Derrida’s *Introduction to Husserl’s Origin of Geometry*, limiting our considerations to the manner in which this is played out in later texts such as *Monolingualism*.



as a ‘condition of possibility’, in its quasi-suicidal im-possibility, from taking on the value of ‘origin’, ‘foundation’, ‘root’ or ‘radicality’ of metaphysics. Is this not, as Derrida suggests, a way of ‘saving’, *even whilst betraying*, ‘the demand for the condition of possibility (for the a priori, for what is originary or the foundation, so many different forms of the same radical exigency of every philosophical “question”)?’ (AIP 354).

However, and here we emphasise this study’s proposal that *passion* functions as philosophy’s deconstructive motif, rather than an active, intentional move to shift or re-situate the approach, what demands attention is the manner in which, as with the movement of deconstruction ‘itself’, this fictionalising, fabulating or phantasing of the transcendental or ontological would have *always already* taken place, and thus that it is a matter of engaging with/in the aporia (as *passion*) in which this leaves us (see Number 103). As Bennington writes, citing the reading by Richard Rorty (in his quest for a ‘pragmatism’) of the ‘quasi-transcendental’ as a mere middle ground between the transcendental and empirical (and we can also think here of the *terstis* evoked above), if we are to think this quasi-transcendental following Derrida and with the full Kantian seriousness, this would require recognising that there is no simple distinction between the two: which is precisely what we aim here with our prioritisation of the *articulation* of the limitrophic hyphen, as *tain*, and the Blanchotian *neuter*.<sup>148</sup> As with the *yes* by which ‘I’ am already promised and signed (‘thrown into’, we might say, evoking the Heideggerian idiom), the ‘quasi-transcendental’ does not name a philosophical position or strategy one might choose to adopt, but rather a sort of necessity: the *necessity* of the meeting of necessity and contingency that Bennington follows in Kant; but also, we might add, of the Derridean (im-possible) ‘*pragmatology*’ (as opposed to a ‘pragmatics’), as a translation of the logic of iterability which we are approaching.<sup>149</sup> Is this not the ‘negotiation’ through which Derrida defines deconstruction, which cannot even be called non-dialectical but rather negotiates ‘between’ the non-dialectic and the dialectic (Negotiations 15-6, 26)?

• **‘Par le mot *par* commence donc ce texte’**<sup>150</sup>

For this promissory *yes*, not falling within any predicative discourse, ‘is neither empirical or ontic’ and yet must be thought in order to then read such empirical or ontic ‘instances’, Satti’s testimony, *for instance*: ‘Presupposed by every position, it cannot be confused with the position, thesis or theme of any discourse’ (Number 104). ‘Pre-supposed’, but as an ‘almost at the beginning’, *almost* [quasiment] before the act and the *logos* (we are still thinking of Satti’s operation), as a *fable* (Number 104).

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<sup>148</sup> Bennington refutes the arguments proposed by Rorty in his ‘Is Derrida a *Quasi-Transcendental* Philosopher?’, *Contemporary Literature*, 36, 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 173-200, as cited in Bennington, ‘X’ 17-20. For Derrida’s responses to Rorty’s reading of his work, see ‘RDP’.

<sup>149</sup> See Bennington, ‘X’ 18. Regarding ‘pragmatology’, see Derrida, ‘MC’ 27 & ‘Afterword’ 151. See also the discussion of ‘pragmatology’ in de Vries, ‘RV’ 408-09.

<sup>150</sup> Francis Ponge, ‘Fable’ (cited in Number 104).

In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida writes the following regarding the very ‘experience of language’ that we are working towards, through our ‘quasi-analytic’ of the *yes* and the ‘giving rise to’ of the double genitive:

‘For is the experience of language (or rather, before any discourse, the experience of the mark, the re-mark or the margin) not precisely what makes this articulation possible and necessary? Is that not what gives rise to *this articulation between* transcendental or ontological universality, and *the exemplary or testimonial singularity of martyred existence?*’ (M 27, emphasis added).

As we will come to ask in our reading of *Monolingualism*, might we not think this hyphenated ‘articulation’ as the ‘re-mark’ of which this text speaks as the ‘**x**’ of ‘**I am the martyr (x)**’ (see M 59) (or the ‘X’ through which Bennington reads the Kantian transcendental as already ‘advancing a *thinking of* the quasi-transcendental’)? (see Bennington, X 19).<sup>151</sup> And as this ‘**x**’ that also, we might propose, stands metonymically for the undecidability between the citation marks that encapsulate given instances of an utterance, for instance ‘**yes**’ (or ‘**I am dead**’), and the silent and impersonal, italicised *yes*? Looking again to *Monolingualism*, with our eyes now keen to the folds and hyphens, we read (and will continue to read in Part B):

‘In what respect, therefore, can the passion of a Franco-Maghrebian martyr testify to this universal destiny which assigns us to a single language while prohibiting us from appropriating it, given that such an interdiction is linked to the very essence of language, or rather writing, to the very essence of the mark, the fold, and the re-mark?’ (D 26).

Returning to the *yes*, it is *almost* [quasiment] at the origin and is only ever a transcendental-ontological *quasi-analytic* insofar as ‘[a]n analytic must return to *simple* structures, principles or elements’ (Number 104). The *yes*, however – as with intentionality, the ‘identity’ of the ‘I’, or the signature (‘the divisibility against which a signature extends’) – ‘never lets itself be reduced to any ultimate simplicity’, but rather is always *derived* (we will return to this motif of *derivation* in Part B). Always ‘of the other’, in other words. Here we return to the series of ‘martyr-testimonies’ in which any responding promise must always be inscribed, for this is because of the auto-immune ‘fatality’ of *repetition* (the *yes* as *yes, yes*, doubling itself in advance, ‘previously assigned to its repetition’; a necessary forgetting, simulacrum and, importantly for testimony, fiction or fable): ‘[a] *yes* always *renders thanks* to this danger’ (Number 133). A necessarily *incisive* opening (we will follow the violence of this incision of iterability in Part B), insofar as the *yes* must be innumerable, and the *first* must always already be a response, as *second*, in turn enveloped or folded in the first and *binding* itself beforehand to a confirmation in yet another *yes*, as we will address in terms of ‘seriality’ in Chapter 5 and the binding/unbinding of the mark of circumcision in Chapter 4. In short, as we read in *Monolingualism*: ‘the fold in dissemination, *as* dissemination’ – a thinking that emerges from the

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<sup>151</sup> In proposing that the ‘**x**’ mark the (*kbōratic*) ‘place’ in which this passion ‘takes place’ (so to speak, without implying any actuality or fulfillment in this ‘taking place’; or, *perhaps*, that it function as the ‘x’ that paradoxically re-marks the nonetheless non-locatable spot), we are excluding, for the moment at least, the implications of the form of the ‘x’. We will however return to this in a discussion of the cross, or crucifix.

‘originary’ complication of the unique (the ‘simple’ mentioned above) and *not* from a thinking of the plural (M 26) or, we could say, ‘numerable’.<sup>152</sup> For with the  $n+1$  of this derived, multiple and disseminal origin, countability (and hence accountability, as the economy of responsibility) is thwarted. *Yes, yes*: the finite-infinite doubling of the double (*the infinite difference is finite*’, we recall, SP 102), ‘a folded thought of the fold’ (M 26).

Thus, returning to a testimony such as Satti’s and the passionate nonmastery it implies, ‘[t]he “I” does not pre-exist this movement, nor does the subject: they are instituted in it [and with ‘instituted’ we are also thinking of the genitive, as ‘generative’]. I (“I”) can only say yes (**yes-I**) by promising to keep the memory of the *yes* and to confirm it immediately’ (Number 104-5). No simple ‘x’ of **‘I am the martyr (x)’**, therefore; but rather an ‘I’ as *derived, hyphenated* and undecidably fictional.

And what of the fulfilment of both this certain ‘arche-originary’ promise and of a promise in the everyday sense? In a given situation, the addressee(s) would certainly expect, hope, or believe the promise to be at least able to be upheld; to pass over from its status as promise into actuality. For instance, in the case of the martyr who signs his promissory will, we have already ascertained that in a certain sense, even if he does not proceed from that point to carry out his martyrdom operation, he is from that moment on ‘dead’ (and perhaps even a ‘martyr’ nonetheless) insofar as he has ceased to be the person (the ‘I’) he once was, whether in the end this is an ‘intentional’ renunciation or not. Therefore, even if his promise **‘I am the martyr’** is not actualised, the promise **‘I am dead’** is. But, in the everyday sense, just as the condition for testimony is its never being amountable to proof or certitude, that which makes a promise a promise is precisely its engagement to be fulfilled, and for this reason it precisely *cannot*, indeed *must not*, be open to the order of foreseeability, knowledge, certainty, guarantee, or program (index: ‘machine’). For a promise is a sending forth into the future, (the gift of) an opening which inscribes us in a fiduciary space. Indeed, as we read in ‘Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of “Religion” at the Limits of Reason Alone’, towards which we are working our way, the possibility of an ‘elementary’ promise, and the promise of a confirmation of the ‘originary’ *yes* is *the very condition* of the future, without which the future would be annulled (FK 83). In short: the promise, as with *passion* and the incertitude of *testimoniality*, as the undeconstructible possibility of deconstruction.

### ***Die Sprach verspricht***

Yet again, whilst we might still *appear* to be quite far from Satti’s and Derrida’s testimonies, we are taking our time in probing further *how* to turn and respond to these impossible, yet *necessary*, passionate performatives, in all their complexities. Lingering a while longer upon this arche-

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<sup>152</sup> It is here that *Monolingualism* unsettles discourses of ‘multiculturalism’, insofar as this ‘multi’ is presumed to be a multitude of discrete cultures. For a discussion of this, see Geoffrey Bennington, ‘Double Tonguing: Derrida’s *Monolingualism*’ in *Tympanum*, Vol. 4 (2000), pp. 1-12.

promise, then, we read that (recalling the ‘law of excess’ of Chapter 2), ‘a promise is always excessive’ (Memoirs 93-4). Were it not to be, it would be a description or knowledge of the future (‘evidence’ of the future, should this be possible); a ‘merely constative’ act (were this possible). This excess does not belong to some determined **‘I promise’** that I would be incapable of keeping. Rather, it is ‘within the very structure of the *act* of promising that this excess comes to inscribe a kind of irremedial disturbance or perversion’ (Memoirs 94) (*perversion* from L. *pervert-ere* ‘to turn round or about, turn the wrong way, overturn, turn to error or ruin, undo, corrupt’, OED); a kind of setting off course, turning the wrong way, to follow the idiom of path or step (the Blanchotian *pas*) that will be so central in a thinking of *passion* as aporia. A structure of pervertibility which is necessary as a prelude to a consideration of the ‘performative speech act’ of testimony, since it ‘never exists without disturbing – I might even say without perverting – the tranquil assurance of the subject of what we today call a “performative”’ (ACTS 93). For this ‘act’ of the *yes* ‘calls us back to a time and place “before” oppositions (before the performative/constative opposition but also before that of literature and philosophy, and consequently many others’ (ACTS 133-34): originality and citation, veracity and acting, for instance, as is central in *Three Posters* and what follows.

• **‘As if there were only arrivals [*arrivées*], and therefore only events without arrival.’<sup>153</sup>**

And so it is destined to the *Sprache* that it give itself up to and *be affected by* the *versprechen*. Following the movement of auto-hetero-affection addressed in Chapter 2, speaking *affects itself* (and hence the ‘*sich*’) *from the outside*, through the deviation and displacement of the ‘*ver-*’ of *versprechen*. Following de Man’s graphic intervention, the *sprechen* of speech is not only a promisor but one that ‘becomes unsettled, *disturbed, corrupted, perverted, affected by a kind of fatal drift*’ (ACTS 98, emphasis added). A potentially fatal yet nonetheless necessary drift which we can translate by the ‘*destinerrance*’ of *différance* (with this ‘-ance’, wherever we read it, signalling ‘acti/passivity’ of *passion*) as the ‘*destinerrant indirection*’ of the trace, or the ‘*perperformative*’, as demonstrated throughout the threatened unity of the destination of *Envois* (‘sendings’ or ‘sendoffs’) of *The Postcard* (see PC 136) that have been so privileged by Catherine Malabou in her *Counterpath*, by ‘*coups d’envoi*’ as ‘opening’ or ‘generative’ gestures, or by the testimoniality being sketched out here that is divorced from *telos*, as destination.<sup>154</sup> (On a ‘given’ level, we might think of the potential ‘fatal drift’ in the course of events during the various ‘stages’ of martyrdom, for instance during the course of 6 August 1985.) ‘Disturbed’ as ‘mad’ even, with (*testimonial*) madness as that which is supposedly, but perhaps too hurriedly, excluded from reason; as ‘derailed’ or ‘unhinged’, to use the terminology of the later *Specters of Marx* (1993) which was nonetheless already employed in *Of Spirit* (1987) (see OS

<sup>153</sup> ‘M’ 61.

<sup>154</sup> With the question of ‘postal economy’, ‘the purloined letter’, destination and the always-possible non-arrival, Derrida’s reading of (Lacan’s reading of) Poe returns. See ‘La facteur de la vérité’, in *The Post Card*, pp. 411-96.

93-4), which we can set to use in discussing the promissory and testimonial instant as a ‘non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present’ which ‘secretly unhinges itself’ (SM xviii); as this time (of politics) which is promissoryly ‘*disarticulated*’, ‘out of order’ and ‘out of joint’ (see SM 20).

Thus the promising of *versprechen*, as a promise unintentionally made, threatens to become a mis-speaking [*sich versprechen*]; a slip of the tongue, a *lapsus linguae*, or even, following our prioritisation of a generalised writing, a *lapsus calami* (a slip of the pen). Or even a *parapraxis*; a going astray in an/the impossible promise. This ‘perverse ambiguity’ cannot be dominated or purified; its ‘act’ cannot be annulled (ACTS 95): hence the *passion*. Before and against the present initiative, intentionality (the meaning to say, the *vouloir-dire*) or will (*volō*) of the ‘I’, be it that of the martyr who announces that he wills that he be a martyr and wills that he be taken at his word), ‘**I mis-speak [*sich versprechen*]**’, admit to and excuse myself for my mis-promise, for the impossibility of my promise which cannot be kept (see ACTS 149-50). From the ‘origin’ on, this mis-speaking of the *versprechen* is simultaneously speaking’s destination *and* that which, essentially, threatens destination in it (ACTS 100). Language cannot *not* promise as soon as it speaks, but it also cannot fail to break its promise (see OS 93-4). And thus, strictly speaking, the promise is impossible. And hence *unbelievable* (or even, scandalously, ‘comical’) (ACTS 94).

In fact, Derrida even goes so far as to say, in what he himself names a ‘probably excessive formula’, that we could almost say that even if a promise could be kept, this would matter little, but that what matters is that a pure promise ‘cannot take place, in a proper place, even though promising is inevitable as soon as we open our mouths’ (ACTS 98). And yet, this impossibility, this irremedial perversion of the *versprechen* is what simultaneously generates the possibility of the promise; what ‘performatively’ renders it possible – and indestructible (Memoirs 94). Or, undeconstructible. This *faktum* – the ‘fact of language which has established the impossibility of the promise over which we have no control’ – leads to a ‘*passionate* attempt to come to terms with the law, the contract, the oath, the declared affirmation of fidelity’ (ACTS 94-5, emphasis added); to come to terms with the vows to which the ‘I’ is bound, even before learning to speak (HAS 14-5) and well before entering the courtroom and approaching the witness box.

• **‘[A]s if, even before learning to speak, I had been bound by some vows.’<sup>155</sup>**

“‘Passion’ implies [...] a certain passivity in the heteronomic relation to the law and to the other, because this heteronomy is not simply passive and incompatible with freedom and autonomy’ (D 26, trajectory 3).

“‘Passion’ also implies liability, that is, imputability, culpability, responsibility, a certain *Schuldigsein*, an originary debt of being before the law’ (D 27, trajectory 4).

So rather than *acting* as an ‘agent’ (and it is precisely the relationship between theatrical and political ‘acting’ that is at stake in *Three Posters*, and which we bear in mind throughout all these

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<sup>155</sup> ‘M’ 1-2.

conversations regarding mastery and resistance), the 'I' is *promised*. This is the law. Although to sketch a scene of pure passivity would be misleading. **'I do not master this language.'**

Nonetheless, **'I say yes to it and to you'** (to the other, as 'you', without which we are arguing the 'I' cannot be thought), *before* the law, 'whatever my discursive mastery may be' (Passages 384). This nonmastery is not only affirmative, but even responsible, for it is 'here', in this submission to the law of language and of the other, that 'I am responsible before even choosing my responsibility' (Passages 384). Such is the enigmatic paradox that we will be following throughout the chapters that follow.

### ***Die Sprach verspricht (sich)***

I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter.

–Barthes, *Camera Lucida*<sup>156</sup>

Between life and death, subject and object, subject and image, *in a kind of parenthesis*, the specter I am becoming declares that the only image or subject that could really be an image or subject would be the one that shows its impossibility, its disappearance and destruction, its ruin.

–Eduardo Cadava & Paola Cortés-Rocca, 'Notes on Love & Photography'<sup>157</sup>

It is with the addition – only in the second version of de Man's essay, 'Promises (*Social Contract*)' (see ACTS 101) – of the (*sich*) to *Die Sprach verspricht* that we finally arrive at the exemplarity of Satti's martyr-testimony and the *I am the martyr* that is implicit in every (linguistic) act. Here we propose that this parenthetical *sich* reveals the auto(*sich*)-deconstruction of speaking into promising, and of the *I* into an *I am the martyr (x)*. In both cases, this auto-deconstruction is *quasi*-suicidal ('*quasi*' insofar as, as we will elucidate in Chapter 4, it deconstructs even the '*sui*-' of suicide) and *quasi*-mechanical (*both* 'machine' and 'event', insofar as it is unintentional yet nonetheless '*is*' some form of *event*, even if only *resembling* an event). (And it is because of this '*quasi*-mechanical' auto-deconstruction that we prefer to use 'auto-', as opposed to 'self-', with 'self' suggesting the 'I' as the 'subject' of the metaphysics of subjectivity and 'auto-' suggesting machinic, the implicit automaton in the 'acting' 'I', even if this (political) 'acting' – as in the case of Satti's video – at least appears to be 'live' and improvised.) Or, as we will come to in Chapter 4, this *sich* functions as the *quasi*-suicidal 'auto-' of auto-immunity: the auto-destructing yet auto-protecting *promise of a threat*. What is at stake here is 'an auto-deconstruction in which the *auto*- or the *self* would not be able to be either *reflected* or totalized, not even gathered or recollected, but only written and caught in the trap of the promise' (ACTS 135, emphasis modified).

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<sup>156</sup> 'CL' 14. Cited in Eduardo Cadava & Paola Cortés-Rocca, 'Notes on Love & Photography', p. 111.

<sup>157</sup> Cadava & Cortés-Rocca, p. 111, emphasis added.

As with the auto-hetero-affection and the law of overflow encountered in our reading of *I am dead*, and following the limitrophic logic outlined above, ‘la parole s’affecte du *dehors* [speaking affects itself from the *outside*].’ And hence the significance of de Man’s having added, between proofs and between parentheses, the *sich* of *Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*, since the reflexive pronoun (*sich*) functions as ‘that which speech must add to itself in order to speak’ (ACTS 100-01). But had he not done so, nothing would be changed (this graphic legibility only renders this auto-deconstruction *more vivid*), ‘since the *sich*, this last-minute signature, is itself affected by the *Versprechen*’ (ACTS 101).

### *I am the martyr (x)*

*Différance* as *passion*, then; as this affirmative, quasi-suicidal *acquiescence*, trapped in the road-block of the aporia of *destinérance*. *I* as *I am dead*, as *yes*, as *I am the martyr*.<sup>158</sup> ‘**I am the martyr (x)**’: this promissory engagement in which Satti’s self-signs, promises himself, his own fate, his ‘auto-effacement’, from which there is no going back. *I am the martyr (x)*: this *yes* in which ‘the *sich* [the ‘**x**’] lets itself be effaced by itself; it is promised over to the effacement that it promises itself (ACTS 101). ‘No erasure is possible for such a pledge. No going back’ (OS 130 n 5). ‘**I am the martyr (x)**’: the passion of the *I* who, even when intending to sign his own fate (to sign ‘**I am dead**’), to promise himself his future, is already doing so – ‘language cannot not promise’ – and yet, simultaneously, can never do so – ‘but it cannot fail to break its promise’ (OS 93-4). The operation of Satti’s ‘**I am the martyr**’ is *martyred*, in effect, by its implicit *I am the martyr*. The mission as *missive*, always already destined for derailment and non-arrival. ‘Arrival’ as that from which, as we will see in our reading of *Monolingualism*, *desire* springs forth, ‘even before the ipseity of an *I-me* that would bear it in advance’ (M 61).

Once again, we must be attentive to the parenthetical marks, with the parentheses around the *sich*, we can propose, signalling the manner in which ‘the “sich” [or the *ich*, as *I*] is itself at the same time constituted and de-constituted, deconstructed if you wish, by the very *act* of the promise’ (ACTS 101). (In effect, we are proposing that whilst the ‘**I**’ is deconstructible, the testimonial promise is not.) Here, we might say, the parentheses function almost like the invisible erasure under which we would need to place this differential *yes* in any attempt to describe it; these parentheses that are but yet another graphic indication of the spectral, promissory *I am dead* of the trace that replaces the ontological ‘is’ of *S is P*. These parentheses that demonstrate the always necessarily secondary or supplementary (derived) nature of the *I* or the *sich*; the *I* or the *sich* as the *x* of the event of ‘**I am the martyr (x)**’:

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<sup>158</sup> We note the problematicity of this ‘as’, as with the entire project’s fleshing out of analogies. As we read regarding the *yes*, this cannot be replaced ‘by a thing which it would be supposed to describe [...], nor even by the thing it is supposed to approve or affirm, so it would be impossible to replace the *yes* by the names of concepts [‘martyrdom’ or ‘passion’, as historical, religious or anthropological concepts, for instance] supposedly describing this act or operation, *if indeed this is an act or operation*’ (Ulysses 297). And yet, simultaneously, it is this differential *yes* which gives rise to an inherent substitutability.

'In truth, it is the value of the *act* – and of the truth – which thus deconstructs *itself*, the “se,” the “itself” of auto-deconstruction does not escape what I will call this aporetic event' (ACTS 101).

'Auto-deconstruction': as the auto-matic deconstruction *of* the 'autos' (and hence the signatory 'P of any testimony), but also *of* deconstruction 'itself'. The double genitive is/in the hyphen. De Man concedes that he need not have 'deconstructed' Rousseau, since the latter has already done so himself. Just as for Derrida, there is always deconstruction in the work of de Man, even if he had wished to erase the very word 'deconstruction' (see ACTS 123). For 'there is always already deconstruction, at work *in* works'. Whilst this is the case exemplarily for literary works, this 'all' is boundless, including works of history and philosophy (ACTS 123-24). Deconstruction '*in* works' (*oeuvres*) but also '*at* work' (*mis en oeuvre*), the *cela oeuvre* of the textual event: such will be our concern in the 'operativity' of the *passion* we will be sketching out in Chapter 4. Returning to the aporia of 'applied deconstruction' which we began, we note how, as Derrida has stated on more than one occasion, '[d]econstruction cannot be applied, after the fact and from the outside [...]. Texts deconstruct *themselves* by themselves' (ACTS 123). As with the '**P**' of '**I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti**', the word 'deconstruction' 'could have or should have been erased *by itself*, since it only designates the explication of a relation of the work to *itself*' (ACTS 124, emphasis modified; see also AL 50).

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### III: The performative; or, theatricality

**Act** *sb.* A thing done; a deed, a performance (of an intelligent being). . . . A decree passed by a legislative body, a court of justice, etc. . . . Any instrument in writing to verify facts. . . . A “performance” of part of a play. . . . Part of a formula used when signing a legal instrument [*act and deed*]. . . . Pretence (of being what one is not).

**Act** *v.* To carry out or represent in mimic action (an ideal, incident, or story); to perform (a play). Hence *fig.* in a bad sense: To simulate, counterfeit. . . . To perform on the stage of existence; to perform actions, to do things, in the widest sense. . . . To do the duties of an office temporarily, without being the regular officer.

–*Oxford English Dictionary*<sup>159</sup>

[I]n *Hamlet*, the dramatization deploys a spectacular and supernaturally miraculous *mise en abîme* of testimonies. Each witness is always *alone in bearing witness* in general (this is the essence of testimony) and thus of testifying to the impossible possibility of testimony, thereby “testifying for the absence of attestation” as Blanchot puts it. Hamlet is alone in being able to bear witness in this way to the testimony. The play named *Hamlet* thus becomes, like “Aschenglorie,” a testimony on the essence of testimony, which also becomes the absence of testimony.

–Derrida, “The Time is Out of Joint”<sup>160</sup>

Jamal Satti is a fighter who does not fear death. As proof, he voluntarily goes out to meet it. Yet as soon as he steps before the camera to film his testimony, his words betray him, hesitating and stumbling between his lips. His gaze is unable to focus, it wavers and gets lost. These different takes are like those of an actor getting ready to play his role. Why does Jamal Satti try to act?

–Mroué, “The Fabrication of Truth”<sup>161</sup>

#### • ‘That simplest of performances, an “I am”’<sup>162</sup>

The testimonial act, we read in *Demeure*, must ‘form itself in an incommensurable performative’ (D 83). In order to be ‘authentic’, testimony *ought* to be a first person present performative act that *does* what it *says*, *at this very instant*, referring only to its present moment (as exemplified by the martyr figure, D 38). Rather than simply drawing from the lengthy thematisation of testimony in *Demeure*, however, might we not simultaneously phrase this passion *of* and *for* testimony through the above-cited wager-provocation as to whether, ‘one day’, we will be able to think together ‘the machine and the event’.

To recapitulate, in *Demeure* – which, let us not forget, is a reading of *the possibility of* ‘the instant of my death’, through which we might read ‘the instant of my martyrdom’ metonymised in ‘**I am the martyr (x)**’ – we read that for testimony, there must be the irreplaceable instant. Both of

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<sup>159</sup> Cited in Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. viii.

<sup>160</sup> ‘TOJ’ 33.

<sup>161</sup> Mroué, ‘FT’ 115.

<sup>162</sup> ‘LO’ 78.

the act of witnessing, and of the act of bearing witness, with the two seeming to come together in Satti's testimony:

‘If that to which I testify is divisible, if the moment in which I testify is divisible, if my attestation is divisible, at that moment it is no longer reliable, it no longer has the value of truth, reliability, or veracity that it claims. Consequently for testimony there *must* be the instant’ (D 33).

And yet, on the other hand, ‘this condition of possibility is destroyed by the testimony itself’ (D 33). In fact, it is precisely the appeal to instantaneousness as *stigmē*, as singular point of time, which conveys the aporia of testimony (D 43), above all as *(re-)marked in and on* the skin and body of the witness-martyr. Regarding that which one witnesses, this must be some ‘thing’ that occurs at ‘a moment assembled at the tip of an instantaneousness which must resist division’ (D 33) but which, as we saw in our analysis of language in Chapter 2, can only occur *by way of* this very divisibility which it forbids. For ‘ocular, auditory, tactile, any sensory perception of the witness must be an experience. As such, a constituting synthesis entails time and thus does not limit itself to the instant’. Likewise, for the instant of *bearing witness*, there must be a temporal sequence, ‘sentences, for example’ (although we recall that a testimony borne is not always verbal, and that the act of testimony is *never simply* verbal, TR 110). Above all, these sentences must *promise* their own repetition and thus their own *quasi-technical* reproducibility, and hence their *alterability*. In other words, as we are coming to, they must promise, or be promised by, *iterability*.<sup>163</sup> And hence – and Satti's three testimonies are exemplary here – when I ‘commit myself’ to speaking the truth, I commit myself to repeating the same thing, whether it be an instant later, two instants later or the next day and, recalling the infinite finitude of *différance*, ‘for eternity, in a certain way’. Thus, in a thinking that echoes what Blanchot describes as the ‘fearsome’ power of the ‘mechanical’, as the repetitiveness of *writing*, the instant is ‘carried outside of itself’ and displaced from its natural lodging; *affected by* and welcoming in the other from without, it is instantaneously divided and destroyed by what it nonetheless makes possible: testimony (D 33).<sup>164</sup>

*Auto-immunely* and *quasi-suicidally*, then, here is the *fatal necessity* of the instant's making testimony simultaneously both possible *and* impossible (D 33): what we can designate as ‘impossible’. Without the uniqueness of the event of the ‘now’ (*stigmē*), testimony would be unreliable. And yet, in the present I also remember the recent past and anticipate the future, for it is precisely through what I experience ‘now’, as that which can be immediately recalled, that I can anticipate the same experience happening again in the future. **Yes**, as always **yes, yes**, or infinitely more; Satti's ‘**I am the martyr**’ *always already* inscribed within a series of testimonies, already beckoning and appealing to unknowable martyrs-to-come and responding to those past. The injunction towards

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<sup>163</sup> *Iterability* can be supplemented by a variety of terms: for instance, *différance*, grapheme, trace (see LI 71).

<sup>164</sup> Regarding Blanchot's conception of the mechanical, see for instance *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 43–4. See also Bernard Stiegler's reference to this in the discussion entitled ‘The Archive Market: Truth, Testimony, Evidence’ in *Echographies* (E 89).

engagement and response of the ‘swear!’ of *Hamlet* around which Derrida’s 1993 *Specters of Marx* unfolds; of the ‘originary performativity unlike all the performatives analyzed by the theoreticians of speech acts’ and the ‘rupturing violence’ of a ‘swear!’ whose speaker, *revenantially*, remains invisible and unknowable.<sup>165</sup> Of a ‘swear!’ that is silently borne witness to in the ‘incoercible difference’ in which the ‘here-now’ unfolds (SM 36-7).<sup>166</sup> Of the singular ‘takes’ of Satti’s testimony, ‘[t]he *same time* never is, will never have been and will never be *present*’ (ACTS 145). Hamlet again: ‘**The time is out of joint**’. Just as, as we saw in Chapter 2, each ‘present instant’ keeps within itself a mark or trace of the past instant and already lets itself be vitiated (*entamé*) by the mark of its relation to the future instant (phrased in terms of the promise or *yes*, ‘[t]here is only the promise and memory, memory as promise, without any gathering possible in the form of the present. This disjunction is the law, the text of law and [the witness before] the law of the text’, ACTS 145). The instant as tracing and traced: as *passion* or acti/passivity.

Of this tracing-traced and a certain *necessity* that will be a chance and a fatality when we arrive at scenes of responsibility, we read:

“**[I]t is necessary that there *have been a trace*,**” a sentence that one must simultaneously turn toward a past *and* toward a future that are as yet unrepresentable. It is (now) necessary that that there *have been a trace* (in an unremembered past; because of this amnesia, the “necessity” of the trace is necessary). But also, **it is necessary** (from now on, it will be necessary; the “it is necessary” always points toward the future) **that in the future there *will have been a trace***’ (HAS 11-12, emphasis modified).

This memory or anticipation consists in traces of repeatability, traces of ‘re-tentions’ and ‘pro-tentions’ (to use a phenomenological and transcendental language that reveals itself to be inadequate, MP 13), and thus there can be no experience that does not essentially and inseparably harbour within it these two agencies of event and repeatability, with this machinic repeatability as what simultaneously makes possible and destroys the event. How, then, to think the two together? Will we ever be able to do so?

### ‘Typewriter Ribbon’: the event and the machine

Testimony, we recall, and above all *responsible* testimony, would *seem* to always necessitate a unique ‘I’ who/which, according to the theoreticians of speech acts who will soon be entering the scene, would be capable of saying ‘I’ in the ‘here and now’ of the present, and thus of being responsible for this speech act (see PP 79-80). Unlike the actor on stage, who would be abrogated of the responsibility for a promise, since this theory would deem such an utterance ‘hollow’, ‘void’ or

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<sup>165</sup> As we are coming to, this ‘force of *rupture*’ of iterability ‘*produces* the institution or the constitution, the law itself, which is to say also the meaning that appears to, that ought to, or that appears to have to guarantee it in return’ (SM 37, emphasis added).

<sup>166</sup> It is here, with this unfolding of the ‘here-now’, that Derrida refutes that claims that *différance* is but an alibi (i.e. an ‘elsewhere’; *alibi* ‘in another place; elsewhere’, OED) for deferral, lateness, delay and postponement’ (SM 37). Regarding the *without alibi* of *différance*, see also ‘Provocation’ and Peggy Kamuf, ‘Introduction: Event of Resistance’, in *Without Alibi*, ed. & trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-27.

‘nonserious’ (LI 88). Satti’s repeated rehearsals, Mroué’s stepping into the place of the martyr figure in offering his homage to previous comrades: can any of this really, ‘seriously’, be described through such terms? **‘Let’s be serious’**, as is Derrida’s half-tongue-in-cheek, half-deadly-serious mimicking-displacing of Austin’s legatee, John R. Searle (LI 34) through a dark – and for that all the more ‘serious’ – humour that is similarly at work in Mroué’s performance. And, recalling the polysemy of the noun and verb ‘act’ – as both ‘serious’ and ‘staged’, as ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ or temporary, as an action, as a law governing actions, and a record (or evidence) documenting actions (Introduction, AL 2) – what of the relationship between the fictional or theatrical and law?

Let us turn to the 1998 ‘Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)’, a text which forms something of a ‘sequel’ to the ‘Limited Inc a b c’ (1977) that we will shortly be reading from, and which marks Derrida’s return to the oeuvre of Paul de Man.<sup>167</sup> Here, on the first page, Derrida demands that we imagine the following scenario:

‘As if *I*, as if someone saying *I* got round to addressing you to say, and you would still be hearing it today: “Here is the most unjustifiable, if not the most unjust, thing I ever happened to do, at once actively and passively, mechanically, and in such a way that not only was I able thus to let myself do it but also thanks to it, or because of it, I was able finally to say and to sign *P*” (TR 71).<sup>168</sup>

Is this not the dream or desire, the passion, of the narrator of *Monolingualism*? The impossible dream for which he takes on the role of martyr-figure? ‘How’, Derrida asks, ‘is that possible?’ (TR 72). What happened there, in this ‘scene’ of saying *I*? Rather than rushing in headlong to answer the question of how and whether this above scene of saying *I* is possible, ‘before trying to understand what happened there, both the event and its *mēkhanē*’, Derrida suggests marking a pause and changing speed, setting in place the premises of our questions (TR 72). And it is here that we find the above-mentioned wager (arguably initially set by de Man, but taken up and countersigned, perhaps more forcefully and certainly more explicitly by Derrida here in the urgency of this scene of perjury, excuses, denials and forgiveness, and hence of *responsibility*) that sets in motion this text, ‘Typewriter-Ribbon’ (but can we not also think here the ‘video-tape’), to which Derrida proposes adding the subtitles ‘machine’ and ‘textual event’ (TR 79). Recalling our discussion of the *studium* and *punctum* in Chapter 2, we read:

‘Will we one day be able, and in a single gesture, to join the thinking of the event to the thinking of the machine? Will we be able to think, what is called thinking, at one and the same time, *both* what is happening (we call that an event) *and* the calculable programming of an automatic repetition (we call that a machine)?

‘For that, it would be necessary in the future (but there will be no future except on this condition) to think *both* the event *and* the machine as two compatible or even indissociable concepts. Today they appear to us to be antinomic. Antinomic because what happens ought to keep, so we think, some nonprogrammable and therefore incalculable singularity.

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<sup>167</sup> We say 1998, insofar as a first version of this text was presented at the colloquium *Culture and Materiality: A post-millennium conference – à propos of Paul de Man’s Aesthetic Ideology – to reconsider trajectories for < materialist > thought in the afterlife of theory, cultural studies, and Marxist critique*, California, April 1998.

<sup>168</sup> We note the inconsistency of the use of italics and quotation marks between this text and others that we are citing from.

An event worthy of the name ought not, so we think, to give in or be reduced to repetition. To respond to its name, the event ought above all to *happen* to someone, to some living being who is thus *affected* by it, consciously or unconsciously. No event without *experience* (and this is basically what ‘experience’ means), without experience, conscious or unconscious, human or not, of what happens to the living’ (TR 72).

Will we be able to think the two together: the event and the machine? Or, as we will ask when we come to read *Monolingualism*: the mother tongue, as ‘natural source’, *and* the machine-like prosthesis of origin? The singular event of language and testimony *and* machine-like re-markability? The event, as necessarily fiduciary *and* the technical? As Derrida proposes in ‘Faith and Knowledge’ (and we stress the ‘tain’ or hyphen of the ‘and’ here), is not the technical in fact the very possibility, indeed chance, of faith (FK 83)? Of the event of a faith freed from dogma and determinable content that is more akin to a structural blindness? ‘Instead of opposing them, as is almost always done, they ought to be thought together, as one and the same possibility: the machine-like and faith’ (FK 83). But in thinking these seeming antinomies, will we not also have to face the risk that this promised thought-to-come, the new figure of this ‘event-machine’, might very well turn out to be a threat that resembles an ‘unrecognisable monster’ (TR 73); that the chance of faith that is the technical might entail ‘the menace of radical evil’ (FK 83), a menace that is arguably borne witness to *exemplarily* by the suicidal attacks of 11 September? It is here, in this risk, that we situate our approach and questioning: on or in the limitrophic, *differential* hyphen (*trait d’union*) of this ‘event-machine’. In working towards a discussion of the wider contemporary context in which testimonies such as Satti’s are inscribed and in which this wager set takes on ever-increasing pertinence, the proposal here is that this aporia reveals itself, *exemplarily* and *already*, in the *passion of testimony*.

Let us not forget (and we return to this over and again, for this is the crux of the matter) that ‘when he testifies, the martyr does not tell a story, he offers himself.’ He does not ‘tell’, in what speech act theorists would call the ‘constative’ mode; rather, he ‘testifies to his faith by offering himself or offering *his life or his body*’ (D 38, emphasis added). Prioritising a thinking of the (graphematic) body, if Chapter 2 performed an ‘autopsy’ of the sentence ‘**I am dead**’, might not the present chapter (as well as Chapter 4) be a diagnostic ‘echography’ (as an ultrasound that passes through the body) of ‘**I am the martyr**’?<sup>169</sup> Jumping from *Demeure* back to the wager of ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, we recall the last line cited above: ‘No event without experience [...] of what happens to the living’, following which we read:

‘It is difficult, however, to conceive of a living being *to* whom or *through* whom something happens without an affection getting *inscribed* in a sensible, aesthetic manner *right on some body or some organic matter*.

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<sup>169</sup> In *Echographies of Television*, as is of relevance for Satti’s testimony and *Three Posters*, Derrida discusses the effects of technologies – as an ‘artificial theatre’ in which one plays, either as actor or spectator – upon the body (see esp. E 96). As the translator, Jennifer Bajorek, notes, ‘the analogy between the (diagnostic and other) possibilities opened by medical imaging technologies and those opened up by television can be understood to frame Derrida and Stiegler’s entire conversation’ (E 96 n. 4).

Why *organic*? Because there is no thinking of the event, it seems, without some sensitivity, without an *aesthetic affect* and some presumption of living organicity' (TR 72, emphasis modified).

The machine, on the other hand, would be excluded from the performative event – and this is at least how it is generally conceived – since it is destined to repetition, 'that is, to reproduce impassively, imperceptibly, without organ or organicity, received commands. In a state of anaesthesia, it would obey or command a calculable program without affect or auto-affectation, like an indifferent automaton', needing no 'I' in order to function (TR 72). And moreover, '[i]t is difficult to conceive of a purely machinelike apparatus without inorganic matter [...] that is, nonliving, sometimes dead but always, in principle, unfeeling and inanimate, without desire, without intention, without spontaneity' (TR 72). 'Unfeeling, inanimate, without desire': *unaffected* by, immune to *passion*, therefore? 'The automaticity of the inorganic machine is not the spontaneity attributed to organic life' (TR 72). Or such, at least, is the common belief. But the paradox of the 'learning by heart' of 'Che cos'è la poesia?' cited at the outset already alerts us that things may well not be so simple. For is a testimony, for instance, ever truly spontaneous or 'original' (and here we recall the *inédit* of which Barthes spoke, and the nonorganic prosthesis of the 'living present' in Chapter 2)? Or is there not always some element of the theatrical scripting – of repeating, rehearsing [*répétition*] and dictation – as is the question posed so enigmatically by *Three Posters*? By the 'event-machine' of *Three Posters*, the 'performance' piece whose subtitle, in the English at least – either 'A Performance – video' or 'a performance/video' – already alerts us to the contamination of the seemingly 'live performance' by the technological, disseminative and archival.<sup>170</sup> Is not the *auto*-immunity of a 'pure' or 'authentic' performative testimony precisely that it is never immune from *auto*-maturity? In that case, perhaps the very concept of 'authenticity' demands rethinking (Secret 72). Is this not precisely what *Demeure* (1998), for instance, as well as the earlier *Echographies of Television* (1996) testify to?

Of the classical conception of 'performativity', Derrida writes:

'One may say of a machine that it is productive, active, efficient, or, as one says in French, *performante*. But a machine as such, however *performante* it may be, could never according to the strict Austinian orthodoxy of speech acts, produce an event of the *performative* type. Performativity will never be reduced to technical performance. Pure performativity implies the presence of a living being, and of a living being speaking one time only, in its own name, in the first person. And speaking in a manner that is at once spontaneous, intentional, free, and irreplaceable. Performativity, therefore, excludes in principle, in its own moment, any machinelike [*machinale*] technicity. It is even the name given to this intentional exclusion' (TR 74).

For testimony to be 'authentic', and hence serve as evidence, this 'living present' *ought* to be devoid of any technical apparatus; for instance, the recording apparatuses such as the camera that films

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<sup>170</sup> In the English transcription published in *Támass*, the piece is entitled 'Three Posters: A Performance – video', and in the article and transcription published in *The Drama Review*, 'Three posters a performance/video'.

Satti's testimony and the television network and monitors through which it is *subsequently* (i.e. not instantaneously) screened. Or the webcams that nowadays record and disseminate the seeming 'live' images and voices (including martyr-testimonies) on the internet, in what we call 'real time'.<sup>171</sup> In its juridical sense, testimony tends to exclude all technical agency: one cannot send a cassette (as did the Bassidji martyrs of Iran) to testify in one's place (D 33). But does not Satti's testimony (which took place in 1985, well before Derrida had begun to probe the aporias of testimony) demonstrate, *exemplarily*, the *necessity* of technical archivability and dissemination? What would his testimony have been without this? Arguably, no 'martyrdom' would have taken place.

In *Echographies of Television*, this problematic of the exclusion of technically recorded images in legal proceedings unfolds, *exemplarily*, around the example of the 1991 Rodney King case (see E 82-99, esp. E 90-6). Although the witness in question (George Holliday) had a video-recording of the assault which may have served as an exhibit, or perhaps even 'evidence', it was deemed that this footage could not replace or *substitute* testimony. Or, more specifically, it could not replace the young man *coming forward*, 'presently', and swearing, *before the law*, that he *was present* at the scene, that he saw the scene 'with his own eyes', and that he was the one to have recorded this footage (E 94). As we read in *Echographies*, the apparent contradiction or aporetic tension is that 'technics will never make a testimony, testimony is pure of any technics, and yet it is impure, and yet it already implies the appeal to technics.' And hence the necessity to rethink the contributions of testimony and technics (E 94-5).

As noted above, a testimony borne must be repeatable, in order to be intelligible and promise truthfulness, and hence to carry some value. This repeatability can be thought in terms of what Derrida names 'iterability', as the differential movement of (machine-like) repeatability and alterability (*iter*, from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit; or 'the logic that ties repetition to alterity' and also, as Hélène Cixous points out, to 'itinerary', as will be important in thinking destination) that, in its breaching and broaching (*entamer*) forms the structure of the mark, and which we will be translating yet again in our reading of *Monolingualism* as 're-markability' (LI 7; see also Secret 72).<sup>172</sup> Always on the verge (*en instance*) of being divided, the singular instant becomes an ideal (*exemplary*) instant since it is always already instrumentalizable and *affected* by technology and virtuality, 'there' where *tekhne* 'should' be excluded (D 41-2). 'For this, we need not wait for cameras, video, typewriters, and computers' (D 42; see also Ulysses 271-72).

But in the case of Satti's testimony, is not the very thing being witnessed in fact the archiving of the bearing witness, insofar as Satti would not 'become a martyr' were his oath not

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<sup>171</sup> Regarding the impact of such 'real time' recordings for the work of the historian, see Pierre Nora, 'Le retour de l'événement [The Return of the Event]', in Jacques Le Goff & Pierre Nora, eds., *Faire l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 285-308. Referenced by Stiegler in *Echographies* (E 93).

<sup>172</sup> For Cixous, the Latin *it* leads us down road in which the repeating or iterating *itero* or *iterum* of iterability would *derive* from the same *it* of itineracy (*iter itineris*). See Hélène Cixous, 'The Keys to Jacques Derrida as a Proteus Unbound', trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Discourse*, Vol. 30, No's 1 & 2 (Winter & Spring 2008), pp. 71-122 (p. 104).

captured and sealed by the inanimate video-recorder, ready to be dispatched (and we remember the *envois*) and broadcast to the general public? Is it not the simultaneous signing of the oath *and* its archiving ('action and archive') that brings about or 'detonates' the event (see Psyche 13)? The event *of* the archive, moreover, insofar as it is the archive itself which brings about the event of both the testimony and the martyrdom, of the event and its becoming-legend, for which we need not wait for commemorative practices such as those surrounding martyr figures ('Signature, already, of the dead man') (SS 54, 108).<sup>173</sup> For whereas the archive might traditionally be thought of in terms of the recording of past events, Satti's martyr-testimony demonstrates the manner in which

'the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future. The archiving produces as much as it records the event. This is also our political experience of the so-called news media' (AF 17).

Following this movement of iterability, this unique and singular statement, '**I am the martyr (x)**', becomes universal and universalisable; the unique becomes the ideal (Secret 73), and *necessarily* so (Secret 73, D 41). Even though 'I', as witness, am irreplaceable (D 30, 41) – '**No one / bears witness / for the witness**' – 'I' simultaneously have to be replaceable in the very same place, and what I experience(d) would have to (have) be(en) experienced by anyone else in my place (D 41, Secret 73). Infinitely secret, my testimony must simultaneously be infinitely public (D 41).

According to Mroué, the societies who praise and celebrate martyrdom 'swiftly forget their heroes, who are relegated to the status of mere names lengthening the list of martyrs' (Támass 114). Whilst we will address 'identity' in Part B and the proper name in Chapter 5, we can at least for the moment note the necessary possibility of the loss of uniqueness that occurs at the moment of testimony and its inherent technical repeatability, even before these testimonies and their signatories' names come to be inscribed in any official records or tally (see Secret 72). In what follows, returning to our emphasis on the hyphen of the 'event-machine', we ask whether this is not the very (non-)place *on* or *in* which singularity, if there is such a thing, 'is inscribed' or 'takes place'? And if '[a] witness and a testimony must always be exemplary' (D 40), is this hyphen between 'event' and 'machine' not the *wounded* and *wounding* 'place' – organic and inorganic – of *exemplarity*: of the exemplary marks and scars of *Monolingualism*, as we will be reading in Part B, which 'allow one to read in a more dazzling, intense, or even traumatic manner the truth of a universal necessity' (M 26)?

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<sup>173</sup> In citing from *Signésponge/Signsponge* (1984), we note that this text, which almost prefigures the insistence in 'Typewriter Ribbon' on 'the event and the machine', is dedicated to Paul de Man.



• '[T]ake precisely this example'

The exemplarity of the example is clearly never the exemplarity of the example.  
–Derrida, 'Passions: An Oblique Offering'<sup>174</sup>

[P]assion is always a matter of example.  
–Derrida, 'Passions: An Oblique Offering'<sup>175</sup>

In English, there is a discrepancy between the words 'instant' and 'instance': "instance" leads us more in the direction of exemplarity: "instance" is an example, and exemplarity names a concept essential to the problematic of testimony' (D 40). A witness, and a testimony, *must be* exemplary, as is exemplified by the witness who testifies to their martyrdom or P/passion. And any exemplarity, in order for to be exemplary, must be both singular *and* universal (D 41): 'event' *and* 'machine'. 'For instance', then, translatable as 'for example': for in necessarily being idealisable, '[i]t is thus the very instance of this instant that seems to become exemplary; exemplary in the very place where it seems to become unique and irreplaceable, under the seal of unicity' (D 42). And hence, another paradox to be borne, another *suffer-ance* of testimony: although the example is not substitutable, this irreplaceability must be exemplary, which means replaceable. The irreplaceable must allow itself to be replaced on the spot. 'The singular must be universalisable. This is the testimonial condition' (D 41, emphasis added).

Mimicking Derrida in 'his' 1993 *Passions: An Oblique Offering* (a precursor to the discussion of P/passion in the 1998 *Demeure* and its 'enactment' in the 1996 *Monolingualism*), 'let us take an example, whether or not it is valid for the law': '**I am the martyr (x)**', for instance. Does the movement between or merging of the '**P**' and the '**(x)**' of this 'example' not *offer* to us, *before* even intending to do so (and hence *before* the decision of any responsibility), in a 'performative fiction' the following: "**take precisely this example**" (Passions 18)? Of the *take precisely this example of I am the martyr (x)*; or, of the fiction of the performative, as performed in *passion*? For as we are coming to, it is precisely the *law* of iterability, as re-markability and hence exemplarity, that 'extends' the 'strict sense' of the performative 'speech act' (Passions 144 n. 14).<sup>176</sup> And does this exemplary testimony not allow for the possibility of beginning not with some theory of performativity or testimony of which we would then give examples, but with *an example* out of which we might, *with* or *following* Derrida, let come the *invention* some altogether unheard-of performative, as *passion*? Furthermore, as *an example* and yet *one example among others*, is '**I am the martyr (x)**' not the exemplary possibility of the law of technical iterability-exemplarity-re-markability to which it bears

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<sup>174</sup> 'Passions' 17-8.

<sup>175</sup> 'Passions' 23 n. 10.

<sup>176</sup> Here we see how the distinction between 'use' and 'mention' becomes unstable: 'if there is a distinction between myself [*moi*] and 'P' [*moi?*], between the reference to me and the reference to (an) 'P' through the example of my 'I,' this dissociation, which could only *resemble* a difference between 'use' and 'mention' [both in English in original], is still a pragmatic difference and not properly linguistic or discursive. It has not necessarily to be marked *in words*' (Passions 143 n. 14).

witness?<sup>177</sup> Of this law which allows for this testimony to be lifted from its ‘original’ context, far from what we can only presume to be Satti’s ‘intentions’, and repeated, reiterated and re-translated, all the while continuing to appeal for new readings and countersignings, even in the radical absence of its signatory?

‘And certainly,’ Derrida tells us, ‘when I say this very example, I already said something more and something else; I say something which goes beyond the *tode ti*, the this of the example. The example itself, as such, *overflows* its *singularity* as much as its *identity*.’ That is why, following the paradoxical and antinomical logic that we will address further in Part B, ‘there are no examples, while at the same time there are only examples’ (Passions 17, emphasis added). Or, as Derrida puts in it the 1991 *The Other Heading*, ‘I have, the unique “I” has, the responsibility of testifying for universality. Each time, the exemplarity of the example is unique. That is why it can be put into a series and formalized into a law’ (OH 73).

• **‘I am alive. No, you are dead’**<sup>178</sup>

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Satti’s testimony can be said to ‘reveal’ exemplarily the manner in which every graphematic mark or ‘signature’ of the ‘I’ (with ‘signature’ in the broad sense, beyond its traditional and *legal* definition, and not necessarily entailing a legible inscription of ‘I’) can be translated by **‘I am dead’**; by this, according to Barthes, ‘scandal of language’ or unforeseen performative. Moreover, through the possibility of our reading this testimonial speech act in the (‘radical’) absence of both Satti and the ‘original’ context of his ‘intention’, we see how **‘I am the martyr (x)’** (above all when translated as **‘I am dead’**) is exemplary of the machine-like law of *iterability* (yet again, a ‘quasi-concept’, Afterword 122) that cannot be excluded from the supposedly ‘authentic’ and ‘organic’ performative act, demanding that the traditional, Austinian theories of ‘speech acts’, while never entirely dismissed, be re-considered and re-invented. ‘Re-invented’ as a what Derrida in the 1995 *Archive Fever* calls a ‘performative to come’ (and there will be many more ‘names’ to-come) the archive of which no longer has any relation to the record of what ‘is’, ‘to the record of the presence of what is or will have been *actually* present’: a ‘performative to come’ which is translatable, *for instance*, by what Derrida calls the ‘messianic’ promise (which we are in turn translating as *testimonial*), which is distinguished – but never *entirely* so – from the determined content of all messianicism (and ‘given’ testimonies) (AF 72).

As is one of the principle assertions of both ‘Signature Event Context’ (1972) and the extended discussion in ‘Limited Inc a b c’ (1977) (both seminal texts in the ‘canon’ of speech act theory and performativity), this machine-like law of iterability means that a written mark *must*

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<sup>177</sup> Such suggestions are based on the manner in which exemplarity is played out in *The Other Heading*, wherein it is proposed (or ‘demonstrated’) that ‘the question of politics is not merely one example of the question of the example, but that the question of example essentially “is” the question of politics’ (OH xviii; see also xxii, xxxvi & 11).

<sup>178</sup> Blanchot, ‘ID’ 9.

(again, the *il faut*) continue to function in the absence of both the addressee *and* the addressor. This absence is not a continual modification of presence, but a distance, delay or *différance* ('difference' and 'deferral') that must be capable of being brought to a certain *absolute* degree of absence, a *rupture* in presence: death, or at least the *necessary possibility* – as a structural law – of the death of both the addressee and/or the addressor (Sec 7-8). In its spectrality, the graphematic mark must continue to be able to 'act' and be readable even when the so-called 'author' of the writing no longer *answers for* what he *seems to* have signed, 'in his name', recalling the abovementioned *responsibility* that is deemed necessary for the 'serious' speech act (Sec 8). Without the possibility of this structural legibility, *inscribed in* the graphematic mark from its 'inception' (i.e. 'source' or 'origin') on, a writing would not be writing, with 'writing' (the disruptive spacing of presence in a mark) here referring beyond semiolinguistic communication, 'to the entire field of what philosophy would call experience' (Sec 9, 19). *Iterability*, then, as the *possibility* of the *yes, yes* of survival and the 'living on' of the text that appeals, infinitely, for ever-new reading-responses.

#### 'The Facts in the Case of Iterability'

A 'singular', 'given' '**I am dead**' (the *fact* of '**I am dead**') and *the* structural possibility of **I am dead**: as with '**I am the martyr (x)**'-*I am the martyr (x)* and '**yes**'-*yes*, we continue to shuttle between the two. For Derrida, indicative and variable examples – 'an absence', such as Satti's, 'that is real or factual, provisional or definitive, such as death for instance' – do not hold the value of an eidetic law (LI 56). And yet, our argument is that certain *examples* can be said to 'reveal' *more vividly* the contours of a law. As a possibility which 'obtains *in fact*, at once, from the inception on [*dès l'entame*]', this structural graphics of machine-like iterability, which we are all the time thinking in light of the hyphenated re-markability of the empirico-transcendental of *Monolingualism*, 'undercuts the classical opposition of fact and principle [*le droit*], the factual and the possible (or the virtual), necessity and possibility', in doing so introducing 'a more powerful logic' (LI 48), 'powerless' as this may in fact, paradoxically, be.

Whilst the 'encounters' between Derrida and fellow reader-writers have so far seemed relatively peaceful and 'productive', this is not necessarily always the case. Indeed, as we will address in what follows, for there to be a 'true encounter', there must necessarily be the *risk* of some violence (of 'injurious speech', to borrow Judith Butler's phrase), and hence our prioritisation of the term 'encounter' over 'dialogue', with all the pacifism, transparency and reciprocity that this commonly implies.<sup>179</sup> Of this potential tension and 'non-recognition', Derrida's 'encounter' with the

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<sup>179</sup> For Derrida, the term 'dialogue' is unappealing first of all because it prioritises spoken communication, and secondly because the facile pacificity implied by the term leads one to believe that, through dialogue, 'one will rediscover transparency and what is equivocal will be made clear'; hardly the case in the scene we're setting out. Preferable for Derrida is the term 'negotiation' which, as we will see above all in Chapter 5, takes into account the potential violence of relations of nondiscursive *forces*. More profoundly, 'dialogue' is generally conceived of as a relation between two 'subjects' (all the questions raised by the concept of 'subject' 'also concern the concept of dialog') and connotes precisely the idea of symmetry and reciprocity in

‘self-proclaimed heir’ of Austin, John R. Searle, is exemplary; the proceedings of which (and let us hear the legal connotations), at least from Derrida’s side of the stand, are collected in *Limited Inc* (1988) (see LI 42). Or, rather than Searle ‘himself’, Derrida’s ‘encounter’ with ‘Sarl’ (Searle and his followers): the ‘divided, multiplied, conjugated, shared signature’ of Searle; the more or less anonymous company or corporation, with *limited responsibility* (see LI 36).<sup>180</sup>

In ‘Limited Inc a b c . . .’, Derrida’s ‘defence’ against what he sees as Searle’s misconstrual of his readings of Austin, Derrida notes how Sarl was ‘touched’ (*sic*) enough by Derrida’s reading of Austin in his earlier ‘Signature Event Context’ (1972) and all the ‘misstating missiles’ within it, to deem it necessary to publish a retort.<sup>181</sup> Whilst there would be much to say about the ‘enactment’ of so much of what is thematised in ‘Signature Event Context’ (or *Sec*, as Derrida nicknames this text) which takes place (intentionally or unintentionally; but this is the point) across these repeated encounters, we will limit ourselves to this remark about ‘being touched’, for it is here that we hark both back to our discussion of Barthes’s *punctum* and look forward to the discussions to-come of the enigma and wounding of testimony, as a ‘performative’ act. In claiming that Derrida’s reading of Austin was ‘obviously false’ and in pointing to ‘major misunderstandings’, Sarl, Derrida alleges, ‘understood’ very well (even if unwittingly) what Derrida calls ‘the *Sec* effect’: in short, the possibility of an utterance or written text functioning beyond the present intention of the signatory. If, Derrida proposes, we are to understand ‘understanding’ as a notion still dominated by the allegedly constative regime of theory or philosophy (is this the *studium*?), then let us rather replace the word ‘understood’ by ‘touched’ (LI 40).

‘In the family of Latin languages,’ Derrida continues, ‘a speech act, whether written or spoken, is only said to be pertinent when it touches: the object to which it seems to refer, but also – why not? – someone, its addressee, *upon whom it produces certain effects*, let us say of a perlocutionary sort’ (LI 42, emphasis added). Once again, is not the violence of the ‘saying of the event’ of Satti’s testimony, as well as its effects and evaluative reactions, exemplary of this? And can the same not also be said for *Three Posters*, quickly withdrawn from production for precisely this reason? Whilst it will not be until Part B and beyond that we will fully confront the violent aspect of the ‘(speech) act’, this violence already begins to permeate the present discussion. For if both *Sec* and ‘Limited Inc’, read in isolation, do not necessarily appear violent, reading these texts in retrospect and in chorus with the subsequent ‘Afterword’ (1988), *Monolingualism* (first presented in 1992) and ‘Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)’ (first presented in 1998), their intrinsically violent nature (above all in relation to the law) is given to be read all the more explicitly. For a start, it becomes

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‘intersubjective’ relations that we are questioning here (see *Negotiations* 32). See Judith Butler, ‘Burning Acts, Injurious Speech’, in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, op. cit., pp. 43-70.

<sup>180</sup> In French, *Sarl* is an acronym for ‘*Société à responsabilité limitée*’, literally ‘Society with Limited Responsibility’ or with ‘Limited Liability’.

<sup>181</sup> See John R. Searle, ‘Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida’, *Glyph*, Vol. 1 (1977), pp. 198-208. Derrida’s ‘Signature Event Context’ had been published in the first volume of *Glyph* that same year, and his subsequent response, ‘Limited Inc a b c . . .’, was published in the same volume as Searle’s ‘Reply’.

apparent that the general law of iterability which simultaneously makes possible and destroys Satti's martyr-testimony will have always constituted a 'violation' of the alleged rigorous purity of every speech act (Sec 18); a purity which, moreover, we will be thinking in terms of the *body* of the graphematic and martyred mark.

Unable to venture far into Derrida's highly elaborate and performative readings of Austin, let us note that it is precisely around the privileged example (both for Derrida and Austin) of the promise, as well as the juridical signature, that Austin's texts are revealed to 'deconstruct themselves', above all where it is a question of context, conscious intention and citationality (Sec 19). And it is here that we can probe further the complications between Satti's 'serious' speech act and that of the 'actor', Mroué, which according to Austin would be 'parasitic'. But, yet again, can such parasitism *truly* be excluded? Or is it not that, in order to retain its value, the performative act of testimony 'must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths, the *possibility*, at least, of literature' (D 30). Or, of citationality or theatricality.

Looking back to the 'original context' of Satti's testimony, we might question the sincerity of his promise. 'Signing' the oath to being a martyr at the very moment of uttering his testimony, he nevertheless repeats (re-iterates) this promise three times, each time slightly differently, at times appearing hesitant. What if between each 'take' there was a change of heart; a difference in intention? As Derrida writes here in *Sec*, just as the written sign must continue to function in the radical absence of its addressor, so too must it carry a force of breaking (*force de rupture*) with the set of 'presences' that organise its supposedly 'original' context (Sec 9). But does an 'original' context ever exist in the first place, given the necessary 'originary' repetition that we have witnessed in both Chapter 2 and the discussion of 'a number of *yesses*' above, and which places Derrida in conversation with Blanchot and his prioritisation of the affirmation of the (Nietzschean) Eternal Return?<sup>182</sup> Still considering Satti's promise, we read that the sign must be readable 'even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor consciously intended to say at the moment he wrote it, i.e. abandoned it to its essential drift' (Sec 9). But, in the *testimonicity* of my relation to the other, do I ever, *truly*, *know* the other's intentions?

Yet again, we are dealing with two sets of contexts. If it is simply an issue of 'real' (*sic*) context then this capacity of the sign to break with its context, as in the case of Satti's '**I am the martyr**', would perhaps be too obvious. (Having said this, as with the word 'evident', we should always be wary of this word, 'obvious' (see LI 40): not to be would be to contradict the force of *effects* with which we are endowing the 'obvious' example of Satti's testimony.) Rather, as with the *arche*-promise, we must continue to fold our reading of *passion* between this 'real' context and the internal semiotic context, so as to get *to the heart of* the 'performative act', 'if such a thing, in all rigor and in

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<sup>182</sup> See, for instance, Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), esp. the chapter 'Reflections on Nihilism' (pp. 136-70).

all purity, should exist' (Sec 13). If *passion* is our subject then this must be thought *between* 'real' instances of martyrdom (*possibility*) and the 'internal' structure of the mark (*necessity*), *as*, precisely, that which 'perturbs' every logic of opposition or dialectic and de-limits any 'internal' limitation (see Afterword 137). The *passion of the performative*, then, with possibility *qua* necessity as that which 'gives rise' to possibility *qua* eventuality.

According to Derrida's reading, for Austin, whose theory is heavily indebted to the metaphysics of presence, in order to be 'authentic', 'literal', 'pure' or 'serious', the performative does not have its so-called 'referent' *outside, before and/or in front of* itself. Rather than describing something that exists outside of and prior to language, the 'successful' speech act *produces* or *transforms* a situation: it *effects*, insofar as it is an *operation* and the *production* of an effect (Sec 13). Requiring at all times an exhaustively determined value of context, Austin devises a list of 'infelicities' that would constitute deviations. Among the criteria for 'success' is the following, privileged, condition: 'consciousness, the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of his speech act', without which the act would not communicate intentional meaning, whatever the 'referent' of this meaning might be. As such, assured of the conscious presence of both the speaker and receiver, the teleological implication is that 'no residue [*reste*] escapes the present totalization' (Sec 14).

For both Austin and Searle, for there to be 'serious literal speech' – by which we are thinking Satti's promise – conscious intention would have to be totally present and immediately (i.e. 'actually') transparent. Moreover, it would need to be 'realised' (i.e. actualised or fulfilled).<sup>183</sup> For Derrida, on the other hand, the 'structural possibility of being weaned from the referent or from the signified (hence from communication and from its context)' is what makes 'every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general'. In other words, what is *necessary* is the nonpresent *remainder (restance)* of a differential mark that is cut off from its putative 'production' or origin, with this in turn being extendable to *all experience* (see Sec 10).<sup>184</sup> And it is ultimately this structure of graphematicity that blurs all the oppositions whose pertinence, purity and rigour Austin had unsuccessfully attempted to establish (Sec 14). Far from being limited to the interlocking chain in which it is caught, the communicative possibilities of the sign or *syntagma* can be recognised by inscribing or *grafting* it into other chains (and with this 'grafting' we are already beginning to think of the 'prosthesis' of origin of *Monolingualism*, as well as the 'wounding', as a certain 'splicing' or 'transplantation', that we will be arguing is inherent to the *graphematic mark*.<sup>185</sup> No context (no single corpus, then) and no code can enclose it (Sec 9) for it is *writing* that renders impossible or *insufficient*

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<sup>183</sup> See John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 57 (cited in LI 68).

<sup>184</sup> We will return to *restance* (a somewhat untranslatable neologism that is perhaps best described as a nonpresent and nonpermanent remainder) in a discussion both of the self-erasing or quasi-suicidal logic of the graphematic mark, and of the *punctum* of testimony as that which 'escapes' or that which 'remains' untranslatable or unreadable, again addressing the *-ance* of *restance* in light of the undecidable acti/passivity of *différance*. Regarding the translation of *restance*, see 'LP' 52.

<sup>185</sup> *Graft*, via Latin from Greek *graphion* 'stylus, writing implement', from *graphein* 'write' (OED).

(the ‘it lacks’ of the *il faut*) the rigorous theoretical determination or empirical saturation of the concept of context (Sec 9).

As we saw in relation to the mark of **‘I am dead’** and the ‘instant’ of testimony, the interval or spacing of *différance* functions as an openness to the ‘outside’, and hence the always open possibility of its *dis-engagement* (the necessary break, infidelity or forgetting that takes place between the ‘first’ and ‘second’ *yes*) both from other elements of the ‘internal’ contextual chain and from all forms of present reference (whether past- or future-present) (Sec 9-10). And hence the *possibility* of the promise’s being repeated not only in the absence of its referent, which is ‘self-evident’ (we recall here the discussion of the meaning of **‘I am dead’** in *Speech and Phenomena*; a discussion which is recited yet again here in *Sec*), ‘but in the absence of a determinate signified or of the current signified of actual signification, as well as all present of communication’ (Sec 10).<sup>186</sup> And this nonpresence of **‘I am dead’** also encompasses intentionality: ‘the nonpresence of intention of saying something meaningful [*mon vouloir-dire, mon intention-de-signification*], of my wish to communicate, from the emission or production of the mark’ (Sec 8).

Continuing from the long passage from ‘Typewriter Ribbon’ cited above regarding ‘the event and the machine’ cited above, we read: ‘This foreclosure of the machine answers to the intentionality of intention itself. It is intentionality. *Intentionality* forecloses the machine’ (TR 74). As we will see, the *success* of the ‘operation’, ‘effect’, ‘detonation’ or ‘execution’ of the ‘performative’ act that we will be following is quite different from the Austinian conception of ‘success’. The aim of *Sec* is to show how what iterability limits is not intentionality itself – ‘*at no time* does *Sec* invoke the *absence*, pure and simply, of intentionality’ and ‘[n]or is there any break, simple or radical, with intentionality’ (LI 56) – but rather its being conscious or present to itself, its being *fulfilled* and *actualised*, *adequate* to itself and its contents (again, the *il faut* as an *essential* lack), and the *simplicity* or *undividedness* of its features (LI 64, 105). In other words, what Derrida is concerned with is the *telos* of intention or intentionality (LI 56) (and this, as an ‘in the name of’, will be crucial in our reading of the suicidal and sacrificial event in Chapter 4). *Telos*, as what we might call the ‘final destination’ of the promissory trace that is always *virtual* and thus *destinerrant* in its spectrality; as the (impossible) ‘arrival’ from which desire springs forth (M 61); as that which ‘organizes the movement and the possibility of a fulfilment, realization, and *actualization* in a plenitude that would be *present* to and identical with itself’ (LI 56). As we read here in ‘Limited Inc’:

‘What makes the (eventual) possibility possible is what makes it happen even before it happens as an actual event (in the standard sense) or what prevents such an event from ever entirely, fully taking place (in the standard sense)’ (LI 57).

In other words, what makes the ‘act’ possible is the *machine-like iterability* which prevents it from ever being more than a rehearsal [*répétition*] (the ‘theatricality’ of which we will arrive at imminently) that refers back to the past but also to a future *active actualisation* that will never fully

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<sup>186</sup> Derrida in fact returns to the very same passages from Husserl’s writings here (Sec 10-12).

take place. If, as Derrida proposes, the ‘value of the *act* (used so generally and analyzed so little in the theory of speech acts), like that of event, should be submitted to systematic questioning’ (LI 58), this is because the generally accepted concept of *activity* or actuality does not appear sufficient to account for a *yes*, for this ‘quasi-act’ that we will be naming the event of *passion* (see Ulysses 297). As we read above, ‘[i]n truth, it is the value of the *act* [...] which thus deconstructs *itself*’ (ACTS 101). And as we will enlarge upon in Chapters 4 and 5, the signature, as act, is ‘*destined* to sign only to *bring about its own effacement* [*arrive à s’effacer*]. That is, to attain, *to arrive at* its own effacement, but also to come about, to happen, *as* its own effacement. Simultaneously event and effacement’ (Countersignature 38, emphasis modified). For despite our emphasis on the double affirmation of the ‘quasi-performative’, what we will ‘arrive at’ in Chapter 4 is Derrida’s proposal that despite the force implied by this double *yes*, ‘the affirmative and performative force at work in a signature is doomed to failure and suicide’, albeit a suicide that ‘in itself’ is always ‘possible and impossible’ (Countersignature 38): ‘this theatre of the possible and impossible suicide’ (Countersignature 38). The *auto*-deconstruction, thus, of the *act* of ***I am the martyr***, yet again. For intention cannot ever achieve actualisation or fulfilment: ‘In no case will it be fulfilled, actualised, totally present to its object and itself’ (LI 56). Introducing an essential dehiscence and cleft (*brisure*) into the heart of the intention animating any utterance, iterability divides and *deports* this intention, from ‘itself’, in advance (and this ‘deportation’ will be vital in our reading of the geographies of *Monolingualism*), in so doing foreclosing its ever becoming an *eventuality*, ‘something that befalls it here and there, by accident’ (Sec 18; LI 56, 105). Intention ‘is a priori (at once) *différente*: differing and deferring, in its inception’ (LI 56).

Recalling the discussion in the General Introduction regarding the ‘meaning’ of the word ‘martyr’, or quite simply of a ‘given word’ *per se*, it is through considering *actualisation* and *fulfilment* that we can scrutinise further the possibility of any linguistic act as *meaningful* (as the plenitude of intention-to-mean and meaning-to-say [*vouloir-dire*]), proposing instead that meaning is only ever *promised*, rather than ‘given’ or ‘received’, and only ‘takes place’ upon the countersignature of the other, as exemplified in the testamentary/testimonial ***I am the martyr***. For according to Derrida, the minimal making-sense of something is incommensurate with the adequate understanding of intended meaning (LI 64): ‘there can not be a “sentence” that is fully and actually *meaningful* and hence (or because) there can be no “corresponding (intentional) speech act” that would be fulfilled, fully present, *active* and *actual*’ (LI 58). No corresponding intentional speech act, for the enterprise of *Sec* is in principle designed to demonstrate a type of ‘structural unconscious’ which (at least in 1977) seems alien to or incompatible with, as if ‘a giant Parasite’, the ‘current’ axiomatics of speech act theory. This unconscious is not (as in Searle’s understanding) a lateral, ‘potential, limited consciousness that has not yet become thematically self-conscious’, but the Unconscious, in its relation to graphematics in general and speech in particular, as ‘what is still designated by this name



in psychoanalysis' (LI 73-4). The Unconscious, then, as 'that parasite which subverts and dis-plays [*déjoué*], parasitically, even the concept of the parasite itself' (LI 74).

• **'I am dead, Horatio'**<sup>187</sup>

But let us not lose sight of *Three Posters*, as a theatrical performance (or as the 'performance-video' or 'event-machine' through which we are thinking the *martyr-testimony*). Insofar as the terms 'performance' and 'performative' imply a self-presence, mastery and *telos* for their successful taking place ('execution') that for Derrida would bring about the annulment ('execution') of the 'act' or 'event', should we not replace these words with something more suitable? In his 1980 **'At This Very Moment in this Work Here I Am'**, Derrida calls for 'a performative heretoforth never described, but whose performance must also not be experienced as a self-congratulatory success, an act of prowess': a 'performative' which, we are arguing, must be experienced as an 'act' of *passion* whose 'passivity' or powerlessness is its only chance of success. 'For at the same time,' Derrida continues, 'it is *the most everyday exercise* in speech to the other, the condition of the least virtuoso writing. Such a performative does not correspond to the canonical description of a performative, perhaps. Well, then, let the description be changed, or renounce here the word performative!' (ATVM 173).

Whilst we will explore various potentially suitable 'translations' for 'the performative' throughout what follows, we might pause here to propose that the term 'theatricality' – as another way of thinking *iterability* and as is given to be read precisely by *Three Posters* and the repetitions, alterations and necessary 'failures' therein – is productive. Here we can draw from the thought of Samuel Weber who, in his *Theatricality as Medium*, proposes a certain generalised 'theatricality' through which we can read the *possibility* of Derrida's 'iterability' or 'repeatability', as opposed to 'iteration' or 'repetition' which would imply a present-to-itself act or occurrence, in the present indicative (again, the 'saturation' of the *is* of *S is P*). For Weber, the possibility of *iterability* lies in its not necessarily implying the possibility of its enactment. In its never fully 'taking place', it is actually much closer to 'impossibility', with this process being associated early on in Derrida's oeuvre with a certain 'theatricality'. As with Derrida's treatment of L/literature in *Demeure*, this Derridean-Weberian 'theatricality' is not necessarily that of Theatre or everything that one would call 'theatrical' but, rather, concerns 'the questions and problems, challenges and injunctions that distinguish the history of "theatricality" – if one can speak of such a history in the singular' (Weber, TM 340).

Whilst Weber states that the word 'theatricality' is his and not necessarily Derrida's (Weber, TM 340), we can qualify this by stating that whilst Derrida perhaps does not use this word in his discussions of 'performativity' in the texts collected in *Limited Inc*, the word punctuates (if one's eyes are attuned to it) several texts, and that the question of 'theatricality' underlies much of his

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<sup>187</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act V, Scene 2, Line 317.

oeuvre. Indeed, this entire study could have been an investigation into just this: the theatricality of the testimonial **'I am the martyr (x)'** and its taking place not only as a 'speech *act*' but as an 'act' upon the contemporary de-localised and tele-mediated global theatrical stage. Unable to follow this line of 'theatricality' explicitly, this will at least be implicit in our discussions of the 'act' of *passion*, as an act of 'passive resistance', that follow.

Recalling our discussions of the grammar of *différance* and **'I am dead'**, and pre-empting the discussions in Chapter 4 of the grammar of *passion*, 'the grammar of the event' and the 'conjugation' of possibility and impossibility, Weber is instructive in his highlighting the link, in English at least, between 'iterability' and various forms of the present participle, including the gerund. For Weber, it is as if this conjugation (this 'bringing together' or joining of the cross of the **'x'**) of (im)possibility 'can be exemplified in what we call "acting" as distinct from "action," "act," or "actual(ity)": *acting* lacks the kind of reality usually associated with the present indicative, and yet it is bound up with "indication" – although it is never simply "present," inasmuch as it is repetitive' (Weber, TM 340).<sup>188</sup> Never simply present, we can add, insofar as it is spectral and thus returns repeatedly to the stage (as exemplified in *Hamlet* and *Specters of Marx*, but also in *Three Posters* and martyr-testimonies such as Satti's), following the logic of the *revenant*, as both noun ('ghost') and present participle ('returning'). Is this grammatical description not yet another way of thinking *différance*, insofar as the present participle, *différant*, 'brings us closer to the action of [the verb] "differing" that is in progress, even before it has even produced an effect that is constituted as different or resulted in [the noun] difference (with an e)' (Diff. 137)? Of thinking the differential and 'theatrical' *writing* that Derrida describes in *Sec* as 'a disseminating operation removed from the presence (of being) according to all its modifications' (Sec 21)?

Furthermore, and we are still thinking of the 'event-machine', 'the presentation of iterability that distinguishes theatrical "representation" puts a particular spin on the question of "technics"' (Weber, TM 341). Here Weber invokes the pre-Heideggerian definitions of *tekhnē* as involving a prosthetic supplement of an internal lack (index: *il faut*), as will be crucial when we come to read the prosthesis of origin of *Monolingualism* or, as we can think it here, of 'original source or context'. Theatrical iterability, then, 'locates that "lack" in and as the "act" of an "actuality" that must be *repeatable* in order to be *enacted*.' Thinking back to our discussion of the parenthetical, implicit and explicit in Chapter 2, and to the discussion of limitrophy at the beginning of the present chapter, we read that the "en—" of "enactment" is thus inseparable from the implicit "ex—" of an iterability that can never be self-contained; that can never be circumscribed by some limit (Weber, TM 341).

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<sup>188</sup> *Conjugate* from *con-* 'together' + *jugum* 'yoke'. *Yoke* 'something resembling or likened to a crosspiece', from the L. root *jungere* 'to join' (OED).

• **‘I am the martyr comrade Khaled Rahhal’**

In the performance of *Three Posters*, the audience learns after the first martyr-testimony that this was in fact merely a ‘fictional performance’: that Khaled Rahhal was *in fact* the actor Rabih Mroué, and that no ‘real’ martyrdom ‘took place’. But is this seeming deception of Mroué’s *parasitic* upon the ‘normal’ speech act, as Austin would call it?<sup>189</sup> For Derrida, the only manner of distinguishing a sincere promise from an insincere one would be the intention which ‘informs and animates it’ (LI 68-9). And yet we have already seen the saturation of conscious intention to be thwarted. Let us rephrase this in terms of citation and repeatability. As we read in *Sec*, the performative utterance can only succeed on the condition of its formulation’s *repeating* a ‘coded’ or iterable utterance. As such, the ‘formula’ I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage – or for that matter, make a martyr of myself – must conform to an iterable model, and as such be identifiable as a citation (Sec 18), as demonstrated exemplarily in the re-citations, from video to video, of **‘I am the martyr’**.

As such, the **‘I’** of **‘I am the martyr (x)’** (or of the **‘I am alive’** of Blanchot’s *The Instant of My Death*) is always already a potential citation, as is also exemplified by the Blanchotian *ré-cit*, which functions, undecidably, as *both* a testimony to a real event which the speaker-narrator witnessed *and* as a completely fictional narrative; in both cases as a re-citation (see LG 226). And hence the parenthetical **‘(x)’**. Do these quotation marks that surround all the given testimonies cited in this thesis not always inherently surround any testimony, any signature, any instance of **‘I’**, even when not legibly given to be read (as an *a priori* putting in quotation marks, ‘in either letter or spirit’, R 60)? Is the signature not always ‘improbable’ (as Derrida describes his own signature at the end of *Sec*, Sec 21) and potentially counterfeited, and hence, as with testimony, only *believable*? (And is the signature, in its relation to the ‘source’ of the utterance or inscription, not always already *citing* and *cited* in its prostheticity? Such will be our question in Part B.) And is the crux of the matter not precisely the necessity to put the ‘here-now’ in quotation marks (see BBI 9), always already accompanied by a silent *as if*?

By prioritising this conception of a generalised ‘theatricality’, we are not proposing, and nor is Derrida (as he is quick to point out), that we begin with theatrical or literary fiction (LI 89), just as in considering the aporias of testimony to simply prioritise and ‘begin with’ fictionality would be too quick and indeed irresponsible (as the kind of ‘alibi’ of ‘anything goes’ against which Derrida warns us throughout *Without Alibi*, and which the second voice of *Monolingualism* accuses him of). The point, rather, is that ‘one neither can nor should begin by excluding the possibility of the parasitic eventuality from the structure of the so-called “standard”, or even “authentic”’ (LI 89). Rather, this supposed ‘standard’ is always capable of being *affected* by parasitism – for instance, miming, reproducing on stage, or citation (these are Derrida’s examples) – which, ‘tied to iterability’,

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<sup>189</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 21 (cited in Sec 16).

‘does not need the theatre or literature to appear’ (LI 89), but which is revealed, all the more vividly, by certain oeuvres.<sup>190</sup>

Continuing with the emphasis on the promise, we see in the following chapter how – as with the ‘meaning’ or ‘truth’ of a testimony, as we have witnessed herein – both the identity of an ‘I’ and the language through which ‘I’ am to testify can only ever be *promised*, with all the potentially fatal and perverted risks this promise entails. Having prioritised here the necessary secret of testimony – as the very ‘essence’ of otherness – which makes promising the only recourse, this is carried over into the chapters that follow, with Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrating the manner in which the *testimonial* experience structures the socius in general; how there is no social bond without the promise of truth, without an **“I believe you”** or an **“I believe”**” (AANJ 63). In Chapter 4, this is phrased in terms of ‘the testimonial pledge of every performative’ (FK 66) or the experience of an ‘elementary act of faith’ (FK 80) as a necessarily powerless and pervertible (messianic) promise that is not indemnified by any immunity. Throughout the chapters that follow, we see how the ‘responsible relation’ to the other (be it some other ‘I’ or the other that is the future) is structured by an essential non-knowledge and cryptic inaccessibility (i.e. as the secret of a generalised *testimoniality*). As already demonstrated to some degree herein, because of the *remainder* of iterability (as an acti/passive *rest-ance*), the truth of the graphematic (*testimonial* and *poetic*) mark is never offered up or fully disclosed, with this being followed through in Chapter 4 in terms of what we will be calling the ‘truth without truth’ of the event of testimony and confession, and in Chapter 5 in a reading of the shibbolethic secret that is ‘at work’ in the poetic oeuvre of Paul Celan.

In the following chapter, we will elaborate upon the limitrophic contamination between *physis* and *tekhne* that we have already seen at work in the play of iterability, viewing this in terms of the ‘living’ and suffering body of both the martyr-figure and the ‘martyred mark’. Delving into the ‘marks and scars’ to which *Monolingualism* bears witness (both crying out against them *and* rejoicing in them), we continue the prioritisation of the secret begun in the present chapter by proposing that the differential hyphen between various dichotomies be read as the site of a wound, and that it is *on* and *on* this wound that the secret (as the arche-secret of *différance* and of *passion*) ‘takes place’. Harking back to Chapter 1 and our discussion of the quasi-transcendental therein, it is proposed that the hyphen of the empirico-transcendental functions as a *quasi*-transcendental, with the repeatability of the ‘x’ of **‘I am the martyr x’** functioning as the re-markability of a *differential* hyphen that cuts across or ‘applies to’ the particular or empirical testifying body. In terms of testimony, by Chapter 5 it becomes clear that the secret, as the (poetic) ‘unreadable’ – or what we will there be naming the ‘readable-unreadable’ – functions as yet another generator of *possibility*; as

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<sup>190</sup> It is worth pointing out that Derrida acknowledges the relative specificity of various performative aberrations, and that the iteration of a promise, philosophical reference or poem, for instance (and is **‘I am the martyr’** not all three?), on stage (for example, Mroué’s ‘enacting’ of the promise that Rahhal did not live to carry out) is not the same as a citation (for instance, if Mroué had uttered the words **‘I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti’**) (Sec 18).

what Geoffrey Bennington describes as ‘the complex implication of the unreadable in the readable as its very resource’, as the quasi-transcendental that ‘makes something (reading) possible only by making its teleological accomplishment impossible, and this differential tension between possibility and impossibility opens the very space and time of reading itself [i.e. witnessing; bearing witness to some testimony proffered, be it written, spoken or gestural], its historicity inaccessible to any historicism.’<sup>191</sup> Chapters 4 and 5, in particular, take it upon themselves to ‘find ways of bringing out this mysterious non-oppositional relation between reading and the unreadable’.<sup>192</sup>

Readable-unreadable, as we have seen from Derrida’s encounter with Austin, the performance of the graphematic-testimonial mark only ‘functions’ in its potentially being parasited by an ‘inauthenticity’. An internal, structural and *necessary* possibility (*I am the martyr (x)*) qua *eventual* possibility (*I am the martyr (x)*): each limitrophically contaminated by the other, the former makes the latter both *possible* and *impossible*, making it happen before it ‘actually’ happens and simultaneously preventing it from ever ‘actually’ taking place (LI 57). Let us now turn to Derrida’s impossible testimony in *Monolingualism*, where we will be proposing that this *possibility of* repeatability, citation and imitation (‘I therefore venture to present myself to you here, *ecce homo, in parody...*’; M 19, emphasis modified) is played out in terms of exemplarity and substitutability, precisely *on* or *in* the wound-hyphen of the ‘empirico-transcendental’ or the ‘*quasi*-transcendental’ mark in which this limitrophic contamination of the *necessary* and the *possible* ‘takes place’.

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<sup>191</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, ‘Editorial’, *The Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1, ‘The Unreadable’ (2011), pp. v-vi (p. v).

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. v-vi.

## Chapter 3B: 'I promise a language'

### Introduction

[...] I want to break into song. Yes, I want to sing to this burning day. I do want to sing. I want to find a language that transforms language itself into steel for the spirit – a language to use against these sparkling silver insects, these jets. I want to sing. I want a language that I can lean on and that can lean on me, that asks me to bear witness and that I can ask to bear witness, to what power there is in us to overcome this cosmic isolation.

–Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*<sup>193</sup>

– Yes, the wound is there, over there. Is there some other thing, ever, that may be legible? Some other thing than the trace of a wound? And some other thing that may ever take place? Do you know another definition of event?

– But nothing is more illegible than a wound, as well.

[...]

– an event, if I understand right, that would have the form of a seal, as if, witness without witness, it were committed to keeping a secret [...]

–Derrida, '*Sauf le nom*'<sup>194</sup>

The witness and the wound: such is our destination. Once again, what is at stake is the *passion* of testimony. Or, as we are coming to through our reading of *Monolingualism* and what we will be reading as a 'topology of the self' therein, what Derrida in '*Sauf le nom*' names the 'passion of, for, the place' (SN 59). Here we move from Satti's testimony to Derrida's testimony to his own Judeo-Franco-Maghrebi experience in his *Monolingualism of the Other; Or, the Prosthesis of Origin* (1996/1998), each of which we read as historical documents. Whilst it appears that Satti's testimony is relegated to the stage-wings, and whilst care is taken not to obliterate the specificities and singularity of the contexts, contents and 'form' of the two documents, by focusing on Derrida's testimony, precisely as exemplary of a universal sufferance (as a corporeal 'demonstration' or 'performance' in and on martyrdom and *passion*), the aim here is to discover what Derrida's testimony and the 'martyrdom' therein gives to be thought in terms of the possibility of not only Satti's testimony but any historical account *per se*.

Whilst we have pointedly made the mode of testimony that at least appears to be 'instantaneous' our object of concern – through the exemplarity of both Satti's testimony and its various possible translations, and the (impossibly) self-referential or reflexive self-offering of the martyr figure – we have already seen how this 'instantaneousness' is always thwarted; how it always recalls some past and promises some future. Hence, we are not out of context in situating this *passion* of the instant of testimony within the wider schema of the sufferances of historical

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<sup>193</sup> Darwish, p. 52.

<sup>194</sup> 'SN' 60.

witnessing; of historical first person narratives precisely such as the narrative offered by Satti in each of his three takes, or the ‘autobiographical anamnesis’ (in the traditionally understood sense) offered by Derrida in *Monolingualism*. **‘No one / bears witness / for the witness’**: whilst of a universal value (and hence ‘applicable’ in a context as seemingly distant to its original inscription as that of the Lebanese resistance against Israeli invasion), this exemplary poetic testimony given to us by Celan is, let us not forget, deeply imbued in a very particular and singular historical event; an event – what was called the ‘Final Solution’ – which, as Elisabeth Weber reminds us, had as its aim the extinction not only of Jews but of all traces that could keep the memory of them; which sought not only to abolish the ‘witnesses of witnessing’ but even the traces of these witnesses (Weber, YC 17).

What always remains *irresoluble*, impracticable, nonnormal, or *nonnormalizable* is *what interests and constrains us* here. Without paralyzing us but while forcing us on the *course* [démarche]: zigzagging, oblique to boot, jostled by the bank [*rive*] to be avoided, like a machine during a difficult maneuver.

–Derrida, *Glas*<sup>195</sup>

As is demonstrated exemplarily not only in the oeuvre of Derrida, but also (albeit each in their distinct ways) that of Blanchot and Celan, the mark or trace of writing functions not as that which conserves, preserves or consigns to safekeeping against amnesia or historical denials, as traditionally conceived of, but rather in a movement of effacement and forgetting. To say this is not, as the second voice in *Monolingualism* retorts, to reduce one’s argument to skepticism, relativism or even nihilism, as opposed to ‘serious’ philosophy (see M 4). For contesting the possibility of truth and its safekeeping – which is precisely what takes place in *Monolingualism* and beyond – does not equate with not *believing* in truth; quite the contrary.

If testimony is shown to be essentially impossible and self-annihilating how, then, to relate and communicate both what *has happened, is happening* and indeed, *perhaps, might continue to happen* in the future, in unforeseeable ways? How to *represent* or ‘show’ some ‘truth content’ which escapes visibility and presentability if we are to understand representation as making visible or showing (see Weber, YC 16)? And is there some connection between the potential *monster* of the future that does not show itself and the *wound* that we have been stressing in Chapter 3A, as the site of ‘revelation’ of some trauma (as will be our concern in Chapter 5)? Or as the (poetic) ‘revealing *without* revealing’ of a certain differential arche-secret that we will explore further in Chapter 5; of that which, as with the *restance* of iterability discussed above, *remains* and *escapes*, visible-invisible and readable-unreadable? Of that which, as the *punctum-event* of testimony that ‘interests and constrains us’, can never quite be mastered by programmatic or machinic attempts to theorise, thematise, classify, name or, simply, re-present?

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<sup>195</sup> ‘Glas’ 5, emphasis added.

Whilst such questions span this entire study, the present chapter focuses on the following: How to testify if the only language one inhabits is not one's own; if one does not know how to say 'I'? How, then, to invent a language that, as Darwish writes (speaking of the fateful Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982), both demands that bear witness and through which I can bear witness. And bear witness, as in Derrida's exemplary case, to the historical experience of Algeria at the beginning of the twentieth century in which both his relation to his language and 'identity' were set (or rather, revealed to have always been) in turmoil.

If testimony is said to be but one mode of 'representation', the discussion of 'revealing *more vividly*' that we are taking to be so central here in *Monolingualism* will be paramount. Here, the exemplary testimony is 'revealed' to be 'a thing of the body' (M 27); a marking or scarring *of and on* the body of the witness-martyr. But does this enigmatic 'vividness', whilst adding to the force and effect of the *pointing or piercing* movement of the *punctum* (the 'capturing', even) in fact reveal any more clarity or detail? Or does it not perhaps simply 'reveal' all the more powerfully the aporia or *passion*? If by *vivid* we understand both 'of material things and substances, or their qualities' and 'of feelings, etc.: lively, strong, intense' (OED) then once again it is a matter of the hyphen of the *event-machine*. And even of the 'material body' given by de Man to be read by Derrida in 'Typewriter Ribbon' as both organic *and* inorganic (TR 73). Above all, *vidid* is to be heard as a thing of *life* (*vīvēre* 'to live', OED): as a language that is alive but which harbours within it the (machinic) archive of memory and forgetting, as well as the promise of the future; as the 'lived experiences' recalled in testimony and auto-*bio*-graphical anamnesis, for instance that of Jacques Derrida.

Testimony, in the present reading and its countersignature of the Barthesian *punctum*, would consist of what Weber calls the 'cracks where remains accumulate that cannot be assimilated by the sovereignty of logic, dialectic, reason, or even the work of mourning'. Remains which, 'in their excessiveness, slip away from representation, from presentation, and even challenge remembering. And this is precisely *why they have never ceased to demand testimony*. History, philosophy, literature, and art all find themselves *affected* by this demand.' This demand which, we can argue, is taken up exemplarily in the writings of Derrida, insofar as they are punctuated by 'the obsession with following remains, what is excluded from the system'. As Weber identifies in the work of the writers interviewed in the collection *Questioning Judaism*, 'in order to bear witness, what is necessary is not only the exact narratives of victims, eye-witnesses, historians, and [...] the executioners themselves [and in which category would we place a witness such as Satti?], but also the testimony carried from that place – impossible to inhabit – at the intersection of the "intransmissible" and the "impossibility of telling this story"' (Weber, YC 17, emphasis added).<sup>196</sup> Is this not, we might

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<sup>196</sup> In Weber's view, this obsession for following remains in Derrida's texts finds an echo in the work of a historian such as Pierre Vidal-Naquet, whose reflections 'speak for the silent witnesses of history' (Weber, YC 17). In the present study, however, the act of 'speaking for', 'speaking in the name of' or 'giving voice' would first need to be problematized (both through a reading of Derrida and, had we time, of Lyotard's *The Differend*, for instance) before we could jump to any such assertions.



ask, the (unlocatable, *laborati*) ‘place’ to and from which Derrida testifies in *Monolingualism* (first presented in 1992)? Is this not one way of reading the ‘passion of, for, the place’ of which he (or at least one part of his divided voice) speaks in the almost concurrent ‘*Sauf le nom*’ (1993)?

‘Writing and thinking’, Weber continues, ‘have to be situated around this point of deafness or silence, around *this blind spot*, this *incandescent* place’, to which we can add: around this ‘place’ of the (never quite ‘taking place’ of the) secret in which the exemplary witness is the blind man, and in which all testimony *must* suffer the fatal risk of becoming-ash. As if testimony were the ‘burning tomb in the middle of the grass’ that Weber cites Derrida as evoking; the sudden *interruption* of reading, life and forgetting before a word or a sentence (Weber, YC 17): ‘**I am the martyr**’ or ‘**I am monolingual**’, for instance. Or, as if testimony were ‘[t]he truth that wounds’, to re-cite the title of a 2003 interview (again, around the poetic wounds of Celan). Testimony as a (quasi-suicidal) poetic mark, then, which leads to the necessity for the reader-witness to remain attentive to the limits of reading, with this attentiveness to nonmastery (again, *passion*) as an ‘ethics or politics of reading’ (TTW 166). The necessity for the reader-witness to remain attentive, in counter-signing, to the risk of suturing or closing the wound of testimony, as poematic mark (see TTW 166). Hypothesis to be verified, as Derrida puts it in ‘Poetics and Politics of Witnessing’: ‘all responsible witnessing engages a poetic experience of language’ (PP 66). *Punctum*.

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## I. The exemplary or testimonial singularity of a martyred existence

I therefore venture to present myself to you here, *ecce homo*, in parody, as the exemplary Franco-Maghrebian, but disarmed, with accents that are more naïve, less controlled, and less polished. *Ecce homo*, and do not smile, for a “passion” would indeed appear to be at stake here, the martyrdom of the Franco-Maghrebian who from birth, since his birth but also from his birth on the other coast, his coast, has, at bottom, chosen and understood nothing, and who still suffers and testifies.

–Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; Or, the Prosthesis of Origin*<sup>197</sup>

Once again, why this seemingly outrageous self-presentation as a martyr figure here in *Monolingualism*? Whilst we have already begun to sketch out the contours of the inherent *passion* in any so-called ‘performative’ and *testimonial* act, and of the exemplarity of the martyr-figure in ‘revealing’ the *passion* of testimony, it is worth lingering upon the ‘offering’ or ‘demonstration’ of this ‘immense little work’.<sup>198</sup> But should we even take the time to consider this self-presentation, given that it is qualified in the preceding paragraph by what at least might appear to read as a disclaimer: ‘let us exercise our imagination. Let us sketch out a figure. It will have only a vague *resemblance* to myself’ (M 19)? If this sketch of the martyr figure is imaginary, and ‘in parody’ moreover (M 19), is there any reason to take it seriously? Is this not a mockery? (But is not Derrida’s entire oeuvre a gesture of mockery towards the metaphysics of presence, subjectivity and intentionality, as well as systems of classification and the fixation of meaning?) As the second voice of *Monolingualism* retorts to the self-contradicting and seemingly nonsensical or hyper-hyperbolic statement with which Derrida opens the text, which we will arrive at shortly: ‘Your speech does not hold water’ (M 2); ‘People will not stop denouncing your absurdity’ (M 3); ‘If you continue, you will be placed in a department of rhetoric or literature’ (M 4); and the list goes on. Is it not *as if* this voice had said ‘**Let’s be serious**’, to cite a phrase (or ‘act’?) that Derrida repeats throughout the earlier ‘Limited Inc’ in mimicking the very attempt of speech act theorists such as Austin and Searle to distinguish or hierarchise between the serious (‘**Let’s be serious**’, LI 43, 39) and non-serious (‘**Picture this. Imagine...**’, M 1 or ‘**Let us imagine**’, Passions 3) (see LI 72)? (And what of the ‘**and do not smile**’?) Given everything that we have so far read regarding the non-saturability of context and conscious intention, upon what grounds would we be able to (should we want to) make such distinctions?

‘In parody’: echoing Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* as well as Derrida’s ‘otobiographical’ (and soon to be ‘allobiographical’) reading thereof in *The Ear of the Other* (1985). Is parody, as imitation and citation, not an inescapable part of the very attempt or desire to invent something inaugural within the tradition or genre of confession or testimony; to lay oneself bare and naked as has never been

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<sup>197</sup> ‘M’ 19.

<sup>198</sup> Derrida uses the term ‘immense little work’ in reference to Herman Melville’s *Bartleby* (Resistances 24), but can the same description not be used with reference to this enigmatic fable that is *Monolingualism* (the English translation of *Monolingualism* fills but a ‘mere’ 93 pages, and the French 136).

done before? Does the ‘insurance’ of this ‘in parody’ betray a certain seriousness? Or does it not heighten this risky exposure? When, exactly, is Derrida being ‘serious’? Derrida as this ‘jocoserious “Jésus juif”’; this, in the words of Hélène Cixous, ‘dry-witted prince of the Jews, the scoffer, the mocker’ (Cixous, Portrait 1), who gives philosophy ‘the full measure of its greatness once and for all, which is both its tragic and its comic dimension’ and ‘makes writing laugh’ (Cixous, Portrait ix; see also 7) but who nevertheless, here in *Monolingualism*, at the moment that the martyr enters the scene, demands that we ‘[d]o not smile’ (M 19)?<sup>199</sup> Derrida, who later ‘confesses’ his excessive taste for hyperbole and exaggeration (**‘I always exaggerate’**, M 48)?

Someone who thinks Relation thinks by means of it, just as does someone who thinks he is safe from it.

[...]

Thus Relation is idea of Being [*sic*] but scatters abroad from Being-as-Being and confronts presence.

–Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*<sup>200</sup>

So this self-proclaimed martyrdom ‘will have only a vague *resemblance* to myself’ and, Derrida continues, ‘to the kind of autobiographical anamnesis that always appears like the thing to do when one exposes oneself in the space of *relation* [relation]’ (M 19). ‘Relation’, as Derrida makes clear, is to be understood here specifically as narration, for instance the narration of the genealogical narrative (the narrative of ‘origin’), but also more generally, in the sense of a reference or relationship (*to* or *with* some other), as epitomised by Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* and a potential ‘politics of relation’.<sup>201</sup> For just as Glissant’s text balances between, *on the one hand*, the concrete particularities, and indeed uniqueness, of a Caribbean culture and identity and, *on the other hand*, the universalisable notion of identity as being constructed in relation rather than in isolation, so too does Derrida’s text, as we shall see, ‘perform’ this same act, albeit in relation to the specificities of the Jewish community of Algeria at the turn of the twentieth century under French colonial rule, as ‘testified to’ by Derrida’s impossible autobiographical anamnesis. The seemingly unique and the generalisable, then, as *the* problematic of exemplarity, as is ‘demonstrated’ or *mis en oeuvre* through Derrida’s repeated claims herein to being not only *an* exemplary Franco-Maghrebian, but *the* exemplary Franco-Maghrebian.

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<sup>199</sup> The appellation ‘jocoserious “Jésus juif”’ is Laurent Milesi’s. See Milesi, ‘Portraits of H.C. as J.D. and Back’, *New Literary History*, Vol. 37 (2006), pp. 656-84 (p. 675). Milesi takes the ‘Jésus juif’ from Cixous’s ‘portrait’ of Derrida in ‘This Stranjew Body’ (Cixous, Stranjew 76).

<sup>200</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 185 & 186.

<sup>201</sup> A shorter and often different in form version of *Monolingualism* was presented at a colloquium, ‘Echoes from Elsewhere’ / ‘*Renvois d’ailleurs*’, hosted by Glissant at the Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge) in April 1992. A passage from Glissant’s *Le Discours antillais* is given as one of the two epigraphs (the other being a passage by Abdelkebir Khatibi, who Derrida repeatedly refers to throughout *Monolingualism*), and Derrida returns to Glissant’s proposal that ‘lack’ resides in the non-mastery of an appropriated language (M 23).

[...] he/it, specified as the indeterminate term in order that the self in turn might determine itself as the major determinant, the never-subjected subject, is the very *relation* of the self to the other, in this sense: relation always in displacement, and in displacement in regard to itself, without anything that has to displace itself, displacement also of that which would be without place.  
 –Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*<sup>202</sup>

With concern to the aporia of testimony, however, these two senses of ‘relation’ can be read as intertwined. Referring to the first sense, as ‘narration’, let us recall that for Derrida a testimony should do what it says, and ‘presently’, ‘at this instant’. As exemplified by the martyr’s seemingly instantaneous ‘self-offering’, ‘it cannot essentially be reduced to a *relationship*, to a *narrative* or descriptive *relation*’ (D 38, emphasis added). And yet, as we saw, the instant of testimony is never ‘purely’ punctual and already harbours within it the space and time of a *testimonial* and *testamentary* narrative. And this is because of the *férance* of *différance*, as the tracing and traced; *to, from, with* and *by* at least one (*plus d’un*) other. Thus, when we read ‘when one exposes oneself in the space of relation’, it is worth recalling that before any active, intentional exposure, one *is already exposed* in such a space, and that the *I* is already constituted by this *férance*. And hence, as is one of the central sufferances (and simultaneously pleasures, M 2) of this text, ‘**I** am never quite ‘myself’, but rather divided, disjointed (spatially and temporally) or, as will be our theme, *hyphenated*. (**I**, therefore, as always *more than one* voice, as audible in the conversation herein, and in *more than one* language.) **I** always *refers*, spectrally and metonymically, *elsewhere* (the *renvoi* and the *allieurs* that punctuates the Derridean corpus: for does each textual event or textual body not always refer elsewhere?<sup>203</sup> Is each time not always already a *response*: to other texts, other times, other bodies, other signatures?). The ‘interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification’ *with* or *to* some other, some elsewhere; the *identificatory modality* that must be assured in order for any autobiographical anamnesis, in its common concept at least, to take place (see M 28). And hence ‘all these problems of identity, as we so foolishly say nowadays’ (M 10). But let us not jump ahead too fast.

• ‘**I have only one language; it is not mine**’

– [...] Nothing will prevent me from repeating to whoever wants to hear it  
 – and from signing this public declaration:  
**“Is it possible to be monolingual (I thoroughly am, aren’t I?) and speak a language that is not one’s own.”**  
 – That remains for you to demonstrate.  
 – Yes, indeed.  
 –Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Blanchot, ‘SNB’ 5.

<sup>203</sup> And hence the *passion* to be *borne* (*refer* late Middle English, from Latin *referre*, *re-* + *ferre* ‘to bear, carry, etc’, OED).

<sup>204</sup> ‘M’ 5.

Once again, and it is worth reiterating this in the present context, '[w]hen he testifies [...] [the martyr's] passion does not refer to anything other than its present moment' (D 38). Thus, although the entire text of *Monolingualism* can be read as a meditation on the impossibility of testimony, and although we will be arguing that the text as a whole constitutes an historical document of significant importance, we will only be reading certain 'moments' in the text as instances of testimony. Such 'instances' take the form of the following (which reads as something of a maxim, dictum or decree) and its subsequent re-iterations and translations: **"I have only one language; it is not mine"** (M 1). Such are the words, encapsulated in quotation marks, of the imaginary French citizen evoked in the very first line of the text (**'Picture this, imagine someone...'** [M 1]) who would perhaps one day come forward and tell this to 'you', 'in good French' (M 1). 'Or rather, and better still', and here the quotation marks disappear from one line to the next: **'I am monolingual'** (M 1). In what follows, we will be (at least apparently) leaving Satti temporarily in the wings, *substituting* (his) **'I am the martyr'** with (Derrida's) **'I am monolingual'** (and this potential for substitutability is part of the very problem), despite the gulf that remains between the two historical contexts, in order to demonstrate further the precariousness of the *I* in general, and thus of the *testimonial* signature and any historical document that would claim to be reliable, and indeed even stake itself upon this claim to historical truth. By working our way through *Monolingualism*, the proposition here is that – as with *I am dead, I promise, yes* and *I am the martyr (x) – I am monolingual* is also silently implied within each and every instance of the *I*, and that (Derrida's) **'I am monolingual'** 'reveals' exemplarily 'the exemplary or testimonial singularity of a martyred existence' (M 27).

**'I have only one language; it is not mine'**: this would be Derrida's impossible and passionate testimony to his idiosyncratic Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian experience; his contradictorily performative 'offering' that testimony must always be. Before addressing this as a universal testimony, let us sketch out the narrative of this 'autobiographical anamnesis' that Derrida 'exposes' himself to and relates herein (as one of the supplementary voices calls it, 'this fable you jealously call your story' [M 28]), and which permits him to speak of the monolingual solipsism or prohibited monolanguage which runs right across the source of his sufferings, as 'the place of my passions' (M 2). That 'permits' him insofar as, following the logic of exemplarity that we are approaching, 'there are situations, experiences, and subjects who are, precisely, in a situation (but what does situating mean in this case?) to testify exemplarily [...]. This exemplarity is no longer reducible to that of an example in a series . . .' (M 26).

Whilst we have spoken of 'the kind of autobiographical anamnesis that always appears like the thing to do when one exposes oneself in the space of *relation*' (M 19), what is at stake in *Monolingualism* is the invention of an altogether *other* anamnesis (M 60). As we read:

'What I am sketching out here is, above all, not the beginning of some autobiographical or anamnestic outline, nor even a timid essay toward an intellectual bildungsroman. Rather than an exposition of myself, it is an account of what will have placed an obstacle in the way of this auto-exposition for me. An account, therefore, of what will have exposed me to

that obstacle and thrown me against it. Of a serious traffic accident about which I never cease thinking' (M 71).

Again, *passion* as the experience of the *aporia*; of the traffic accident as road block that nonetheless does not paralyse thought and passage; on the contrary. 'If, for example, I dream of writing an anamnesis of what enabled me to identify myself or say *I*' (M 66) – an anamnesis *of the other* (M 60), the contours of which we will outline in due course – then what at least *appears* to be the anamnesis of *Monolingualism*, in the common or traditional sense and now told in the third person herein, must serve as the exemplary prelude:

Having grown up in the colonial milieu of the Algeria of the 1940s, Derrida experienced a certain prohibited access to any non-French 'native' language of his country of birth (i.e. Arabic or Berber). Arabic was swiftly disappearing as the official, everyday, administrative language, and its study was restricted to the school where, together with Berber or Hebrew, although the right to study it was granted, this was not actively encouraged and the percentage of students who opted for it was almost zero. Thus the much sought after effect of 'the growing uselessness and organised marginalisation of those languages' was attained, with their weakening 'calculated by a colonial policy that pretended to treat Algeria as a group of three French departments' (M 38-9). Living on the edge of an Arab neighbourhood – 'at one of those hidden frontiers, at once invisible and almost impassable' (M 37) – Arabic was, for Derrida, 'a strange kind of alien language as the language of the other' but simultaneously, strangely, unfamiliarly and disconcertingly [*unheimlich*], of 'the other as the nearest neighbour' (M 37).

And yet this interdict was double, existing simultaneously and equally with regards to the French language, 'in a different, apparently roundabout, and *perverted* manner' (M 31, emphasis added) that would be all the more difficult to show (M 41). For the pupils of the French school in Algeria, whether of Algerian origin, 'French Nationals,' 'French citizens of Algeria' or, like Derrida and the Jewish people of Algeria, 'at once or successively the one and the other,' French was a language 'supposed to be maternal, but one whose source, norms, rules, and law were *situated elsewhere*': France, the Metropole, the 'Capital-City-Mother-Fatherland' (M 41, emphasis added). Just as with the uncanny experience of the relation to Arabic described above (M 37), this 'elsewhere' of the metropole that came to stand for the hearth of the French language – for the 'source' or 'origin' of 'the mother tongue' – was *both* faraway *and* near: 'not alien, for that would be too simple, but strange, fantastic, and phantomal [*fantomal*]' (and let us hear this 'phantomal' with all the tones given to it in Chapter 2); a place of fantasy, a mythical 'overthere', at an ungraspable, infinite distance, across the sea, yet simultaneously incommensurably near (M 42-3). French, the supposed 'mother tongue,' was in fact the *substitute* for a mother tongue as the language *of the other*; the language of the master; a master represented by the metropole and the schoolteacher in Algeria (M 42). Therefore, whilst for Derrida it was only French that could have possibly been the mother tongue (M 33), he

was never able to call it, precisely, *my* ‘mother tongue’ (M 34): “‘My mother tongue’ is what they say, what they speak; as for me, I cite and question them’ (M 34).

Let us turn back to the beginning; to this ‘imaginary someone’ who the French language would cultivate. Between the **“I only have one language; it is not mine”** and the ‘Or rather, and better still.’ followed by the **‘I am monolingual’** with which the passage below opens, the quotation marks (and in fact any graphic marking of distinction: italics, for instance) disappear from sight. But as with the *yes* or the *I am dead* with which the *cogito ergo sum* was reformulated (or resituated), can we not say that *an* **‘I am monolingual’**, or even *an* **‘I am’** or an **‘I’**, is always already ‘preceded’ by *the* silent *I am monolingual*? And hence the *passion*:

**‘I am monolingual.** My monolingualism dwells, and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. The monolingualism in which I draw my very breath is, for me, my element. Not a natural element, not the transparency of the ether, but an absolute habitat. It is impassable, *indisputable*. I cannot challenge it except by testifying to its omnipresence in me. It would always have preceded me. It is me. For me, this monolingualism is me. That certainly does not mean to say, and do not believe, that I am some allegorical figure of this animal or that truth called monolingualism. But I would not be myself outside it. It constitutes me, it dictates even the ipseity of all things to me, and also prescribes a monastic solitude for me; as if, even before learning to speak, I had been bound by some vows. This inexhaustible solipsism is myself before me. Lastingly. [*A demeure*]’ (M 1-2).

Insofar as this impassable ‘monolingualism’ is the effect of *différance* and the trace structure, as we will be elaborating upon further, was this ‘complaint’ not already legible in the earlier ‘Différance’ from which we were reading in Chapter 2? For instance, as indicated in the following passage in which Derrida is reading *from* Saussure:

‘[T]he subject (in its identity with itself, or eventually in its consciousness of its identity with itself, its self-consciousness) is inscribed in language, is a “function” of language, becomes a *speaking* subject only by making its speech conform – even in so-called “creation,” or in so-called “transgression” – to the system of the rules of language as a system of differences, or at very least by conforming to the general law of *différance*’ (MP 15).

**‘I cannot challenge it except by testifying to its omnipresence in me.’** How then to testify – not only *to* this impossible monolingualism but, moreover, *to* ‘a general law’ – without being able to lay claim to a mother tongue? How to formulate a grievance when one has no language through which to express it, when one is only a ‘function’ of the language that is not one’s own? And how to testify to this ‘situation’, as Derrida repeatedly names it, for this is a text about processes of identification and what we might call a certain ‘topology of the self’: the ‘always there’ of the mother tongue (M 85 n. 9), precisely as *the* “always there”, as the ‘always *elsewhere*’; in short, the ‘passion of, for, place’ of which *Sauf le nom* speaks (SN 59), the necessity (*il y a lieu de*: again the *il faut*, ‘it is necessary’ ‘there is ground for’) of ‘rendering oneself *there where* it is impossible to go’ (SN

59).<sup>205</sup> As we are coming to, it would be a case of inventing an altogether unprecedented language, a pure idiom; an invention of the impossible, with all the risks this entails. Before arriving at this discussion, however, we must first look to the manner in which this grievance of Derrida's – 'almost originary', insofar as it would be a mourning for what one never had (M 33; see also 2) – would be a complaint to be suffered by all. For whilst Derrida's 'situation' testifies exemplarily, he nonetheless demonstrates how this supposedly exceptional and idiosyncratic experience is '*always that way a priori* – and for everyone else' (M 58), *even* the colonialist or master, the linguistically erudite, the polyglot or those blessed with unquestioned and assured citizenship or those with a *seemingly* pacified 'identity'. 'The language called maternal is never purely maternal, nor proper, nor inhabitable' (M 58).

'My' supposed 'only language' is never in fact 'mine'. Rather, it is *of* (the double genitive of the French '*de*') the other, with this 'of' signifying 'not so much property as provenance': always for, coming from, remaining with, kept by, and returning to the other: '*the coming of the other*' (M 40, 68). ('The other', we can add, as 'who' or 'what'; as the impersonal *it is happening* of *tekhne* that we will be responding to in Chapter 5, or the coming of the future, *perhaps*. Of the other, then, as that which is 'generated', so to speak, by the machinic reproducibility or germination of dissemination.) Thus 'my' language exists asymmetrically (M 40), with an origin that is always already divided, multiple and in continual reference [*l'étrançé*] or relation to an other; towards an *elsewhere* 'towards which I was myself was ex-ported in advance' (M 71). And hence an 'interminable and indefinitely *phantasmatic* processes of identification' (M 28, emphasis added), a 'disorder of identity' that drives the genealogical fantasy to despair and 'has us running to the point of losing our breath, or our minds' (M 18). Since the identity of the (testifying) 'P' is not *given* (and here we recall the potential anonymous societies of any signature), it 'would have formed itself [...] at the site of a situation that cannot be found,' a site always referring elsewhere (*hyphenated*, in other words), 'to some other, to another language, to the other in general' (M 29).

'In what respect, therefore, can the passion of a Franco-Maghrebian martyr testify to this universal destiny which assigns us to a single language while prohibiting us from appropriating it, given that such an interdiction is linked to the very essence of language, or rather writing, to the very essence of the mark, the fold, and the re-mark?' (M 27).

Once again, it is a case of 'the passion of the singular mark', translatable as what Derrida in his 1967 'Ellipsis' names 'the passion of origin', as the differential ellipsis, supplement and technical prosthesis (i.e. technical iterability) *at the heart of* the graphematic mark. Again, the *hyphen* of the 'event-machine', despite the seeming 'impossibility' (see M 7) of what it at once (limitrophically) joins and separates, with the *passion*, in short, being the contamination of the corpus by *tekhne*, thus making the body divisible, repeatable, replaceable, substitutable; in other words, idealisable and

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<sup>205</sup> Regarding 'site', see the earlier 'Différance': 'Since the trace is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site – erasure belongs to its structure...' (MP 24).



*exemplary*, as if the body of a martyr. *Corpus*: as both the 'literal' body (were such a thing possible) of the martyr-witness and the body of the exemplary (graphematic) mark:

'We speak here of martyrdom and passion in the strict and quasi-etymological sense of these terms. And when we mention the body, we are naming the body of language and writing, as well as what makes them a thing of the body. We therefore appeal to what is, so hastily, named the body proper, which happens to be affected by the same ex-appropriation, the same "alienation" without alienation, without any property that is forever lost or to be ever reappropriated' (M 27).

'To write', Derrida writes in 'Ellipsis', 'is to have the passion of origin' (Ellipsis 372). Moreover, recalling our initial discussions of *passion*, the middle voice and acti/passivity in Chapter 2, as well as our continuing interest in the genitive, we read: 'Writing, passion of the origin, must also be understood through the subjective genitive. It is the origin itself which is impassioned, passive, and past, in that it is written. Which means inscribed' (Ellipsis 373).

As we have seen in both Chapter 2 and Part A of the present chapter, the (or 'my') origin (or first utterance) is always complex: always already broached and breached [*entamée*], complicated and multiple; differing and deferring; disseminating and disseminated, tracing and traced, re-marking and re-marked. Or, in the vocabulary of living corporeality and the hyphenation of *physis-techné* or 'event-machine', always emerges in reference to another sign, which '*will be born* of having been divided', the grapheme 'has neither *natural site* nor *natural center*' (Ellipsis 374, emphasis added). As we read above, '[m]y monolingualism dwells, and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. [...]' (M 1): 'an absolute habitat' that, contradictorily, has no natural site and cannot be located, always referring elsewhere, as we saw above. *Kbōratically* displaced, '[t]he language called maternal is never purely maternal, nor proper, nor inhabitable' (M 58).

But, as Derrida had already asked in 'Ellipsis', did the grapheme ever have a natural site or centre to lose? And can one not *affirm* the non-referral to the centre? 'Why would one mourn for the center?' (Ellipsis 374). Such a question has already been responded to, to some degree at least, in our discussions of the f/phantasies of the metaphysics of presence. Earlier we read: 'I cannot challenge it except by testifying to its omnipresence in me' (M 1). If 'challenge' were to mean to *resist*, would one want to resist? Is this *passion borne* not also to be *affirmed* and celebrated? Such is one of the central questions of this study. Suffering *and* taking pleasure; the pleasure of desire and of a *passion* for the impossible? For as Derrida himself warns us (and here we recall our discussion of the aporia of testimony/witnessing in the Introduction above), to describe his role as 'victim' would be perhaps too precipitous (M 35). As we read at the outset:

'But above all, and this is the double edge of a sharp sword that I wished to confide to you almost without saying a word: *I suffer and take pleasure* in [*jouis de*] what I am telling you in our aforementioned common language:

**"Yes, I only have one language, yet it is not mine"**' (M 2, emphasis modified).

It is by looking to yet another proposition, maxim or decree (for it takes the form of a law) put forward repeatedly in its varying translations here in *Monolingualism* that we begin to unravel the

*necessity* of this aporetic and contradictory logic (the *quasi*-suicidal logic of autoimmunity whereby some thing – here the propriety and unicity of ‘my’ language, and body – is only possible in its impossibility; whereby the only chance is coupled with a threat; whereby survival is coupled with spectrality openness to contamination and pleasure with suffering) and how, were that which I desire possible, this would in fact also be suicidal, but the suicide of (paradoxical as this may seem) a *total immunity* that is arguably ‘worse’ than the *quasi*-suicide of auto-immunity (and if this logic does not yet appear apparent, it will be addressed in more detail in our discussion of *passion* and suicide in Chapter 4). Following the testimony ‘**I have only one language; it is not mine**’, the contradiction within which would be enough to infuriate the rational reader, comes the risk of the ‘double law’ or ‘antinomical duplicity’ of the following two propositions which together form a ‘clause of belonging’ (M 8), ‘[n]ot only contradictory *in themselves*, this time, but also contradictory *between themselves*’ (M 7):

- ‘1. *We only ever speak one language.*
2. *We never speak only one language*’ (M 7; see also 8, 10, 27).

Or, a page later:

- ‘1. *We only ever speak one language – or rather one idiom only.*
2. *We never speak only one language – or rather there is no pure idiom*’ (M 8).

Such would be the law of translation, as we will elaborate upon imminently. And such would be the ‘performative contradiction’ of Derrida’s impossible testimony precisely to, or before, this law (see M 5). The ‘*performative or pragmatic contradiction*’ of Derrida’s ‘**I have only one language; it is not mine**’ that the second voice diagnoses as ‘desperate’, ‘incoherent, inconsistent and gratuitous in its phenomenal eloquence’, ‘absurdity’, and so forth (see M 2-3). And yet, as Derrida retorts later in the book with regard to his self-proclamation as *the* exemplary Franco-Maghrebi (to which we will return):

‘**Believe me**, although *I measure* [and let us stress this *measurement*, as calculation] the absurdity and presumptuousness of these infantile allegations (such as the “**I am the last Jew**” in *Circonfession*), *I risk them in order to be honest with my interlocutors and myself*, with this someone in me who feels things in that way. In that way and no other. Since I always tell the truth, you can believe me’ (M 49-50, emphasis added).

‘In order to be honest’ or ‘serious’, precisely through the potential ruse of (self-)mockery, or laughter. Whilst we might choose to simply risk believing him, this logic of hyperbole and antinomy (‘if you like that word of which I am fond’, M 7) will be thematised at greater length in an imminent discussion of the markings of exemplarity. *Antinomy*, as the antagonism maintained *between* these two laws. Or, *aporia*, as the sum of the two. ‘Between’ and ‘the sum of’: is this not what is marked in the (in-visible) hyphen of the ‘event-machine’? The hyphen (as wound) as the event *in and on* language (SN 58) – and therefore the event *of* language of a hyphenated ‘I’ (or ‘subject’) inscribed *in* language – marking *passion* as *aporia*; with *aporia* to be thought as ‘the very condition of the step [*pas*]’ or even the experience of the event: ‘the coming of the other, in sum, *of writing and desire*’ (see

WA xv-xxxv, emphasis added).<sup>206</sup> Aporia: as the *passion* for the impossible, as that which impassions one in its very impossibility; as (recalling the wager of thinking *together* the event and the machine) the *hyperbolic* as the limits of the thinkable.

• **‘But who’s talking about living? In other words on living?’<sup>207</sup>**

But let us not lose sight of the law of translation; a law which, moreover, we can ‘situate’ again in this very aporia of the ‘event-machine’ of iterability, of the law of excess and overflow. For whether or not we think we are witnesses, we are always before the law. And if it seems that a discussion of translation might lead us astray from the question of testimony and martyrdom (although having said this, in offering this reading of Satti’s **‘I am the martyr’**, originally spoken in Arabic, translation is certainly crucial), it is because we are moving towards a discussion of the body of the mark, *as* body of the martyr, that we must pass through this antinomical and impossible space of prosthetic iterability. The law of translation, then, but ‘a translation other than the one spoken about by convention, common sense, and certain doctrinaires of translation’ (M 10): a law of translation through which Derrida restages and recalls, reminds himself of, the *intractable* traits [*traits intractables*] of ‘an impossibility so impossible and intractable that it is not far from calling an interdiction to mind’, an impossibility and interdiction in which there would be a *necessity*, ‘but the necessity of what presents itself as impossible-forbidden’ and that, as will be our interest in Chapter 4, *operates* or ‘works’ (M 9-10).

Impossibility, then, as the *working* of some *passion*. However, if our ultimate proposition is that the *passion* we are tracing throughout this study is somehow constitutive in its simultaneous sufferance and affirmation, then this ‘working’ must be qualified. For insofar as the ‘abiding “alienation”’ of which *Monolingualism* speaks – as the internal divisibility of the graphematic mark that brings about the impossible assimilation of ‘my language’ *as* the language of the other – is neither a lack nor an alienation (but rather an ‘alienation without alienation’, an ‘inaliable alienation’ [M 25]) insofar as ‘it lacks nothing that precedes or follows it, it alienates no ipseity, no property, and no self that has ever been able to represent its watchful eye’ (M 25), we cannot speak of its productivity or its constitutive lack (M 25). Rather, as we will enlarge upon in Chapter 4, the constitutive quality lies in what we will be naming an unfailing fidelity to the aporia and the demands of the impossible, as what *Monolingualism* names ‘the origin of our responsibility’ (M 25). *Cela oeuvre*, then, as we read in ‘Typewriter Ribbon’ (TR 150-51), but in an antinomical sense to be further clarified. Or, harking back to our discussions in Part A, the ‘event-machine’ as the ‘*oeuvre*-event’ (for an *oeuvre*, in its necessary singularity, is always an event; TR 133), with the (hyphenated) and non-literal *oeuvre* (i.e. an *oeuvre* that is not limited to the literary work) as that which bridges the

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<sup>206</sup> See also: ‘philosophy lives *in* and *on* *différance*’ (Différance, MP 17). Regarding ‘the subject’ as inscribed *in* language and the possibility of writing *on* ‘the subject’, see ‘EW’ 268, 270.

<sup>207</sup> ‘LO’ 62.

antinomy of machine and event. The dramaturgy of a *passion*, before or in excess of any ‘I can’, *mis en oeuvre* (see WA xxix, 10).

Further on, we read:

‘In a sense, nothing is untranslatable; but *in another sense*, everything is untranslatable; translation is another name for the impossible. In another sense of the word “translation,” of course, and from one sense to the other – it is easy for me to hold firm between these two hyperboles which are fundamentally the same, and always translate each other’ (M 56-7).

In order for the desired originary or source language to exist, it would have to be an absolute singularity or pure idiom (the ‘only one language’), but as such it would be untranslatable and hence unreadable or indecipherable; it would not function as language but would be ‘a language that is impossible, unreadable, and inadmissible’ (M 66). A given language or mark must be minimally *untranslatable* (One), in order for it to resist being incorporated into the generality of other languages or marks (and we are all the while also thinking of the singularity of a testimony here). And yet, in order to be readable, it must be translatable, prosthetically iterable, re-markable and supplementable (*always already* more than one: the *yes, yes* that must be cited and re-cite itself; see LO 70-1). As such, reappropriation must always take place (M 66; see also SI 68).

– According to you, it is this normative denunciation on the ground of impossibility, this sweet rage against language, this jealous anger of language within itself and against itself, *it is this passion that leaves the mark of a scar in that place where the impossible takes place*, isn’t it? Over there, on the other side of the world? The other side *of the world*, is that still the world, in the world, the otherworld or the other *of the world*, everything save the world [*tout sauf le monde*, also ‘totally safe, the world’: totally immune]?

–Derrida, ‘*Sauf le nom*’<sup>208</sup>

As elaborated upon in the logic of *sur-vie* in Derrida’s reading of Blanchot’s *révits* (for instance, *L’arrêt de mort*) and Shelley’s *The Triumph of Life* (or the ‘triumphs of death’ [see LO 71]) in ‘Living On: Borderlines’, it is only as translatable *and* untranslatable (and, we can add, as phantasmatic) that the text lives on [*sur-vit*]: ‘Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, *as a body of language [langue]*. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, *it dies immediately*’ (LO 102, emphasis added). ‘Totally untranslatable’, we can add, as already translatable by ‘totally discrete, simple and delimitable’; totally *immune* to any (re)ference or relation. The only chance of *survival* would lie with the law of excess, of overflow and of the supplement (of/at the ‘origin’); in short, mortality and finitude, the *quasi*-suicide of the autoimmune exposure to *without*. For ‘[i]s not the center, the absence of play and difference, another name for death?’ The death which, according to the logic of f/phantasy outlined in Chapter 2, ‘reassures and appeases, but also, with

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<sup>208</sup> ‘SN’ 59-60, emphasis modified.

its hole, creates anguish and puts at stake?’ (Ellipsis 374).<sup>209</sup> Rather, the chance lies with survival, not as immortality but as the finite ‘life beyond life, the life more than life’, ‘the surviving of *an excess of life which resists annihilation*’ (LLF 52 & AF 60, emphasis added).

‘[W]hat status must be assigned to this exemplarity of re-mark? How do we interpret the history of an example that allows the re-inscription of the structure of a universal law upon the body of an irreplaceable singularity in order to render it thus remarkable?’ (M 26).

Returning to the ‘originary’ monolingualism, as we saw above regarding its necessary translatability, reappropriation must always take place (M 66). And yet, there is no such thing as *absolute* appropriation or reappropriation (the *prohibition* of appropriation spoken of above, M 27). ‘Because there is no natural property of language, language gives rise only to appropriative madness, to jealousy without appropriation. Language speaks this jealousy; it is nothing but jealousy unleashed. It takes its revenge at the heart of the law’ (M 24). And thus the ‘very principle of jealousy as the primitive passion for property and as a concern for the proper’ of which Derrida speaks in the 1993 *Aporias* (A 3). As we saw in Part A, insofar as it is a structure of re-markability, language is law (i.e. the ‘principle’ just cited). The law that exacts itself *in* and *on* the body, moreover, be it of language or the witness-martyr. For it is here, with this law of re-markability, and hence of generality, that we come to the immense problematic of exemplarity that we began to broach in Part A in our initial discussion therein of the *passion* of testimony; of the exemplarity, as the *wounding* of the fold or re-markability, ‘that allows one to read [*donne a lire*, ‘gives to be read’] in a more dazzling [the ‘incandescence’ of which we spoke in the Introduction], intense, or even *traumatic* manner the truth of a universal necessity’ (M 26, emphasis added).

‘As regards so enigmatic a value as that of attestation [and let us stress this *enigma*, to which we will return], or even of exemplarity in testimony, here is a first question, the most general one, without the shadow of a doubt. What happens when someone resorts to describing an allegedly uncommon “situation,” mine, for example, by testifying to it in terms that go beyond it, in a language whose generality takes on a value that is in some way structural, universal, transcendental, or ontological? When anybody who happens by infers the following: “What holds for me, irreplaceably, also applies to all. Substitution is in progress; it has already taken effect. Everyone can say the same thing for themselves and of themselves. It suffices to hear me; I am the universal hostage”’ (M 19-20).

Re-markability, as we saw in Part A, as the technical re-applicability (‘machine’) of the analogical *quasi*-transcendental or *quasi*-ontological within the phenomenal, ontical or empirical *example* (M 26) that makes the event possible (‘event-machine’, therefore), and as the marking *on* or *in* this hyphen between the empirico-transcendental or historico-transcendental; as the re(-)markable experience of language which ‘gives rise to’<sup>210</sup> this articulation between transcendental and ontological universality, and the exemplary or testimonial singularity of a martyred existence’ (M 27). The re-markability

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<sup>209</sup> ‘Life without differance: another name for death’ (OG 71).

<sup>210</sup> ‘Gives rise to’: *donne lieu à*, literally ‘gives *place* to’. It is this ‘place’ that is our concern here, as well as what is ‘given to be read’, as noted above, in these exemplary scars.

which gives rise or ‘place’ to the parentheses (as the *fold* of the re-mark) surrounding the ‘(x)’ of ‘**I am the martyr (x)**’ (see M 26-7, OG 161-62).

• ‘**I am only an example**’<sup>211</sup>

‘How does one describe this time, then; how does one designate this unique time? How does one determine this, an uncommon this whose uniqueness stems from testimony alone. from the fact that certain individuals in certain situations testify to the features of a structure nevertheless universal, *revealing it, showing it, and allowing it to be read “more vividly”* [*la donnent à lire « plus à vif »*], more vividly as one says, *and because, above all, one says it about an injury, more vividly and better than others, and sometimes alone in their category?* And what makes it more unbelievable is that they are alone in a genre which becomes in turn a universal example, thus interbreeding and accumulating the two logics, that of exemplarity and that of the host as hostage’ (M 20, emphasis modified).

It is with the problematic of exemplarity that we return to our initial concern set out in the General Introduction regarding the potential injustices (violences, even) done in the generalizing moves undertaken not only by Derrida throughout his oeuvre but also, *following or with* Derrida, in the present study, insofar as the main proposal is that Satti’s testimony is exemplary of a *passion* suffered by *all*, a *passion* which, in some instances, ‘reveals itself in ‘martyrdom’ (whatever we understand this to be). And insofar as the *violence* of Satti’s ‘act’ is being generalised herein to ‘*reveal more vividly*’ a certain *necessary* violence entailed in *any* act of language (as will be enlarged upon shortly).

Returning to the ‘**Let’s be serious**’ with which we began, it is worth noting how, in the interview ‘A Testimony Given’, Derrida states the following of his having dwelt, both in *The Post Card* and ‘Circumfession’, upon his exclusion from high school in Algeria and ‘from Frenchness’ (and we recall our earlier emphasis on Derrida’s ‘measurement’ of the risk of absurdity):

‘I shouldn’t place too much emphasis on this episode in my life – perhaps I already have a bit too much. Of course it was painful, with pain that can’t be measured, since all pain is immeasurable. All the same, I shouldn’t do it, because measured on the scale of the pains, wounds, and crimes of that time – because *you do have to measure as well* – it would be indecent to stress it’ (TG 55, emphasis added).

Given our concerns regarding the potential injustices done by reading these two testimonies (Satti’s and Derrida’s) together, this caveat is certainly worth stressing. However, this interview was given in 1991, prior to the first presentation of *Monolingualism* in 1992. Despite the acknowledgement of these few passages in *The Post Card* and ‘Circumfession’ being perhaps a little extreme, Derrida nonetheless chose to publish what is in effect a book-length ‘complaint’ to precisely these exclusions. The proposal here is that this risk taken involves a certain responsibility (not to mention the self-exposure to the negativity of mockery), and that this dramatisation (in both *Monolingualism* and beyond), taken together with the complicating of the supposed serious-mockery binary and the seeming absurdity that comes with the Derridean ‘logics’ of antinomy and hyperbole,

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<sup>211</sup> ‘Passions’ 89.

serve only to highlight the *passion* of testimony all the more *vividly*, revealing it to be all the more scandalous. In short, what *Monolingualism* demonstrates so *exemplarily* is that even if one had experienced a singular and seemingly exceptional ('remarkable') situation, on whatever 'scale' of violence, one's experience of the generality ('re-markability') of language is such that, re-citing from Part A above, '[t]he singular must be universalisable. This is the testimonial condition' (D 41). Similarly – and this is the scandal of historical revisionism – in its never being provable, the testimony may always be met with the vehement claims to absurdity voiced here in *Monolingualism*. Thus, whilst the proposal here is that any 'I' is translatable by '**I am monolingual**', this is in turn exemplarily translatable by (Satti's) '**I am the martyr (x)**' which (and we are not proposing that this *simply* be some 'meta-testimony') *both* testifies to his exceptional act of 'martyrdom' (i.e. the suicidal operation and/or its announcement) *and*, exemplarily, to 'the exemplary or testimonial singularity of a martyred existence' entailed in any signature or instance of the 'I', *testimonial* as this must always be.

• '**I therefore venture to present myself to you here, *ecce homo*, in parody, as the exemplary Franco-Maghrebian.**'<sup>212</sup>

Here in *Monolingualism*, however, this role of exemplarity is taken up by Derrida himself. Following a logic of the Aristotelian type, 'we model ourselves upon what *is* "most this or that" or what *is* "the best this or that"', hence arriving at the essence of *what it is to be x* (Franco-Maghrebian, or a martyr, for instance) *in general* by looking to a paradigmatic example, *par excellence* (M 11).<sup>213</sup> Or, as Derrida puts it elsewhere, 'the *Urbild*, at the same time the archetype or the *ultimate* example, so the best example' (TG 57, emphasis added). But given everything we have seen so far regarding the spectrality, fictionality (the '**as if**' of the 'in parody') and hyphenation that replaces the *is* of **S is P**, we will need to follow another logic, for this 'being' Franco-Maghrebian betrays, *exemplarily*, a disorder of identity [*trouble d'identité*] (M 14) that we are locating, precisely, *in* and *on* the wound of the hyphen. A martyred identity, in short. The *passion* of the singular mark; the *passion* of the **I**.

The exemplary Franco-Maghrebian – or rather: *as if* the exemplary Franco-Maghrebian in 'the story' or 'little fable' that 'I tell myself' (M 13, 14) – but following in the hyperbolic logic already demonstrated in the earlier 'Circumfession' (1991) and the subsequent 'Abraham, the Other' (2000/2003) in which Derrida testifies '**I am the last and the least of the Jews**' (Abraham 17) and in which '**the more I say it, the less I am it**' *and* '**the less I say it, the more I am it**' (Abraham 38). The *quasi*-quotation and *quasi*-mockery that is both a signing and the taking upon oneself of an outrageous, stereotypical declaration; the 'citational staging of mockery itself.' The *mise-en-abyme* that is writing itself, in other words (TG 56-7).<sup>214</sup> The archi-origin that both gives the impression of

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<sup>212</sup> 'M' 19.

<sup>213</sup> Not that this 'fable' that Derrida tells himself authorizes him in any way to speak *in the name of* anyone, 'especially not about some Franco-Maghrebian entity whose identity remains in question' (M 14).

<sup>214</sup> 'I wanted to show the way that mockery repeats, responds to, a stereotype or prototype.' When questioned further, however, Derrida clarifies that this kind of 'mockery' is a certain kind of laughing – a laughing that is

intensifying the origin *and* refers to something not at all of the order of the origin; the extreme (‘eschatological’) which ‘is neither the end nor the origin’. The very near *and* infinitely far away experience of ‘my’ language referred to above (M 37). And hence the hyperbolic ‘**I am the last of the Jews**’ and ‘**I am the last of the eschatologists**’ (C 75) as ‘**I am the last of the last**’ as ‘**I am the most last, so the least last**’ (see C 75), for there is no last, just as there is no first.<sup>215</sup> The ‘internal’ (around the hyphen) polarity of the most-least, the ‘*différance* of the origin’ (Derrida emphasises the ‘of’ here), the origin as *différ/ant*, which separates it (to which we can add ‘I’) from itself (i.e. ‘myself’) so that ‘it is not what it is’ (i.e. ‘I am not what I am’) (TG 55). *Or, the Prosthesis of Origin*. Again, hyperbole, paradox and antinomy (the aporia of *passion*):

‘[N]othing is more incompatible with originarity and *différance* but, at the same time, they are inseparable, according to a *differential* logic that is both economic, meaning that it functions like the restoration of the same in alterity, and, at the same time, an-economic, like absolute heterogeneity. Absolute *différance*’ (TG 55).

Regarding this paradoxical hyperbole, we can also turn to ‘Sauf le nom’ (1991/1995), where Derrida speaks of the philosophical and Greek heritage of the phrase ‘paradoxical hyperbole’. Although space does not allow for a discussion of the main concern of this text, negative theology, what is said therein regarding the ‘*beyond*’ (of being itself, in the case of negative theology, or the *sur-* of the *sur-name* or, we can add, *sur-vival*) can be reinscribed in our discussions herein of the law of excess, and also points towards a potential discussion of the *pas au-delà*, as the *passionate* passivity of the step beyond (the ‘limit’ of) ‘dying’, above all where it is a matter of the ‘beyond’ within discourses surrounding martyrdom. Referring to Plato’s *Republic*, Derrida reminds us that *hyperbolē* names the movement of transcendence that carries or transports beyond being or beingness [*étantité*] *epekeina tēs ousias* in a formal and *excessive* movement that allows us to say that ‘**X “is” beyond what “is,” X is without being (X) [*sans (l’)être*]**’. This hyperbole, Derrida writes, *announces* in a double sense: *signalling* an open possibility, but also *provoking* thereby the opening of the possibility. Can we not read this *announcing* and *provoking* as the differential *yes* or *arche-promise* discussed above, together with the law of iterability through which we are reading the *exemplarity* that carries the example *beyond* the example, and through this hyperbolic logic of the ‘last’ and the ‘least’? Derrida continues: ‘Its event is at once revealing and producing, *post-scriptum* [and here we think of testament, last-will and last-word] and prolegomenon, inaugural writing. Its event announces what comes and makes come what will come from now on in all the movements in *hyper, ultra, au-delà, beyond, über*, which will precipitate our discourse or, first of all, existence

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not far from affirmation (as had been discussed in ‘Ulysses Gramophone’) – and should not be understood in terms of the potential sarcasm of mockery, from which Derrida would want to distance himself (TG 57-8).  
<sup>215</sup> In saying that there is no origin, it does not follow however that something is put ‘before’ the origin and as a result, ‘according to what can look like antinomies of the Kantian type, constantly to dissolve *and* to restore the originary’ (TG 57). Rather, as with the double *yes*, what is being *affirmed* is the supplement (i.e. prosthesis) of/at the origin.



[‘existence’, and not ‘subject’, ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, ‘ego’, or even *Da-sein*]. *This precipitation is their passion*’ (SN 64, emphasis modified).

But let us return to our concerns regarding the potential effacement of specificities. *Monolingualism* is a political and historical text through and through, in all that it has to say regarding ‘the relationships between birth, language, culture, nationality, and citizenship’ (M 13) as well as colonial alienation and historical servitude, as is revealed through Derrida’s experience of the *determinate*, singular historical experience of early twentieth century Algeria. However (and this does not erase the political and historical import – far from it), this universal monolingualism of the other experienced by Derrida himself ‘carries *well beyond* these determinate conditions’ (emphasis added), also holding for the so-called language of the master, *hospes* [‘guest-master’] or colonist (M 23). As Derrida professes:

‘Quite far from dissolving the always relative specificity, however cruel, of situations of linguistic oppression or colonial expropriation, this prudent and differentiated universalization must account, and I would even say that it is the only way one can account, for the determinable possibility of a subservience and a hegemony’ (M 23).

Furthermore, as we are coming to, it can ‘even account for a terror inside languages (inside languages there is a terror, soft, discreet, or glaring; that is our subject)’ (M 23); an internal and seemingly infinite escalation of terror which we will be returning to in Chapters 4 and 5 in light of the phenomenon of suicidal operations. For this discourse on the ex-appropriation and mark ‘opens out into a politics, a right and an ethics: let us even go so far as to say that it is the only one with the power to do it’ (M 24), and thus – as is our argument – accounts for determined cases. Not possessing exclusively or naturally what he calls ‘his’ language, ‘the master is nothing’ and must pretend, through ‘an unnatural process of politico-phantasmatic constructions’ (yet more *f//phantasies*) – through a supposedly ‘felicitous’ speech act – and through ‘the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it and impose it as “his own”’ (M 23-4). Derrida’s proposal here is that *all* culture is originarily colonial (M 39), and that *given* instances and histories of ‘colonialism’ or ‘colonization’ (Derrida’s quotation marks) ‘are only high points [*reliefs*], one traumatism over another, an increasing buildup of violence, the jealous rage of an essential *coloniality* and *culture*’ (M 24).

• **‘I will be accused of confusing it all. Of course I am not!’<sup>216</sup>**

‘But what if, while being attentive to the most rigorous distinctions and respecting the respect of the respectable, we cannot and must not lose sight of this obscure common power, this colonial impulse which will have begun by insinuating itself into, overrunning without delay, what they call, by an expression worn enough to give up the ghost, “the relationship to the other”! or “openness to the other”!’ (M 40).

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<sup>216</sup> ‘M’ 40.

This monolingualism of the other is that of ‘a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial’, ‘that law originating from elsewhere’, but also the very language of the Law, the experience of which would be heteronomous. A sovereignty that would wish, as with the fantasy of the metaphysics of presence, to reduce language to the One (‘to the hegemony of the homogenous), ‘effacing the folds and flattening the text’ (M 39-40). But let us defer a reading of sovereignty (of the ‘sui-’ or ‘self’) and the law of the other until our discussion, in Chapter 4, of *Demeure*’s seven trajectories of *passion* and of the suicidal logic that is *exemplified* in the violence of contemporary political struggle. Lingering a while longer with the question of exemplarity, we see how for Derrida the question here is not ‘to efface the arrogant specificity or the traumatizing brutality of what is called modern colonial war in the “strictest definition” of the expression’ (M 39), just as we neither wish to do this with regard to the specificity of each of the contexts of which suicidal operations are the symptom. ‘On the contrary. Certain people, myself included, have experienced colonial cruelty from two sides, so to speak. But once again, it reveals the colonial structure of any culture in an exemplary way. It testifies to it in martyrdom, and “vividly” [*en martyre, et “à vif”*]’ (M 39).

Roots make the commonality of errantry [*errance*] and exile, for in both instances roots are lacking. We must begin with that.

—Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation*<sup>217</sup>

Some pages later, we find yet another disclaimer: whilst it is ‘all too well known’ that the value of inhabiting is quite disconcerting and equivocal, that ‘one never inhabits what one is in the habit of calling inhabiting’, and that there is no possible habitat without the difference of the exile and nostalgia described at length by Derrida with regard to his own experience (‘my nostalgia’, M 52), ‘it does not follow from this that all exiles are equivalent. From this shore, yes, *from this* shore or common drift, all expatriations remain singular’ (M 58). This necessity of an essential alienation ‘is here re-marked, therefore marked, and revealed one more time, still one more first time, *in an incomparable setting*. A setting called historical and singular, one which appears idiomatic, which determines and phenomenalizes it by bringing it back to itself’ (M 58, emphasis added).

However, as Catherine Malabou notes in her study of the experience of travel in the work of Derrida, ‘doesn’t presenting it in these terms mean reintroducing the distinction between the transcendental (“common drift or shore”) and the empirical (“every exile and every individual voyage”) that constitutes yet again the traditional schema of derivation?’ (Malabou, *Counterpath* 52). Or, we can add, the derivation within the traditional schema of exemplarity outlined above? Recalling our discussion in Part A of the *yes* as a *quasi*-transcendental (itself hyphenated) which ‘opens up’ determined instances of speech, as well as our questioning as to whether we begin with the ‘theory’ or concept of performativity, for example, and subsequently ‘apply’ this to an example such as Satti’s, or whether it is *from* the *exemplarity* of such an example (Satti’s, or Derrida’s) that we

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<sup>217</sup> Glissant, p. 11.

(Derrida, for example) might *invent* some altogether unheard-of quasi-concept, we read: 'Indeed, it is on the condition of this transcendental edge [...], and by starting out from it, that every phenomenal, empirical, or individual exile opens up. Every particular *destinerrance* would be no more than a case of or testimony to that universal uprooting' (Malabou, Counterpath 52).

Without dismissing this, however, this movement can always be reversed. As Derrida himself notes on the next page of *Monolingualism*, and as we can inscribe within the broader logic of his deconstructive writing and its paleonymic reinventions of traditional concepts (see Chapter 4), the philosophical tradition that he wishes to deconstruct has supplied him with a reservoir of concepts that 'I have indeed had to serve for a short while now in order to describe this situation, *even in the distinction between transcendental or ontological universality and phenomenal empiricity*' (M 59, emphasis added). Without exception, all of these traditional metaphysical terms – '*truth, alienation, appropriation, habitation, ones-home [chez-soi], ipseity, place of the subject, law, and so on*' – remain problematic to the extent that they 'bear the stamp of the metaphysics that imposed itself through, precisely, this language of the other, this monolingualism of the other' (M 59). And thus, 'this debate with monolingualism will have been nothing other than a piece of deconstructive writing [*écriture*].' A writing which, as we are coming to in a discussion of the body of the martyr-witness and of the hyphen, 'always attacks the body of this language, my only language'. And *attacks*, moreover, 'what it bears the most or in the best way,' namely, the philosophical tradition and the abovementioned reservoir of concepts. For what Derrida wants to *demonstrate* or *perform* is that 'this empirico-transcendental or ontico-ontological re-mark, this folding which imprints itself upon the enigmatic articulation between a universal structure and its idiomatic testimony, *reverses all the signs without any hesitation*' (M 59, emphasis added).

The imprint of this re-mark or folding which we are situating in and on the hyphen *between* the empirical and the transcendental; this limitrophic and aporetic endurance of the *passion* of being trapped, undecidably, between the two (with *passion*, let us recall, being read here as the experience of a passage, a 'traversal without line and without invisible border' (A 14-15), the endurance of an impossible aporia): *this* is where singularity becomes reconfigured not as the individual, empirical or accidental, but as (as we shall elaborate upon shortly in a discussion of poetic invention) this (hyphenated) between of the re-mark or folded thought of the fold. Such would be the 'reversal' – or *reflection*, even, to recall one of the motifs of the title of this study – of which Derrida speaks. The reversal which leads Malabou to assert the following, in which we can translate 'voyage' or 'trip' by 'testimony' (or even martyrdom):

'Far from being pre-constituted, far from preceding what it sets the conditions for, the transcendental here depends precisely, in order to be what it is, on the particular occurrences of the voyage that give rise to it. In this sense, it "is" not transcendental; it only becomes so by means of the voyage. [...] Every one of Derrida's trips in fact invents each time the conditions of its possibility. It is in this sense that they are singular and "underivable" events' (Malabou, Counterpath 53).

‘Underivable’ as unprecedented, insofar as we will be reading Derrida’s texts as constituting the invention of an unheard-of performative; in the words of Hélène Cixous, ‘an autobiography of an unknown genre, written “interiorly and *on* the skin”’ (WTL 8), *in* and *on* the wounds, marks and scars which both punctuate and set in motion the text of *Monolingualism*. Wounds, marks and scars which – and *Monolingualism* does not let us forget this – could always re-open, always threatening to become something even *worse*, worse even than a resurgence of colonial violence as we have known it; an unimaginable perversion; the monster of which the wager of ‘Typewriter Ribbon’ speaks. For the idiom to be performatively and idiosyncratically invented – to be ‘colonised’ to some degree in order to be ‘mine’ – will always bear the marks and scars of another colonisation since, as ‘event’, it can never be pure of the wounding inscription of the ‘machine’, the *incisory operation* of iterability which we are approaching. But, returning to Malabou, such events will never be ‘underivable’ if by ‘deriving’ we are to think as *coming from* the other. Testimony, as the event *of* the other. The *passion of* the other.

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## II. Traces, marks and scars

*Passion*, then, as the experience of *affect* and being *inscribed*. The experience of a sufferance, and of being acted upon from *without*: such are but two ‘definitions’ of *passion* in the ‘strict’, etymological sense. The experience that is testified to by the wounded body of the martyr.<sup>218</sup> As we read in trajectory 5 in *Demeure* (and we note the quotation marks that signal this paleonymically re-invented sense of ‘passion’): “‘Passion’ implies an engagement that is assumed in pain and suffering, experience without mastery and thus without active subjectivity’ (D 27). Returning to the ‘giving rise’ or ‘giving place’ of which Malabou writes, we find this term (*donner lieu*) frequently in *Monolingualism*, most importantly in the following crucial passage:

‘For is the experience of language (or rather, before any discourse, the experience of the mark, the re-mark or the margin) not precisely what makes this articulation possible and necessary? Is that not what *gives rise* [*donne lieu*] to this articulation between transcendental or ontological universality, and the exemplary or testimonial singularity of martyred existence? While evoking apparently abstract notions of the mark or the re-mark here, we are also thinking of scars. Terror is practiced at the expense of wounds inscribed on the body. We speak here of martyrdom and passion in the strict and quasi-etymological sense of these terms. And when we mention the body, we are naming the body of language and writing, as well as what makes them a thing of the body. We therefore appeal to what is, so hastily, named the body proper, which happens to be affected by the same ex-appropriation, the same “alienation” without alienation, without any property that is forever lost or to be ever reappropriated’ (M 27).

‘And when we mention the body, we are naming the body of language and writing, as well as that which makes them a thing of the body’: whilst this questioning of the ‘body proper’ can be traced right the way back across Derrida’s oeuvre, and could indeed constitute an entire study (especially when subsumed within the wider logic of ‘life’ and ‘generation’ that guides and ‘nourishes’ Derrida’s corpus, as we began to see in Chapter 2), our focus here lies specifically on the idea of the graphematic mark as wounded and wounding, as parasitically infecting and infected, and as performing and performed.<sup>219</sup> And, in considering this, on the manner in which an individual, idiosyncratic martyrdom is counteracted by a universal *passion* insofar as the law of iterability and violent re-markability is to be read as being inscribed upon a speaking and writing – testifying – body.

Wounding *and* wounded: for, as we are working towards, a *certain* irreducible violence, above all in the form of a *cut* or *interruption*, is in fact the ‘scandalous’ condition of responsibility.<sup>220</sup> A scandal which we will read together with the ‘scandal’ of the violence of Satti’s testimony being *at*

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<sup>218</sup> Regarding ‘experience’ as traversal and corporeal, see: ‘I rather like the word experience whose origin evokes traversal, *but a traversal with the body*, it evokes *a space that is not given in advance but that opens as one advances*’ (Narcissism 207, emphasis added).

<sup>219</sup> Regarding the corpus as a ‘body’ of texts, by demonstrating the consistencies of various ‘logics’ across Derrida’s writings, we are ascribing to Derrida’s claim that the corpus bears an ‘insistent signature’ (which is differentiated, ‘within’ itself) (see TS 14). See also ‘Between the writing body and writing...’ (interview with Daniel Ferrer), in Martin McQuillan & Ika Willis, eds., *The Origins of Deconstruction* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 9-21.

<sup>220</sup> A scandal that is ‘beyond an ethics, if there is any’ (R 60).

once the extraordinary *and* the ordinary story not only of language, but every relation to and encounter with the other; the ‘disturbing’ (or perturbing, we can add, following our logic of pervertibility) experience of a ‘strange violence that has always insinuated itself into the origin of the most innocent experiences of friendship or justice’ (PF 231). The economy of a transcendental and irreducible *violence* that is simultaneously *nonviolence*, ‘since it opens the relation to the other’, as Derrida writes in the earlier ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, a reading of Levinas (VM 160). However, recalling our ongoing concerns not to efface ‘the arrogant specificity’ or ‘traumatising brutality’ of determined, *given* instances of violence, together with our assertion in Chapter 1 that Derrida’s oeuvre is ceaselessly attentive to the historical, Chapter 4 will return to the notion of the oeuvre of deconstruction – as singularity, justice and *operation* – in terms of the ‘radical passivity’ of a *passion* that, precisely because of this passivity, is nonetheless responsible (‘without alibi’) insofar as, whilst accounting for a *necessary* irreducible violence, it *resists* the separation or ‘cutting-off’ from the world, in solipsistic isolation, for which, for instance, the academic ‘antihistorical formalism’ of the United States was criticized during the 1980s.<sup>221</sup>

In terms of the graphematic mark and the ‘articulation’ of which Derrida speaks above, there is – as we will explore in a reading of the exemplarity of the *poetic* and *testimonial* mark – an irreducible violence at the origin of meaning that cannot so easily be condemned from a moral or political point of view (Afterword 150). As we read in ‘Signature Event Context’ and ‘Limited Inc’, it is the law of iterability that makes possible idealisation and hence ‘a certain identity in repetition of the multiplicity of *factual events*’ (LI 61, emphasis added), thus rendering unstable irreplaceable and verifiable testimony and the historical archive in general. Whilst we will address this ‘rendering unstable’ of the archival mark in further detail in Chapter 4 in terms of a certain ‘death drive’ or suicidal logic of the archive and hence all witnessing (the *I am the martyr (x)*, in effect, of every archival mark), as is revealed exemplarily in the ciphered wound (the *punctum*?) of the poetic mark, for the moment we can focus on the manner in which the singular mark is, from the inception on [*dès l’entame*], broached and breached [*entamée* ‘cut’ or ‘incised’] in its origin by the repeatability and alterability of iterability (Sec 17). Or, re-markability. ‘Cut’, then, or ‘wounded’ (*entamé*), from its inception on, in order to function as language.

Let us pause for a moment with this verb *entamer*. Operating, as with *différance*, both temporally (‘to initiate’) and spatially (‘to cut’), this verb, whether voiced as such, shades what follows and is crucial for understanding the wounding affect of *passion* as well as what Derrida names ‘the passion of origin’. As Michael Naas proposes in a reading of *Of Grammatology*, where the verb *entamer* is vital but rarely emphasised in secondary readings, this term, which also means to ‘interfere’, ‘infiltrate’, ‘break into’ and ‘usher in’, is almost as important and useful to Derrida as the term *différance* or *différer*, and Derrida’s multiple and varied uses of it can do much to help illuminate

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<sup>221</sup> See Kamuf, ‘Introduction: Event of Resistance’, esp. pp. 20-1.

what is at stake in these other, better-known terms.<sup>222</sup> Returning to ‘Signature Event Context’, we see how this ‘cut [*entaille*] of an unrepeatable singularity’ (S 34) ‘takes place’ as a martyrdom, which cannot not but be repeated. The auto-immunity of the graphematic mark, then, and of the martyr-testimony. Cut, and indeed *cutting*, in the structure of acti/passivity of the trace that is both *tracing* and *traced*. The law of caesura (S 4), of the incision that the mark, like the poem, ‘bears in its body like a memory, sometimes several memories in one, the mark of a provenance, of a place and of a time’ (S 18).

So, the *prosthesis of origin as wounding of origin*. The multiple gesture of writing (and, by inference, of the ‘I’); of the disseminatory unity of language which ‘is open to the most radical grafting, open to deformations, transformations, expropriation, to a certain a-nomie and de-regulation’ (M 65). Prosthesis, then, as the graftings, parasites and impurities with which Derrida ceaselessly negotiates; the corporeal and medical tropes, starting with that of the *pharmakon* (both poison and cure<sup>223</sup>), that will eventually lead us, through *the body of the martyr-witness*, to a further discussion of the quasi-suicidal logic of *auto-immunity*.

Returning to the hyphen of the ‘event-machine’, as in-organic, we have already seen in our reading of *Limited Inc* that iterability constitutes a *violation* of the allegedly rigid ‘purity’ of an ‘authentic’ performative speech act or event of discourse (Sec 18) and that the necessary fictionality and theatricality that we have been stressing constitute a violation of the conventions and laws (themselves *at times* violent and brutal) set up by the metaphysical tradition (‘the police is always waiting in the wings’) (LI 105, see also Afterword 111, 112).<sup>224</sup> Whilst the performative event is never ‘actualised’, ‘whatever *violently* “takes place” or occupies a site is always something of a parasite’ (LI 90, emphasis added). Or, we can add, what ‘takes place’ is the wound. The wounded structure of exemplarity which

‘appears in the experience of the injury, the offense, vengeance, and the lesion. In the experience of terror. It is a traumatic event because at stake here are blows and injuries, scars, often murders, and sometimes collective assassinations. It is reality itself, the scope [*portée*] of any ference, of any reference as difference’ (M 26).

‘*Ecce homo*, and do not smile, for a “passion” would indeed appear to be at stake’ (M 19), with the quotation marks here signalling that this ‘passion’ is a paleonymic one whose contours and trajectory we will need to follow in more detail in Chapter 4. For the moment, we can address this in terms of the body of the witness-martyr on the wooden cross, *limitrophically affected from ‘without’,* by the *zero-minus-one* degree of writing (the arche-promise that ‘did not take place’) ‘that leaves its

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<sup>222</sup> Michael Naas, ‘*Entamer, Entamé, To Initiate or Open Up, to Breach or Broach*’, in Sean Gaston & Ian Maclachlan, eds., *Reading Derrida’s Of Grammatology* (New York & London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 119-23 (p. 119).

<sup>223</sup> See ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ in *Dissemination* (1972).

<sup>224</sup> Derrida takes pains to make clear here that he is not proposing that every police, or every law, is violent and repressive, and that one must avoid too hastily confounding law and prohibition, law and repression, prohibition and repression, and that ‘[e]lsewhere I have tried to mark out what in the essence of the law is not necessarily tied to negativity’ (Afterword 133).

phantomatic map “inside” the said monolanguage’ (M 65). *Affected* by an originary prosthesis, in what David Wills (the dedicatee of *Monolingualism*) calls ‘the logic of a body always already inhabited by its inanimate or nonorganic other, grafted to wood and metal, prosthetized’ (Wills, Matchbook 152).<sup>225</sup> The traversing of the individual by the general as ‘the linguistic cross we must all bear’, not as a sanctimonious means of dramatisation (although the parody is nevertheless important, as we have seen), but as the carrying prosthetically of language by (*in* and *on*) the body, the suffering of language in the flesh (again, therefore, the *à vif*).<sup>226</sup> As the universal principle (the *law*, thus, we could say) of an ‘originary prosthesis’ in which language is ‘constructed from the beams of its differences and elaborated through the crossbeams of its articulations to form the gibbet upon which one suffers or mourns as one speaks the single tongue that is not one’s own’ (Wills, Matchbook 137-38). Derrida’s, or anyone’s, monolingualism is disjoined, i.e. exiled, and this is a disjunction or exile of the body: ‘like a tongue dislocated from a self, articulated through the impossibility or pragmatic contradiction of a *ligneo-linguism*, spoken by a wooden tongue, given as an originary prosthesis’ (Wills, Matchbook 153); a prosthesis which for Wills one carries ‘in the form of a linguistic cross through one’s speaking and writing life’ (Wills, Matchbook 138).

• ‘What is the nature of that hyphen?’<sup>227</sup>

Of those exemplary figures who ‘live in a certain “state”’ and ‘have a certain status’ as far as language and culture are concerned, Derrida writes:

‘In what is so named and is indeed “my country,” this status is given the title of “Franco-Maghrebian” [*Franco-Maghebain*].

‘What can that possibly mean to say, I ask you, you who are fond of meaning-to-say [*vouloir-dire*]?’ What is the nature of that hyphen? What does it want?’ (M 10-11).

As noted above, the body is *affected* by the arche-promise. Or, we can say, by the *gage* of *différance* which simultaneously both enjoins *and* cuts. The *sufferance* of the at times unbearable and unreadable link of the hyphen. So far we have prioritised the mark, or ‘space’, of the hyphen. However, to think the hyphen as merely a mark of ‘union’ (as suggested, for instance, by the French *trait d’union*) would be misleading and stray far from Derrida’s thought in which the perils of ‘union’ and ‘belonging’ are returned to repeatedly. In thinking the trace structure – the structure of re-markability – as both a binding *and* an unbinding, an incisory interruption *and* a mark of belonging (and hence, for instance, a ‘belonging *without* belonging’ or a ‘response *without* response’, insofar as

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<sup>225</sup> Wills has published a full length study on prosthesis: *Prosthesis* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>226</sup> Wills’ reading seeks to take things further (indeed, further than Derrida himself articulates) and to speak ‘not only of wounds and scars but of the nonorganic corporeal relation, the wrack, that gives rise to these scars; not only of the stigmata but also the nails and wood that produce them’; in other words, of the prosthetic – the originarily prosthetic structure of language articulated through a fundamental linguistic otherness (Wills, Matchbook 151-52). Thus Wills evokes the potentially sanctimonious crucifixion scene in order to underscore his own thematics of the wooden – his ‘ligneous logic’ (Wills, Matchbook 149) – and ‘Derrida’s wooden logic’, ‘his wooden language’, ‘his wooden tongue’ (Wills, Matchbook 146).

<sup>227</sup> ‘M’ 10-1.



the radical separation between ‘myself’ and my witness-addressee always spells the *passion* of a *secret* and a certain unreadability, as will be addressed in our reading of the *passion* of the *punctum* or *enigma* of testimony<sup>228</sup>), this hyphen will in time come to be replaced by the mark (or rather, ‘articulation’, understood in the sense of dividing *and* connecting, hence following Derrida’s early logic of the ‘hinge [*brisure*]<sup>229</sup>) of *circumcision*: a mark – *given* to Derrida, we might say, by the poetics of Paul Celan – which functions exemplarily across Derrida’s corpus, as we will come to see in our examination in Chapter 4 of the *operation* of his reinvention of the performative, and passionate event. For the moment, however, it is worth lingering upon this hyphenated exemplarity, this hyphen of the empirico-transcendental ‘in’ which the *I*/ ‘*I*’, undecidably, ‘takes place’ (without ever fully taking place; and hence the *passion* of the *I*, and the martyrdom of ‘*I*’).

The hyphens (more than one), then, of the exemplary Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian; the exemplary experience without which Derrida could not explain anything (and hence the *force* of the example):

‘A Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian genealogy does not clarify everything, far from it. But could I explain anything without it, ever? No, nothing, nothing of what preoccupies me, what engages me, what keeps me in motion or in “communication,” nothing of what summons me sometimes across the silent time of interrupted communications, nothing, moreover, of what isolates me in a kind of almost involuntary retreat, a desert that I sometimes have the illusion of “cultivating” by myself, of surveying like a desert, while furnishing myself with fine and nice excuses – what little taste, but also what “ethics,” what “politics”! – whereas a hostage’s place was reserved there for me, as a summons [*mise en demeure*], right before me’ (M 71-2).

The Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian experience of an ‘insult’, as ‘injury’ (and let us recall, the structure of exemplarity ‘appears’ in the experience of an injury or offense [M 26]): the word *jeu*, received as an ‘insult [*injure*], *injuria*, in English, *injury*, both an insult, a wound, and an injustice, a denial of right rather than the right to belong to a legitimate group’; what Hélène Cixous has named ‘nosblessures’ (see *Stigmata* 149 & *WTL* 5). A word ‘received [...] like a blow [...] struck against me, but a blow I would henceforth have to carry and incorporate [*porter, comporter*] forever in the essence of my most singularly signed and assigned behaviour [*comportement*]’ (Abraham 10; see also 22).

‘The silence of that hyphen [*trait d’union*] does not pacify or appease anything, not a single torment, not a single torture. It will never silence their memory. It could even worsen the terror, the lesions, and the wounds. A hyphen is never enough to conceal protests, cries of anger or suffering, the noise of weapons, airplanes, and bombs’ (M 11, Fr. 27).

This silence of the hyphen will never enough to conceal the weapons, airplanes and bombs that will be the subject of our inscription, in the chapters that follow, of martyr-testimonies such as Satti’s as the exemplary ‘manifestations’ of all that is discussed, above all the hyphenated dislocations of the tele-technical and the body proper, in texts such as ‘Faith and Knowledge’ and ‘Real and Autoimmune Suicides’. In reading, through the hyphen, the body of the ‘*I*’ that *Monolingualism*

<sup>228</sup> In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida speaks of a ‘community without community’ (PF 48, 62, 81).

<sup>229</sup> Regarding ‘articulation’, see note 72 above. Regarding the ‘hinge’, see ‘OG’ 65-73.

presents as ‘fascinated by its own “division”’ (M 8), only able to promise and promise itself by threatening to dismember itself (M 22), we can turn to another secondary source. In both his Introduction to the collection *Acts of Religion* and his monograph *The Jew and the Arab*, Gil Anidjar returns repeatedly to the motif of the hyphen. For Anidjar, whose major concern is the figuration of the Abrahamic and the comma of ‘the Jew, the Arab’, the Abrahamic – ‘that is to say, Derrida on religion’ – inscribes a certain hyphen of the theologico-political (AR esp. 5-7), the nature of which we cannot enter into here but will touch upon in Chapter 4 in our discussions of the ‘religion without religion’ of the (messianic) promise being addressed herein. What is of import, however, is the manner in which he describes this marking of the hyphen as that which, following what we have outlined in Part A regarding iterability, ‘breaks and tears as it utters words that break from their context, finding again a speech that cuts and unbinds’ (AR 9). The hyphen of the Abrahamic – but also, we can add, of the Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian – is ‘insufficient’ insofar ‘as it does not bridge anything’ (AR 9), if we are to understand ‘bridging’ as unifying; appeasing, as the *f/phantasy* of the metaphysics of presence and of the subject of which we have often spoken. And hence the inability to appease even a single torment or torture, but rather the potential to even worsen the wounds.

• **‘I am always speaking about myself, without speaking about myself’<sup>230</sup>**

‘An example always carries beyond itself: it thereby opens up a testamentary dimension. The example is first of all for others, and beyond the self.  
–Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*<sup>231</sup>

Not losing sight of Satti’s (and Mroué and Rahhal’s) testimony, Derrida’s ‘autobiographical enactments’, as we might call them (his wounded yet nonetheless veiled confessions and testimonies which enact a simultaneous ‘showing’ and ‘veiling’ that we will elaborate upon in terms of the ‘revealing without revealing’ of the poetic and the ‘cipher without truth’ of ‘Différance’) demonstrate exactly the undecidability of ever deciding whether an ‘**I**’ is ‘a reference to me or to (an) “**I**” through the example of my “**I**”’ (Passions 143 n. 14); the difficulty of ever locating the border separating the life of an author or signatory and his work, or separating an essentialness or transcendental from an empirical fact.

Rather than attempting to come to a definitive conclusion regarding whether and when Derrida’s texts are autobiographical, the task set here is to explore the impossibility of such resolution and the manner in which the autobiographical (or auto-bio-thanato-graphical, the hyphenated sur-vival) *cuts across* both the *body* of work and the *body* of the real person, for instance

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<sup>230</sup> ‘Passions’ 144 n. 14.

<sup>231</sup> ‘SM’ 41.

Jacques Derrida (see EO 71-2).<sup>232</sup> As such, what is being prioritised throughout this study is the manner in which empirical facts or accidents that come to make up Derrida's 'life' or biography – the chance encounters with other writers and texts, and hence the importance of the at times ciphered inscription of dates and proper names within his corpus – come to bear upon the inventions of his corpus (for instance, the 'concept' of allo-testimony or allo-biography), as *opus*. As Derrida tells us in a 'Roundtable on Autobiography', it is when the mark, identity or unity of the line or mark of this border becomes divided or dislocated – prosthetised, folded, grafted, *hyphenated* – that 'the problem of the *autos*, of the autobiographical, has to be totally redistributed' (EO 45). Redistributed, or reinvented: 'autobiography' as 'just as old name for designating one of the bodies [...] pledged', *promised* (Madness 346-47). A thinking of the trace, *as* promise, as an undermining, by what we might call the *autobiographical* involvement of Derrida's texts, of 'the very notion of autobiography, giving it over to what the necessity of writing, the trace, the *remainder*, could offer of all that was most baffling, undecidable, cunning, or despairing' (Punctuations 125).

And can we not read this abovementioned hyphenated border as Derrida's 'implication' of himself, in the words of one interviewer, 'along with your "body," your "desire," your "phantasms," in a way that perhaps no philosopher has ever done until now' (BBI 5), as the re-marking or 'folded thought of the fold' of which *Monolingualism* speaks (M 26) (*implicate* from Latin *implicates* 'folded in')? Derrida's oblique self-presentation as an exemplary figure as an *implication* that would have to account for a responsibility?

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<sup>232</sup> For instance, we could look to Derrida's readings of the signature of Nietzsche, as inscribed in both 'Otobiographies' and this text's precursor, 'Interpreting Signatures (Nietzsche/Heidegger): Two Questions', *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1986), pp. 246-62, proposing that the proper name 'Nietzsche' can be substituted by 'Derrida'; that Derrida's reading of 'the corpus of Nietzsche' informs our reading of 'the corpus of Derrida'; and that 'Derrida reading x' might in fact become 'Derrida reading Derrida'.

### III. The paradoxopoetic matrix of testimony

• ‘*As if* [...] I were finally able to say and sign I’<sup>233</sup>

As suggested in Part A, is this fable of ‘Typewriter Ribbon’ not the dream or desire voiced, indeed performed, precisely in Derrida’s playing of the role of martyr here in *Monolingualism*? Having asked the ‘most fatal question’ of how is it possible that this only language that the monolingual is destined to speak is not his and always remains mute for him (M 57-8), a second question arises: How, then, to testify? How to account for – or *give an account of*, testimonially – the logic in which, as with the impossibly unique testimony, ‘[t]he improvisation of some inaugurality is, without the shadow of a doubt, the impossible itself’; this logic in which ‘reappropriation always takes place’; the logic of this aporia which involves (recalling our discussions of translatability) a language that is ‘impossible, unreadable, and inadmissible’ (see M 66-7)? Whilst this ‘how’ will be the target of Chapters 4 and 5, for what remains of this chapter we will begin to set the scene by looking to the (impossible) invention of a language through which to testify as a necessarily poetic act.

How, then, does one orient the inscription of self – not to mention the *I think* of the *cogito* – in proximity to this forbidden language when such an inscription cannot be oriented from the ‘situable’ space and time of a unique and pure mother tongue? (M 33). How does one invent the story of a construction of the *self*, the *autos*, or the *ipse* when the *identificatory* modality is unassured and one does not know how to say *I*?<sup>234</sup> ‘How does one utter a worthwhile “**I recall**” when it is necessary to invent both one’s language and one’s “**I**” [...]?’ (M 31). For whereas the seeming ‘solution’ would be the restoration of the unity (and hence purity) of one’s language, of the *given* One of language (M 28), such a unity, as we have seen, never existed. Never existed, and can never be actualised, in the sense of an *arrived* at (at some distant shore, for instance), as we have seen in our reading of the necessary iterable desterrance of the performative speech act. As if, therefore, there were only ‘events without arrivals’ (M 61), not only for the expatriated but for *any* ‘I’. *Thrown* (*jeté*, and we are also thinking of the jetty) into absolute translation, this monolingual of whom Derrida speaks is not only mute but ‘in a way *aphasic*’, ‘without an originary language, and without a source language [*langue de départ*]’ (M 61):

‘For him, there are only target languages [*langues d’arrivées*], if you will, the remarkable experience being, however, that these languages just cannot manage to reach themselves because they no longer know where they are coming from, what they are speaking *from* and what the sense of their journey is’ (M 61).

Lacking any itinerary, it is this impossible arrival from which *desire* nevertheless springs forth or is borne, ‘even before the ipseity of an *I-me* that would bear it in advance’ (M 61): a desire to *invent* ‘a *first language* that would be, rather, a *prior-to-the-first language*’ destined to translate the

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<sup>233</sup> ‘TR’ 71.

<sup>234</sup> ‘In its common concept, autobiographical anamnesis presupposes *identification*. And precisely not identity. No, an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures’ (M 28).

memory of what, precisely, *did not take place* (M 61) – the arche-engagement or messianic promise of a ‘zero-minus-one of writing’ (M 65) which, although never taking place *as such*, never reaching its destination, is nevertheless ‘not a non-event’ (M 66) – but which nevertheless ought to have left a trace; a trace which, as we are coming to in our imminent reading of the wound and the poetic mark, ‘reveals’ itself in the phantomatic body and in marks and scars. And thus, it would be ‘*as if* a matter of producing the truth of what never took place by avowing it’ (M 61). Again, the promise: of a language that can only be a future, target language, the language of the other, ‘a promised sentence’ (M 62).

But ‘a promised sentence’ that might *perhaps* deliver some sentence; a death sentence, even. An *undesirable* sentencing of the necessarily unknowable ‘worst’, whatever that *might* be. For as we will see in Chapter 4 and in relation to the wider context of suicidal operations and a logic of autoimmunity, whilst this promise of the other is devoid of any determinable or *given* content and as such opens up speech in the structure of a *messianicity*, it nonetheless *resembles* messianism, soteriology or eschatology. The promise of the other is the *messianicity* that opens up and allows for all given *messianisms* insofar as these would find their imprint within the *remark* of this universal structure (see M 68-9). As the wager of thinking together the event and the machine and the risk that this ‘together’ might bring about something *resembling* an ‘unrecognisable monster’, this monolanguage of the other and its ‘fatal precipitation’ entails the ‘unsettling’ threat that this language-to-be invented *might perhaps* become another language of the master or some unknown master-to-come (M 62). Before coming to what some label our contemporary ‘age of extremes’, then, the possibility of extremism – as the logic of hyperbole which does *not*, however, denote a ‘fundamentalism’ – lies at the very heart of experience: “The worst can happen at every turn’ (M 48).<sup>235</sup>

• ‘I promise a language’<sup>236</sup>

‘[T]his promise heralds the uniqueness of a language to come. It is the **“there must be a language”** (which necessarily implies: **“for it does not exist,”** or **“since it is lacking”**), **“I promise a language,”** **“a language is promised,”** which at once precedes all language, summons all speech and already belongs to each language as it does to all speech’ (M 67).

Whilst Derrida acknowledges that he has often made use of the expression ‘the given language’ in order to speak of an available monolanguage (just as the term ‘given’ has been repeatedly used herein to speak both of some determined, empirical instance, and of some gift of or from the other), he nonetheless affirms that ‘there is no given language’ (M 67), if by ‘given’ we are to understand a language that is gathered in a present and presents itself *as such* (Cf. ACTS, esp. 147).

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<sup>235</sup> With respect to the label ‘age of extremes’ as the characterisation of the major trends of the twentieth century and as epitomised by Eric Hobsbawm’s study of the same name, see de Vries, ‘PTR’ 20.

<sup>236</sup> ‘M’ 67.

Rather, ‘there is some language, a gift of language (*es gibt die Sprache*)’ (M 67). Like a ‘charge [*enjoignant*]’, it remains only on the condition of remaining to be given (M 67); of being promised. Promised, moreover, *by* the other. The monolanguage of the other *as* the promise of the other. Of the other, even, *of* or *in* ‘myself’, following the *testimonial* and *testamentary* structure of the dehiscence within auto-(hetero-)affection (see EW 268) outlined in Chapter 2 and the necessary technical prosthesis of ‘my body’ being advanced herein. The ‘myself’ *to* whom and *from* whom I tell the tale or intrigue of this interdiction (see 32 & 35).

Whilst the passage above speaks of the promise as heralding ‘the uniqueness of a language to come’, this uniqueness is not of the One of language, but is a uniqueness *without unity*. And it is here that we can speak of the singularity and uniqueness of any *given* testimony – Satti’s or Derrida’s, *for instance* – as necessarily marked *in* and *on* this (wounding) hyphen of the event-machine. As we read earlier in *Demeure*, a testimony must always be exemplary, and hence singular *and* universalisable. And hence the lament (and simultaneous pleasure) of *Monolingualism* with which we have been grappling thus far. As we read here in *Monolingualism*, this appeal to come [*appel à venir*] which *gathers* language together in advance does so ‘not in its identity of its unity, not even in its ipseity’. Rather, this gathering ‘takes place’ *‘in the uniqueness or singularity of a gathering together of its difference to itself: in difference with itself [avec soi] rather than difference from itself [d’avec soi]’* (M 67-8, emphasis added). What is made clear here is that singularity can only ever be thought precisely *here* (if we can say ‘here’) in the differing and deferring iterability that makes the example exemplary and repeatable, as *neither* the universalising tendency of some concept *nor* the individual, contingent or empirical but rather as the *between* of the ‘folded thought of the fold’ (M 26), of the hyphen or the parenthetical ‘(x)’; ‘here’ as the singular imprint of the re-marking in the universal of this barren, desertified and hence abstract, khōratic place. As the traces of singularity in this quasi-fictional producing, by avowing, the truth of what never ‘took place’. ‘There can be no question of getting out of this uniqueness without unity.’ For singularity cannot be thought in isolation or solipsism. Rather, as this uniqueness without unity, ‘[i]t is not to be opposed to the other, nor even distinguished from the other. It is the monolanguage of the other. The of signifies not so much property as provenance: language is for the other, coming from the other, the coming of the other’ (M 67-8).

• ‘A poem, I never sign(s) it’<sup>237</sup>

Unable to ever fully testify in one’s own name, in the intactness and purity of a signature that is one’s own, this impossible invention of the prior-to-the-first language – this impossible and *impassioning desire* for the idiomatic – is ‘revealed’ exemplarily across Derrida’s oeuvre not only in a thinking of literature but, more specifically, of poetry. In its singular and testimonial *insignificance*,<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> ‘Che’ 237.

<sup>238</sup> In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida describes Bartleby’s famous ‘formula’, ‘**I would prefer not to**’, as ‘this singularly insignificant statement’ (GD 75). Is not this formula also a generalisable testimony that testifies to

its exemplary ‘oblique offering’ of the secret and the call of this secret which points back to the other, literature (encompassing both the ‘literary’ and ‘poematic’ trait, and the *as if* of a generalised fictionality), or the literary signature,<sup>239</sup> is that which – and again we are thinking of the *punctum* – fascinates or holds us spellbound, ‘keeps our passions aroused [*tient notre passion en haleine*], and holds us to the other’ (Passions 29-30, Fr. 68). *Acts* of literature as acts of writing, be they ‘serious’ or ‘staged’, appeal for *acts* of reading in which the *passion* of an impossible decision must take place insofar as it is impossible to decide (as noted above) whether, when I speak of something, I am speaking of the thing itself, or if I am giving an example, either of the ‘thing’, or the fact that *I can* (or *cannot*, precisely) speak of it. And this undecidability holds for the trace in general, for any preverbal gesture even (Passions 142-43 n. 14). ‘If you continue, you will be placed in a department of rhetoric or literature!’, exclaims the ‘other’ voice at the beginning of *Monolingualism* (M 4). But as Derrida writes in ‘Passions’:

[S]uppose I say “**I,**” that I write in the first person or that I write a text, as they say “autobiographically.” No one will be able seriously to contradict me if I claim (or hint by ellipsis, without thematizing it) that I am not writing an “autobiographical” text but a text *on* autobiography of which this very text is an example. No one will seriously be able to contradict me if I say (or hint, etc.) that I am not writing about myself but on ‘**I,**’ on any **I** at all, or on the **I** in general, by giving an example: **I am only an example, or I am exemplary.** [...] **I give an example of an example**’ (Passions 43 n. 14).<sup>240</sup>

Without a certain love for the text, no reading would be possible, Derrida tells us; without the struggle or *corps-à-corps* between reader and text in which the reader’s *desire* is incorporated into the desire of the text (and we are all the while thinking of the suffering *and pleasure* of *Monolingualism*).<sup>241</sup> In which the reader opens or *offers* himself to the desire of language in its search for a presence and fulfilment which is ultimately deferred, in the search for something which remains absent and other than ourselves. Literature, for Derrida, is something that makes room for the long detour that, as Derrida writes in the interview ‘Unsealing (“the old new language”)', but which we can read with his monolingualism in mind:

‘will lead me back to this thing, this idiomatic writing whose purity, I realize, is inaccessible, but about which I continue to dream. I’m not talking about a *style* but an intersection of singularities, habitat, voices, graphism, what moves with you and what your body never leaves. In my memory, what I write resembles a dotted-line drawing that would be circling around a book to be written in what I call for myself the “old new language,” the most archaic and the most novel, therefore unheard-of, unreadable at present’ (Unsealing 118-19).

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the engagement that one did not choose? And can we not find there, as Derrida asks, ‘the secret of a hypothetical reference to some indecipherable providence or prudence?’ (GD 75).

<sup>239</sup> ‘To signify oneself in the insignificant (outside meaning or concept), isn’t this the same thing as signing?’ (SS 40).

<sup>240</sup> The last of the two instances of ‘**I**’ (‘on any I at all, or on the I in general’) are not distinguished typographically in any way, either in the English or the original French (Passions 43 n. 14, Fr. 89 n. 12).

<sup>241</sup> ‘Deconstruction gives pleasure in that it gives desire [...] Here is the pleasure, the very opposite of that arid intellectualism of which deconstruction has so often been accused’ (DO 156).

• ‘You will call poem from now on a certain passion of the singular mark’<sup>242</sup>

‘I would now like to show that this empirico-transcendental or ontico-ontological re-mark, this folding which imprints itself upon the enigmatic articulation between a universal structure and its idiomatic testimony, reverses all the signs without any hesitation’ (M 59).

‘The enigmatic articulation between a universal structure and its idiomatic testimony’: an *articulation* that we might perhaps think in terms of the wound-hyphen of exemplary re-marking, as the ‘connecting part’ or suturing that nonetheless is simultaneously *not* a suturing insofar as it ‘holds apart’. In Chapter 5, this ‘articulation’ will be read again in terms of the ‘piercing’ (*punctum*) of testimony, as the place of the wound in which ‘legibility and illegibility do not equal two’ (SN 60); a *differential* and *testimonial* wound which always necessarily holds some secret and therefore, as with the act of literature, demands a decisional countersignature – ‘*beyond* at least the legibility of what is currently readable, *beyond the final signature*’ (SN 41, emphasis added) – made in what Derrida on several occasions names ‘the night of non-knowledge’ (FL 255). The necessary non-certitude of testimony that Derrida describes in a reading of Celan as ‘the paradoxopoetic matrix of testimony’ (PP 68). The demand for the responsibility of a response (as we will read in Chapter 5 in light of the series of martyr-testimonies) made by a poetic or fictional, and hence *testimonial*, sentence which ‘detaches itself from the presumed source and thus remains locked away [*au secret*]’ (SN 29); the event of a response that must nonetheless remain foreign to any regulative Idea, as machinic program. ‘*Au secret*?; or rather, *passion* as ‘*in place of the secret*. In place of an absolute secret. There would be the passion. There is no passion without secret, this very secret, indeed no secret without this passion’ (SN 28).

But it is specifically by thinking the *poematic mark* and the invention of this unheard-of language as an act of *poetic invention* that we can prepare for thinking together of *passion* and the corporeality, indeed necessary wounding, of the (exemplary) testimony or text. As we read in ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’ (‘What is poetry?’): ‘No poem without accident, no poem that does not open itself like a wound, but no poem that is not also just as wounding’ (Che 297). Moreover, on several occasions Derrida stresses the need to think together testimony and the poetic. In order to testify, we recall, one must invent one’s language and one’s ‘I’ (M 31) ‘without a model and without an assured addressee’ (M 55); one must invent one’s own singularly idiomatic language *without a map or itinerary* (M 58); an impossible invention of which the poetic would be the exemplary experience. For instance, as we read in *Demeure* (and we read this with the ‘event-machine’ in mind), ‘the witness must both conform to the given criteria [i.e. machine, program] and at the same time invent [i.e. the event], in a quasi-poetic fashion, the norms of his attestation’ (D 40; see also PP 65-6). And again: ‘There is here the genius of the witness who reminds us that the testimonial act is poetic or it is not, from the moment it must invent its language and form itself in an incommensurable performative’ (D 82-3). And returning to the abovementioned enjoining or engaging of the reader-

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<sup>242</sup> ‘Che’ 297.



witness to respond to the literary text or mark, it is here a question of the aporia of responsibility, 'when it engages in a poetic signature, at a singular date' (PP 66). Such is the problem, indeed the *passion*, that we are working towards, as we will be reading through the exemplarity of what is *offered* for reading or *given* to be read by the poet Paul Celan, the poet whose lines **'No one / bears witness for the / witness'** silently haunt this entire study (as signalled towards by the problematics laid out in the Introduction to the present chapter). As we read here in 'Poetics and Politics of Witnessing', one of Derrida's readings of Celan: 'Hypothesis to be verified: all responsible witnessing engages in a poetic experience of language' (PP 66).

Whilst it will not be until Chapter 5 that we return explicitly to a discussion of the performative act of testimony as necessarily poetic, Chapter 4 sets up this discussion by preparing the ground in terms of the event (of testimonial and poetic invention) necessarily being an event *of the body*, and taking as exemplary the poetic operation of the corpus of Hélène Cixous, above all where it crosses over with that of Derrida. In our reading of Celan's poetic word in Chapter 5, the terrifying law of technical repeatability that we have seen in all its violences herein is inscribed within the context of 'philosophy in a time of terror', with the task of philosophy being to think *both* the conditions that allow for and necessary conceptual responses to acts of terror such as the 'exemplary' event of 11 September *and* 'the terror of time' *per se*. It is with this 'time of terror' that Chapter 4 begins, insofar as the chapter situates itself within the context of three exemplary texts of Derrida's (published between 1995 and 2003) that respond to the so-called 'contemporary' violences unleashed across the globe. Here, continuing with the logic of pervertibility and 'risk as chance' developed both in the present chapter and in Chapter 2, we follow Derrida's proposition that any 'true' event (be it political or otherwise; should such a distinction hold) is auto-immune, and hence quasi-suicidal, thus demonstrating yet again an inherent auto-deconstruction, as metonymised by *I am the martyr (x)*.

Whilst from Chapter 2 onwards we have seen how the writer's or philosopher's corpus is never inseparable from the corpus that is his 'living body', and whilst this chapter has demonstrated the manner in which philosophical problems are experienced *in* and *on* the auto-bio-thanatographical signatory body, this *corporeality* becomes all the more pronounced in the following chapter, with the exemplary event being described in its biomedical and wounding or operational dimensions. Here, once again, we turn to Derrida's anamnestic 'demonstration'. This time, however, what is recalled is an event which (as with the *arche-yes* of Chapter 3A) Derrida does not remember experiencing 'himself', but which nonetheless leaves its indelible mark not only upon his body but also his philosophical corpus: the operation of circumcision performed upon the not yet fully conscious child. Upon a child, thus, *before* he has recourse to any sovereign or subjective will; *before* he can decide upon any strategy for resistance or aggression.

## Chapter 4: Operativity, *Différance* and the *Testimonial*

### Introduction

[T]he experience of what arrives must be passion, exposure to what one does not see coming and could not predict, master, calculate or program.

–Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*<sup>243</sup>

In the present chapter, we move from the *passion of and for* testimony, on the part of the witness, to a more generalised thinking of *passion* and *testimoniality* as philosophy's deconstructive condition. Having immersed ourselves in the *passion* of the performative event of testimony (as promise) in Chapter 3, we here carry over the essential features of this aporetic and paradoxical structure (as metonymised by the coupling of, or hyphen *between*, the event *and* machine) to a thinking of the performative act or event *per se*, ranging from the most seemingly mundane of (speech) acts to the promise of a 'democracy to come' or the sovereign decision. Thus, whilst Chapter 3 was largely concerned with the experience of the 'I' and 'you' in relation to testimony, literature, law and so-called autobiography, the present chapter extends this to the 'we' of the public and political sphere, taking the scenarios of Chapter 3 and re-reading them in light of (philosophical responses to) acts of terror and major historical events such as that of **11 September** (that 'doubly suicidal' operation that 'will have targeted and hit *the heart* [...] of the prevailing world order' [RSS 95, emphasis added]), in doing so preparing for a discussion of the series or 'community' of exemplary martyrs – as both witnesses and addressees – in Chapters 4 and 5. Having described at length the experience of the *passion* of the witness in Chapter 3, the focus here lies *both* on the im-possibility of the performative act (of testimony, martyrdom or suicide, for instance) for the 'I' (the 'subject', the *sui*, the *self* [soi], the *oneself* [soi-même]) *and* on the experience of a generalised *testimoniality* for both the witness and addressee(s): as the experience of a 'hyper-critical faith' – *without* dogma or religion and without assurance, insurance, knowledge or certitude – that is the *raison d'être* not only of any relation to the other, and thus of any community or social bond, but of the arrival of any event; of any belief *in* the other, including the future (see R 153).

In short, insofar as the performative event is concerned, the axiom we will be following is that the 'event' marks *the limit* of the performative (see Countersignature 39): a necessary failure which we will be reading through the quasi-suicidal logic of autoimmunity which works to *destroy* that which it means to protect. Following this 'ruinous' logic that Derrida developed as a response, precisely, to suicidal operations such as Satti's, the 'radical passivity' ('acti/passivity') or 'force *without* force' of this autoimmune *passion* 'defeats' the concept of the performative, threatening to destroy the very possibility and meaning of both the *sui* and *suicide*, 'turning a certain death drive

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<sup>243</sup> 'D' 90.

against the *autos* itself, against the ipseity that any suicide worthy of its name still presupposes' (R 123).

Whilst the '(quasi-)concept' of the performative is central to the later texts that deal more 'explicitly' with the aporias of contemporary politics and global violences (carried out, for instance, against so-called democracy and in the name of religion), we will look back to earlier and *seemingly* more 'private' texts, reading Satti's performative *operation* as a *corporeal operation of the body* ('passion': an *affect* from without [OED]; as 'an engagement assumed in pain and suffering' ; D 27), as is exemplified in Derrida's 'testimony' to the scene of circumcision, asking what the experience of being 'operated upon' (as decided or signed) brings to a thinking of the operativity of a militant act of resistance such as Satti's and proposing that this prioritisation of the corporeal performance – as thought through the 'passive decision' – broadens and enriches the oft-cited logic of the autoimmune and hospitable political event. Thus we continue the discussion begun in Chapter 3 regarding the 'taking place' of the event *in* and *on* the body, above all the wound, which will be continued both in the present chapter and Chapter 5. Whereas Chapter 2 performed something of an 'autopsy' of the performative act of '**I am dead**', finding it to be more *vital*, in its very spectrality, than it first appeared, the present chapter lays the performative event – above all its 'instant' – on the operating table, rooting around within the body of the act in order to probe further its contradictions *and* possibilities.

Lingering for a moment with the operation of circumcision, it is worth pointing out that, as with the messianic promise of a democracy to come, which Derrida both dissociates from *and* maintains in relation to religious messianisms, the exemplarity of the scene of circumcision – as a performative act undergone by *anyone*, regardless of sex and religion – arises once again (as in *Monolingualism*) from the idiosyncratic experience of the Jewish tradition testified to by Derrida himself. However, following the prioritisation of the *heart* that will soon become apparent, this 'originary' circumcision *interrupts* the relation with both Judaism and Christianity (notably St. Paul's conception of the circumcision of the heart), instead calling for an *other*, more 'resistant', conception of the heart (following the logic of '*hospitality*' and autoimmunity), together with a thinking of the corporeality and incisory logic of the (linguistic) event, as described in our reading of the necessary violence of the bro/eaching (*entame*) of machine-like iterability in Chapter 3. As we read in 'Shibboleth', Derrida's reading of the 'circumcised word' of Paul Celan, a text in which the *law of caesura* of the graphematic, 'poematic' word is aligned, precisely, with *the heart*: 'circumcision would be *just* this, the decision of the word, its sentence, inscribed right on the body, right at the heart, *precisely*' (S 61).

Following the 'seven seals' of *passion* in *Demeure* (see Appendix), we see yet again how *passion* implies the *necessary* suffer-*ance* of an aporia, with the present chapter (indeed this entire study) following Derrida's questioning of 'what it means "to experience the aporia," indeed *to put into operation* the aporia' and his assertion that one must neither stop at the aporia nor overcome it; that

there is no utopic solution to or way out of this aporetic *passion* in which we find ourselves inscribed and which must be *thought* and *negotiated* with before considering *the possibility* of any determined act of resistance, Satti's for instance (A 32). Demonstrating the *necessity* of the aporetic logic of autoimmunity, once again the argument follows the *affirmation* of a logic of sur-vival and the 'for life' that is shown to thwart the sacrificial logic and economy of an operation such as Satti's.

As proposed in Chapter 3A, the minimal differences between Satti's repeated 'takes' and his hesitation in pronouncing his words suggest a quasi-automaticity of the supposedly singular and 'performative' event, *as if* he had been learning his lines by rote, or *by heart*, thus recalling our question at the outset regarding 'application' and learning by heart, a question which we here pose in terms of the invention of the impossible that is necessary for there to be any 'true' deconstructive event.

Reading from texts *at the heart of* which lies 'the question of life and of the living being, of life and death, of life-death' (R 123) (i.e. the spectral hyphen *between* 'life' and 'death' of the *I am dead*; the auto-hetero-affective reference discussed by Derrida and Barthes that defines *the very heart of* the living [see DRB 65], or the element of haunting in which 'deconstruction finds the place most hospitable to it, at the heart of the living present, in the quickest heartbeat of the philosophical' [E 117]), we follow an autoimmune logic of betrayal and contamination *at the heart of* any given concept: a potentially fatal logic by which we come to think the heart firstly in terms of the other *in* me, as heartbeat, and secondly in terms of the heart *as hearth*; the *chez soi* of *ipseity* that in *Monolingualism* was complicated and rendered 'uncanny' and 'foreign'. For what is at stake – as is revealed exemplarily through Satti's militant *operation*, as an operation of *resistance* carried out near the southern border between Lebanon and Israel, *against* Israeli foreign aggressors, but also *against* it/him-self – is a thinking of an *unconditional hospitality* that takes place not only at territorial borders but also at the thresholds and contours of *the body of* the sovereign, 'performing' 'P'; of the graphematic (temporal and spatial) mark; and of the very 'concept of the concept'. The threshold of the body of 'the concept of the concept' which, as with the delimiting borders of genre seen in Chapter 3A, *opens itself* to allow for disseminative and infiltrative delimitation, for an 'aconceptual concept or another kind of concept, heterogeneous to the philosophical concept of the concept' (Afterword 118). And hence the 'quasi-concepts' that we have been describing throughout, as each of the chain of terms that loosely translate (but are not synonymous to) *différance*, and are being put to use herein to demonstrate further the nuanced dimensions of the generalised *passion* and *testimoniality* that we are prioritising.

Following this motif of the *heart(h)*, we will argue that a generalised and 'operative' *passion* – as the 'passivity of resistance' that 'resists thought because it is what *does* the most' and '*makes* the most happen' – must be thought as the necessity impurity at the heart of any 'pure' event, and thus as 'the impossible itself, at the heart the possible' (Provocation xxxiii-xxxiv). Whilst Satti's operation was carried out in the name or defence of freedom, sovereignty and autonomy, the scandal is that

such an operation is always destined to suicide itself, insofar as this *passion* signals a *heteronomy* that rebels against the decisionist conception of sovereignty, opening autonomy on to itself as ‘a figure of its heartbeat’ (PF 69). For the ‘activity’ of this necessarily *unconscious* (and yet paradoxically, responsible) operation, in its ‘passivity’, is ‘delivered over to the other, suspended over the other’s heartbeat’ (PF 69). *Passion*, then, as the im-possible wager or mission of the promise, the persistence of ‘an antinomy at the heart of every –nomy, that is, the source of every autoimmune process’ (R 47-8).

Whilst what will be at stake in Chapter 5 will be the always inherent risk of the suicidal self-effacement – total annihilation, even – of the archival mark (for instance the proper name or date; and hence our attention to names and dates herein), this principle of ruin at the heart of both the archive and the performative operation must nonetheless be affirmed. All the while asking how to respond, within *reason*, to the inherent risk of the disappearance of truth, the proposition nonetheless is that in order to ‘succeed’, a performative act must ‘free itself’ from knowledge (see PF 69); that it must be a nocturnal operation carried out in a testimonial space of a certain ‘truth *without* truth’ (following the Blanchotian logic of the *sans*, which we will be thinking through the differential and hospitable mark of circumcision as an *other* truth that is simultaneously ‘cut off’ from *and* ‘bound’ to truth) in which non-knowledge and the risk of madness, even, can be found *at the heart of* reason. In short, this *passion* is to be translated as the perilous *affirmation* of the double *yes* that ‘resides at the heart of deconstruction’ (Mnemosyne 20).

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## I: Real and symbolic suicides

At around two o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday, three soldiers of the Lebanese army, rifled ready, led me to a jeep where an officer was dozing.

[...]

He looked at my passport. He said, in French:

'You're coming from there?' (He pointed toward Shatila.)

'Yes.'

'And you saw?'

'Yes.'

'You're going to write about it?'

'Yes.'

–Jean Genet, 'Four Hours in Shatila'<sup>244</sup>

### • “One of the questions I will not avoid is that of religion.”

In the present chapter, we will begin *in media res*: in the centre of the politico-theological stage upon which suicidal operations such as Satti's have, as outlined in the General Introduction above, developed and taken on their current form. Here we take as our starting point three texts of Derrida's that appear relatively late in his corpus: 'Faith and Knowledge' (first published 1996, but dated '1995, Laguna'), 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides' (2001) and *Rogues* (2003), each of which engages either directly with suicidal operations or, as in the case of 'Faith and Knowledge', with the theologico-political context in which such acts are inscribed. Whilst this study argues that the testimoniality, martyrdom and passion in question, together with many of the key 'logics' or 'quasi-concepts' through which we are reading Satti's and Derrida's testimonies (for instance: spectrality, fictionality, theatricality, affirmation, survival and pervertibility, to name but a few) are to be found at work 'implicitly'<sup>245</sup> throughout Derrida's oeuvre (thus disputing to some degree the tendency amongst some readers to point to religious, ethical or political 'turns' in his thinking; 'turns' which are commonly located, respectively, in 'Faith and Knowledge' of 1995/6 and *Specters of Marx* of 1993<sup>246</sup>), these three texts are nevertheless exemplary insofar as they thematise such a theologico-political and media-theatricalised context and, above all, are a response to both the terror of so-called 'contemporary' acts of violence such as Satti's (whether carried out 'in the name of' religious or secular ideals) as well as to the various political, philosophical and media responses to such acts. Furthermore, it is in 'Faith and Knowledge' that we find one of Derrida's most sustained (although far from unprecedented) readings of *tekhnē* and tele-technics, a reading which is continued in the subsequent two texts, and it is here in this triad, beginning with 'Faith and Knowledge', that we find Derrida's most 'explicit' considerations of the quasi-suicidal logic of autoimmunity: of the 'double bind' of the threat *and* chance in the promise (R 82) which has already

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<sup>244</sup> Jean Genet, 'Four Hours in Shatila', in *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Albert Dichy, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 208-28 (p. 227).

<sup>245</sup> It is worth recalling the original sense of *to implicate* (from which *implicit* is derived), as 'to entwine' and 'to entangle', but also (in the 16th and 17th centuries) as 'to employ' – as we will be elaborating upon in terms of the 'operativity' of passion (OED).

<sup>246</sup> Derrida refutes such claims in *Rogues* (R 39).

been so central in our readings of testimony and the linguistic, performative event; of, as Derrida puts it elsewhere and which we can relate back to the auto-deconstruction of the (x) of ‘**I am the martyr (x)**’ discussed in Chapter 3A, the ‘autodeconstruction *in* every concept, in the concept of the concept’ (H 362, emphasis added).

Taking these texts as a starting point, we will subsequently fold our reading back into and across other texts (above all *Demeure*, where we find the ‘seven seals’ of *passion*, which in effect form the backbone of this study) in order to then return to the milieu of this triad in Chapter 5, where we will read the phemonemon of suicidal operations and martyr-testimonies in light of the *terror* of the testimonial *it is happening* of seriality, *tekhne* and exemplarity.

Let us begin with ‘Faith and Knowledge’. Gathered amongst scholars in 1994 in **Capri** to speak of the ‘question of religion’ and the (seemingly unprecedented) ‘resurgence’ of ‘this ageless thing’ (FK 44), the 52 cryptic sections through which this text is presented (‘like a field of ruins and of mines’ [FK 76] – the bombs that, as we saw in *Monolingualism*, are never far from the hyphen<sup>247</sup>) centre, in the present reading at least, around the so-called ‘war of religions’ and the acts of violence carried out by various ‘fundamentalisms’ (and let us immediately take note of the hyperbolization and desire for purity of origin brought to mind by this word) *in the name of* religion, together with the increasingly central role played by the technoscientific, tele-biotechnological and by media-theatricalisation (see also AANJ). Or, these 52 ‘mines’ centre, yet again, around the hyphen of the ‘event-machine’, if we are to understand this as a translation of ‘faith *and* knowledge’; of a certain *fiduciary* rationality, paradoxical as this may seem. In other words, around faith, performativity and technoscientific or tele-technological performance (see FK 57).

Faith and knowledge: between believing one knows and knowing one believes,  
the alternative is not a game.  
–Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge’<sup>248</sup>

In beginning to speak of religion, a potential riposte immediately arises: why speak of religion when Satti’s operation, as discussed in the General Introduction above, was carried out in the name of the Lebanese Communist Party, only to later be appropriated by the Shi’ite party of Hezbollah (by the so-called ‘resurgence’ of the religious)?<sup>249</sup> Thus it may appear that the need to address such an act in religious terms in general, or from within an Islamic discourse on martyrdom (as would, perhaps, be an *automatic* reaction nowadays) would be disqualified. And why speak of religion when we have already made it clear that the martyrdom, passion and testimony which we are tracing are structural and secular, devoid of dogmatism and concerned with the experience of language and the

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<sup>247</sup> See Anidjar’s ‘Introduction: Once More, Once More’, in Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-39 (pp. 37-8).

<sup>248</sup> ‘FK’ 76.

<sup>249</sup> As testified to in *Three Posters* in the interview with the politician, the appropriation of such acts of resistance by Hezbollah was due in part to what we can call, using the terminology of ‘speech act’ theorists, the ‘failure’, lack of ‘efficacy’ or even ‘infelicity’ of the Communist Party.

idiom, with technology and ‘performance’, and the dislocated experience of *différance*? For a start, however, when we look to the narrative that ensues within each of Satti’s ‘takes’, certain motifs such as the afterlife, immortality and heroism of the martyr prevail, arguably inherited from the rhetoric of Islamic cultures of martyr-commemoration and from discourses of the sacred. Furthermore, whilst this study is a reading of Jamal Satti’s martyr-testimony, it is also with a view to discovering what this gesture of ‘reading with Jacques Derrida’ can tell us about a phenomenon such as suicidal operations and martyr-testimonies, as well as the precariousness of the archive and witnessing, *today*, in a ‘today’ in which such acts of violence remain largely motivated by, or at least take the alibi of, religion.

‘Faith and Knowledge’ is also pivotal in the present study because of the proper names and dates inscribed within it, above all in the last paragraph (parenthetical, let us stress; but all the more important for this, in our reading), inserted a year later in **1995**, which we already began to read in Chapter 1. What is important here is that we are choosing to read this as an at least encrypted response to the events of the 1980s and 1990s in Palestine and Lebanon, with the proper name **Chatila** functioning metonymically (or as a *shibboleth* of sorts, as Derrida calls the checkpoints at Ramallah; Malabou, Counterpath 263) as a register of the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance to the brutality of Israeli invasion and occupation that is not necessarily explicitly voiced in Derrida’s oeuvre. Quoting and countersigning *Genet à Chatila* (Genet had been one of the first to witness, and bear witness, to the massacres at the **Sabra** and **Chatila** camps), ‘*of which so many of the premises deserve to be remembered here, in so many languages, the actors and the victims, and the eyes and the consequence, all the landscapes and the spectres*’, the last but one sentence of ‘Faith and Knowledge’ reads as follows: “‘*One of the questions I will not avoid is that of religion.*’”<sup>250</sup>

As will become clear as we proceed, the present chapter argues that the question of religion cannot be so quickly excluded but rather lies – structurally, at least, as the ‘binding’ or ‘linking’ (*ligare, religare*) and/or the ‘gathering’ (*legere, relegere*) at the ‘double source’ of *religion* (FK 71) which we will be ‘situating’ both in the hyphen and the wound and event of circumcision – *at the heart of* the very experience of *différance*, re-markability and the idiom, and that in fact this potentially desired bracketing or exclusion is embroiled in our ongoing questions regarding exemplarity or, as we will phrase it here, singular ‘revelation’ vis-à-vis a structure of ‘revealability’.

Whilst in what follows we will be tracing a conception of *passion* that can be termed, as some readers have done, ‘radically atheist’ or, in Derrida’s words, ‘hyper-atheological’ (DP 165), insofar as it is premised upon both a thinking of finitude and hence sur-vival (i.e. the responsibility of a secular mortality, as opposed to the immortal saint or martyr figure or the religious ideas of the economy and *telos* of the afterlife) and the necessary openness to corruption and imperfection that is far from religious ideals of ‘the good’ or ‘the best’, we are nevertheless wary of rushing too hastily

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<sup>250</sup> Genet, *Genet à Chatila*, ed. Jérôme Hankins (Paris: Solin, 1992), p. 103. As cited in FK 101. In fact, this is only the last line if we do not count the dating of ‘**Laguna, 26 April 1995**’ as a part of the text; a move that we would be hesitant to make.



into an exclusion of either ‘the religious’ or, in particular, the theologico-political and its Abrahamic heritage.<sup>251</sup> Indeed, as Derrida states in the 2001 ‘Death Penalties’ interview (in which he speaks of the figures of Christ, Joan of Arc and Al-Hallaj as paradigmatic or exemplary of a ‘religious accusation [...], launched or inspired by a religious authority, which is then taken up by that of the state, which decides on the death sentence – and which carries it out’; DP 144):

‘I am pursuing as far as possible the necessity of a hyper-atheological discourse, but at the same time, I do not cease to meditate on Abrahamic culture (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) without the least desire to destroy it or to disqualify it’ (DP 165).

Rather than disqualify the Abrahamic, what interests Derrida is the deconstruction (i.e. countersignature) of, in particular, the ‘Christian’ landscape of the deconstruction (*Destruktion*) that he inherits from previous thinkers such as Heidegger; a deconstruction that *must* and yet *cannot* pass through or surpass (i.e., yet again, *exceed*) this Christian landscape without being *marked* by it, as we see in the repeated references to the Latinity (or, rather, the Latin-Roman-Christian heritage) of both Literature (see D, esp. 20-5) and globalisation (the *globalatinization* of which ‘Faith and Knowledge’ speaks) and indeed in Derrida’s emphasis on the *universalization* of the Latin word *religion* which we are reading as a universalisable experience of faith.

Although Derrida does not speak of suicidal operations here (or even of the ‘concept’ of suicide) *as such*, ‘Faith and Knowledge’ is an important precursor to both ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides’, an interview carried out in response to the suicidal attacks of **11 September**, and the subsequent *Rogues*, wherein Derrida speaks of the ‘concept’ of suicide in relation to the paradoxical suicide of democracy (see R 33, 37) in seeking to protect itself, for instance against ‘terrorist’ suicidal operations such as the attack on the World Trade Center (R 40). Once again, we find ourselves moving between *given* instances of suicide and/or martyrdom (not to mention murder, which in *Rogues* is aligned with suicide) and a certain (*quasi*-)concept of suicide, which we are here aligning with a structural or formal sense of *passion*. Or, to use Derrida’s terms: ‘real and symbolic suicides’, as exemplified by the ‘extraordinary economy’ of a doubly suicidal force of the **11 September** attacks (or, as exemplified by the ‘extraordinary economy’ of a doubly passionate or martyrological force that we are arguing is *borne witness to* by Satti’s martyr-testimony-operation), in which the hijackers incorporated two suicides in one: their own (the ‘operational’; *martyrdom* as the execution of a strategic, militant operation) and that of the American democracy which welcomed, armed and trained them (the ‘symbolic’; the structural *passion* of which we are speaking, as *operation of the other*, and against which the ‘itself’ can only *ever* be defenceless) (RSS 95).

And thus, with this ‘doubly suicidal force’ of each time singular martyrdoms and suicides vis-à-vis a structural *passion*, the following anachronistic reading (following the ‘absolute anachrony of

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<sup>251</sup> The prime example of a reading of Derrida’s work as ‘radically atheist’ is Martin Hägglund’s *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, which we will return to below. Regarding the importance of the Abrahamic in Derrida’s writings, see Anidjar’s ‘Introduction’ to *Acts of Religion* and his *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

our time, the disjunction of all self-contemporaneity’, FK 52) in effect takes us in and out of the desert, as will become clear: from the desert of abstraction to **Hasbayya** in the **Bekaa Valley** or to **New York** and back again, or vice versa; from **6 August, 1985** and **11 September, 2001** to the ageless time of *kbōra* and back, or vice versa; and, eventually, from **Mount Moriah** to the instant of *every* decision, to *the heart of every* instant of the (responsible) performative act and back again, to use a trope that will be ‘vital’ (in both senses) in our thinking of autoimmunity. Or, again, *vice versa*. Moving back and forth, *reflecting* between the desertified and the concrete, we say ‘from’ and ‘to’, but it is not yet clear *from* which of the two we begin. Unless – and we leave this as an open question – this ‘beginning’ take place, so to speak, *on* or *in* the tain of the mirror that is the hyphen of the empirico-transcendental, *in* and *marked by* this aporia of *différance* and *passion* that ‘is’ the iterable re-marking and re-markability between the two; *in* the passion of this undecidable experience. As previously, it is again a question of exemplarity and the hyperbolic *beyond* of aporia: a question of whether the exemplary example (**11 September, New York** or **6 August 1985, Hasbayya**, *for example*), as an event of *revelation* (*Offenbarung*, to use the Heideggerian idiom that Derrida countersigns), *reveals* or *bears witness*, and does so *vividly*, *to* a general law, indeed *reveals* or *bears witness to revealability* itself; or whether (the iterable and always double law of) *revealability* (*Offenbarkeit*; *kbōra*, the desert, the *yes*, for instance) is more originary and thus remains independent of (‘immune to’, we might say) all historicity and determined instances (see FK 54-5). *Perhaps*, as Derrida states here, not leaving us the assurance of any signposting, ‘one must take one’s chance in resorting to the most concrete and the most accessible, but also the most barren and desert-like, of all abstractions’ (FK 42). Which way, then, to turn? And *from where* do we depart?

Returning to passion and martyrdom, what is spoken of here in ‘Faith and Knowledge’ is a *certain* martyrdom, in precisely the ‘originary’ sense and allied with a generalised *testimoniality* that is *at the heart of* not only this study but, as is the major proposition here, *experience itself*:

‘Like benediction, prayer pertains to *the originary regime of testimonial faith or of martyrdom* that we are trying to think here *in its most “critical” force*’ (FK 100, emphasis added).

Continuing with the undecidability of revealability-revelation, this ‘originary regime of testimonial faith or of martyrdom’ would be ‘situated’ (were such a thing possible), in the ‘place without place’ and ageless time of the abovementioned *kbōra* and desert. For is not this ‘immemoriality of the desert in the desert’ (FK 59) the aporetic – indeed autoimmune – ‘time’ and ‘place’ of the event of the arche-promise, the *yes* or the dreamed of idiom that ‘never took place’, the ‘elsewhere’ of the *férence* of *différance* that was so central for our reading of the ‘situating of the self’ in *Monolingualism*? Without this *kbōratic* desert in the desert,

‘*there would be neither act of faith, nor promise, nor future, nor expectancy without expectation of death and of the other, nor relation to the singularity of the other. The chance of this desert in the desert (as of that which resembles to a fault, but without reducing itself to, that via negativa which makes its way from a Graeco-Judaico-Christian tradition) is that in uprooting the tradition that bears it, in atheologizing it, this abstraction, without denying faith, liberates a universal rationality and the political democracy that cannot be dissociated from it*’ (FK 57).

In its ‘most extreme abstraction’, this ‘desert in the desert’ would be the place ‘which *makes possible*, opens, hollows or infinitizes the other’ (FK 55, emphasis added). The paradox of a universal, *fiduciary rationality* that demands to be thought (faith *and* knowledge; the impossible and terrifying wager of the ‘event-machine’) and that would open up the space of the messianic promise and an impossible justice to-come: such is ‘the originary regime of testimonial faith or of martyrdom’ that we are trying to think ‘in its most “critical” force’. And whilst we stated that we would leave the question as to *from where* we ‘begin’ open – open to further layers of questioning and further translations – we can nevertheless look to Derrida’s words here to at least set us on our way. Speaking of *khōra*,<sup>252</sup> as the Greek noun which ‘says the immemoriality of a desert in the desert of which it is neither a threshold nor a mourning’, Derrida writes:

*‘The question remains open, and with it that of knowing whether this desert can be thought and left to announce itself “before” the desert that we know (that of the revelations and the retreats, of the lives and deaths of God, of all the figures of kenosis or of transcendence, of religio or of historical “religions” [and, we can add, of religious testimonies and martyrdoms]); or whether, “on the contrary,” it is “from” this last desert that we can glimpse that which precedes the first <l’avant-premier>, what I call the desert in the desert. The indecisive oscillation, that reticence (epoché or Verhaltenheit) already alluded to above (between revelation and revealability, Offenbarung and Offenbarkeit, between event and possibility or virtuality of the event), must it not be respected for itself? Respect for this singular indecision or for this hyperbolic outbidding between two originarities, the order of the “revealed” and the order of the “revealable,” is this not at once the chance of every responsible decision and of another “reflecting faith,” of a new “tolerance”?’ (FK 59).*

It is from here that we will be ‘situating’ ourselves: in this ‘originary regime of testimonial faith or of martyrdom’ in which the testimonial event of decision, as *passion*, ‘takes place’, as we will be exploring in Part II in a discussion of the event as an impossible and violent invention of the other. An event of *passion* and autoimmunity, a wounding *operation* of the other that, in order to be responsible, must always inhabit this ‘indecisive oscillation’, without this ever becoming an alibi that stoops to indecision, deferral or even skepticism.

And this aporetic undecidability between desert-like abstraction and the concrete, *given* event, is also to be thought in terms of the impossibility of bracketing the religious. For as we read, the desert – as we know it – is traditionally the place of revelations and miracles. What is of interest for us is the manner in which, from *Specters of Marx* (1993) onwards, religious faith, testimony and even passion become abstracted and emptied of all dogmatism and determined content, thus giving rise to the structure of the messianic promise and generalised *testimoniality* that has already been so central in Chapter 3 and to which we are now adding a further element: that of the logic of a structural *passion*, as the violence of corporeal *affect*, as a *desire* for the impossible, and as autoimmunity. This ‘messianicity without messianism’ would be a ‘general structure of experience’ which depend on no messianism, follows no determinate revelation, and belongs properly to no

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<sup>252</sup> Derrida uses the spelling *chora* here in ‘Faith and Knowledge’ but, for the sake of consistency, we are following the spelling used in ‘Khōra’ in *On the Name* (ON).

Abrahamic religion (FK 56) or, as Derrida puts it in *Rogues*, entails an act of faith that is ‘irreligious and without messianism’ (R xiv); a messianicity *beyond* messianism. As such, whilst the event of revelation – a given testimony or martyrdom such as Satti’s or Derrida’s – reveals *more vividly* a general structure, what Derrida is proposing is that this logic ‘has no need of *the event of revelation or the revelation of an event*’ and that ‘it heeds to think the possibility of such an event but not the event itself’ (GD 49; see also TR 74). However, as is the case across Derrida’s paleonymic re-inventions and the legacies that cannot so easily be disinherited but rather must be countersigned and thus transformed, rather than choosing an altogether different name, the name (‘messianicity’, ‘passion’, ‘testimoniality’) is obliged to bear the trace of that which it displaces and reinvents, in this case the Abrahamic religions (see FK 56).

### **Autoimmunity**

Let us recall the passion *of* and *for* testimony presented in Chapter 3A: ‘Testimony seems to presuppose the instance of the instant that, at that very instant, however, it destroys. *It destroys it as if it were destroying its own condition of possibility*’ (D 32, emphasis added). And let us re-fold this thought of the integrity of the instant into the later discussions of autoimmunity: ‘the biological processes by which an organ *tends to destroy*, in a quasi-spontaneous and *more than suicidal* fashion, some organ or other, one or another of its own immunitary protections’ (R 124, emphasis added). The *double bind*, then, of threat *and* chance (‘not alternatively or by turns promise and/or threat but the threat *in* the promise itself’ [R 82]); ‘the best’ and ‘the worst’ occupying the same space and resembling each other in their very structure; self-protection *as* the exposure to *self*-destruction from *without* (again, auto-hetero-thanato-affection; *passion*, both of the ‘body’ of the ‘concept’, of the martyr-witness, and of the mark). In short, the passion of *autoimmunity* as the condition of the event. *Passion*, then, as the ‘constitutive’ suffering and exposure of a ‘radical passivity’ or ‘archi-passivity’ (see D 26-7, trajectory 3), to use terms central in the work of both Levinas and Blanchot and countersigned, albeit without using the same name, by Derrida.<sup>253</sup> Or, as we read in the 1965 reading of (Blanchot’s reading of) Antonin Artaud, ‘La parole soufflée’, of ‘the “unpower” (Artaud speaking of himself) “essential to thought” (Blanchot)’ (PS 171). In what follows, we will summarise the manner in which this *as if* suicidal autoimmune logic *affects* the (performative) event (of testimony, for instance; or even – and this is the scandal and the cruelty – of the ‘successful’ martyrdom or suicide), the concepts of sovereignty and freedom (and by inference the intentionality and *telos*, as ‘goal’ or ‘destination’, of decision, suicide and sacrifice), and the ‘self’ or *autos* (*ipseity*), or the ‘witness-I’), showing it to be a translation of what we can call Derrida’s ‘passion for the impossible’ (insofar as the only possible event is that which, paradoxically, destroys its conditions of possibility), and indeed of the ‘quasi-concept’ of *passion* itself, insofar as it is an aporetic and paradoxical *sufferance* to be borne and endured (again, the *porter* of *porter témoignage*), and

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<sup>253</sup> Derrida speaks of the ‘constitutive autoimmunity’ of democracy in *Rogues* (R 63; see also 72).

insofar as it is *a thing of the body*. And let us recall that what is at stake here, which we are working towards and will discuss further in Chapter 5, is the passion of autoimmunity as the *possibility* of that radical evil without which there would be no responsibility and ‘nothing could be done (well)’ (FK 82).

Whilst this logic of autoimmunity can be traced back across Derrida’s corpus as yet another translation – although not an exact synonym – of the passionate logic of *différance* and indeed of *kebōra*, as described above (see R 35), it is in the 1995 ‘Faith and Knowledge’ that it is first audibly voiced and named as such, with this logic then forming the backbone, so to speak, of ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides’ and *Rogues*. Whereas in these texts Derrida relates this *quasi*-logic back to earlier logics such as that of the *pharmakon* (see RSS 124) and in turn ‘*applies*’ it to – or better put, *reveals* how it had always been *at work within* (recalling the ‘auto-deconstruction’ of the ‘(x)’ in Chapter 3A) – concepts of democracy, freedom and sovereignty, our priority here is to take these corporeal, ‘acti/passive’, limitrophic and antinomial elements of autoimmunity and fold them back into, thus augmenting and further elucidating, the ‘seven seals’ of *passion* presented in *Demeure* (see Appendix).<sup>254</sup> Thus, by thinking together these two ‘logics’ of *passion* and autoimmunity, in time combining them with ‘a poetics of the event’, and by thinking the two in relation to the contemporary global phenomenon of suicidal operations, we take Derrida’s thinking further than he himself had the chance to do. Having summarised ‘the plural logic of the aporia’ (A 20) to be suffered yet nonetheless affirmed (the ‘I suffer *and* take pleasure’ of *Monolingualism*), we will (both in the latter part of this chapter and in Chapter 5) consider further ‘the invention of the impossible’ heralded in Chapter 3 in terms of a performative *act* of poetic invention *of* the other (an ‘allo-confession’, or ‘allo-decision’), with the poetic mark revealing exemplarily a necessary corporeal affect, interruption, wounding and self-effacement (again, a *quasi*-suicide). In short, the passion *of* the body of the poetic and martyred mark (again, the double genitive), insofar as the mark ‘itself’ is wounded *and* wounding, effaces or destroys itself *and* creates its conditions of possibility.

Before proceeding, it is worth recalling what we mean by ‘passion’ by returning briefly to *Demeure* and subsequently weaving what is proposed therein into our readings of these three texts on/of autoimmunity. Here we read that ‘passion’ ‘implies an engagement that is assumed in pain and suffering’ (D 27, trajectory 5), which we will here read through the pain and suffering of the autoimmune, *affected* and wounded body, and through the suffering of the aporia and double bind. This experience is one ‘without mastery and thus without active subjectivity’; the experience of a passion as the ‘archi-passivity’ or acti/passivity that we have already begun to explore in our reading of ‘Différance’ in Chapter 2 and which leads to the proposal that *différance*, which ‘can only be

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<sup>254</sup> In presenting the ‘seven seals’ of the trajectories of passion that run across Blanchot’s *récit*, Derrida emphasises, yet again, the manner in which both L/literature and P/passion are ‘burdened with Christian Latinity’, pointing to the universalisation of religion (what he names *globalatinization*), as discussed in the earlier ‘Faith and Knowledge’ (D 25). See esp. trajectory 1.

written in the grammar of a certain middle voice' (although not confined to this historical grammar), might be translatable as 'passion' (D 26-7, trajectories 3 & 5), with this passion here recalling the 'archi-passivity' of Levinas and Blanchot (see D 26-7, trajectory 3). (Lingering for a moment with this *certain* middle voice, and returning to our motif of the hyphen-wound, we will in time ask whether we can think 'the entire history without history' of this middle voice, 'and perhaps the neuter of the narrative voice' – 'a voice without person' and, recalling *Monolingualism*, 'without the narrative voice from which the "I" posits and identifies itself' – *on* or *through* the hyphen of the *yes*, *kbōra* and re-markability, as that which is 'opened in passion'; see D 26-7, trajectories 3 & 5.)

As recounted in our three exemplary texts, the *passion* of autoimmunity is a logic that can be extended 'without limit', *beyond* the circumscribed domain of biology from where it stems, 'in the form of an *implacable law*' (RSS 94, emphasis added); a movement which, following the logic of finitude and survival that we began to trace in Chapter 2, functions to destroy that which it means to protect (R 36); a movement whereby 'a living being, in *quasi*-suicidal fashion, "itself" works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its own immunity' (RSS 94) in a paradoxical logic of 'autoimmune auto-indemnification' (FK 78; see also 80 n. 27).<sup>255</sup> Whilst Derrida speaks in this particular citation of a 'living being', we can however – following Derrida – extend this to the (stigmatic) indivisibility, purity and immunity (i.e. the defence mechanisms or 'border controls') of the 'itself, self-sameness or *ipseity* not only of the sovereign, living being but also of the corpus of any given 'concept' – testimony, the promise, sacrifice, democracy or sovereignty, for instance; and even, scandalously, the 'itself' or *sui* of suicide or martyrdom – the instant of the 'living present' in which an act (a decision, for example) is 'executed' and, eventually, the corpus of the (poetic and archival) mark, thus making of this autoimmunity a translation of the double bind, aporia or *testimonial* undecidability of the Derridean logic of im-possibility (what we might, with caution, call Derrida's 'passion for the impossible'<sup>256</sup>), whereby any 'concept' or 'act' is only possible in its very im-possibility.

*Passion*, then, as the autoimmune operation of the other 'in' me. As Thomas Carl Wall notes at the outset of his study of 'radical passivity' in the thinking of Levinas, Blanchot and Agamben, before being simply opposed to activity, this radical passivity

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<sup>255</sup> Regarding the development of the lexical resources of immunity in the biological domain into a general logic of auto-immunity, which 'seems indispensable to us today for a thinking of the relations between faith and knowledge, religion and science, as well as the duplicity of sources in general', see 'FK' 80 n. 27. See also 'RSS' 187-88 n. 7 & 'R' 109.

<sup>256</sup> The phrase 'the passion for the impossible', as well as 'the passion for the unforeseeable or unknowable' (with which we could translate 'testimonial') is used by John D. Caputo in his *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, but as the means to an entirely different reading of Derrida to that being offered herein. By 'impossible', however, Caputo is referring to what is impossible for human mortals but not for God, and thus an *ideal* possibility that we desire, or which impassions us in its inaccessibility. See John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. xxi. In contradistinction, our reading of the impossible is as that which is *not* an inaccessible ideal – an utopic place to be reached – but rather is a necessary passion to be suffered and negotiated in the (always divided) 'here and now', with every step. In this sense, the present reading falls more in line with that of Martin Hägglund in his *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. See Chapter 2 note 86 above.

'is passive with regard to *itself*, and thus it submits to itself as though it were an exterior power. Hence, radical passivity conceals, or harbors in itself, or communicates with, a *potential*; it is always outside itself and its own other. Passive with regard to itself, the essential passivity of the subject must undergo itself, suffer itself, feel itself *as other*. In this sense, passivity is purely passionate.'<sup>257</sup>

In evoking these motifs of the (borders between) 'within-without', we speak here of the 'internal' strangeness and non-identity of *Monolingualism*, but also of mourning, as pointed towards in Chapter 2, precisely as an 'originary' experience. As Derrida clarifies, and as is useful here, this question of the event of the other 'in me' does not mean 'that I have someone in me, like a sort of little machine, a ventriloquist, who takes action in my place.' Rather, it means that the other who arrives to me 'is in some sense before me' – a 'pre-originary intervention of the other in me' (IS 89) – with this 'pre-' or 'before' being thought in terms of a certain 'positioning' (a 'being faced with') and a responsibility, for instance that of being 'before the law' (law: as juridical, as in the testimonial scene; or as the law of the other or the maddening laws of language that plagued us in our reading of *Monolingualism*). Whilst I can only gain access to my selfhood or *ipseity* from this relation to the other in me, the other – 'who is in me, greater than I' – can nevertheless not be incorporated or introjected (Perf. P 468).

Through addressing the event of invention as an autoimmune and corporeal *operation of the other* (an 'operation' exemplified in the scene of circumcision) we will also return to the religious heritage of Derrida's thought and the 'hyper-atheism' of which he speaks in the passage cited above as a radical separation from, or reinventive countersignature of, the theological, in time coming to read Derrida's 'relation' to 'the religious' as a 'relation *without* relation' that can be better thought through the movement of the simultaneous binding *and* unbinding of the *circumcisional* mark of *différance*. And it is here that Satti's testimony functions exemplarily yet again, revealing *more vividly* an internal paradox in which the two, paradoxical as it may seem, come together. For what will become clear is that, as noted above, this 'ruinous' logic of autoimmunity (see R 45), in destroying my own protections and in doing so at least threatening to commit suicide, harms not only myself – ('I') but also the 'itself' (the *I*, the *ego* or the *autos*, *ipseity* itself): and thus the 'host as hostage' of which *Monolingualism* speaks (M 20). Worse still, not only does this autoimmunity consist in committing suicide, but 'in compromising the *sui*- or self-referentiality, the *self* or *sui* of suicide itself. Autoimmunity is more or less suicidal [i.e. *quasi*-suicidal], but, more seriously still, it threatens to rob suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity' (R 45), *as if* making '**I am the martyr (x)**' translatable not only by '**(I) am the martyr (x)**', but also '**(I) am the (martyr) (x)**'. Robbed of intentionality, economy and *telos*, the suicidal sacrifice of martyrdom loses its religious (and secular, militant) value (its 'in the name of'), replaced instead by an affirmation of finitude, mortality and sur-vival that, scandalously, is made possible by the *passion* of this quasi-suicidal autoimmunity: 'a

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<sup>257</sup> Wall, *Radical Passivity*, p. 1.

principle of sacrificial self-destruction ruining the principle of self-protection (that of maintaining its self-integrity intact), *and this in view of some sort of invisible and spectral sur-vival* (FK 87).

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## II. The invention of the impossible

‘It is thus the place of which we must speak: not necessarily *from* this place or *in view of* this place but on the subject of the possibility or impossibility *of* such a place.’

–Derrida, *Rogues*<sup>258</sup>

In Chapter 1 we proposed that another way of addressing (rather than escaping from) the circularity of the antinomic ‘slogan’ ‘Deconstruction can never be applied / Deconstruction can only ever be applied’ would be look to how this aporia might be played out or ‘performed’ in the realm of testimony. And, towards the end of Chapter 3B, having laid out the impossibility of any pure act (or ‘application’) of testimony, we proposed that what remains is an im-possible act of invention, in which ‘I’ must invent a language-to-come through which I might testify. Rather than simply reiterating the ‘formula’ whereby ‘invention is only possible when it is impossible’ (to paraphrase; see Psyche 44), we propose that it is more instructive here to see how this paradox plays itself out across the event of autoimmune circumcision, thus allowing us both to continue to think the corporeality of ‘the operation of the other’ and, insofar as circumcision (like testimony) is *supposed* to take place only once, to think the ‘one time’ of the historical event. Here, in thinking together this impossible ‘one time’ of the event of circumcision, as a poetic (cir)confession, *with* the supposedly ‘unprecedented’ and ‘exemplary’ event of **11 September**, we return to the quest set at the outset regarding whether Derrida’s poetic thinking can be reconciled with ‘doing’ history.

Although in what follows it may at times appear that we are straying from our reading of Satti’s testimony and the phenomenon of suicidal operations, instead entering into an exegesis of Derrida’s writings, it is in fact in order to think such suicidal operations *otherwise* that such the seeming detour of this oblique becomes necessary, precisely through an *other* thinking of the *act* or *operation* of suicide that is exemplarily given to be read through the Derridean *corpus* (in the double sense) and which we will be folding back into a consideration of the (political, sovereign) act of decision, as is so central in the triad of texts discussed in Part I. In what may at first seem an unlikely gesture, it will be argued that examining the *operation* of this corpus through a reading of Derrida’s prioritisation of the operational scene of circumcision (a combination which would no doubt for some cause offense) as a scene of performative and *passional* decision allows us to explore in a more nuanced manner both the *act* of the suicidal operation as an operation *of the other*, before any mastery and intentionality on the part of the ‘subject’ (*sui*), and the corporeal and wounding (‘affective’) aspects of the paleonymic thinking of *passion* and the body of the martyr(ed mark) being advanced herein. In short, we will be asking what can be gained by reading together the root of an *act* (Latin *-āda* ‘agent’, *-ādiūm* ‘act’, from *caedere* ‘to kill’) of fatal incision (*-cide*, *-caedere*) common to

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<sup>258</sup> ‘R’ 81, emphasis added.

both the *sui-cide* or *sui-caedere* of ‘suicide’<sup>259</sup> and the *de-caedere* of ‘to decide’,<sup>260</sup> following Derrida’s proposition that *any* performative act or event (the signature and suicide are exemplary instances of decision; Countersignature 38) implies an *incisive interruption* of my sovereignty, as exemplified in the scene of circumcision.

In an interview in 2001, Derrida states the following: ‘I’ll thus testify by speaking at the crossroads between singularities and common traits’ (Writing Body 10). As in Chapter 3, and indeed throughout what follows, what is at stake here is the responsibility of such a ‘positioning’. And once again, it is a question of what ‘takes place’ *between* two violences or two wounds – between the violence of an ‘actual’ suicidal or martyrdom operation and that of a differential *passion*; between the wound of an ‘actual’ operation (Derrida’s impossible anamnesis of his own circumcision) and the circumcisional dimensions of a ubiquitous *différance*. As in Part I, which ‘gives rise’ or ‘gives place’ (*donne lieu*) to a thinking of which? (Which is the place the im-possibility of which our epigraph above speaks?) Again: revealability or revelation? Must we choose? In short: *yes*, insofar as this study must *take a stand*. From where do we begin? Can such a positioning ever be posited, or is the responsibility called for above not a case of affirming one’s place at the aporetic, hyphenated and *passional* crossroads, affirming that one *does not know* (and this is the *testimony*) from where one comes or which way to turn, without taking such a situation as an alibi for hesitation and indecision? And is this not indeed the very ‘place’ of the (performative) event? From one wound to another then, *between* the (circumcisional) wound of *différance* in which all instances of testimony are enmeshed and made im-possible *and* the wound of each of these testimonial instances which, in their re-markability and exemplarity, reveal more vividly this *différential* wound that ‘precedes’ us.

Looking to Mroué’s ‘The Fabrication of Truth’, we read the following:

‘Does his martyrdom then need *some trace more effective* than the one to result from his suicide operation, which is nonetheless supposed to “cause great damage to the Israeli enemy”? Is the media image *more effective* than martyrdom in itself, than physical death?’

‘These questions, although simple, are *violent*. [...]

‘Indeed, it seems that the martyrdom *is actualised* at the very instant when the young man announces his martyrdom before the camera [...]. The martyrdom has taken place before the suicide mission, and therefore, whether this operation *has effectively taken place* or not no longer makes any real difference’ (Mroué, FT 115, emphasis added).

As in Chapter 3, our concern lies with the im-possible *actualisation* of the *act*. Here however, taking the motif of *operation* as the hinge around which our discussions revolve, this is re-inflected with a questioning of the *effectivity* of the act, in terms of its *operativity*, (*coming into*) *force* or *fulfillment*. Whilst we will address the effectivity of the media image and the manner in which the archiving of Satti’s spoken words and image *produces* both the event and *effects* of actuality in Chapter 5, we take our leave here from a questioning of the ‘effectiveness’ of Satti’s act, as a strategic (and hence

<sup>259</sup> Neo-Latin *suīcīdium*, *-īda*, equivalent to Latin *suī* ‘of oneself’, genitive singular of reflexive pronoun + *-īdium*, *-īda*, *-īde* (OED).

<sup>260</sup> ‘To decide’, from French *décider*, from Latin *decider* ‘determine’, from *de-* ‘off’ + *caedere* ‘cut’ (OED).

teleological) military *operation* of *resistance* against an invading ‘foreign body’, reading such motifs of *defence*, *militancy*, *operativity* and *resistance* in light of the *non-mastery*, *powerlessness* and *auto-immune self-exposure* of the structural *passion* being advanced herein. (As such, whilst we lack the space to move far beyond Derrida’s oeuvre, we at least acknowledge that this discussion must be placed in the context of broader discourses regarding in-operativity [*dés-ouverture*], for instance in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and Blanchot, as well as the above-mentioned ‘radical’ or ‘archi-’ passivity’.<sup>261</sup>) In summary, our proposal here is that, in its very failure to ‘act’, the non-mastery and powerlessness of a certain structural *passion*, as an unconditionality without power or sovereignty, ‘defeats’ any given instances or intentions of ‘effectivity’ and (militant) operativity. Or, in other words, that this quasi-suicidal logic of autoimmunity that we hold to be but one aspect of Derrida’s paleonymic logic of *passion*, is in fact ‘*more than suicidal*’ (R 124). A *double suicide* then; the suicide *of* suicide. Or, the ellipsis of sacrifice, as the autoimmunisation of a ‘sacrifice of sacrifice’ (FK 88).

As outlined in Part I above, this quasi-suicidal auto-immune *passion* threatens to rob a ‘real’ suicide such as Satti’s of its meaning and supposed integrity. This is *not* to propose, however – and we must be clear on this – that it is robbed in any way of its violence. However, in effect this ‘theft’ of what never belonged in the first place makes this violence *double*, as if folding it back onto Satti himself, as (*political*) *actor* or (*military*) *agent*. For just as ‘my decision’ is always that *of* the other, ‘my suicide’ is always ‘an impossible suicide’, doomed to ‘fail’: ‘a murder come from the other, a heterocide, a non-suicide or a homicide’ (Countersignature 38). In the present section, the ‘force *without* force’ (R 86) of an *altogether other* performative event will be seen to *defy* performativity (WTL 11) and ‘*defeat*’ both the performative *and* the constative – as the rules, grammar or strategy (index: ‘machine’) of performativity – whilst simultaneously never fully ‘winning’ or *succeeding* with this ‘defeat’ (or ‘succeeding’ at all) insofar as, as an *operation*, it can never quite *break free* of the law of iterability, as *machinic operativity* (index: event-machine; ‘la machine performante’) (see TR 72-3, Psyche 173).<sup>262</sup> To summarise in yet another manner: because the event, as with the coming of the other, must exceed both knowledge (hence its *testimoniality*) and active mastery (hence its *passion*), ‘[t]he other’s coming outstrips any performative force or power’ and thus ‘there is no performative’ and the other’s unexpected coming never signs or countersigns, if we are to understand the (counter)signature within the classical conception of the performative. Thus the event of the other, which let us not forget can be the other ‘in me’, ““suicides” the [testimonial] signature, so to speak, carries it away, undoes it, *exceeds it*, *effaces it*, derides it.’ Such is yet but another *violence* revealed in Mroué’s questions. Rather than a given suicide – Satti’s for instance – it is this impossible (‘more than suicidal’) event of the other that ‘*is suicide itself*’ (Countersignature 39, emphasis added).

<sup>261</sup> As with the im-possible being described above, it is valuable to add a hyphen here in ‘in-operativity’, so as to indicate its non-negative sense. Regarding this paradoxically ‘operative’ in-operativity, see also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, with a Foreword by Christopher Fynsk, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), and Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (**Barrytown, New York**: Station Hill Press, 1988).

<sup>262</sup> Derrida uses the vocabulary of ‘defeat’ (CC 21).

## ‘Might that I be the martyr’; or, The mighty *might* of an unheard-of performative

Through, perhaps, another experience of the possible.  
–Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*<sup>263</sup>

In a discussion of ‘strategy’ in his 1967 ‘Différance’, which we can read with the ‘effectivity’ of the trace of Mroué’s questions in mind, Derrida states his wish to underline that ‘the *efficacy* of the thematic of *différance* may very well, indeed must, one day be superseded, lending itself if not to its own replacement, at least to enmeshing itself in a chain that in truth it will never have governed’ (MP 7, emphasis added). Whilst we have already witnessed, to some degree at least, the chain in which *différance* is enmeshed (for example: *yes*; the ‘arche-promise’, of democracy or justice, even; *khōra*; and so on), we will focus here on this ‘*efficacy*’ by looking to the ‘translation’ of *différance* by the performative event of the Cixousian *puisse* and by exploring the impossible performative event as the *operation of the other*, all the while bearing in mind Derrida’s postulation, in *Demeure*, that ‘one might be able to reduce “différance” to another name for “passion”’ (D 27), as a performative experience ‘without mastery and without active subjectivity’ (D 27).<sup>264</sup>

In our discussions of the ‘act’ in Chapter 2, we proposed that a ‘grammar of the event’ might be thought through a *certain* middle voice (as *passion* or *différance*), but noted Derrida’s hesitancy, in **1966** in **Baltimore**, to formulate this ‘grammar’, on the basis that he *did not know* what this grammar *might be* (Derrida in discussion in Barthes, SC 271). As we will see, however, it is precisely this *non-knowledge* of what *might be* that forms the basis of this ‘grammar to-come’. By **1980**, as we saw in Chapter 3, Derrida was audibly calling for an altogether *other* conception of the performative event; for the recognition of a performative distinct to the hegemonic conception of performative mastery, ‘heretofore never described, whose performance must [...] not be experienced as a self-congratulatory success, an act of prowess’ (ATVM 173).<sup>265</sup> In short, a thinking of ‘the responsibility of the trace (*performing* or *performed*)’ that is presupposed by every constative or performative (ATVM 173). Although, as we saw in Chapter 2, the ‘grammar’ of this *passional* and wounding performative had already been at work from the earliest texts (for instance, but the potential references are endless, as in the **1968** ‘Différance’, or the **1969** ‘Dissemination’, which speaks of the incisory violence of the act of reading and writing and of a ‘decided decision, of decision undergone as well as decision deciding’ [Diss 301] as well as ‘the scission, the decision – which is both deciding and decided’ [Diss 304], or the **1972** ‘Signature Event Context’), we might propose that it is with the later *H. C. For Life, That Is to Say* . . . of **2000** that the dimensions of this performative come together most forcefully, with the ‘**mighty power of “might”** [*la puissance de “puisse”*]’ that is

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<sup>263</sup> ‘PF’ 24.

<sup>264</sup> Cf. the earlier discussion in ‘Différance’ regarding the playing movement that ‘produces’ (effects of) differences ‘by means of something *that is not simply an activity*’ (MP 11, emphasis added).

<sup>265</sup> This ‘call’ for ‘a new theory’ is also made in ‘Psyche: Invention of the Other’ (first presented, in two parts, in **1984** and **1986**) (see Psyche esp. 7-13).

‘(re-)invented’ therein designating economically both (a) the testimonial, undecidable and ‘dangerous’ *perhaps* or *maybe* (*peut-être*, literally ‘may be’ or ‘can be’) that, counter-signing Nietzsche, was the name given to the condition of *possibility* of the event from the 1994 *Politics of Friendship* onwards, as a ‘mode’ of the promise, and which here becomes a *might that it be* from which emerges any given ‘**might that I be**’ and (b) the paradoxical ‘mighty might’ of the ‘unpower [impuissance]’ through which we are reading the ‘acti/passivity’ of *passion*.<sup>266</sup>

Unable to enter into anything nearing a nuanced reading of this surprisingly overlooked<sup>267</sup> (above all within discourses regarding ‘P/performativity’) and highly elaborate text that is the last instalment in a series of counter-signatory encomiums to Cixous, we can at least signal towards the main features of this new logic of the event which, moreover, would be ‘inseparable from a poetics of the event’ (HC 76) (or, as we will see in Chapter 5, what Derrida elsewhere names a ‘poet/ics of the event’, HN 192<sup>268</sup>), in turn elaborating these contours further through looking back to the corporeal *operation in* and *on* the body that takes place, once again, *between* the *corpora* of Derrida and Cixous. Both designating and itself ‘performing’ the movement of a *letting come*, as a ‘making-say or making happen’ which ‘speech act theory will not get the better of and whose possibility it has probably not yet objectivized’ (HC 77) – a movement of *visitation*, as opposed to *invitation*, that nonetheless ‘produces’ (index: the ‘effectivity’ of Mroué’s question), and which we are all the while thinking through the defence-forces and border-controls of autoimmunity – this unheard of, performative *might* ‘arrives’ to Derrida from the subjunctive *puisse* that is *at work* in the writings, fictions or poetics of Cixous; from the ‘poetics of her verbal inventions, her still unheard-of vocabulary’ (HC xiv). ‘Provoked’ by Cixous ‘into interesting myself in this subjunctive modality in a way I had never done before’ (HC 105), Derrida, following Cixous, discovers and uncovers within the French language (‘my language’) *another grammar*,<sup>269</sup> in the movement of the ‘decisional invention’ (HC 75) of a necessary violence, a ‘grammatical alchemy’ (HC 70), in turn wishing to dedicate the ‘resurrection’ of ‘this yet unknown word, “*might*” to her, by giving it back to her (HC 20).

In the address of Cixous, ‘[m]ight does not occur to life [...]. No, life *is* mighty, more or less mighty, differentially, but always mighty might’ (HC 69). ‘*For* life’, then, as the title of the eulogy tells us: taking the side of life, in the logic of sur-vival (*survivance*) and affirmation that we have been following throughout and in light of which any given sacrificial suicide, *for instance* Satti’s, is being read. In Cixous’s writings Derrida hears the term *puissant* (‘mighty’ or ‘powerful’) not as the

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<sup>266</sup> Derrida speaks of the *perhaps* as a ‘totally new experience’ which ‘no metaphysician might yet have dared to think’ (PF 29; see also esp. 67-8). See also Derrida & Alexander García Düttman, ‘Perhaps or Maybe’, *PLI Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 6 (Summer 1997), pp. 1-18.

<sup>267</sup> Ginette Michaud cites Peggy Kamuf in raising this point. See Michaud, ‘Derrida & Cixous: Between and Beyond, or “what to the letter has happened”’, *New Literary History*, Vol. 37 (2006), pp. 85-106 (p. 91).

<sup>268</sup> This ‘poethics’ can be traced across Cixous’s *corpus*, beginning with its use as a section title in *Rootprints*, a collection of interviews with Cixous. See Hélène Cixous & Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1997), -p. 79.

<sup>269</sup> Recalling the 1966 statement ‘I don’t know what a grammar of the event can be’ (Derrida in discussion in Barthes, SC 271), we now read ‘it is as if one had to invent a new grammar’ (HC 70).

predicative adjective of the verb *pouvoir* (to be able to), but as ‘the grammatical inauguration of a new present participle as active as an active volcano’ (HC 69-70) (the ‘conventional’ present participle of *pouvoir* would be *pouvant*). (And here we recall the *-ance* of the inventive neologism *différance*, as well as the abovementioned *surviv-ance*, whose *a* derives from the present participle of *différer*, thus bringing us closer to the action of the verb but simultaneously neutralising what the infinitive denotes as simply active.) Probably bearing the memory of the Latin present participle of the verb *pouvoir* (*potens* or *potentissimus*), *puissant* henceforth will not signify *pouvant* (being able to), but *puissant*, from *puisse*, the subjunctive mood of *puissance*: ‘according to some heresy of the subjunctive, an *originary subjunctive*, an equally present participle for *puisse*’ (HC 70, emphasis modified). *Testimonially* and *promissorially*, the power of this *might* arrives from the wish or desire of the subjunctive (or subjective) ‘**might that it be**’ or ‘**might that it happen**’ (a wish that is also an ‘**I order [jubeo]**’), depending on the order of the promise – and with it its necessary autoimmune pervertibility, the ‘possibility’ or risk whose virtuality is *before* any intention or will to commit evil or do harm (see RSS 108-09) – and the performative injunction (HC 70). A ‘**might that it be**’ that we shall soon be allying with the performative act of the decision, made in what Derrida often, in the later texts, refers to as ‘the night of nonknowledge’; a space and/or time of desire, certainly, but with no horizon of foreseeability.<sup>270</sup>

‘Everything happens therefore as if I proposed or decreed around here, presuming or exceeding an authority, that from now on in the French language, the words *puissant* and *puissance* would no longer be formed from a nominalized present participle, that is from the complement of an actual power, or even of virtual potentiality. *Puissant*, *puissante*, *puissance* would henceforth be written otherwise, according to another grammar, from her own signature, that of a *puisse* awaiting its countersignature. *Puissance* would come from, and partake of, *puisse* and not elsewhere. *My decisional invention* would be one of these countersignatures, which would not only inscribe themselves *on the very body of a given language* that would be its support. *The countersign would change the very body of the given language, its semantics and its grammar*’ (HC 74-5, emphasis modified).

‘[N]o longer designating the virtuality, the potentiality, a *dynamis* that one could traditionally oppose to *energeia*’, that which arrives according to the event of this mighty power or the “might” ‘*really actually arrives, in real life*’ (HC 70, emphasis added),<sup>271</sup> as here in the event of invention between Derrida and Cixous. And moreover, as that which ‘happens’, ‘*effectively*’, not only on the level of *the* performative event *de jure*, but in any given, *de facto*, suicidal operation.

Rather than simply foraying headlong into what could be an interminable reading of this immense text, let us return to Mroué’s questions regarding the *effectivity* of Satti’s operation vis-à-vis that of *the trace left* by his testimony, which we are here pitting against the *effectivity* of the *arche-trace*,

<sup>270</sup> Let us not forget the Barthesian *punctum*, the nocturnal light of the Winter Garden photograph around which Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* circles, and Barthes’s search for the ‘truth’ of the face that he loved (his mother’s face) (Barthes, CL 67).

<sup>271</sup> We might place this ‘actually’ in quotation marks since, following the logic of destinerance prioritised in Chapter 3 and the questioning of destination across *H. C. For Life* (see for instance 64), the event simultaneously *never* ‘actually’ arrives. As Derrida writes here, ‘this might is actual if it decides to act, is not a matter of actuality or activity, of *energeia* that is opposed to *dynamis*’ (HC 77).

inscribing ‘the magnitude of this “might of the may”’ (HC 104) back into questions of operativity, force and resistance to hegemony, mastery and domination, indeed even of militancy, and subsequently returning to a consideration of Satti’s suicidal *operation* against the occupying Israeli military within the ‘explicitly’ political discussions of the *quasi*-suicidal messianic promise of democracy. Ultimately, can we not say that, thought in terms of both the autoimmune ‘unpower’ of this *might* and the messianic promise outlined in Part I (an ‘unpower’ which is ‘*beyond* the possible, beyond power, and their dynasty’ [HC 107, emphasis added]), the *passion* and *testimony* being pursued herein *operate* not only as the deconstructive condition of both philosophy (the uncovering, for instance, of philosophy’s ‘repression’ of the middle voice into the active and passive voice [MP 9]) and the (performative) event but also, as the promise of an im-possible justice and a democracy to come, as a call for ‘a militant and interminable political critique. A weapon aimed at the enemies of democracy’ (R 86)?

A ‘militant’ critique. But also, perhaps, a militant ‘force’, albeit thought *otherwise*, insofar as the *passion* of this *might*, as a translation of *différance*, cannot be *mastered* or *governed* by a *who* or a *what* (MP 14-5). This ‘power *without* power’ ‘governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority’. Rather, it not only instigates ‘the *subversion* of every kingdom’ (MP 21) (and here we are still thinking autoimmunity in terms of cosmopolitanism and hospitality) but also ‘rebels against’ and *escapes* the *hegemonic* senses of decisionism, freedom and sovereignty (see PF 68-9), instead operating as ‘a freedom that would no longer be the power of a subject, a freedom without autonomy, *a heteronomy without servitude*’ (R 152) which nonetheless comes *before* any given or identifiable emancipatory or utopic discourses or movements.

Implying a ‘retreat’ (*sic*) of the performative authority or mastery that would in fact neutralise the event, this *might*, as with the hauntology of the *I am dead* of Chapter 2 and the *yes* of Chapter 3A, might potentially ‘prevail over’ ontology (see Perf. P 467, Countersignature 38, R 45, 54, 137; RSS 128). ‘Older’ (as with the promissory, spectral and *différential yes*) than being and ontology, ‘the *might* of this mighty power *is not*’ (HC 84). And yet, in the gest of this experience of ‘im-potence’ that, as signalled by its hyphen, is not the opposite of the possible and of potency (HC 120, WTL 10), the ‘apparently subordinated might of the subjunctive’ (is) ‘potentially *mightier* [*en puissance plus puissant*]’, from a performative point of view, than the present indicative (supposedly ‘constative’) ‘**it is**’ or *S is P*, ‘and therefore the ontological idea of subjectivity or objectivity’ (HC 104). ‘[N]o longer contained within the classical philosophical concept of “possibility,” *dynamis, possibilitas*, in the traditional modality of the possible or of the virtual that is traditionally opposed to the act, the real, or the necessary’ (HC 77), the ‘originary subjunctive’ of this *might* ‘is the absolute performative’ (HC 104),<sup>272</sup> the ‘performative par excellence’ (HC 134):

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<sup>272</sup> Although Derrida writes here that it ‘is’ the absolute performative, this might be better read in terms of the *resembling* an absolute performative of the arche-*yes*, insofar as it is neither a traditional ‘performative’ nor ‘absolute’.

‘Any performative, any phantasmatic omnipotence of the performative draws from the mighty power of this “might.” Only an affection, the *affective* part of an event, can remind it of its limit. The subjunctive is *mightier*, from the subordinate clause, than the ontological main clause’ (HC 104-05, emphasis added).

*Might*, then, as ‘the quasi-underivable trace that one must presuppose *so* that the other *agencies* (for example, power, *posse*, *dynamis*, dynasty, potentiality, then act and effectiveness) *might*, precisely, appear (HC 70-1). Following the undoing of (or hospitality between) traditional oppositions such as strong-weak, hegemonic-oppressed, friend-enemy that had been at work throughout Derrida’s corpus and which began to take an overtly political vocabulary in the **1994** *Politics of Friendship* (see, for example, PF 80), this *might* is presented as a force of resistance to which ‘I’ must *surrender*, unconditionally (the ‘terrifying truth’ of ‘to surrender is to gain’, see HC 87, 127, 138), but a ‘force’ which comes ‘before’ any intentional decision on the part of the ‘I’ (as we shall imminently see in a discussion of the scene of circumcision) and which, as Derrida had already stated in a **1987** interview, within a discussion of Nietzsche, moves away from ‘a discourse on force that has the coherence of classical logic’ into a scene in which a *certain* weakness – that of the *differential* and iterable structure of the mark which, as we will see, both inscribes *and* erases itself – ‘is *revealed* [in this case, precisely, by Satti’s act] to be stronger than force’ (Negotiations 35).<sup>273</sup> On an optimistic note, given the im-possibility we have been emphasising thus far in Satti’s ‘act’ of resistance, we read:

‘And in fact this is what I am always referring to, at least vaguely, when I say force; force is not power, finally. It is not something; force is always inscribed in a space where a ruse (not a subjective ruse but a ruse of structure) is possible, making the weakest strongest. And this can be translated into political terms. Always to put oneself on the side of the weakest and the most oppressed is also a kind of confidence in the future. One says to oneself, one knows that in the end true force is on the side of the oppressed, that this is true force, and conversely’ (Negotiations 35-6).

### **Circumcision; Or, the Operation of the Other**

“Passion” implies an engagement that is assumed in pain and suffering, experience without mastery and thus without active subjectivity.

–Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*<sup>274</sup>

*Passion*, we are proposing, implies an experience of the im-possible as the ‘engagement assumed’ of the *necessary* and in effect *a priori* constriction of a body bound to a linguistic cross; a cross that, moreover, cannot *not* be borne, as we saw in Chapter 3B, together with the necessary violence of the bro/eaching of iterability. A *double binding*, as we read in the **1993** ‘Passions: An Oblique

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<sup>273</sup> Returning to our prioritisation of ‘encounter’ over ‘dialogue’ (see Chapter 3A n. 179 above), here Derrida states how ‘dialogue’ implies a symmetry between two ‘subjects’ which we could think in terms of a symmetrical force. Rather, there are relations of force, and these are unquantifiable since sometimes weakness is a force, or can be played as a force (see Negotiations 32-3).

<sup>274</sup> ‘D’ 27, trajectory 5.



Offering’, which we will soon be addressing through the simultaneous binding *and* incisory separation of the différential mark of circumcision (and we recall here the ‘binding’ [*ligare, religare*] and ‘gathering’ [*legere, relegere*] at the mechanically self-dividing or self-separating ‘double source’ of *religion* in Part I above). A double binding that ‘paralyses us’, albeit, as we read in *Aporias*, ‘in a manner that is not necessarily negative’ (A 12):

‘This aporia without end paralyzes us because it binds us doubly. [...] In one and the same place, on the same apparatus, I have my two hands tied or nailed down. What are we to do? But also how is it that it does not prevent us from speaking, from continuing to describe the situation, from trying to make oneself understood. [...] Of what does this verification consist, when nothing happens without some sacrifice? Will one call this a testimony [*témoignage*] in a sense that neither the martyr, the attestation nor the testament would exhaust? And, as with every testimony, providing that it never be reducible, precisely, to verification, to proof or to demonstration, in a word, to knowledge?’ (Passions 22-3).

Is this not an ‘inexhaustible’ generalised *testimony* and/or *passion*, as the ‘origin’ of responsibility? And is this not ‘revealed more vividly’ by thinking the mark of *différance* through wound of circumcision, as the *re-* of the re-lation (L. *relāt-*, ppl. stem of *referre* to REFER [OED]) to self of auto-*affection* (i.e. the ‘carrying back’ of the *-férance* of *différance*) into which the other cannot but enter, autoimmunely and cruelly *affecting* and *infecting* the supposed stigmatic indivisibility of sovereignty, the self, the *ipse* or *autos* ‘itself’ (see R 109)? The auto-*affection* which, moreover, is exposed by this autoimmune logic to in fact be a movement of the self’s encountering with and *countering* of itself; its return *to* and *against* itself? (see R 109). Can we not find here the ‘bond to self’ of classical subjectivity re-conceptualised as the ‘engagement *with*’ that is entailed in the (originally Christian) responsibility and liability of the *re-legere, re-ligare* and *re-spondeo* (see FK 73-4), together with the ‘radical’ separation between ‘myself’ and the necessarily always secret other?

“Between the aleatory and the calculable ... chance and necessity”: the provisional law of *Circumfession*, a machine-with which breath had to be calculated, each period punctuated, the contour of the periphrasis arrested, in a word, circumcision performed so that the event might challenge or surprise the *other* machination. Not a single sign more after the warning: command counter command”

–Derrida, ‘Circumfession’<sup>275</sup>

Beginning with the biomedical trope of autoimmunity, and now moving on to circumcision: whilst such themes and tropes may appear far divorced from the phenomenon of suicidal attacks, the argument here is that this is at once the case *and*, simultaneously, the opposite. As outlined above, the logic of autoimmunity is a vital and prescient manner through which to address not only a phenomena such as suicidal operations, but also (contemporary) aporias of democracy and sovereignty (be it of the state or the individual) in general. But circumcision? Is this unsettling alliance not too far-fetched, irresponsible even? We might argue against this for two principle

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<sup>275</sup> ‘C’ 35.

reasons: firstly, we will propose that the seemingly ‘private’ (familial, domestic, medical, religious) event of circumcision is a *vivid* precursor of the overtly political readings of the ‘event’, as the promise of messianicity, in the later texts (for instance the triad with which we began) and that this scene in fact *reveals more vividly* the autoimmune and corporeal logic of the event and of (‘private’, or geopolitical) hospitality. (It goes without saying that we place all these terms and their accompanying classical dichotomies – ‘private’/‘public’, ‘personal’, ‘political’, and so forth – in the necessary quotation marks, for any such distinctions are necessarily rendered unstable in a deconstructive reading, above all given that we are allying the seemingly ‘private’ modes of testimony, confession and autobiography with acts of violence on a geopolitical scale. The proposal here, rather, is that the ‘quasi-concepts’ of *testimoniality* and *passion* bridge any such previously delineated spheres.) Above all, it is argued that the *corporeal* elements of this autoimmunity (*as* a political matter; insofar as it is a question of sovereignty) are revealed *more vividly* when ‘performed’ or ‘demonstrated’, once again, through what we might call the auto-bio-corpo-graphy of Derrida himself; of Derrida’s ‘I’ which this time is countersigned by Hélène Cixous, following the logic of the testimony *of* the other introduced in Chapter 3B. A *corpography*, we might say, as a writing *of* the body, yet again in the oscillation of the genitive: the invention of an unknown autobiographical genre written, according to Cixous, according to ‘a body in passion’, ‘interiorly and *on* the skin’ (WTL 8). Here, in Cixous’s words, is the ‘extraordinary audacity’ of showing that the philosopher writes with all his body (WTL 8).

Secondly, our argument is that this event of circumcision highlights, *exemplarily*, the aporia of singularity (index: ‘event-machine’) which had been central in our consideration of the passion of testimony and will continue to be central in thinking both the trauma and ‘eventfulness’ of an event such as the suicidal attacks of **11 September** and the *hapax legomenon* of ‘my death’. In addition to this, but still connected to the ‘one time’, it is proposed that the marking and scarring of this *operation of the other* reveals, *more vividly*, the aporia of re-markability of *Monolingualism* discussed in Chapter 3B. The singularity of the ‘one time’, the wounding rupture of decision as the operation of the other and the *passion* of responsibility and decision, all of which we will be reading through this exemplary scene: in other words, everything we call ‘politics’ and ‘ethics’.

Whilst a scenography of the event is laid out, in its ‘explicitly’ political dimensions, from the early **1990s** onwards (following the publication of *Specters of Marx* and the focus on the ‘messianicity without messianism’ therein), considerations of the scene of circumcision – *as event* – can be found from as early as the **1986** *Schibboleth: pour Paul Celan* (published in English as ‘Schibboleth: For Paul Celan’), to which we will turn in Chapter 5. Indeed, Derrida had already begun collecting notes regarding circumcision as early as **1976**, but (unusually) all the time not knowing where he was going with this, and it was only upon the encounter with the ‘circumcised word’ of Celan’s poetics that a thinking of a generalised ‘circumcisionality’, as graphematicity, appears. Following this, the theme becomes a recurring one throughout a host of texts, which we will draw from as we proceed.

Derrida's reading of Celan's 'circumcised word' is of particular importance when we recall our discussion, in Chapter 3B, of the (im-possible) invention of a language in which to testify as an act of poetic invention, since the event of circumcision – as a testimonial and confessional event, insofar as each 'makes the truth' in its very 'instant' of enactment – will be thought together with that of both the poem and the date, as that which takes place *one time only*. What is at stake here is 'the resistance that *once* may offer to thought. [...] of what such resistance *gives* one to think' (S 1). In an at once distinct *and* translatable context, this is exactly what this entire study revolves around, all the time thinking of the 'effectivity' of Satti's (not-so-)singular martyr-testimony, as an act of *resistance*: the *resistance* that 'the passion of the singular mark', paradoxically, *gives* to be thought. Whilst in 'Shibboleth' (published in a collection of Derrida's readings of Celan entitled, tellingly, *Sovereignities in Question*) this resistance of the *once* 'points back to the last war, all wars, clandestine activity, demarcation lines, discrimination, passports, and passwords' (S 1), the argument here is that this can be effectively translated into the vocabulary of autoimmunity and hospitality (of the exposure of the corpus of the *chez-soi* to the violence of aggressions, invasions and sacrificial defence), through which we can *effectively* read Satti's operation.

Indeed, it is with this 'one time' of the 'event' that we find an at once aleatory *and* 'essential' (if we dare use this word) relationship between the event of circumcision as the phenomenon of suicidal attacks, above all the *exemplary* event of **11 September**. In what follows we will draw from various texts included in *Augustine and Postmodernism* (2005), a publication ensuing from the 'Religion and Postmodernism 3: Confessions' conference (Villanova University, 27-29 September 2001). As noted in the Introduction to the proceedings (under the subheadings 'September 11' and 'After the Event'), whilst the original intention had been for the participants to gather to speak about *one* event – as, paradoxically, the *repetition* of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* in Derrida's writings, notably his 'Circumfession (*Circonfession*)' (first published in 1991 but written between **January 1989** and **April 1990**), and in contemporary Continental thought – they were unable to do so without speaking of another inescapable event that had been superimposed on the topic: that of **11 September**. Thus the conference itself became very much 'after the event' (an 'after' that we are thinking through the event of signature being 'constituted' by the subsequent countersignature), whilst all the while enquiring, as is the case with the present chapter, into the intricacies of what Derrida means by 'event'.<sup>276</sup> As with the **Villanova** proceedings, the current study is coloured by, indeed an oblique response *to*, this event.

Moreover, recalling this study's concern with the deconstruction of the archive and with the possibility of 'effectively' thinking a generalised *passion* and *testimony together with* the task of 'doing history', a larger question arises: can we not say that it is not fortuitous that it is precisely at this event – the 'Augustine and Postmodernism' colloquium, during which a thinking of the event of

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<sup>276</sup> See John D. Caputo & Michael Scanlon, 'Introduction: The Postmodern Augustine', in John D. Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 1-15 (pp. 1-2).

circumcision, as the event of *confession* (or, as we are proposing, as the event of a martyr-testimony) was so central – that we find one of Derrida’s most emphatic ‘confessions’ (understood in the conventional sense) that *at heart*, so to speak, as noted above, the desire to be a historian orients much of his thinking? The *resistance* of the *once*; of the ‘here and now’ of spatial and temporal singularity and immunity: is this not *the very passion* of any ‘applied deconstruction’ and of ‘doing history’?

Furthermore, whilst our concern is to probe both the aporia of singularity, as that of the ‘event-machine’, and the question of where we position ourselves within the movement *between* ‘revelation-revealability’, the argument is that there are certain *enigmatic* events – Satti’s testimony, for instance – that function to *interrupt* and disrupt any generalising logic, indeed history. Is it not in the *interruption* (i.e. *incision*) of repetition – whilst all the while within sight of an iterable truth – that we might find the *chance*, at least, of ‘the completely new of the unique, of absolute singularity’, of ‘the beginning, finally, of history’ (Moscow 226)? (A *chance* of ‘absolute singularity’ that is nonetheless – and this is the passion of the ‘event-machine’ – ‘the most iterable thing in the word’ [Moscow 226]). What is proposed here is that by looking closer to the scene of incisory yet nonetheless infinitely repeatable circumcision/circumfession, we might come closer to the ‘logic’ that, as Derrida puts it in his own idiomatic and idiosyncratic ‘confession’ of ‘Circumfession’, is ‘stronger than I’: a ‘logic’ that is ‘at work and verifiably so right down to so-called aleatory phenomena, the least systematic, the most undecidable of the sentences I’ve ever made or unmade’, and which ‘nevertheless *opens, leaving room for the unanticipatable singularity of the event*’, as that which remains, ‘by essence, by force, nonsaturable, nonsuturable, invulnerable, therefore only extensible and transformable, always unfinished’ (C 34, emphasis added). ‘Invulnerable’, we are arguing, only on the condition that this ‘body-event’ is *immune to immunity or indemnification* itself: on the condition that it remain, involuntarily and un-programmatically, *exposed, unconditionally* welcoming. (But can, or *should*, the event ever be immune to the program? Again, ‘event-machine’: this is the very question.) This ‘wound-event’ whose ‘meaning’ is ‘nonsuturable’ and therefore always open to counter-signatory readings-to-come *only* on the condition that something *remains (reste)* and escapes and in doing so *resists* (i.e. the *passional ‘-ance’* of ‘*restance*’). And, as we will see in Chapter 5, on the condition that the total annihilation of this remainder – the total, *pyro-technical* incineration, for instance, of this *archival* and *testimonial* mark – remain an always-open possibility.

As with the ‘range without limit’ granted to the schema of autoimmunity, revealing this logic to be *always already* in operation ‘*far beyond the circumscribed biological processes*’ (R 124, emphasis added), as well as to that of messianicity and the space of the desert outlined above, the schema of circumcision extends *far beyond* the ‘literality’ (were such a thing possible) of the religious and/or medical scene in which the infant is handed over to the *mobel* or surgeon, functioning – once again, *exemplarily* – as a motif for *any* performative event or act of language and in fact *all* (differential) experience, regardless of the sex or religion of the ‘subject(ed)’. Indeed, although we will not digress

here into the import of Derrida's corpus for discourses regarding sexual difference, we will draw briefly from *Veils* (1998), yet another episode in the counter-signatory series between Derrida and Cixous which contains Cixous's 'confession' or 'testimony' to her myopia-correcting operation ('Savoir'), together with Derrida's response ('A Silkworm of One's Own'). What is important here in *Veils* – a text woven around the play of veiling-unveiling, and thus, as is of pertinence here, around the possibility of *revealing the truth* or *making truth* – is that this *optical operation* undergone and subsequently borne witness to by Cixous herself (it all comes down to a question of visibility and [fore-]seeing) and in turn by Derrida, can be read as what we might call a 'circumcisional confession' or, following Derrida's 1991 countersignature (yet again, 'auto-bio-corpo-graphical') of Augustine's *Confessions*, a 'circumfession' (or, as in the French, 'circonfession').<sup>277</sup>

Turning to 'Circumfession', this is a quasi-autobiographical work of mourning which circles around two major sets of wounds – that of Derrida's own singular but nonetheless divided circumcision and the multiplying bedsores of his dying mother – and responds not only to Augustine's *Confessions* but also to yet another 'wager', this time set by Geoffrey Bennington, to write a text that would 'surprise' and 'outbid' the programme of the text which it would literally underlie and potentially even undermine: Bennington's 'Derridabase'.<sup>278</sup> Once again, it is a case of the paradoxical hyphen of the 'event-machine' and the wager of 'Typewriter Ribbon' (1998), or the call to 'renounce' the word 'performative' of the 1980 'At This Very Moment...' that we cited from above. In short: the paradox of the event of Satti's 'live' testimony, made 'in the flesh', and its *necessary* technical repeatability and programmability. Here, as with the '**I testify**' or '**my language**' of the later *Monolingualism*, the possibility of saying '**I confess**', as well as for instance '**I give**', '**I forgive**' and, importantly, '**I decide**', or even 'that simplest of performatives' (LO 95), '**I am**', is problematised and, as Derrida puts it in a later reflection upon the 'failures' and/as 'success' of this 'textual event', "**I don't confess**' (C&C 32-3). Again, the 'martyrdom' of the event: '**I am the martyr (x)**'. In what is a clear precursor to the discussions of the necessary deconstruction of performative mastery, sovereignty, force and decisionism in thinking the political sphere, the 'event' of 'Circumfession' demonstrates that '**If I am able to confess, I don't confess**' (C&C 33).

Phrased in the vocabulary of this triad of texts with which we began, we witness here, already, the necessary deconstruction of the '**I can**' or '**I may**' of the classical conception of freedom, right (*droit*), *ipseity*, strength, force or resistance, as well as that of the performativity of the messianic promise, to which we will return as we proceed slowly through this surgical scenography (see R esp. 11-12, 23, 45, 54, 137; RSS 127-29). In short, what we witness here is the playing out of the Derridean im-possible, as a heteronomous *passion*: a playing out, as we read in 'Real and

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<sup>277</sup> The text in question, 'Circumfession', published in English in 1993, was first published in French in 1991 as 'Circonfession', in Geoffrey Bennington & Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

<sup>278</sup> 'Circumfession' runs along the bottom part of each page of the 'Derridabase', in much the same format as the earlier 'Living On / Borderlines' (1979). As the incipit states: 'Fifty-nine periods and periphrases *written in a sort of internal margin, between Geoffrey Bennington's book and work in preparation (January 1989–April 1990)*'.

Symbolic suicides’, ‘of what must remain (in a nonnegative fashion) foreign to the order of my possibilities, to the order of the **“I can,”** to the theoretical, descriptive, constative, and performative orders (inasmuch as this latter still implies a power guaranteed for some **“I”** by conventions that neutralize the pure eventfulness of the event)’ (RSS 134). Or, as Derrida puts it in ‘Provocation’, the Foreword to the collection of texts in *Without Alibi*, what is at stake is a certain ‘passive resistance’<sup>279</sup> that ‘does the most, makes the most happen, more than the most, the impossible itself, at the heart of the possible’ (Provocation xxxiii). Here, the ‘enigma’ of the *oeuvre* (and we can think the textual event of any testimony as *oeuvre*) is that ‘its event does not totally depend on an action carried out by my sovereign initiative’:

“The same passivity marks the experience of all unconditional and pure events as such (gift, forgiveness, hospitality, *death*). It marks and thus doubly limits the most active and productive performativity: on the one hand, a performative depends passively in itself on conventions that are prior and external to the act, which supposes them and does not control them; on the other hand, by virtue of an **“I can,”** **“I am authorised, competent to,”** **“I have the right and the power to,”** whereby the performative tries to master the event it is supposed to produce, it neutralises and annuls that event in the same stroke. Precisely because it has the power and the possibility. A performative remains, therefore, passively exposed to what is coming, to the other who comes and carries the day against any performativity, which is exceeded by the event worthy of the name’ (Provocation xxxiii-xxxiv).

As we will see in the scene of circumcision, an **‘I can’** would be the annulment of the event, since the ‘I’ is in fact not constituted prior to the event of confession, but only through the counter-signatory incision or interruption of the other.

Returning to the scene of circumcision, Derrida’s ‘Circumfession’ could not but fail to some degree (but this is not to dispute the ‘eventfulness’ of this extraordinary *oeuvre*) insofar as, trapped in the aporia of the event-machine, for Derrida to centre his text upon circumcision in fact was not entirely unpredictable. As Bennington put it in the same publication in **1991**, ‘for a long time now he has been talking of nothing else’ (Bennington, Derridabase 327). Once again, taking leave from and testifying to his ‘own’ singular and dated experience of this necessarily *un-experienced, immemorial* and *immemorable* event (is this not sounding like the differential, *testimonial yes* and/or the *puisse?*) which is nonetheless *borne witness to* by an irrefutable and ineradicable scar (again, the cross to which we are all linguistically bound and that *must* be borne), as in the later *Monolingualism*, Derrida ‘demonstrates’ – through his ‘body in passion’ and ‘dislocations’, to use Cixous’s words (WTL 8) – how this singular and irreplaceable experience *reveals* the readable-unreadable mark that is *borne* by all. In a notebook entry from **20 December 1976** cited in ‘Circumfession’, we read: ‘Circumcision, that’s all I’ve ever talked about, consider the discourse on the limit, margins, mark, marches, etc., the writing of the body, the *pharmakos* excluded or cut off’ (C 70). To which we can, **today**, in retrospect, add *autoimmunity*, which we propose must in turn also be thought together with the word

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<sup>279</sup> The term is in fact used by Peggy Kamuf, but is responded to affirmatively by Derrida. See Kamuf, ‘Introduction: Event of Resistance’, p. 12 & Derrida, ‘Provocation’ xxxiii.

of *unconditional* welcome that is the *come* (*viens*): yet another *passional* translation of the *yes* or *puisse*, and yet another inheritance from or countersignature of the oeuvres of Blanchot and Levinas.

Whilst we will return to this *come* imminently, as an ‘*a priori*’ unconditional and autoimmune *hospitality* – as an *unconscious* word of welcome implied even in the hostility of Satti’s ‘**I am the martyr**’ – it is worth pointing out at this stage that yet again we follow the ‘logic’ of (or hyphen *between*) the formal or structural (as *différance*) vis-à-vis its instances of re-citation in the empirical or determinable. For as Derrida tells us elsewhere, ‘[o]ne must think the event [i.e. the infinitive ‘to come [*venir*]’] from the “**come [*viens*],” and not the reverse (DA 94, PN 15). One must think the event *as* absolute ‘*arrivant*’ (yet another word ‘received’ in part from Cixous<sup>280</sup>), or even *revenant*,<sup>281</sup> as the absolute other, *before* any determinable welcome to some identifiable ‘who’ or ‘what’: the Israeli occupier, for instance, or the *tekhne* of recording instruments, surgical knives, foreign bodies or grafts.<sup>282</sup> The event of the absolute *arrivant*, then, as that which exceeds the order of any determinable promise and threatens to annihilate or render indeterminate all the distinctive signs of a prior identity, beginning with that of the very border itself (see A 34).**

Circumcision, we are proposing, is translatable as the autoimmunity of passion, *différance* and an unconditional hospitality insofar as the ‘I’ is the subjected subject of the event, submitted to it (again, ‘the host as hostage’ of *Monolingualism*; M 20), as revealed exemplarily in the scene in which the mohel cuts (operates upon) the defenceless infant.<sup>283</sup> Rather than being possible on the basis of performativity and mastery, the idiomatic signature of a confession is possible here in its occurring to a powerless child precisely before he can decide, speak or sign (before he can utter any cogito), let alone ‘offer’ himself in any act of sacrifice or martyrdom, and before he has a name, through this wound which he receives and which leaves a signatory mark or scar on and in his body, together with an inescapable and undeniable heritage: genealogical, religious, and also of the trace of language into which he is thrown (CC 21). Whereas autoimmunity might traditionally be thought on the basis of the body destroying ‘some organ or other’ of its ‘own’ body (R 124), the scene of circumcision reveals exemplarily the rendering indistinguishable of the self-other border, revealing the corporeality of the auto-affection as hetero-affection that had been operating since the beginning of the Derridean corpus. As such, this ‘quasi-suicidal’ logic is at the same time ‘more than suicidal’, insofar as the ‘self’ (sui) cannot even destroy itself, by its ‘own hand’, but rather only ‘succeeds’ in its ‘auto-de(con)struction’ by exposing itself, automatically and unconsciously, to the other.

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<sup>280</sup> In *Aporias*, Derrida speaks of being ‘taken’ by this word, ‘as if its uncanniness had just arrived to me in a language in which it has nonetheless sounded very familiar to me for a long time’ (A 33), adding in a note that he remembered, after the fact, the *arrivant* of Cixous’s *La (Paris: Gallimard, 1976)* and of the play she presented in 1977 in *Avignon: L’arrivante* (see A 86 n. 14).

<sup>281</sup> ‘There may be something of the “revenant,” of the “reviens” at the origin, or at the end, of every “viens” (DA 94-5).

<sup>282</sup> We recall here that the *revenant* is foreign to the order of visibility, eluding ‘the very watch of consciousness’, and hence pertaining to the non-identifiable order of *visitation* (see TOJ 19, 29 & E 120-21).

<sup>283</sup> In Judaism, the act of circumcision is traditionally carried out on the seventh day (see C 65).

*Automatically* exposing or offering itself, then, in the ‘operation’ of a visitation rather than an invitation (see CC 23; H 362), I cannot ‘perform’ (i.e. sign, confess, testify, invent; sacrifice, even) myself, but am performed, signed, operated, by the other (see C 144, Silkworm 36). **“I” don’t confess**, says Derrida, since ‘I’ am not constituted prior to the event of confession (C&C 32-3, C 75) but only *after* the event (with this *differential* delay or *lapsus* ranging from a fraction of a second to an indefinite duration), upon its validation (its countersignature) *by* the other. As in the act of c(irc)onfession, it is in the ‘conversion’ that is but one of the senses of the *circum-* that ‘I’ occurs, or is ‘made’.<sup>284</sup> Such is the truth of this paleonymic and differential avowal of circumfession which is *without* truth (see C 14). In fact, this is ‘the experience of a confession which no longer has anything to do with truth’ (C 132); the event of avowal that disrupts and interrupts philosophical notions of *absolute truth* (*Savoir Absolu*, SA, also Saint Augustine). If there is a truth, it is not some truth to be revealed through the act of testimony or confession, but rather that the event (of confession) overtakes me, *happens to me*, in so doing ‘making the truth’, to recall the promise to make truth of Augustine’s (*facere veritate*) that Derrida aligns with testimony, passion and martyrdom in the seventh seal of passion in *Demeure* (D 27).<sup>285</sup> Again, does this not sound like the earlier accounts of *différance*: as that which is never presented as such and, although ‘operating’ in the logic of a *passional*, autoimmune and ‘acti/passive’ exposure (as we will elaborate upon in Chapter 5), never ‘exposes’ (in the sense of ‘presenting’) some truth, but rather ‘reserves’ or ‘ciphers’ itself and as such *exceeds* the order of truth.<sup>286</sup>

*Beyond* and heterogeneous to truth – ‘*without* truth, *without* veracity, *without* veridicity’ (Silkworm 23, emphasis added); ‘the event *without* truth unveiled or revealed’ (Silkworm 85, emphasis added; see also C 87, 88, 102, 107, 132) – is not this thinking of testimony or confession being put forward both here and in Chapter 3 counterproductive (fatal, even?) when, at bottom, our concern lies with the truth and precariousness of the archive and of testimony? With the *passion suffered* by and for the truth of testimony by countless witnesses (and even addressees), and indeed by the very ‘concept’ or possibility of the archive, the document or testimony itself? Is such a line of procedure in fact not then irresponsible, even, laying open the ground for countless revisionisms and denials? For countless *alibis*, as excuses, or as the deferral of the urgency of decision and response? Oblique as this approach may be, the argument is that this is not the case and that, following and responding to Derrida, it is precisely an acknowledgement – indeed an affirmation – of this excess or ‘beyond’, as the readable-unreadable remainder (*restance*) of a structural secret and non-knowledge, that is the condition of any responsible reading. And, moreover, that is that which impassions, even ‘pierces’, us.

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<sup>284</sup> A confession must ‘affect me, touch me’, transform me through and through (C 75-7).

<sup>285</sup> See also ‘C’ 18, 46-9, 56, 137, 191.

<sup>286</sup> ‘What results is a cipher without truth, or at least a system of ciphers that is not dominated by truth value, which only then becomes a function that is understood, inscribed, and circumscribed’ (Diff. 149).



For when we say ‘without truth’, what is central here is the ‘*without*’: following the logic (‘without logic’) of the Blanchotian ‘*sans* (without)’ and *ne uter* (which we would also need to read further in terms of the Blanchotian *pas* – both ‘not’ and ‘step’ – that is also so central to Derrida’s thinking; see PN) which in *Demeure* is allied with a thinking of *passion* and *différance*, this ‘*without*’ of the Blanchotian ‘**X without X**’ is far from simply negative or dialectical but rather, as with the differential and circumcisional mark, maintains a binding relation (for instance, to truth) whilst simultaneously cutting or dissociating itself radically from it, in the movement of a ‘relation without relation’ or ‘belonging without belonging’ (see esp. D 26-7 [trajectory 5], 89, 90, 92).<sup>287</sup> Binding and unbinding: does this circumcisional mark not exemplify the *neither-nor* of this Blanchotian neuter that ‘is beyond all dialectic’, and as such to be read in light of the Derridean understanding of a ‘negotiation’ between the dialectic and the non-dialectic (see N 26), as well as the ‘hospitable’ but nonetheless necessarily violent sense of ‘the poetics of encounter’ or ‘the secret of encounter’ inherited, as we are coming to, from Celan?

The Derridean countersignature of the differential and iterable mark of circumcision, then, as the wound that *every* body bears, as a ‘belonging *without* belonging’, in a ‘relation *without* relation’, that both breaks *and* maintains its heritage with not only the (patriarchal) Jewish community in which this ritual marking is so vital but also with the common-union or communion of *any* community: is this not what Derrida elsewhere describes as ‘the condition not only for being singular and other, but also for entering into relation with the singularity and alterity of others’ (TS 27)? Can we not say that the mark of circumcision operates as a more nuanced, indeed more ‘effective’, formulation of the re-marking hyphen of Chapter 3B; as an incision that paradoxically, in the tropic of its annularity, simultaneously maintains a relation: the break (of the secret) that was so central in our reading of testimony in Chapter 3A, and without which ‘there would be no respect for the other, no relation to the other as such’ (C&C 45); without which one would lose both oneself *and* the other ‘in the herd’ (see TS 27)?

*Neither-nor*, ‘beyond the negative grammar that the word neuter, *ne uter*, seems to indicate’, as well as the seeming negativity of the Derridean im-possible, as a *passion* perhaps more forceful and affirmative than that of any given or lived instance of martyrdom. As, perhaps, what Derrida *might* have meant to say when he wrote of the responsibility of ‘a passion *without* martyrdom’ (Passions 31, emphasis added). As we read in *Demeure*, ‘[t]he neuter is the experience or passion of a thinking that cannot stop at either opposite without also overcoming the opposition – neither this nor that’ (D 90). ‘Overcoming the opposition’: which we can think here, for instance, as the ‘defeat’ not only of the classical conception of performativity itself but of the traditional border that demarcates the

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<sup>287</sup> In *Demeure*, Derrida speaks of Blanchot’s *The Step Not Beyond*, proposing that the logic of this text is ‘in some sense potentialized in this instant of death *without* death that signals to, *without* signalling, the literature of Blanchot’ (D 90, emphasis added). In other words, that this entire ‘logic without logic’ of the ‘X without X’ *is made possible or revealed by*, this experience of ‘dying without dying’ testified to by Blanchot *and*, we are arguing, by Satti.

performative and the constative, as was our subject in Chapter 3. Does the mark of circumcision not operate, then, as a reformulated thinking of the limitrophic hyphen-wound of Derridean (*testimonial*) undecidability and incalculability, as was so central in Chapters 2 and 3; as an unconditional, autoimmune and *passional* hospitality at or on the border between the ‘autos’ of a term or concept and its supposed opposite, even when that supposed opposite threatens to destroy it? Indeed, between the immune and that which threatens it, between immunity and autoimmunity, ‘the relation is neither one of exteriority nor one of simple opposition or contradiction’ (R 114). Once again, the words of *Rogues* are useful here:

‘Although *aporia*, *double bind*, and *autoimmune process* are not exactly synonyms, what they have in common, what they are all, precisely, charged with, is, more than an internal contradiction, an indecidability, that is, an internal-external, nondialectizable antinomy that risks’ (R 35).

Here, in thinking the ‘concept’ of truth (of testimony), *passion* and autoimmunity and their supposed ‘others’, what in Chapter 3 we named *limitrophy*, (*testimonial*) *undecidability* or the re-marking trait that overflows and ‘belongs’ to *more than one* genre is reformulated as the very ‘auto-deconstruction in every concept, in the concept of concept’; as what Derrida describes in the 1997 ‘Hostipitality’ as the *automatic* movement by which ‘each concept opens itself to its opposite, reproducing or producing in advance, in the rapport of one concept to another, the contradictory and deconstructive law of hospitality. Each concept becomes hospitable to its other, to an other than itself that is no longer its other’ (H 362). And thus the entire contradiction that we already witnessed being played out in the seemingly nonsensical and certainly maddening law of antinomy of *Monolingualism*: antinomies in which something (martyrdom or testimony, for instance) is ‘at once *both...and...*’, thus also shattering the integrity and purity of the ‘at once’. The entire contradiction as a (counter-signing) ‘contra-diction’:

‘which is more than a dialectical contradiction, and which constitutes perhaps the very stakes of all consistent deconstructions: the difference between something like “its” other (the very Hegelian formula of “its other”), the difference, therefore, between hospitality extended to one’s other (to everybody their own, their chosen and selected hôtes, their integrable immigrants, their assimilable visitors with whom cohabitation would be liveable [and we are all the while thinking of the **Lebanon** of the **1980s**]) and hospitality extended to an other who no longer is, who no longer was the “its other” of dialectics’ (H 363).

*Hospitality*, then, as *passion*, *testimoniality* and *autoimmunity*, as ‘the exemplary experience of deconstruction itself, when it is or does what it has to do or to be, that is, the experience of the impossible’ (H 364).

As such, returning to the circumcisional hospitality of this ‘*without*’, this act of what we might call a ‘confession *without* confession’, as a ‘truth without truth’ or the ‘secret truth’ of a truth ‘severed from truth’ (C 314), might *perhaps* (with the necessary precautions and an impossible insurance against misconstruals) be translatable as ‘the circumcision *of* deconstruction’ (again, with the double genitive): as the cutting off (the ‘circum-severing’, as ‘relation *without* relation’) of deconstruction from (absolute) truth, *Savoir absolu*, but not from the concern with, indeed *passion for*,

truth.<sup>288</sup> The ‘truth’ as a *certain* madness that is not so easily divorced from reason, as we will see when we turn to what Derrida, from the **1994** *Politics of Friendship* onwards, names ‘the passive decision’. Or ‘ashes in truth’ (see S 37, 47), as we will explore in our reading of Celan’s poetic mark in Chapter 5. As Hent de Vries remarks in his paper presented at the **2001 Villanova** colloquium:

‘in “Circumfession” as in *Glas*, one version of Absolute Knowledge, of *Savoir absolu*, SA – here with the help of *Saint Augustine* – is played out against (or substituted for) another – another knowledge, another *savoir*, another having self, another having, relating to, oneself, *s’avoir*? (de Vries, Instances 71).

This *other Savoir*, then, as the *perhaps* of the *puisse*, would be a testimonial and passionate ‘*sans savoir*’,<sup>289</sup> albeit without this ever becoming an alibi for relativisms, or for not wanting or needing to know. As we read in ‘A Silkworm of One’s Own’:

‘What knowledge does not know is what happens. *Voilà* what happens. For what happens (the operation I don’t operate, the one that operates me), you must *Savoir*, another *Savoir*, here it is, the other’s’ (Silkworm 86).

Another *Savoir*: the *Sans Savoir* that Cixous acknowledges, *after the event*, as perhaps having been the better title for her ‘confession’ (Cixous, *Insister* 110). *Sans savoir*, in the logic of this ‘testimonial without certitude’ or ‘passion without passion (i.e. passivity)’, as the ‘*knowing* not to know’ of the act of response and decision that is one of the main tenants of the **1992** *The Gift of Death* in which, as we are coming to in an imminent discussion of the ‘passive’ and *passionate* decision, the scene on **Mount Moriah** becomes exemplary of the impossible decision and with it the necessary sacrifice of ethics that we are faced with at every second of every day (GD 68-9).<sup>290</sup>

Knowing *without* knowing, then (and we are all the while thinking of the ‘program’ of ‘applied deconstruction’ and ‘doing history’), as the *knowing* that what is at stake in the *passion* of the aporia is ‘not knowing where to go’ (and this, as the experience of the nonpassage, as the experience of ‘what happens [*se passe*]’, in a way that is not necessarily negative, is what is ‘fascinating [*passionnel*]’ and *impassions*) (A 12). As what Derrida had already in the **1984** *Feu la cendre* (*Cinders*) named the ‘*passion du non-savoir*’: ‘writing in the passion of non-knowledge, rather than of the secret’ (*Cinders* 75, emphasis added).<sup>291</sup> But by ‘secret’, Derrida is referring here to some determinate secret – some intentional encryption or dissimulation, a code word or given instance of a shibboleth, for instance – rather than the ‘more ancient, more originary experience [...] of the secret’ which, as we will follow further in a reading of the poetic archive of Paul Celan, is in fact that which *impassions* us (see *Narcissism* 201). The passion of the ‘arche-secret’, then, as the necessary structural blindness of the

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<sup>288</sup> The phrase ‘circum-severed’ is used by John D. Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon in their ‘Introduction’ to *Augustine and Postmodernism*, p. 9.

<sup>289</sup> For Derrida, this *perhaps* is the modality of Blanchot’s entire discourse, above all in his testimony in *The Instant of My Death* (see D 68).

<sup>290</sup> This ‘knowing not to know’ is taken from the title of one of the chapters in *The Gift of Death*, yet another text in which the paradox of the secret is *vital*: ‘Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)’ (pp. 53-81).

<sup>291</sup> Derrida, *Feu la cendre* (Paris: Des femmes, **2005** [1987]), p. 55. First published as *Feu la cendre / Cio’che resta del fuoco* (Firenze: Sansoni, **1984**).

arriving of the event which for Derrida makes the blind man the exemplary witness (MB 104; see also 10, 102),<sup>292</sup> thus breaking from the tradition of the witness understood as eye-witness.

(Blindness, as *destinérrance*: as the non-visibility of the *horizon*, be it utopic or not, as destination or place of arrival.)

This experience of the arche-secret, as the circumcisional and differential confession ‘without truth’ described above, is an experience ‘that does not make itself available to information, that resists information and knowledge, and that immediately encrypts itself’ (Narcissism 201): an experience more akin to that of ashes, or cinders, as encrypted in the ‘untranslatable’ ‘*Il y a là cendre*’ (‘Cinders there are’) that we will return to in Chapter 5 in a discussion of the terrifying precariousness of the archive, and the *place* of the secret: ‘*Il y a là cendre : il y a lieu*’.<sup>293</sup>

The secret, once again, as the essence of otherness. The ‘radical’ inaccessibility that means that ‘severed from the truth [...] you will never have had any witness’ (C 314). The terrifying ‘truth’ that a witness is always alone in bearing witness; that, as Celan tells us, ‘**no one / bears witness for the / witness**’.<sup>294</sup> But which also means that, simultaneously, one can *only ever* bear witness and appeal to be believed. And hence the necessary *testimoniaity* of this *passion du non-savoir*; the necessary ‘good faith’ (albeit ‘without’ religion) demanded by the *Zusage* – *before* or *beyond* any determined ‘belief’ with a given object – that is ‘the condition of testimony, of the social bond and even of the most radical questioning’ (FK 93). The space of the *perhaps* of a messianic faith that is so vital for the triad of texts with which we began, as the promise of justice; as an originary *fidence* or heteronomic trust (index: passion as heteronomy; D 26), an entrusting myself ‘without measure’ to the other (PF 195) that, as we read in *Politics of Friendship* (and here we recall the *cogito* of Chapter 2), ‘exceeds the reflexive forms of knowledge and consciousness of a subject [i.e. that which would be expected in a classical conception of confession], all the certitudes of an *ego cogito*’ (PF 195).<sup>295</sup> With this in mind, we can return to the ‘passion without martyrdom’ of ‘Passions’ introduced above, this time citing in full:

“The secret never allows itself to be captured or covered over by the relation to the other, by being-with or by any form of “social bond.” Even if it makes them possible, it does not answer to them, it is what does not answer. No *responsiveness* [English in original–Tr.]. Shall we call this death? Death dealt? Death dealing? *I see no reason not to call that life, existence, trace. And it is not the contrary.*

‘Consequently, if the simulacrum still bears witness to a possibility which exceeds it, this exceeding remains, it (is) *the* remainder, and it remains such [*il (est) le reste*, il le rest – and we

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<sup>292</sup> This blindness is also central in *Veils*, where the event is ‘an absolutely unforeseeable verdict, absolutely, that is with no relation to fore-sight, nor therefore to sight’ (Silkworm 41): a gage ‘beyond truth as ontological revelation’ (Silkworm 83).

<sup>293</sup> Derrida, *Fen la cendre*, p. 21.

<sup>294</sup> Once again, Hamlet plays an exemplary role: in his witnessing of ‘the naked and monstrous truth’, a truth glimpsed or a ‘more than lucid knowledge’ which is *so terrifying* that he *decides* to move no further, remaining paralysed and silent, Hamlet is from then on ‘a pure witness, he is alone, alone and inconsolable [...]. Like every witness – and he bears witness also for every witness. He says no more than that, while keeping it a secret: I am alone in being able to bear witness’ (TOJ 35).

<sup>295</sup> ‘**I think, therefore I am**’, translated as ‘**I think, therefore I need the other (in order to think)**’: ‘the cause of the other at the heart of the cogito’ (PF 224).

recall here the *excess* and the non-present *remainder* of iterability in Chapter 3] even if one precisely cannot here trust any definite witness, nor even any guaranteed value to bearing witness, or, to put it another way, as the name suggests, to the history of any *martyrdom* (*martyria*). For one will never reconcile the value of a testimony with that of knowledge or of certainty – *it is impossible and it ought not be done*. One will never reduce the one to the other – *it is impossible and it ought not be done*.

“That remains, according to me, the absolute solitude of a passion without martyrdom” (Passions 30-1, emphasis modified).

This absolute non-response will be read in Chapter 5 in terms of a necessary betrayal and forgetting of the *counter-signatory* second *yes* that is, paradoxically, the condition of responsibility. And, as the passage above affirms, of *life* and *survival*. The necessary betrayal and violence of the infinite finitude of this circumcisional and spectral *différance*, as a ‘community without community’ of witnesses conjoined in absolute solitude, paradoxical as this may seem. ‘Absolute solitude’ as, *perhaps*, the interruption and unbinding that, as we read in *Rogues*, ‘opens the free space of the relationship to the incalculable singularity of the other’ (R 150). An ‘absolute interruption’ that, following Blanchot and Levinas and the circumcisional ‘relation without relation’ described above, is also the condition for the testimonial experience of any social bond (see FK 99). A certain ‘exceeding’ (index: the law of excess of Chapters 2 and 3) as the secret of the *remainder*, or as the (ontological) *resistance* of *restance*, the performativity or ‘unthinkable *passivity*’ that ‘remains to be thought’ (see WA xxxii-xxxiii).<sup>296</sup>

Let us stress once again, however, that this ‘without truth’ of the secret is *not*, by any means – and above all when it is a question of the ‘truth’ of the archive or of testimony – a *not wanting to know* or a limit in the progression of a knowledge, but rather that this ‘without’ is at once ‘heterogeneous, foreign to knowledge’, ‘something in relation to which knowledge is out of the question’ (Narcissism 201) *and* at the same time, we can argue, has *everything to do* with knowledge.<sup>297</sup> With the paradoxically *necessary* science and calculation (the ‘measure’ of which we spoke in Chapter 3B) of the ‘event-machine’; with the *necessity* of a hospitality towards the *studium* whilst all the while thinking the *punctum*. This ‘event-machine’, then, as the necessity, as we shall imminently see in an inspection of the (sovereign) decision, of thinking the circumcisional hyphen between faith *and* knowledge; between madness *and* reason. As mad as that might seem.

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<sup>296</sup> ‘(What) *res(is)ts*: what remains resists thought [...] What remains to be thought: the very thing that resists thought. It resists *in advance*, it gets out ahead. The rest gets there ahead of thought; it remains *in advance* of what is called thought. For we do not know what thought it. We do not know what this word means before or outside of this resistance. It can only be determined from, in the wake of, what resists and remains to be thought. Thought remains to be thought.’ Regarding the ontological resistance of *restance*, as Derrida notes here in the ‘Foreword’ to *Without Alibi*, the earlier *Glas* had shown how *restance* (remaining) undoes the ontological question ‘**What is it?**’ (index: *S is P*), and appears to be older than the distinction between ‘who’ and ‘what’ (Provocation xxxii-xxxiii).

<sup>297</sup> This ‘disclaimer’ is also legible in ‘Circumfession’: ‘not that I love nonknowledge for itself, on the contrary, I am even ready to think like certain Muslims that “the ink of the learned is more sacred than the blood of the martyrs,” but sacred, precisely, through something other than knowledge, sacred truth of this nonknowledge’ (C 141-42).

Returning to the ‘arche-originary’ *come* (the *viens* that comes from Derrida’s readings of the archi-passivity in Blanchot’s writings; see esp. PN), as with the *yes, yes* from which ‘comes’ the *given* word ‘**come**’,<sup>298</sup> or as with the originary *testimoniality* from which any *given* testimony takes place and in turn testifies to, this autoimmune, *passional* and *kbōratic* ‘letting come’ is the ‘place without place’ from which any discussion of the messianic promise of democracy to-come, of the act of decision, as a ‘sovereign’ and ‘free’ *operation*, must ‘begin’.<sup>299</sup> Before being any determinable ‘who’ who oversteps the threshold, the one (living or non-living) to whom the ‘performative apostrophe’ (DA 94) *come/ ‘come’* is proffered cannot be known in advance but, rather, must be *absolutely* other, expected in ‘an expectation constituted by nonexpectation, without what in philosophy is called a *horizon of expectation*’ (DA 96).

As with the tele-technological advances capitalised upon by the ‘wars of religion’ that Derrida discusses in ‘Faith and Knowledge’ and the madness of the autoimmune logic that infects the Reason of *Rogues*, Satti’s martyr-testimony and the possibility of the decision therein demands a re-thinking of the conceptual oppositions (‘the *limits* of Reason’) that have remained a legacy of the Enlightenment.<sup>300</sup> And as with the *puisse*, the event of the other is welcomed, ‘acti/passively’, meaning that not only is *another* performative called for, together with *another* knowledge and *another* mode of ‘self-possession’, but also *another* way of seeing (a saying **come** to the event, ‘*sans savoir, sans avoir, sans voir*’, PN 15), another thinking of the I/eye that is probed in what we might call the ‘optobiography’ of Derrida and Cixous that is *Veils*: a structurally veiled vision in this night of *faith* that is but a ‘différant’ reason or knowledge; a faith that is and remains faith, but in *différance*, *both* repeated in its economy and radically altered in the structure of iterability. And all this within the context of our probing of the *passion* of testimony and what Derrida elsewhere, in a not altogether unrelated context, names ‘a desire for light, for lucid vigilance, for the elucidating vigil, for truth’ (AT 157). As yet another silent word accompanying all speech and every intentional operation, it is *as if* this unwittingly pronounced welcome is the self-sentencing signature of the *arrêt de mort* (as both ‘death sentence’ and ‘suspension of death’): welcoming the foreign aggressor (but does the friend/enemy, host/guest distinction any longer stand?) and in so doing obliterating both the ‘self’ and the ‘instant’; in this case of ‘my death’.

And it is with this ‘*instant* of my death’ that we can turn to the instant of decision. As Mroué writes of suicidal operations such as Satti’s, ‘if ever [the ‘martyr’] decided not to carry out his suicide mission after his testimony had been broadcast, I think he would have no other choice than

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<sup>298</sup> Compare Derrida’s comments regarding this *viens* with the description of the *yes* set out in Chapter 3: ‘Giving no order, receiving no order from the law of laws [and here we recall *différance* as ‘ungovernable’], from the order of language, giving none because it receives none, *come* exchanges nothing, does not communicate, says nothing, shows, describes, defines, states [*constate*] nothing, the instant it pronounces itself, nothing that may be something or someone, object or subject. *Come* does not even call someone who would be there before the call’ (PN 16).

<sup>299</sup> ‘One must think the event from the “come [*viens*],” and not the reverse’ (DA 94).

<sup>300</sup> Regarding Reason, let us not forget the full titles of these two texts: ‘Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of “Religion” at the Limits of Reason Alone’ and *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*.

isolation and withdrawal from life' (Mroué, FT 117). The scenario brings to mind Hamlet's **'to be or not to be?'** (albeit this time *after* his testamentary dying words, **'I am dead'**) and the *decision* demanded by his paralysing dilemma, as well as the **'I would prefer not to'** of Melville's Bartleby (see GD 74-5), each of which is never far from our concerns. Rather than thinking this deciding *not to* of the 'literal', physical, suicidal operation, our interest lies in thinking the testimony itself as the suicidal operation, and in thinking the *instant* of this performative event *as* signatory and decisional.

Rather than the question **'to be or not to be?'**, then, what is at stake here is **'the time is out of joint'**: Hamlet's *affirmation* of the instant of testimony and decision as 'disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged [...] on the run and run down, deranged, both out of order and mad.' But a madness in a way that, however paradoxical and terrifying this may seem, is a way of keeping within reason: an autoimmune madness and derailment that is both a *threat* and a *chance*. As Derrida writes in *Specters of Marx*: 'Time is off its hinges, time is off course [index: *destinérrance* or perversibility], beside itself, disadjusted' (SM 20). Whilst the *terror* of the quasi-suicidal *madness* of time will be our concern in Chapter 5 – above all of the singularity and hence 'significance' of the (poetic and testimonial) date (Chatila, 1982; Bekaa, 1985; Laguna, 1995) – as 'the disadjustment of our time' (SM 20) that an operation such as Satti's reveals exemplarily, it is with what Derrida calls the 'dismemberment' of time, as an 'essential disjoining' (TOJ 34) that is above all *corporeal*, that our current focus lies.

Returning to the scene of *operation*, it is from the wounding of this dismembering that we sign. The mark of circumcision, then, as this 'unrefusable' and 'immemorial' wound that is 'older' than us; this covenantal pact we did not choose but which nevertheless has 'taken place' and leaves its mark, *bearing* in advance the unremembered memory of the unique yet infinitely repeatable and virtual re-markability testified to in *Monolingualism*; the lesions of this re-markability *from which* we sign, speak and testify:

'I sign, an **"I"** signs, she signs always *in the very place of the wound*, in the place of the wound that is only possible, of course, but so virtual that it remains, the possible wound is assigned, it bears the bereaved memory of an unrefusable lesion: you'd think it was older than self, you can have forgotten it but it carries on dictating the place of all the blows to which we are sensitive, all the blows of fate we await and fear as though we necessarily desired even the worst of them' (Silkworm 82-3, emphasis added).

Signing, deciding and testifying here become a case of what Derrida comes to name the 'passive decision': an unheard-of performative act which would entail rethinking 'the philosophemes of the decision, of that foundational couple activity and passivity,' as well as 'potentiality and actuality' (R 152). Radically *interrupting* the ordinary and hegemonic schema of decision (above all in the theory or exception and sovereignty of Carl Schmitt) which tends to imply 'the *instance* of the subject, a classic, free and wilful subject' (PF 86, emphasis added), the experience of this decision is one of being *originally affected* by the other which the 'good sense' of philosophy can only exclude as madness or nonsense (see PF 68) but which we are arguing is in fact the 'operative' *chance* (and risk) of philosophy, politics and any so-called 'ethics'. An experience of freedom 'that would no longer be the power of a subject, a freedom without autonomy, a heteronomy without servitude' (R 152).

Both ‘hyper-active and suffered [*sur-active et subie*]’ (again, the sur- as hyperbolic excess as witnessed in Chapter 3) and made in an *instant* of absolute urgency, this ‘mad’ decision must ‘rend time [i.e. *destroy* the instant of the performative, for instance of suicide] and defy dialectics’ (FL 255), operating in ‘the night of nonknowledge and nonrule’ (FL 255) that we are by now familiar with and which – before turning to the dismemberment of the instant – we can translate back to the surgical, operational scene.

Exposed as such, the corpus of the signatory of any performative act ‘must not be absolutely invulnerable, such is the condition of the signature’ (Silkworm 82). For the event ‘must, beyond all mastery, affect a passivity. It must touch an exposed vulnerability, one without absolute immunity, absolute indemnity [...]. In this regard, autoimmunity is not an absolute evil or ill’ (R 152). In other words, it must not be indemnified or immune; immune to the hand of the other which may very well not know what it is doing (Silkworm 82). As with the accidental arrival of Barthes’s reading of Poe from which emerged the reading of **‘I am dead’** in ‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’ and from which we in turn draw our counter-signatory quasi-concept of the *punctum*, and as with the ever-possible ‘traffic accident’ (the ‘essential accidents’ of the performative promise; see ACTS 100) about which the signatory of *Monolingualism* never ceases thinking (M 70), ‘[a]n accident is always possible’. An accident, as the necessity of *alea* (‘the lucky vein of this word’) of which we might say ‘Circumfession’ is the adoration; the ‘raw happenings’ that ‘no program, no logical or textual machine will ever close’ (C 15-6) (and with this we recall the paradox of ‘application’ with which this study began).<sup>301</sup> Is not (Satti’s) **‘I am the martyr x’** just one of these ‘raw happenings’, the *enigma* of which, however much theory or conceptualisation we apply, always somehow escapes, *breaking* through any possible circumscription?

The instant of decision, says Derrida, countersigning Kierkegaard, is a madness (FL 255). Returning to Satti’s decision, it is not a case of the potential ‘if he decided not to...’ *after* the testimony, since the surgeon’s hand has already fallen. I *will have been* signed (in the future perfect; see DI 50), counter-signed, by countless others who will (have) decide(d) upon the ‘truth’ of my testimony: for instance, what **‘I am the martyr’** really ‘means’.<sup>302</sup> Returning to the instant of the ‘passive decision’ and the ‘sceneless scene’ on **Mount Moriah** evoked above (see AANJ 58), that which must separate the responsible decision from knowledge and the indemnity of certitude is ‘an absolute interruption’, as a wounding incision, which ‘can always be judged “mad”’ (R 145). For to decide means to cut: Latin *decidere* ‘determine’, from *de* ‘off’ + *caedere* ‘cut’ (OED). ‘It is to interrupt the continuity of time and the course of history, to cut. [...] For me to decide, I must have in myself someone else who cuts, who interrupts the possibility’ (CC 25).

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<sup>301</sup> ‘What would a future be if the decision were able to be programmed, and if the risk [*l’aléa*], the uncertainty, the unstable certainty, the inassurance of the “perhaps”, were not suspended on it at the opening of what comes, flush with the event, within it and with an open heart?’ (PF 29).

<sup>302</sup> ‘[N]ot only will I no longer sign but I will never have signed, is this not basically what I have always meant to say’ (C 33).



As with the welcome to the unknowable and unforeseeable other that takes place *before* any decision of the border patrols, the ‘instant’ of my decisional auto-hetero-affection is always already inhabited by some other; by some who or what who/which *interrupts* me in my continuity: who incises or circumcises me in my autonomy (see RSS 134).<sup>303</sup> By the spacing of time, for instance. For, as with reflection, the decision – despite its ‘heartrending’ urgency in a ‘here-now’ – *takes time* (PF 15, 79). By the at once violent *and necessary* broaching and breaching (*entame*) of the *stigmē* of the instant discussed in Chapter 3. As Derrida writes in ‘Force of Law’, where it is above all a question of an im-possible yet nonetheless ever-urgent justice, the acti/passivity of this decision ‘preserves something passive, even unconscious, as if the deciding one was free only by letting himself be affected by his own decision and as if it came to him from the other.’ The consequences, Derrida continues, ‘of such a heteronomy seem redoubtable, but it would be unjust to evade its necessity’ (FL 255). It is precisely with the necessity of both suffering and negotiating with the threat and chance of this *terrifying* and ‘mad’ aporia – as the threat of irresponsibilisation and betrayal *at the heart of* any so-called ‘ethics’, ‘morality’ and responsibility – that we begin the following chapter.

At the outset, we made the claim that *passion* and *testimony* might function as philosophy’s deconstructive condition of possibility. Here we have seen how not only is a certain quasi-suicidal *passion* the ‘trap’ which unsettles and threatens the performative and yet simultaneously renders it possible and ‘indestructible’ (ACTS 94), but also how corporeal and quasi-suicidal ‘logics’ such as those of autoimmunity and circumcision are revealed as the very *passions* of philosophy, wounding the assurances upon which conceptions of sovereignty and subjectivity are built and causing them to tremble. Here, in Cixous’s words, is the ‘extraordinary audacity’ of showing that the philosopher writes with all his body (WTL 8).

In beginning to speak of the necessary non-knowledge for any quest for testimonial or confessional truth, we asked whether this might perhaps seem an irresponsible path to take, given the potential for relativism, skepticism and denial that such a route might open up. In the following chapter, we look to the poetico-testimony of Paul Celan, proposing that it is precisely the secret and terrifying unknowability at the heart of the testimonial and poetic pledge that makes possible any readability, thus returning to our earlier proposition that the unreadable of the arche-secret functions as a quasi-transcendental condition for any possible readability. And hence for the possibility of any testimony borne. Continuing to think in terms of the hyphen-wound, we see how the wound operates at once as a traumatism and as the site of significance. As is exemplified by the wound of the Celanian poetic date, the testimonial mark is shown to necessarily ‘efface itself in order to become readable, to render itself unreadable in its very readability’ (S 15), inscribing itself in a space of the ‘truth without truth’ or ‘revelation without revelation’ already encountered herein.

If we began here with philosophy in a time of terror, we see in the following chapter how ‘what terrorizes the most’ is that ‘one will remain forever defenceless in the face of a suicidal

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<sup>303</sup> See also the ‘Introduction’ to *Augustine and Postmodernism*, pp. 4-5.

autoimmunitary aggression' (RSS 95). Here, this time of terror is phrased in terms of the 'time is out of joint', as a time that dismembers and derails itself, thus spelling the death-drive of the historical archive and the dates inscribed therein. If, as Derrida proposes, deconstruction has perhaps never done anything but interpret this sentence of Hamlet's, '[b]eyond reading and theatre, interpreting interpretation' (TOJ 29), then can we not say the same of '**I am the martyr (x)**', insofar as '**x**' signals not only the testimonial 'I' but also the temporal mark of archival and testimonial inscription that begs for interpretation?

In the present chapter we have spoken of the madness of the responsible decision as closer to a post-Enlightenment form of Reason than might at first be imagined. The instant of decision must not only interrupt time, but 'interrupt the time of science and conscience, to which the instant of decision will always remain heterogeneous' (PF 79). In Chapter 5, this madness and wounding *of* time is re-inflected as what we will be calling the madness of the date, with this madness sending us into a space far from the assurances of science and evidence, instead leaving the witness exposed to the violences of historical revisionism. How, we will continue to ask, to defend such a madness when it is precisely such risks that we would seem to seek to dispel? Or might it not be, once again, that such risks are paradoxically necessary?

Regarding the 'poethics' of the event introduced herein, Derrida is commonly cited as prescribing the milieu of the only possible event of responsible decision as being 'the night of nonknowledge'. Whilst this is certainly useful for our thinking, above all in its unsettling of the privileging of ocular witnessing, Chapter 5 asks whether this might not be rephrased in terms of what Celan names the 'secret of encounter', as a terrifying space always open to the worst possible perversions, substitutions and betrayals, and hence to what in *The Gift of Death* Derrida names the 'scandal' of responsibility, as the 'sacrifice of ethics' (GD 60, 68); to a 'poethics' as a necessary 'irresponsibilization' of ethics (GD 61); a space in which the 'veritable essence' of the encounter is shown to be necessarily 'casual, improbable, risky, fortuitous, *unprovable*, and forever alien to knowledge' (HC 64).

## Chapter 5: The Wounded Archive

You will call poem from now on a certain passion of the singular mark, the signature that repeats its dispersion.

–Jacques Derrida, ‘Che cos’è le poesia?’<sup>304</sup>

Would Hamlet have felt the delicious fascination of suicide if he hadn’t had an audience, and lines to speak?

–Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*<sup>305</sup>

### Introduction

#### *It is happening*

In writing this book, the A. had the feeling that his sole addressee was the *Is it happening?* It is to it that the phrases which happen call forth. And, of course, he will never know whether or not the phrases happen to arrive at their destination, and by hypothesis, he must not know it. He knows only that this ignorance is the ultimate resistance that the event can oppose to the accountable or countable [*comptable*] use of time.

–Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*<sup>306</sup>

In a **2004** review of two studies on suicide bombing, Jacqueline Rose is concerned with how one should write about suicide bombing; about ‘an ethics of form’.<sup>307</sup> Whilst it has been made clear that this thesis is not *about* the phenomenon of suicide bombing, insofar as she speaks of *horror* of this phenomenon and of public conceptions of such acts as *monstrous* and humanly incomprehensible, Rose’s admirable and necessary article is informative on the broader level upon which we have placed ourselves and *from which*, it is argued, one might subsequently approach this specific phenomenon, having first passed through and acknowledged the broader conceptual framework that is given to be thought by the corpus of Derrida.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> ‘Che’ 297.

<sup>305</sup> Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2003), p. 63.

<sup>306</sup> Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. xvi. Part of this book was originally presented as a paper at the conference ‘Les fins de l’homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida’ (Cerisy, July 1980).

<sup>307</sup> Jacqueline Rose, ‘Deadly Embrace’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 26, No. 21 (4 November 2004). Review of Christoph Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, trans. Helena Ragg-Kirkby (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) and Barbara Victor Robinson, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (London: Robinson Publishing, 2004). <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n21/jacqueline-rose/deadly-embrace>>.

<sup>308</sup> As Rose writes, ‘suicide bombing is most often considered a peculiarly monstrous, indeed inhuman aberration that cannot – or must not – be understood.’ In particular in circumstances in which the case for war is weak or non-existent, in which the ugliness and guilt of war rise perilously close to the surface of the public mind, ‘it helps to *be able to point to something far worse*, preferably from another culture or world, with which no *reasonable* human being could possibly identify’ (ibid., emphasis added). See also the chapter ‘Horror at Suicide Terrorism’ in Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, pp. 65-92, which proceeds from Rose’s article.

The present chapter is concerned with Derridean *iterability* as an inherent *seriality* (index: the  $n+1$ , the ‘more than one [*plus d’un*]’ of Chapter 3) that is exemplified by the series of martyr-testimonies, with each martyrdom and testimony only ‘functioning’ as part of a series of witnessing and bearing witness; as part of a cacophony of calls and responses, appeals, injunctions and inheritances; a series of spectacles that appears to be ‘on loop’, *as if* each testimony were yet another instalment or ‘episode’ of a pre-scripted drama that, although predictable to some degree, always bears the possibility of an infinite, unmasterable and incomprehensible escalation.<sup>309</sup> In other words, that always bears the possibility of an unforeseeable and infinitely wounding event. And it is precisely in this structure of technical *seriality* that Derrida identifies the *terror* and trauma of the event of **11 September**: the trauma that comes not from what *has happened* but from what *might happen* in the future.<sup>310</sup>

As Derrida proposes in his (‘actual’) response to **11 September** (but also his ‘virtual’ response to Satti’s testimony) published in the collection *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, what is ‘terrible’ about this event is that its wound remains ‘infinite’, and ‘that we do not know it is and so do not know how to describe, identify or even name it’ (RSS 93-4). Here, in this movement of the ‘repetition compulsion’ of seriality, ‘the wound remains open by our terror before the *future* and not only the past’ (RSS 96) and what the theatricality of this event bears witness to, ‘on its body’, is ‘the terrible sign of what might or perhaps will take place, which will be *worse than anything that has ever taken place*’ (RSS 97). Whilst a weapon wounds and *leaves forever open* an unconscious scar, the weapon of this seriality ‘is so terrifying because it comes from the future, a future so radically to come that it resists even the grammar of the future anterior’ (RSS 97). Whilst one might desire to silence the martyrs’ voices and chase away the tele-mediated spectres, thus being able to say **‘It has happened, and now it’s over; the dead are dead and this event will not be repeated’**, the argument here is that this technical seriality is designated by an inherent and inerasable *it is happening* that is borne witness to, impersonally, by the wound of the hyphen *between* the event and the machine; by the wounding *of time*, in all its madness and terrifying unmasterability (see RSS 97). *Impersonally*, for before being the testimony of a ‘subject’, this is the trace of the other, ‘even if it is no-one’ (AT 118).<sup>311</sup> For perhaps it would be too quick to assume that all *terrorism* is deliberate or intentional:

‘there are historical “situations” where terror operates, so to speak, as if by itself, as the result of some apparatus, because of the relations of force in place, without anyone, any conscious subject, any person, any **“I”**, being really conscious of it or feeling responsible for it’ (RSS 108).

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<sup>309</sup> These martyr-videos can be read as a series of ‘epistles’ or poetic sendings, signed each time by the martyr-witness, as with Blanchot’s narrator, ‘in an uncertain non-place, antagonistic to both of the known worlds’ (Mroué, FT 115); as a series of ‘dead letters’ that reveal, exemplarily, the ‘originary’ mourning and haunting unleashed by spectres (see E, esp. 132). It is as if each martyr-testimony functions as one instalment in a series of ‘mimodrama, a sort of epigraph to some future development’ (DS 183).

<sup>310</sup> In speaking of *trauma*, the omission of an engagement with psychoanalysis here is acknowledged.

<sup>311</sup> Regarding the wound, as ‘witness’, see also Cixous: ‘Entretien de la blessure. De page en livre, faire parler la plaie. La blessure parle’ (Cixous, EB 25).

Thus, whilst we might speak of ‘philosophy in a time of terror’ as the task of philosophy to respond to ‘contemporary’ events such as **11 September**, by tracing the *it is happening* of this *differential* wound-hyphen back to the most seemingly ‘archaic’ of forms and technologies and forward to *the possibility* of future nuclear catastrophe and even apocalypse, the argument is that (a) there is nothing ‘new’ about the *today* of our ‘contemporary’ time of terror, but that the technologies that allow for operations such as Satti’s or that of **11 September** are merely *accelerations* of the existing ‘mechanisms’ of serial iterability; and (b) that whilst it is indeed the task of philosophy to both respond to what is ‘happening, **today**’ in techno-science, international law, ethico-juridical reason and political practices (R xii-xiii) and to respond to determined events of terror that are either the cause or the symptom of this ‘happening’, as Derrida’s oeuvre demonstrates (see *Madness* 356), what *also* demands confronting and *negotiating* is ‘a time of terror’ as *the terror of time*. Above all when events such as **11 September** and Satti’s ‘act’ threaten the very systems of interpretation for understanding and explaining, precisely, such events (see RSS 93). Once again: will we one day be able to think, *together*, both what is happening (the event) and the calculable programming of an automatic repetition (the machine) (TR 72)?

Thus, in looking to the madness of this *time of terror*, what is at stake is the *terror* of the quasi-suicidal *I am the martyr* (*x*) of every mark, whether this is ‘revealed’ in an address that announces death, destruction and murder (**‘I am the martyr’**), or whether this announce itself in the most ‘mundane’ of exclamations such as the **‘you know, it’s raining’** of Chapter 3A. In allying the seemingly mundane (as an ‘originary’ wound or *passion*) with the most extreme of acts (the wound of Satti’s **‘I am the martyr’**), once again it is a case of what Rose names an ‘ethics of form’, a risk addressed by Derrida notably in ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, where he speaks of the risk of conferring on the word ‘trauma’ a generality ‘that is as fearsome as it is extenuating’ (TR 159). As will be asked in our reading of Celan’s poetics, whilst all the while veering from the traps of quantification and comparison, is this ‘fearsome’ risk not produced, precisely, by the *terrifying* force of a more ‘originary’ wounding which it perhaps would be ‘worse’ to not confront?

Following our proposal in Chapter 3B that the act of testifying, as an act of invention, must be a poetic act, we move through the *corpus* of the event of *passion* in Chapter 4 to the *corpus* of the poetics of Paul Celan, as an exemplary *mise-en-oeuvre* of the limitrophic and hospitable ‘relation’ between the ‘structural’ wound and the ‘real’ wound to which a poem may bear witness.<sup>312</sup> What Celan’s poetics bear witness to is not only the inherent wound of testimony, as this readable-unreadable secret (what we were earlier calling the *punctum*) that ‘takes place’ on the *kbōratic* hyphen of the event-machine and without which there would be no testimony, no archiving and no commemoration, but also the wounding of *the passion of testimony* of Chapter 3, insofar as the seriality of the event-machine means that the wound of some experienced event (the ‘real’ wound) to which

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<sup>312</sup> We are concerned with what Celan’s poetry tells us, exemplarily, about bearing witness in general and the bearing witness to which every poem bears witness; about ‘a certain limit makes meta-witnessing – that is, absolute witnessing – at the same time possible and impossible’ (PP 70; see also 96).

the poem bears witness may always be infinitely displaced and metonymised; and thus that the ‘truth’ of the testimony may perish or *offer itself*, *auto-matically*, to annihilation. In thinking seriality, what persists to be at (the) stake is *the possibility of* absolute singularity. Without its being strictly *impossible*, how would one speak or write? And what chance would there be for the truth of testimony? For a testimony *given* that must absolutely touch on absolute singularity, without missing it, but that simultaneously always misses it, straightaway (see SI 65)?

What *is happening*, then, is a certain dis-location and anachrony (cf. the Heideggerian ‘*aus den Fugen*’) of *differance*, as *passion*, that allows us, beckons us even, to move from age to age and scene to scene, transporting Celan’s poetic word far beyond its intended destination, should we ever know what the intentions of this exemplary witness-poet may have been. Whilst the argument here is that there is much to be gained from doing so – from countersigning Celan’s poetics by *betraying* it, and in doing so being faithful to it – does this not also bear witness to the *terror* of the inherent precariousness – as an inherent ‘principle of ruin’ – of both testimony and, more generally, of the archive?<sup>313</sup>

Continuing with our question of what it is, and *how*, to ‘apply deconstruction’, to ‘do history’ or even ‘to testify’, in taking the scene on Mount Moriah as exemplary of the madness of the decision already encountered in Chapter 4 and of the ‘poethics’ that is exemplified in the Celanian poetic ‘encounter’ we see how, contrary to what is implied by the series of ‘scripted’ and seemingly ‘programmatic’ martyr-testimonies, there is no example: no exemplarity of the Passion. Without example, the experience can only be *terrifying*, enough to make one tremble (see GD 53-5, 116). Here, in this im-possible act of invention that ‘takes place’ in or on this hyphenated crossroads, the only exemplary figure is Abraham, who teaches us that there can be no precedent, that we can take heed from no-one and tell no-one. Is this not what Satti *perhaps* realises, in beginning to speak and in the solitude of his testimony, as demonstrated by his stumbling and hesitation?

Finally, what is *scandalous* is that in speaking of an ‘ethics of form’ or a ‘poethics’, sacrifice is always necessary: that the *it is happening* is also the Derridean *it is necessary (il faut)* of responsibility (see WA xxvii) as a necessary and autoimmune *irresponsibilisation*. But is the seeming ‘stumbling block’ or ‘snare’ of this *scandal* not also the experience of the *aporia*, as the condition for passage?<sup>314</sup> The wound, then, as the ‘site without site’ of terror, but also as a blessing, a ‘noble wound’: this is the *passion*.

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<sup>313</sup> Regarding this ‘principle of ruin’, see Cadava, ‘Lapsus’. This chapter is indebted to both this text and to Cadava’s reading of the poetic ‘encounter(s)’ between Derrida, Celan and Avital Ronnell in ‘Toward an Ethics of Decision’, *Diacritics*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter 1994), pp. 4-29.

<sup>314</sup> *scandal* from Gr. *skandalon* ‘snare, stumbling block’ (OED).

## I. The madness of the date

Contrapuntal theory or a procession of stigmata: a wound no doubt comes in (the) place of the point signed by singularity, in (the) place of its very instant (*stigmē*), at its point, its tip. But *in (the) place of this* event, place is given over, for the same wound, to substitution, which repeats itself there, retaining of the irreplaceable only a past desire.

–Derrida, ‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’<sup>315</sup>

– The trace of this wounded writing that bears the stigmata of its own proper inadequation: signed, assumed, claimed . . .

–Derrida, ‘Sauf le nom’<sup>316</sup>

In the following section, our attention will lie predominantly with Derrida’s reading of the poetics of Paul Celan. Continuing to prioritise the (im-possibly) ‘autobiographical’ (i.e. the testimonial ‘I’), we look not only to Celan’s poems but also – again, *beyond* genre – to a broader sense of *the poetic* or *the poetic word*, as *poetic trait*, reading Celan’s ‘The Meridian’ (the speech, or ‘poem’, given upon his receiving the Georg Büchner Prize in **Darmstadt** on **27 October 1960**) in line with the *passional*, *testimonial* and *poetic* (or *poetological*) ‘offerings’ of Satti’s video-testimony and Derrida’s *Monolingualism*. Just as both Satti’s **‘I am the martyr’** and Derrida’s **‘I have only one language; it is not mine’** ‘enact’ or ‘perform’ the very thing to which they testify, it will be argued that Celan’s ‘Meridian’ can be read as a *certain* (and we emphasise this ‘certain’) *mise-en-oeuvre* of the very same *poematic passion* (see S 10) and that this exemplary text, together with its ‘enactment’ in so many of his poems, reveals *yet more vividly* the logic of the wound and the archi-passivity that we have been tracing thus far; an archi-passivity that is to be distinguished from the ‘productivity’ or ‘putting to work’ of the Heideggerian ‘setting-forth-of-truth-in-the-work’ but which nevertheless ‘works’ (we recall here the Blanchotian-de Manian *‘cela oeuvre’*). For as Derrida’s reading shows us, the ‘archi-passivity’ of what Celan names the ‘secret of the encounter [*Geheimnis der Begegnung*]’ can be read as a ‘hyper-majesty of poetry’ (Majesties 117) – as what we might call the ‘mighty power’ of a ‘sovereignty *without* sovereignty’ – that is to be read in line with the ‘more than suicidal’ logic of autoimmunity already encountered (R 124).<sup>317</sup> Whilst in Chapter 4 this ‘more than suicidal’ logic was *revealed more vividly* by Satti’s **‘I am the martyr’** and the suicidal attacks of **11 September**, here, following Celan, we also draw from the exemplary poetico-performative, **‘Long live the King!’**, exclaimed by Lucile Duplessis (the wife of the executed Dantonist, Camille Desmoulins) in Georg Büchner’s play set in the midst of the French Revolution, between the first and second *terrors*, *Danton’s Death* (**1835**): a cry

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<sup>315</sup> ‘DRB’ 67.

<sup>316</sup> ‘SN’ 61.

<sup>317</sup> In conjugating this ‘hyper-majesty’ of which Derrida speaks in ‘Majesties’ (2002), his reading of Celan’s ‘The Meridian’, with the ‘mighty power (of “might”)’ of Derrida’s reading of Cixous in *H.C. For Life* (2000) and the ‘more than suicidal’ logic of autoimmunity of *Rogues* (2003), we note the relative simultaneity of these texts and the ‘sovereignities in question’ towards which they all move. Regarding sovereignty, Derrida was delivering the seminar ‘La bête et le souverain’ between 2001 and 2003 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

which, contrary to its appearance, does not affirm support for the Monarchy but rather functions as a seemingly absurd self-sacrifice or self-sentencing to death at the hands of the revolutionaries who are the subject of Büchner's critique. Might something be gained by reading *together*, equating even, Lucile's '**Long live the King!**' and Satti's '**I am the martyr (x)**'? And/or *Long live the King!* and *I am the martyr (x)*?

• '**Each time what is involved is a machine, a tele-machine**'<sup>318</sup>

Although we are not yet ready to step over the threshold into Celan's 'Meridian', it is worth saying a little more at the outset about Lucile's cry. In responding to this exclamation, we find ourselves, once again, *in or on* the hyphen of the 'event-machine'. Here, in this closing scene of the play, Danton and Camille Desmoulin (who are in opposition to Robespierre) have been executed. Each goes to the scaffold histrionically and spectacularly, 'speechifying', as if confirming Danton's sense of revolutionary events as an absurd spectacle or theatre in which human beings are mere automata: 'Marionettes, that's what we are, pulled by strings in the hands of unknown powers, nothing by ourselves, nothing!'<sup>319</sup> And as if confirming what for Celan is the nauseating display of 'art [*Kunst*]'; of the *Kunst* that mechanically proceeds, marionette-like, to the ceaseless ('uneventful', we might say) rhythm of the iambic pentameter (see Celan, Meridian 173). Even here, facing death, Danton and Camille 'are not at a loss for words, words rich in artistry, which are effectively disposed' (Celan, Meridian 174). Suddenly, however, Lucile, Desmoulin's wife, cries out appalled, '**Long live the King!**', which immediately leads to her arrest and inevitable execution. This cry, for Celan, is the 'something' that 'intervenes' (Celan, Meridian 173) – that *interrupts* or *punctuates*. And that something is *Dichtung* (poetry): something that testifies to the 'human [*Menschliche*]' in the face of a brutal absurdity. This, for Celan, is poetry's *Atemwende*, its 'turn-of-breath' (Celan, Meridian 180).

In what follows, we will follow this exemplary 'counter-word' on two levels. *Firstly*, on a formal level, whilst for Celan the 'majesty' of this exclamation signals 'the event, or chance, of poetry' (Majesties 115), the proposal here is that, as with Satti's exemplary act, Lucile's exclamation is also exemplary not only of the im-possible performative act of testimony but also the im-possible act of invention that any 'application' of deconstruction – any attempt to 'do deconstruction' or 'do history' – must be. *Secondly*, on both the formal *and* the historical plane, can we not read Lucile's cry *as*, precisely, a (poetico-)martyr-testimony? And, inversely, can we not read this 'theatre' of the series of tele-mediated martyr-testimonies in light of the *theatrical* and *spectacular* scene of Revolution in *Danton's Death*? '**I am the martyr**' and '**Long live the King!**', then, as the rallying cries around which one might read the seeming futility (absurdity, even) of struggle and action together with the

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<sup>318</sup> 'FK' 78.

<sup>319</sup> Georg Büchner, *Danton's Death*, act 2, scene 5. Cited by Jean Launay in Paul Celan, *Le Méridien et autres proses*, trans. & ed. Jean Launay (Paris: Seuil, 2002), p. 103 n. 31, as cited and discussed by Derrida in the Tenth Session of *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminars (BS I 252). For the published English, see Georg Büchner, *Complete Plays and Prose*, trans. Carl Richard Mueller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), p. 36.



breakdown of morality and free will demonstrated in *Danton's Death* and the failure of the Communist resistance in the Lebanon of the 1980s. Satti's '**I am the martyr**', or *the I am the martyr, as passion*: is this to be read on the side of the absurdity of Danton, Camille and the others' 'theatrical' deaths, with their 'effective disposal' of words, 'in top form', as part of their 'talk of going-to-our-deaths-together' and wanting, even, to die 'twice over' (Celan, Meridian 174-5); in short, as part of the 'triumph of "puppet" and "wire"' (Celan, Meridian 175)? Or on the side of Lucile's 'statement that severs the "wire," that refuses to bow before the "loiterers and parade horses of history"; of Lucile's statement as an 'act of freedom', a 'step' (Celan, Meridian 175)?

But can one choose between the two? *Dichtung*, for Celan, travels the same path as *Kunst*. And yet it moves towards something 'strange' and '*unheimlich*', something *other*, 'perhaps in the cause of a *wholly Other*' (Celan, Meridian 180). For instance, the marionette or robot *at the heart of* the living, as the prosthesis encountered in our reading of *Monolingualism*. Once again, what is at stake is the performative 'act' (in both scenes, of revolution and resistance) that is caught *between* the organic or corporeal event and the machine-like marionette or automata; between the 'spontaneous', 'sovereign' 'act' of the political 'actor', then, and the puppet pulled by the strings of history.

### The trace of the wound

Is it necessary and is it possible to give an account of this wound, of this trauma, that is, of the desire, of the living movement, of the proper body, and so forth, given that the desire in question is not only injured or threatened with injury by the machine, but produced by the very possibility of the machine, of the machine's expropriation? Giving an account becomes impossible since, once again, the condition of possibility is the condition of impossibility. This is, it seems to me, the place of a thinking that ought to be devoted to the virtualization of the event by the machine, to a virtuality that, in exceeding the philosophical determination of the possibility of the possible (*dynamis*, power, *Möglichkeit*), exceeds by the same token the classical opposition of the possible and the impossible.

—Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)'<sup>320</sup>

Having said that we will be focusing on the 'encounter' between the two signatures of Derrida and Celan (but these two are already four: for each is in virtual dialogue with Satti's and Lucile's, and in fact so many more), by virtue of the signature's very *virtuality* a host of other proper names, voices and indeed *corpora* should be heard and felt in the background, however quietly, above all where these stand, *metonymically*, for what we are calling the *poetic*, the *wound* and the *event-machine*. For a start, the Derridean-Cixousian countersignature 'forces' itself upon us yet again. Added to which we can also feel the *poignancy* of the Derridean-Barthesian *punctum*, or rather, of the serial 'procession' of stigmatic *puncta* of the citation above, precisely as the seriality of a 'new contrapuntal equation' that is 'the new metonymy of metonymy itself, a new metonymy of the substitutive virtue of the

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<sup>320</sup> 'TR' 135.

*punctum*' (DRB 60).<sup>321</sup> But the list is endless, and the discussion of the wound of testimony that follows must be situated as part of a *series* of 'encounters', inheritances and counter-signatures (*between* genres, moreover) extending beyond those recounted or even simply named and signposted here. In other words, as has been one of the main points throughout this study, what warrants highlighting is that the Derridean '(quasi-)concepts' through which we are reading Satti's martyr-testimony must always be thought through this divided signature and seriality; through a series of injunctions and responses to 'fellow' poet-witness-philosophers not so far unlike the series of martyr-testimonies. For what is shared *between* Derrida, Celan, Cixous, Barthes, Blanchot, de Man, Augustine and even Genet, *for instance*, is 'the trace of the wound' (Cixous, *Stigmata* xi)<sup>322</sup>; a wound which, when thought as the *open* wound of a *stigmata* that Derrida refers to fleetingly but that is given to be read more insistently by Cixous, *bears witness* to the 'passion without Passion' that is our concern. A *showing* of the wound, *without revealing* the secret, which in turn *bears witness* to both Derrida's parodic '**Ecce homo**' or '**this is my body**' of *Monolingualism* and beyond and Satti's insistently secular martyrdom, but also to the *passion-martyrdom* of every testifying **I-*P***. A *showing* of the wound-hyphen that, furthermore, as the 'in (the) place of' in the citation above, is also the 'place' of *terror*. Above all when, as is our concern here, it is a question of bearing witness, 'authentically' and irreplaceably, to the 'one time' of a traumatic event; to a 'one time' that is, *at heart*, threatened by seriality and metonymy, by the 'in (the) place of' cited above.

Moreover, whilst we are arguing that the wound (as the 'place' of *différance*, passion and the arche-secret of the trace) 'is' (so to speak) at the origin not only of all literary writing but of *all* writing<sup>323</sup> – above all as an experience of the date, as the singular experience of a 'originary' wound that sets in motion philosophical reflection but which philosophy has tried to *efface* (Passages 382) – if we began by stressing the *autobiographical* and thus *exemplary* element of Derrida's and Celan's 'poetic offerings' this was because the argument here is that insofar as all of the abovementioned writers are concerned, the 'poetic operation' of their *corpora* is in each case *indebted to a 'real' ('given')*, *singular and dated* (thus 'historical') traumatism or wounding (*trauma*, from Gr. 'wound', OED) that

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<sup>321</sup> *Poignant*, from Latin *pungere* 'to prick' (OED). Derrida refers to the 'poignant emotion' of the *punctum* (E 97).

<sup>322</sup> Besides Derrida's encounter with Augustine in his 'Circumfession', an encounter which arguably takes place *across a wound*, Cixous also speaks of the 'happy fault' or 'blessed wound' of the *Felix Culpa* with which everything begins, as is given to be read in Augustine's *Confessions* (Cixous, *Stigmata* 149). Regarding the wound in Genet, as 'the founding secret of all major creation', see also Cixous, 'Stigmata' 149 and Cixous, 'EB'. Concerning the centrality of the wound (*la blessure*) in Genet's ethical and political commitment and the hypothesis that this can be traced back to a biographical event – the encounter with a fellow-traveller on a train in the early **1950s** – defined by Genet as '*la blessure*', see Carl Lavery, 'Ethics of the Wound: A New Interpretation of Jean Genet's Politics', *Journal of European Studies* Vol. 33, No. 2 (June **2003**), pp. 161-76.

<sup>323</sup> Regarding the wound as *blessing*, see Derrida's 'Foreword' to Cixous's *Stigmata* (Cixous, *Stigmata* ix). In speaking of *stigmata*, we note that the wound with which we are concerned is *not* to be thought of as a *scar*, insofar as a scar implies a closure or barrier to the 'without' which would be contrary to everything that we have thus far laid out regarding the lesions and traumatisms of the mark of re-markability, and regarding the wound of circumcision as an *openness* and exposure to the other. What *is* useful here is to think the stigma 'which comes from our Greek memory', as *stigmē*: the point, the spike or *the punctuality of the instant* (see Cixous, *Stigmata* x).

such writing comes to *bear witness to*. To a ‘real’ traumatism or wound such as the experience of injustice borne witness to within the narrative of Satti’s three takes and which intersects with the ‘originary’ wounding of his im-possibly ‘instantaneous’ (i.e. *stigmatic*, from *stigmē*) testimony **‘I am the martyr’**. To a ‘real’ traumatism that, moreover, may well not be understood (“translated”), borne witness to or remembered. For of the *oeuvre* of Satti’s testimony, where is the *punctum* that makes us *remember* and learn *by heart*; that makes us, moreover, stop and listen: the wounding injustice *from which* Satti speaks, as testified to in his narrative with all its dates and proper names and which causes him to commit such an act; or the enigmatically shocking *and* mundane, readable *and* unreadable utterance **‘I am the martyr’** and the ‘three times’ of the ‘one time’? Or of Mroué’s testimony to the lived experience of the failure of the Communist struggle in Lebanon and of the mechanisms of representation, what did the audiences read? The audiences whose mis-readings caused Mroué and Khoury to cease performing their homage and testimony? The audiences who heard the words **‘I am the martyr’**, saw the iconography of an incomprehensible jihadist combatant, and promptly ceased to truly watch and listen?

As, for instance, in Derrida’s reading of the ‘poetic operation’ of Cixous’s ‘Savoir’, the ‘unheard-of operation’ of a poetic writing *indebts itself* to the *other* operation, ‘the so-called “real” operation’, of the other; the event that *happens* to ‘a body proper exposed, vulnerable, expropriable in advance: readable unreadable’ (Silkworm 82); the poignant operation of the Barthesian-Derridean-Cixousian *punctum*, as testimony, which ‘pierces me’ (Barthes, CL 26).<sup>324</sup> This operation, the *caedere*-confession of Chapter 4 (*caedere* L. ‘to cut’ [OED]) ‘thus engenders the opus, that is, the poem that was born of it’ (Silkworm 50). The poem born of it, as testimony *borne*. And as Cixous, for instance, writes of her own texts collected in *Stigmata*, but as can be ‘applied to’ the abovementioned (or rather, as is already ‘interior’ to them): ‘*caused by* a blow, they are the transformation of a spilling of blood, be it real or translated into a haemorrhage of the soul’ (Cixous, *Stigmata* xi, emphasis added). Thus, as with our discussion of the messianic desert of abstraction and *khōra*, the question of how to think the hyphen *between* revelation and revealability (and thus of how to think the aporia of exemplarity) remains open, although by now we are coming closer to some kind of response.

All ‘events’, Derrida deduces from his **1998** encounter with de Man (taking de Man’s thinking *beyond* de Man), are traumatic and wounding, even supposed ‘happy’ ones (TR 135-36, 159-60). Whilst this is bound up with the inherent irreducibility to *desire* of any ‘true’ event, this is also due to the necessary incisory *wounding* of the textual event, as is legible in Derrida’s reading of de Man. This is reiterated in ‘Real and Symbolic Suicides’ of **2001**, where we read that this trauma is due to the fact that the event ‘always inflicts a wound in the everyday course of history, in the ordinary repetition and anticipation of all experience’ (RSS 96), a proposal that we find already in ‘Typewriter

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<sup>324</sup> In the case of Barthes, does not the whole of *Camera Lucida* ‘owe itself’ to the wound of Barthes’s mother’s death, and to the **‘one November evening’** upon which he found the photograph of his mother as a child, taken in **1898**, that haunts the entire book (see Barthes, CL 63, 67)?

Ribbon', which speaks of the singularity of the event, which is ultimately what we are concerned with, functioning as an *essential trauma* that '*interrupts* an order and *rips apart*, like every signature worthy of the name, the normal fabric of temporality or history' (TR 135).<sup>325</sup> Is this not what we are proposing occurs with the event of Satti's testimony, precisely, paradoxically, in the event (the *punctum*) of the three 'rehearsals'?

We will imminently be arriving at a reading of the testimonial status of the *dates* of the poems of Paul Celan, asking what the *traumatic* and *wounding* experience of *these* dates tells us about the possibility of testimony (and thus of '*the date*' in general) *per se*. Taking pains to stress that there are indeed several kinds of wounds to be distinguished (and here we refer back to the 'fearsome' and the 'terrifying' with which we began), we can say that, 'structurally', every date is a wounding in some way, even the dates of happy experiences, such as that of the gift, gratitude or joy (see Passages 381). Regarding the 'philosophy in a time of terror', we can look to the **1990** interview 'Passages – From Traumatism to Promise', where Derrida asserts that, whilst all the time wary of giving in to pathos,

'a philosophical discourse that would not be provoked or interrupted by the violence of an appeal from the other, from an experience that cannot be dominated, would not be a very questioning, very interesting philosophical discourse' (Passages 381).

Granted, there is always the risk that a discourse can be destroyed by the traumatism. But, Derrida continues,

'When the discourse *holds* in some way, it is at once because *it has been opened up* on the basis of some traumatizing event, by an upsetting question that doesn't let one rest, that no longer lets one sleep, and *because it nevertheless resists* the destruction begun by this traumatism' (Passages 381, emphasis modified).

What is vital for our understanding of the affirmativity of the *sufferance* of *passion*, as *wounding affect* and *interruption*, is that, in its autoimmunity, this not be read as entirely negative: that the impossibility of *absolute singularity*, itself a traumatism in its re-markability (we recall the 'lesions' of *Monolingualism*), is both 'tragically' and 'happily' universal (SI 65) and that whilst there is no denying the trauma of the *nosblessures* shared by Derrida and Cixous and beyond, these are also 'happy'; 'noble wounds' or 'blessed wounds' (Cixous, *Stigmata* 149; Cixous & Derrida, *WTL* 5), both traumatic and 'felicitous' events, to borrow and re-inflect a term from the speech act theory.

### The poetic experience

Before turning to the Celanian poetic testimony as a poetic '*mise-en-oeuvre*' of the *passion of testimony*, it is worth noting that whilst Derrida speaks in the **1986** 'Shibboleth' of the 'poetic' mark or encounter, we can read this with what, in a text entitled 'Che cos'è la poesia? [What is poetry?]' (first published two years later, in **1988**), Derrida names 'the poetic', or even 'the poetic

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<sup>325</sup> Cadava foregrounds the manner in which time 'presents itself' as a repetition 'that tells us that history can only emerge in the *interruption* of the continuum of presentation' (Cadava, *Lapsus* 44, emphasis added).

experience' (see Che 295, 297), in mind.<sup>326</sup> For the sake of clarity, we will continue to use the conventional term, 'poetic', but it is worth bearing in mind the pains Derrida takes to distinguish the experience of which he speaks therein. Implying *poiesis*, with *this* poematic mark there is 'nothing to be done (*poien*), neither "pure poetry," nor pure rhetoric, nor *reine Sprache*, nor "setting-forth-of-truth-in-the-work"' (Che 297). "There is never anything but some poem, before any *poiesis*' (Che 297). And by 'poematic', furthermore, we allow ourselves to break free of the circumscribed institution of Poetry, letting the 'poematic' join the 'literary' and 'theatrical' traits, for instance, *beyond* genre, that we have been appealing to thus far. Unlike the *act* of creation of poetry, the poematic is constituted by a certain experience of *waiting* (*without* waiting, 'awaiting absolute surprise' [H 362]), rolled up in a ball on the autoroute (we recall here the highways, destinations and arrivals in *Monolingualism*), exposed to the event (the signature or decision) of the other, to the blessing that *may* very well turn out to be a catastrophe; radical evil, even, or 'the worst'. Whilst operating as the condition of the event, 'this destiny without a strictly assignable destination is also the tragedy of competence, relevance, truth' (SI 65). As 'poematics', or what in *Sovereignities in Question* is referred to as 'poetic signature', and not 'poetics', the poem (or *poiemata*) becomes 'profoundly estranged' from *poien* as the poetic source, and from *poiesis* as the *work* or the Heideggerian *setting-to-work of truth* (Istrice 303-04). Instead, this *passional operation*

'takes place, essentially, without one's having to do it or make it: it *lets itself* be done, without activity, without work, in the most sober *pathos*, a stranger to all production, especially to creation. The poem falls to me, benediction [i.e. the 'blessing' of which Cixous speaks], coming of (or from) the other. Rhythm but dissymmetry' (Che 297).

If there 'is' some poem, it is without a subject, and 'I' never write it: **'A poem, I never sign(s) it. The other sign(s)'** (Che 299).

#### • **'This is my body'**

Whilst the chosen figure for this 'poematic creature' is the hedgehog (whose rich philosophical-poetic legacy we are unable to reconstitute here), we are never far from the 'hero-martyr-pioneer-outlaw-legislator' of *Monolingualism*, and thus from Satti, or indeed from the figure of Christ. 'Eat, drink, swallow my letter, carry it, transport it in you, like the law of a writing become your body: writing in (it)self: such is the injunction given to the 'you' to which 'Che cos'è la poesia?' speaks (Che 293). Again, the **'This is my body'** that is repeated and displaced across Derrida's corpus in this 'passion without Passion' and which every poematic mark bears witness to. Exposed to oncoming traffic and the potential accident that is never far away ('[y]ou hear the catastrophe' [Che 293]), this highway experience of the poematic comes to pass in the space of the irreducible and

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<sup>326</sup> Although not referenced by Derrida, it is worth noting, as pointed out by Sarah Wood, that it was Antonin Artaud who coined the word 'poématique', 'finding the Greek word *-ema* (meaning blood, or in French *sang*) in the "*poème*" and reinstating it in the middle of the word "poetic". Sarah Wood, 'Editorial: "It will have blood"', pp. v-vi.

objectless faith that ‘Faith and Knowledge’ prioritises as the milieu of the tele-mediated information highways which both produce and transmit so many ‘televisualizable’ miracles (Satti’s ‘martyrdom’, for instance) (see FK 62 n. 17 & AANJ 57). A ‘place’ which we propose is also the nocturnal crossroads of **Mount Moriah** of Abraham’s terrifying ordeal, and which we will be soon be reading in terms of the ‘(on)topology’ of the Celanian ‘secret of encounter’. Waiting, patiently, in the middle of the road: is this poetic experience not also, paradoxically, the ‘leap’ of faith required for any political or ethical decision (see HJR 66)? For any ‘action’ or ‘praxis’ that by its nature is necessarily always textual? For a ‘pragmatalogy’ to-come that is inscribed in the structure of undecidability of the trace? Just as the scene of circumcision is exemplary of the ‘night of nonknowledge’, so too is the event of the poem, above all when the poetic mark is given to be thought as a ‘circumcised word’. Reflecting language or speaking poetry, but never relating back to ‘itself’, the event of the poem ‘always interrupts or derails absolute knowledge’ (Che 299) – the ‘circum-severing’ of Savoir absolu discussed in Chapter 4. Let us turn to the encounter, itself poetic and shibbolethic, between Derrida and Celan.

• ‘Only one time: circumcision takes place once only’<sup>327</sup>

IN EINS

**Driezehnter Feber.** Im Herzmund  
erwachtes Schibboleth. Mit dir,  
Peuple  
de **Paris**. *No pasarán.*

AS ONE

**Thirteenth of February.** In the  
heart’s mouth  
An awakened schibboleth. With you,  
Peuple  
de **Paris**. *No pasarán.*<sup>328</sup>

One of the central features of ‘Shibboleth’ is Derrida’s focus on the manner in which so many of Celan’s poems are *punctuated* by dates: dates which are inscribed and commemorated within these poems which *bear witness* to the *wounds* of at times coded and other times decipherable *singular*, dated events. *For example* (and it is still very much a matter of exemplarity): the **13 February** of Celan’s ‘As One’ (or ‘In One’ [*In Eins*]), the **14 July** of ‘La Contrescarpe’ or the **March** or **September** of ‘With the Hailstone’ (*Beim Hagelkorn*)’ and ‘Huhediblu’. But why concern ourselves with the date here when there *appears* to be no date in Satti’s ‘**I am the martyr**’? Certainly, in the narrative that ensues, Satti refers to the Lebanese civil war of **1975-76** and to the Israeli invasion of **Southern Lebanon** in **1982**, but in the performative ‘instant’ that has so far been our interest, as exemplary testimony, there at least appears to be no date. And why read Satti’s testimony together with Celan’s poems when these poems, following the temporality of the classical and prevailing schema

<sup>327</sup> ‘S’ 1.

<sup>328</sup> Paul Celan, ‘Aschenglorie’ in *Atemwende* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967); English trans. by Joachim Neugroschel in Celan, *Speechgrille and Selected Poems*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 240. Cited in ‘PP’ 66-7.

of testimony laid out at the outset, bear witness to some past event that was first witnessed and then *subsequently* borne witness to? Or does this ‘instantaneous’, ‘*stigmatic*’ ‘**I am the martyr**’ not in fact testify to the conditions of im-possibility of the dated narrative that ensues? And when we say that Celan’s poems only bear witness to some past event(s) and/or even the present of their inscription, should we be so fast to exclude the future? Are not these poetic marks also sending [*envois*], in the structure of the messianic promise, towards the future? Are they not beckonings for infinite counter-signatures to-come? And does not every poetic, testimonial and traumatic mark in fact bear witness to at least the possibility of a future event, thus functioning in a sense as the ‘dress rehearsal [*répétition générale*]’ of a future anterior? And of a future anterior, precisely, as an infinite trauma, as exemplified by *terror* imparted by the date **11 September**?

As Derrida asks: ‘Does one ever speak of the date? But does one ever speak without speaking of a date? of it and as of it?’ (S 13). In short, the thesis here is that *every mark* – and above all the poetic and archival mark (which is what a mark of testimony always is) – is always inherently *dated*, in fact *constituted by* a date, whether or not a particular date is *given*, ‘explicitly’, to be read. And that whilst Celan’s poems so often speak of a particular date, as ‘referent’ to some signifying historical event, the poems simultaneously *reveal* much regarding the ‘instant’ of the poetic testimony itself, as exemplified by ‘**I am the martyr x**’. Thus, to our list of silent and implicit accompaniments to each and every testimony – *I am dead, I am the martyr (x), yes, yes, come*, for instance – we here add a *certain*, silent and unreadable date. By looking to the logic of the date that Derrida detects as functioning exemplarily in Celan’s poems – a logic that already, in **1984**, is shown to be autoimmune, quasi-suicidal and circumcisional –, what is given to be read *more vividly* is the *madness* of the *instant* and of the *date*: a madness that becomes central in the **1993** readings of *Hamlet* that deal with the instant of political and *just* decision and the time of mourning (see SM 147, 204-05 & TOJ 15, 17), as well as the instant of ‘ethical’ decision discussed in *The Gift of Death* (see GD 65) in which the contradiction and paradox of responsibility ‘must be endured *in the instant itself*’ (GD 66).<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> In speaking of **1984**, we note that although ‘Shibboleth’ was first published in French as *Schibboleth pour Paul Celan* (Paris: Éditions Galilée) in **1986**, a first version was presented at the ‘International Paul Celan Symposium’, University of **Washington**, Seattle, October **1984**.

## The fabrication of truth

Is a date true? What is the truth of this fiction, the untrue truth of this truth?  
– Derrida, ‘Shibboleth’<sup>330</sup>

Supposing that deconstruction has a *shibboleth*, I remind you that the question of the date is inseparable from it and that the link between *shibboleth* and *date* is an insistent theme of what is called deconstructive readings, one of the most apparent themes of deconstruction.

–Derrida, ‘The Time is out of Joint’<sup>331</sup>

In addition to the political and ‘ethical’ paradoxes of this madness, this self-exposing logic of the dated mark is exemplary of the *passion*, or quasi-suicide, of testimonial and signatory archival inscription *per se*. Thus (against traditional historical approaches that would exclude the literary) our argument is that a thinking of poetry, as exemplary of the aporia of singularity and corporeal autoimmunity, is essential for a thinking of the archive and even ‘the historicity of history’ (see SI 63-4). What, we might ask, recalling the discussion of the precariousness of testimony mid-way through this study, is the relationship between the poetic work and the historical ‘reality’ of the archival event (as ‘wound’, precisely) from which the poem springs and to which it *bears witness*? In other words, as with testimony, what is the ‘documentary’ or ‘evidential’ status of the poem? What is the relationship between the poetico-performative signature and what Mroué names ‘the fabrication of truth’? Or the ‘making truth’ of the Augustinian sense of confession? Or rather, the ‘truth *without* truth’ of circumfession? What does the poetic mark tell us about the *possibility* of the documentary, or the *limits* of representation?<sup>332</sup> About precision, calculability and hence reliability?

We can begin to respond to these questions by looking to Celan’s proposal, in his **1958** address in **Bremen**, that at stake in the poem are *addressable realities* and that the contemporary poet goes towards language ‘with his very being [*Dasein*], reality-wounded and Reality-seeking [*wirklichkeitswund und Wirklichkeit suchend*]’ (Celan, Bremen 396).<sup>333</sup> For Celan, writing in the ‘today’ of ‘the polychrome of apparent actuality’ of **1958**, the German poetic language is ‘concerned with precision’ and, distrusting beauty, ‘tries to be truthful’, naming and positing, trying to ‘measure’ the area of the given and the possible. We read on:

“True, this is never the working of language itself, language as such, but always of an “I” who speaks from the particular angle of reflection which is his existence and who is concerned with outlines and orientation. Reality is not simply there, it must be searched and won.”<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> ‘S’ 47.

<sup>331</sup> ‘TOJ’ 17.

<sup>332</sup> The allusion to the now seminal collection, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (which contains a ‘testimony’ to the experience of translating Celan’s ‘Todesfuge’ by John Felstiner), is intentional. See Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>333</sup> Celan, cited in John Felstiner’s ‘Introduction’ to *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York & London: Norton, 2001), pp. xxvi.

<sup>334</sup> Celan, ‘Reply to a Questionnaire from the Flinker Bookstore, Paris, 1958’, in *Collected Prose*, trans.



Moreover, the German language is concerned with ‘the *irreducible polyvalence* of this term: precision [*Präzision*]’ (emphasis added): a polyvalence through which we might think both the ‘cutting (off)’ – *pre-cision* – of our discussions of the ‘truth *without* truth’ of the event of circum-fession in Chapter 4 and the *piercing* of the *punctum* (this circular mark in Derrida’s countersignature of Barthes) and Barthes’s search for the ‘truth’, ‘justice’ and ‘*accuracy*’ of the image of his beloved mother’s face (see CL 67, 70) in the *exemplary* Winter Garden photograph from which he decided to “‘derive” all Photography’ (Barthes, CL 73).<sup>335</sup> How to think this search for precision that is both *rooted in* and *surpasses* ‘autobiographical’ (*witnessed*) experience together with the necessarily *shibbolethic*, readable-unreadable mark of the date-wound? How to think the necessary *calculation* (the *studium*?) of responsible witnessing when, as we will see, the (*punctum*-)date of the poem ‘can give place to calculations’ but, ‘in the final account,’ as with the decision, ‘ceases to be calculable’ (S 48)? How much faith to place in what John Felstiner names Celan’s ‘uncertain yet urgent hope for human addressability’; in his hope (as voiced in the **Bremen** address) that a *poem*, by which we understand here a *testimony*, ‘can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the – not always greatly hopeful – belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps’ (Celan, Bremen 396)?<sup>336</sup>

In thinking the *fatal*, *autoimmune* and *terrifying* logic of the *madness of the date*, we will explore further the event of *encounter* as always necessarily both *dated* and *shibbolethic* – the secret or ‘relation *without* relation’ of the radical cut of circumcision – and, following the discussions in Chapter 4, as exemplary of the ‘deconstructive *disruption* or *madness in the concept* of hospitality, the madness of hospitality, even *the madness of the concept* of hospitality’ (H 362, emphasis added). Sovereignties *in question*, thus.

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Rosemarie Waldrop (**Manchester**: Carcanet, **1986**), pp. 15-6.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p. 16. *Precision*, from Latin ad. *praecisionem* ‘a cutting off abruptly’, n. of action *praecēdere* ‘to cut off (in front), cut short, abridge’, from *pra* ‘PRE- + *cadere* ‘to cut’ (OED). Regarding our concern for the ‘one time’ and the ‘uniqueness’ of the wound-date-event(-machine), our choice to evoke Barthes’s Winter Garden photograph is not fortuitous, given that ‘it achieved for me, utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*’ (Barthes, CL 71). As with Celan (especially in ‘The Meridian’), had we the space, we would need to investigate further the use of the term ‘utopic’ and how this potentially differs from the non-utopia of Derrida’s messianic promise.

<sup>336</sup> Felstiner is referring here to the sentence ‘*Kämen Menschen*, If only people would come, I could almost begin anew, *ich könne fast neu beginnen*’ in a handwritten note in the back endpapers of a copy of Kafka’s *Erzählungen*. See *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

## The delirious sense of *wann*<sup>337</sup>

For a poem is not timeless. Certainly it lays claim to infinity, it seeks to reach through time – through time, not above and beyond it.

–Paul Celan, Speech on the occasion of receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, 1958<sup>338</sup>

Is this not the madness, the absolute anachrony of our time, the disjunction of all self-contemporaneity, the veiled and cloudy day of every today?

–Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge'<sup>339</sup>

So, to *the madness of the date*: as the 'radical *ad absurdum*' (S 11) that is the impossibility of any ideal or absolute meaning, and as the *delirium* (the *more than one* madness) of Hamlet's '**The time is out of joint**' (see TOJ 19) that testifies to the *it is happening* of the event-machine.<sup>340</sup> As the *contretemps* that 'looks favourably on the encounter', which would not take place without this possibility of *contretemps* and 'more than one' (PF 1), but *also* as the 'terrible Thing' witnessed by Hamlet, rendering him silent and paralysed, as the 'terrible *dismembering* of the world in its present' (see TOJ 35, emphasis added). 'Philosophy in a time of terror', then, as the demand for philosophy to think time *as* terror, or the terror *of* time. The *terrifying* con-joining, 'con-signing' and 'co-signing' (see S 21) of the event *and* machine that 'takes place' in the 'speaking with' (*Gespräch*) of the poetic encounter and which is witnessed and *revealed all the more vividly* upon viewing both the *more than one* attack of **11 September** and the unedited version of Satti's testimony that, let us not forget, was never intended to enter the public archive. What Celan, in the specific context of the '**today**' of **1958** names 'the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech' (Celan, Bremen 395) *can* also – and this is the terrifying law of iterability – be transported elsewhere: *for instance* to a thinking of the *today*, *per se*, as the im-possible *here* and *now* of an 'originary' tele-technical dis-location that is 'the very spacing of deconstruction' (SN 80) and without which there would be no survival. As in *Hamlet*, it is not just that 'time is out of joint', but more specifically the date: '[d]ates have become unhinged' (TOJ 19). '(In) a time of terror', then, as the 'madness of "when"' – of the '*wann* [when]' and '*Wahnsinn* [madness]' – of Celan's poem 'Huhediblu' (1973) (see S 48).

With this mad impossibility of measuring time comes the impossibility of 'measuring the measure of all things', despite the demand for *precision* cited above. 'Measurelessness thus becomes the law' (TOJ 33-4). But when we speak of the madness of the date, we are also thinking of the proper name, and above all the names of geographical locations (see S 13, 16, 18). For the

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<sup>337</sup> '*Wahnsinn*: the madness of the date, the madness of "when," the delirious sense of *wann*' (S 38).

<sup>338</sup> Celan, 'Bremen' 396.

<sup>339</sup> 'FK' 52.

<sup>340</sup> Although in his '*Lapsus Imaginis*' Cadava speaks of the time of the image, without obliterating specificities, this is nonetheless relevant to the poem: 'if time ruins the image, this ruined image also interrupts the movement of time, in a manner that has, not the form of time, but rather the form of time's interruption, the form of a pause, of an explosion. This ruined time wounds the form of time. It suspends and deranges time. But since time – and all time – can be deranged in this way, time itself is perhaps a kind of madness' (Cadava, *Lapsus* 44).

‘structural’ date of which we will be speaking is also the ‘place’ of an encounter – as in *Monolingualism*, it is a ‘situation’ (S 48) – albeit a non-locatable place (*kbōratic*, then) *from which*, through an *ontopology*, we might think the ‘rootedness’ both of the ‘body proper’ and the ‘real’ place (**Chatila, Hasbayya**, *for instance*): the ‘unhinging’ of place as the ‘arch-originary’ (and thus, even *today*, always ‘archaic’) tele-technical *dis-location* of the *férance* of the poe(ma)tic trace.<sup>341</sup> The *it is happening* of the expropriating, delocalising and decorporalising sites of abstraction of ‘Faith and Knowledge’ that are ‘the machines, technics, technoscience and above all the transcendence of tele-technology’ (FK 43), against which vengeance is taken by violences enacted upon the body proper (see FK 88-9).

Paradoxically, however, in the tragedy *and* happiness of the autoimmune logic with which we are now so familiar, what Celan’s poetic word demonstrates exemplarily is that it is the always possible annihilation of the date, and thus of its significance, that makes any dating – and thus any *bearing witness* – possible. Wound *and* blessing. Just as the process of virtual dis-location (the ‘martyr’ ‘in’ one’s sitting room or computer monitor, so to speak) is ‘the positive condition of the stabilization that it constantly relaunches’ (SM 103). Thus the coded marks of the date and place ‘share a common resource, but also a *dramatic, fatal*, and fatally equivocal power’ (S 18, emphasis added); a ‘power’ that risks the reality of the date or name becoming mere *legend. Becoming-legend*: is this not necessarily what takes place whenever there is some martyr-testimony, as the commemoration and celebration of a ‘heroic’ and mythical status?<sup>342</sup>

Whilst any piece of archival inscription *might* very well be intentionally or accidentally suppressed, destroyed or lost (we recall how the video of Satti’s very much temporally specific testimony was only found *by chance*, years later, languishing on a shelf and destined to eventual disintegration and disappearance), this structurally *necessary* self-exposure both to accident and to destruction – this *essential precariousness* of the archive to which no mark is immune (see LINO 107) – functions within the logic of the ‘passion of the proper name’<sup>343</sup> of the **1974** *Glas* and the *necessary* law of the incisory bro/eaching of iterability of the **1972** ‘Signature Event Context’ witnessed earlier, setting the scene for the *mal d’archive* of the **1995** *Archive Fever*: the self-effacing logic of the archive ‘itself’ (*mal* is translatable as ‘sick’ or ‘fever’, but also as ‘evil’, thus alerting us to an in-finite threat of the death-drive, without which the archive would not be possible) (see esp. AF 19, 29). In short, what is at stake here is the quasi-suicidal logic of *passion* as a ‘principle of ruin’ at the heart of

<sup>341</sup> ‘It is not only time that is “out of joint,” but space in time, spacing’ (SM 103).

<sup>342</sup> This potential for becoming-legend is legible in the testimonies of ‘martyrs’ who endow themselves with mythical status, foregoing their names for more mythical ones such as ‘*the bride of the South*’ or ‘*the flower of the South*’. See Toufic, ‘I am the Martyr Sanâ’Yusif Muhaydlî’, p. 84 n. 26, and Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah’s New Martyrs*, pp. 147-48.

<sup>343</sup> Across many of his texts, Derrida speaks of a spelling of death that is borne by the proper name (which we are here thinking *as date*) (see, for instance, *Glas*). What is worth noting here is what Derrida names, in ‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’, the ‘terrifying’ nature of this future anterior announcement not only of the death of the name’s bearer but also of the disappearance of the ‘unique-I’ or, we can add, of the unique (archival, poetic) mark in general (see DRB 34).

the trace. As with our ‘blessed wound’, what must be thought is the doubly genitive *possibility of ruin* (MB 68); a ‘love of ruins’, with ‘ruin’ not as an object of love but rather as *experience* itself (MB 69).

But of which date do we speak? As with the signatory wound introduced above, there are *at least* two:  $n + 1$  or ‘more than one [*plus d’un*]’. As Derrida recounts, Celan dated all his poems (S 16). But Derrida’s interest does not lie so much with the mentioning of the date on which the poem was written (for instance the **1995** of ‘Faith and Knowledge’); a supposedly ‘*external*’ date that, ‘properly speaking’, as with the title, lies ‘*outside*’ the poem. In fact, whilst the dates of Celan’s poems are documented in his manuscripts or workbooks and in some of the earlier publications of individual poems, apart from one exception (the **October 1953** of ‘Epitaph for François’, written after the death of the first child of Celan and his wife, Gisele Léstrange, within days of his birth) these dates were suppressed upon publication in collections, and thus in effect withheld from the publicly accessible archive (S 16-17). What is of more interest to Derrida is the ‘more essential incorporation’ of the supposedly ‘*internal*’ date (S 16). But the word ‘internal’ is used simply for clarity here, since in fact what Derrida is at pains to demonstrate is the manner in which Celan’s poetry aims to displace or even efface such a limit: between the date *of* the poem-testimony, as the date ‘internal’ to the poem as, *on the one hand*, the ‘external’, calendrical date borne witness to *in* the body of the poem, *in* one of its parts, in a form *legible* according to traditional codes and, *on the other hand*, the ‘non-conventional, non-calendrical form of dating, one that would merge entirely, *without remainder*, with the general organization of the poetic text’ (S 16, emphasis added). The limitrophic enmeshment or *shibbolethic* border between ‘internal’ and ‘external’: as in the previous chapter, sovereignties are in question and at stake.

#### • ‘20 January’

Let us look to an *example*, one ‘external’ date in particular that occurs, *legibly*, at least three times, not within Celan’s poems but in his ‘Meridian’ speech, arguably both his and the twentieth century’s major poetological statement. The date is **20 January**, a date which is significant both in the particularity of the wound-references to which it bears witness *and* in its functioning *in the place of* the singular date *in general*. **20 January**, then, as the date that every poem *bears*: ‘*Perhaps* one can say that every poem has its “**20th of January**”?’ (Celan, Meridian 180, emphasis added).<sup>344</sup>

In ‘The Meridian’, we learn that it was on **20 January** (Celan in fact does not mention the year, **1778**<sup>345</sup>) that Lenz – both the ‘real’, ‘historical’ Lenz and the fictional Lenz of Georg Büchner’s eponymous novella – set off into the mountains (Celan, Meridian 179). Unable to fully follow the path taken *from* this *particular 20 January* either by Lenz or by Celan here in the ‘Meridian’ address,

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<sup>344</sup> We emphasise this *perhaps* which punctuates not only *Sovereignties in Question* and Celan’s ‘Meridian’ address therein but also the corporeal encounters of Derrida, Cixous, Nietzsche and Celan (see esp. Majesties 130 & 132).

<sup>345</sup> The exact date is given in Georg Büchner, *Lenz*, trans. Richard Sieburth (New York: Archipelago Books, 2004), p. 151 n. 2.

for fear of being led too far astray, we can at least signpost towards the significance here of the motif of ‘setting off’, destination and passage (see Celan, *Meridian* esp. 178-80). As in Chapter 3, what is vital for our concerns regarding the singular poetico-testimonial mark is the manner in which for Celan the poem moves both *from* and *towards* the reality of some date (Celan, *Meridian* 180). Speaking in the *hope* of an other,<sup>346</sup> the poem moves *from* and *towards* not only a potential ‘Thou’ and/or date to-come, but *from* and *towards* an ‘addressable reality’ (see Derrida, S 7-8 & Celan, *Bremen* 396): the historical ‘wound-reality’ (the above-cited *wirklichkeitswund*) – both past *and* future – to which the poem testifies. Following the *perhaps* of the **20 January** or every poem cited above, Celan continues:

‘Perhaps the novelty of poems that are written today is to be found in precisely this point: that here the attempt is most clearly made to remain mindful of such dates? ‘But are we all not descended from such dates? And to which dates to we attribute ourselves?’ (Celan, *Meridian* 180, emphasis added).

Signing a ‘here’ (of a country, region or even house, in their proper names) and a ‘now’ (of the calendar or clock), the date marks the provenance of what is *given*, *sent* or *destined* (see S 13), whether or not it arrives at its intended destination (and as we will see, when it comes to testimony – above all to the third **20 January** that we have yet to encounter – it is this potential ‘missing the mark’ that causes despair and even terror). *Speaking at its date*, this discourse about the date declares that it is ‘marked by its date, signed by it, re-marked in a singular manner. What is thus remarked is its *departure*, that to which it no doubt belongs but from which it departs in order to address itself to the other: a certain (im)parting [*partage*]’ (S 13).

### **20 January**

In what follows, we will focus on two further **20 Januarys**, reading them together through the logic of the (Derridean-Cixousian) shared ‘noblewounds’ (*nosblessures*), as the wound *and* blessing of the hyphen of the event-machine; a hyphen that, yet again, forces us to think the *between* of the encounter (itself wounding and terrifying) between the wound, date or ‘encounter’ as, *on the one hand*, structural or formal and, *on the other hand*, ‘given’, empirical or historical (for instance, the wound of the Judeo-Franco-Maghrebi experience shared by Derrida and Cixous). By tracing the event of this structural or *given* encounter, we also augment our thinking of *passion* as responsibility, as the terrifying experience of the ‘secret of encounter’, an experience which we have already translated into the scene of the perilous highway crossing or the crossroads of ‘*sans savoir*’, and which we will in turn transport to Mount Moriah and beyond.

Firstly, as Celan relates here in ‘The Meridian’, **20 January** also marks the eve of the beheading of Louis XVI in **1793 (in Paris)**, thus leading to Lucile’s ‘**Long live the King!**’, to which we will be returning when we move from the ‘encounter’ of the poetico-testimonial mark to the

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<sup>346</sup> Derrida speaks of the ‘distress’ *and* ‘hope’ of the poem (S 40).

‘encounter’ between an ‘I’ and some *other* in the terrifying ordeal exemplified on **Mount Moriah**. Secondly, in stating above that at the ‘origin’ of every (poetic, testimonial) writing is an ‘arche-wound’ that is *revealed more vividly* by a ‘real’ wound, and *from which* the testimony to that ‘real’, dated wound is issued, another **20 January** comes to function exemplarily in the very *passion* of its *metonymy*.<sup>347</sup> Although Celan does not state this, either in ‘The Meridian’ or beyond, it was during the course of the **Wannsee** conference on **20 January 1942** that Hitler and his collaborators finalised plans for the ‘final solution’ (see *Majesties* 113).<sup>348</sup> Thus whilst Celan’s ‘Huhediblu’, for instance, speaks of the **September** roses and thus, *hypothetically* at least (for a date, as with a testimony, *can only ever be a hypothesis*, ‘the support for a by definition unlimited number of projections of memory’ [S 25]), of **1 September 1939**, the day when Hitler invaded **Poland**, the madness of *this 20 January* (Celan underlines ‘this’ in the manuscript of ‘The Meridian’), as secretly evoked by the pun on **Wannsee** in the poem’s repeated ‘*wann* [when]’ and ‘*Wahnwann* [mad-when]’, silently functions as the **20 January** of every poem; as the exemplary date which sets the poem in motion and *towards* which – in Celan’s ‘**today**’ but also in our **today** and in *the today* – we must attempt to remain mindful (or ‘precise’, as we read above). *This 20 January*: ‘anniversary of death, then, of the crime against humanity, of the *sovereignty*, arbitrarily genocidal *decision*’ (*Majesties* 113, emphasis added).<sup>349</sup>

**20 January**, then, as the metonymic cipher for the loss of Celan’s parents in the **June** of that same year,<sup>350</sup> but also, as we will see, as the cipher for the serial *re-markability* that made it possible for Celan to be charged with poetic plagiarism and for his accusers to speak of the young poet’s ‘sorrowful *legend*’ of his parents’ having been killed by the Nazis, which he had ‘related so tragically’. As Felstiner relates, the word *legend* ‘hit a nerve in one who could barely bring home to himself, much less to others, *the reality* of his parents’ death [emphasis added]’; a reality made all the more scarring through Celan’s having been accused of taking from Goll’s **1951** collection the ‘mills of death’ of his **1948** poem ‘Late and Deep [*Spät und Tief*]’.<sup>351</sup> Charged thus with the inauthenticity of his signature and the relegation of his wound-reality to a mere fiction, at stake is the inherent *quasi*-suicide or *im*-precision of the archive, which is itself constituted through the wounding trauma of its inherent dating and datedness. Such is the terror to which philosophy, but also literature and historical enquiry, must respond; a terror that is *revealed more vividly* by the wounding of the poetic-testimonial mark.

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<sup>347</sup> This metonymy that, as we recall from our brief foray into ‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’ in Chapter 2, ‘is no mistake or falsehood; it does not speak untruths’ (DRB 65). The truth of metonymy, then.

<sup>348</sup> Derrida notes how it was only upon reading Jean Launay’s translation of *Der Meridian*, after having written *Schibboleth*, that he discovered this additional significance of this date (*Majesties* 113).

<sup>349</sup> As John Felstiner writes, an agenda was hereby set, albeit tentatively, here in **Darmstadt, 1960**: ‘Poetry ought to speak in view of Europe’s murdered Jews.’ John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 106.

<sup>350</sup> Celan’s parents were picked up in an overnight raid in **Czernowitz, Bukovina** on **27 June 1942**. Celan was born in **Cernowitz** on **23 November 1930**. See *ibid.*, pp. 6 & 14.

<sup>351</sup> Regarding the plagiarism charges, see *ibid.*, p. 222. Felstiner notes how Eichmann had been quoted on ‘the mills of death’ during the **Frankfurt Auschwitz** trial in **1964**.

In what follows, whilst looking more closely to this terrifying logic of the wound-date, let us *also* think the affirmation of what Derrida calls the ‘hyper-majesty’ of this metonymised **20 January 1793**, which we will read in terms of the Celanian ‘secret of encounter [*Geheimnis der Begegnung*]’ (Celan, Meridian 181), *as* experience of the date. Or, in fact, as ‘experience itself’ (S 9). *As experience*, and therefore, yet again, as *passion* and *différance*.

### *Faire date*

There is here the genius of the witness who reminds us that the testimonial act is poetic or it is not, from the moment it must invent its language and form itself in an incommensurable performative.

–Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*<sup>352</sup>

Reading Celan’s celebrated **1963** ‘In One [*In Eins*]’ – a poem which speaks of **13 February** and of a *shibboleth*, and thus also of the cipher of the *shibboleth* that every poem and every date is (see S 24-6) – Derrida asks: ‘What is gathered and commemorated, in a single poetic stroke, in the unique time of this “In eins”?’ (S 21). In the ciphered access that we can only ever be granted to both *this* poem and *every* poetico-testimony, **13 February** just *might, perhaps*, refer to the electoral victory of the *Frente Popular* in **February 1936**, thus marking the eve of the Spanish Civil War and the rallying cry of resistance, *No pasarán* (see S 23). ‘**I am the martyr**’: in the context of the series of martyr-testimonies of the Lebanese Communist Party, is this not a translation of ‘*No pasarán*’? Of the *shibboleth* for the Republican people, for their allies and for the International Brigades that functions as a password to grant passage *at the border* – a ‘*visa*’ both to enter a country and a meaning, theme or content (see S 25-6) – but is also translated and re-cited *across* geographical and temporal borders whenever it is a case of *resistance*? Of this ‘*mot d’ordre*’ that is both a ‘watchword’ and a ‘password’, but also a word of command’ (see S 32 n. <sup>o</sup>): ‘**I am the martyr, and I urge you to follow my example**’. And, on another level, is not the *Come* of *I am the martyr* also, paradoxically, as an auto-immune and unconditional hospitality that is *also* a ‘hyper-majestic’ resistance, a *No pasarán*?

Returning to **13 February**, Derrida writes of how the “as one,” all at once, several times at the same time, seems to constellate in *the uniqueness* of a date’ (S 21, emphasis added). Is this date ‘one’? ‘[W]hat if there were more than one **thirteenth of February**?’ (S 21). Or, more than one **20 January**? This we have already seen, in the multiplicity of dates that are gathered around ‘the same anamnestic center’ (see S 10 & Rams 153) in the constellation of the poem that is ‘The Meridian’ and which mark ‘the poetic and political anniversary of singular events’ (S 23). Or, what if there were more than one **11 September**? Is this not what, *at heart*, Derrida is asking us in ‘Real and Symbolic Suicides’? In this response to the event of **11 September** where it is precisely a question of the uniqueness and unprecedented nature of this ‘major event’ (RSS 85, in English in the original), *as* event (RSS 85-6); of **11 September** as an event that ‘*fait date*’, ‘marks a date in history’

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<sup>352</sup> ‘D’ 83, emphasis added.

(RSS 85), ‘an event that truly *marks*, that truly makes its mark, a singular and, as they say here [in the US], “unprecedented” event’ (RSS 86, emphasis added)? An event as unprecedented as that of the mark of circumcision to the *as if* blind body of the child?

But when we say **11 September**, we are already citing, are we not? (RSS 85). *Yes, yes*. Just as within the prosthetised body of the signature-date we are already, *by necessity*, forgetting, *dis-en-gage-ing*. Again, an *immemorial* event that leaves its mark upon the body; the wound of circumcision to be read as singular, immemorial and corporeal archive. *Yes, yes*: the second yes *must* betray and forget the first (see Number 649), disengaging itself from its context (Sec 9-10).<sup>353</sup> Always-already citing, the ‘*No pasarán*’ that in ‘In Eins’ is allied with **13 February** is already *both* a repetition of the First World War *and* the ‘*dress rehearsal* [répétition générale], its own future anterior, that was the Spanish Civil War’ (S 23).<sup>354</sup> The ‘*unheimlich* dimensions of a cryptic predestination’ (S 24) of the date; of the *future anterior* that is the grammatical tempo of the event, as revealed exemplarily by the madness of the date and the ‘fabulous retroactivity’ of the signature (DI 50) and by the *I am dead* inherent in any dated/dating mark (S 25; WM 157-8)<sup>355</sup>; of the ‘fatal necessity’ of *destinérance* (PC 66) in the necessarily proleptic event as the inherent threat of absolute and monstrous danger (see OG 5). ‘Dated structure of the dress rehearsal: everything happens [*se passe*] as if the Second World War had begun in **February 1936**’ (S 23). *For instance. As if* the event testified to *and* the event of the testimony itself were but a virtual rehearsal for some event – who knows what – *to-come*, as is demonstrated not only across this series of tele-mediated and tele-staged martyr-testimonies but also, *all the more vividly*, in the ‘theatricality’ of Satti’s testimony, *between* and *within* each of his rehearsals of the event of ‘**I am the martyr**’.

By its mere occurrence, the date, as ‘the inscription of a sign “as a memorandum,” will have broken the silence of pure singularity’ (S 9). That which is unrepeatable and *cannot* come back nevertheless *does* come back, both in memory and the same date; a *revenant* and virtual possibility of re-citation (and hence the potential fictionality of the fable or theatre) signified by the first inscription of each date (S 18). The possibility of seriality, then, as a *marked* and *marking* multiplicity (see S 25), as both the condition and destruction of both testimony and the archival mark. Condition *and* destruction, then: for in order to remain faithful to the wound-experience testified to, the poetico-testimony must betray it; must offer itself to the ‘grievous figure of a metonymy’ (S 23) that we already witnessed in Derrida’s encomium to Barthes; must *expose itself* to the future repetition of the future anterior.

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<sup>353</sup> Again, de Man is important here: regarding the memory *and* amnesia that divide the act of the signature, see ‘AM’.

<sup>354</sup> Derrida also raises the possibility of reading this **13 February** as that of **1962**, when Celan was in Paris. This was the date of the funeral for the victims of the massacre at the Charonne metro station, and of an anti-OAS demonstration at the end of the Algerian war, the day on which the *peuple de Paris*, in their several hundred thousands, were marching on the street (S 25).

<sup>355</sup> ‘Regarding the *terror* of which the present chapter is concerned, it is worth noting that for Barthes the future anterior announcement of the death of the subject of the photograph is described in terms of ‘horror’, a ‘shuddering’, and a ‘catastrophe’ that has already occurred (Barthes, CL 96).



Earlier we cited Derrida's proposition, in his reading of Cixous's 'Savoir', that the poetic operation *owes itself* to the 'real' operation. Here we see how if the poem 'owes a debt to the date, if it owes itself to its date as to its own most proper thing (*Sache*), cause or signature', it must also simultaneously *acquit itself* of this date, which is also a gift, *releasing itself* from the date, *betraying* it (and here is the 'counter' of Derrida's reading of Genet [see Countersignature]) but without denying or disavowing it; *absolving itself* of the wound-date in order that it may resonate 'beyond the pure singularity of which it speaks', beyond a purity that would otherwise remain immured and hence illegible ('untranslatable', to recall our discussion of the necessary *more than one* language of *Monolingualism*) (S 8-9, emphasis added). In order that it might speak and bear witness to that very date it betrays, in other words. In order to be legible, the date must be able to be transcribed or exported, dis-engaged from its 'original' context, repeated in its absolute singularity (S 6, SEC 9-10). Again, the law of iterability, as that which makes possible idealisation and hence 'a certain identity in repetition of the multiplicity of *factual events*' (LI 61, emphasis added). Once again, what is the *meaning* of '**I am the martyr**'? Or even just the word 'martyr'? Or, for instance, the **13 February** of Celan's poems? Although the poet-witness 'is *the only one who can bear witness*' to the ciphered referents (and both Celan's entire oeuvre and his '**No one / bears witness for the / witness**' are exemplary here) (PP 67), and although 'the possibility of a secret always remains open, and this reserve inexhaustible' (PP 67), this *necessity* of a possible trans-port-ation<sup>356</sup> of the date functions as an *offering itself up* 'to the work of a hermeneutics that does not require, for its "internal" reading, access to the singular secret partaken of by a finite number of witnesses' (S 32, 48). Without witness-go-between, a certain 'internal necessity' of the poem-testimony nonetheless *speaks*, 'beyond what appears to confine it within the dated singularity of an individual experience' (S 17), and it speaks not only to the date that provokes it but to *us*, whoever 'we' *may be* (see S 8).<sup>357</sup>

The poem speaks, moreover, because of the movement of dissemination that, as we saw in our discussion of iterability, 'directs itself [*se porte*] toward an irreducible remainder or excess' (the *shibboleth* and, once again, the *hyper-*), the abandonment or survival of the poetic work, beyond any signatory and any specific reader which 'escapes any gathering in a hermeneutic'. As Derrida asks, can one not name this injunction, provocation, *Anspruch* or address of Celan's 'but the poem does speak!' (Celan, Meridian 132) 'Singable Remnant [*Singbarer Rest*]', to use the title or *incipit* of one of the poems collected in *Atemwende* [Breathturn]? (Rams 149; see also S 33).<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> We think here of the necessary translatability, as the 'carrying across' of *-ferance* (*translate* from Latin *translatus* 'carried across', from *trans-ferre*), of bearing witness (*porter témoignage*).

<sup>357</sup> 'But the poem does speak! It remains mindful of its dates, but – it speaks, to be sure, it speaks only in its own, its own, individual cause' (Celan, Meridian 132).

<sup>358</sup> 'The poem speaks, even if none of its references is intelligible, none apart from the Other, the one to whom the poem addresses itself and to whom it speaks in saying that it speaks to it. Even if it does not reach the Other, at least it calls to it. Address takes place' (S 35).

• ‘Circumcise the word [*bedchneide das Wort*]’<sup>359</sup>

‘In the literality of its word (*Beschneidung*), circumcision appears rarely in Celan’s text, at least to my knowledge. But does one ever circumcise without circumcising a word? a name? And how can one circumcise a name without touching upon the body? First, upon the body of the name, which finds itself recalled by the wound to its condition as word, then as carnal marks’ (S 54).

At stake here, in this anachronistic and displaced path that we are suggesting *must* be taken, ‘today’, is the *corporeal archive* as both the body *of* the archive and the body *as* archive. Returning to the ‘speaking’ referenced above, the poetico-testimony speaks, moreover, on account of the wounding *of* its body. For the date is ‘a cut or incision that the poem bears in its body like a memory, sometimes several memories in one, the mark of a provenance, of a place and of a time.’ ‘S’y *entame*’: Cut into, the (testimonial) poem *begins, there*, in the wounding of its date (S 18). Once again, the bro/eaching of caesura – ‘the severing of the relation to the other’, ‘the interruption of address’ – is the law (S 4). The date functions as a *puncturing* of the archive (is this not how we described the event of Satti’s testimony?), or as the ‘rip in time’ [*Zeitenschrunde*<sup>360</sup>] in which, in Celan’s ‘Weggeteitz’ [‘Corroded Away’, ‘Etched Away’ or ‘Eroded’], ‘your unassailable testimony’ or ‘irreversible witness’ (*dein unumstößliches Zeugnis*) waits.<sup>361</sup> Whilst *différance* and *iterability* had always been, ‘from the inception on [*dès l’entame*]’, characterised by interruption and caesura, it is here, in this encounter with, for example, the ‘sicklescript [*Sichelschrift*]’ of Celan’s ‘Singable Remnant [*Singbarer Rest*]’ which cuts in coming around, circumcising words in silence (see S 38) and recalling the ‘circumcise the word’ of ‘To One, Who Stood Before the Door’ (see S 38, 56, 60), as well as the painfully inscribed and ciphered ‘wound-read [*Wundgelesenes*]’ of ‘Your Dream’, that the logic of circumcision explored in the previous chapter comes to the fore in the Derridean corpus. Although rarely named in its literality, what Celan’s poetic word *gives to be read* is the ciphered wound of circumcision, as a ‘reading-wound’ to be deciphered (S 53-4);<sup>362</sup> as part of a wider *tropic* of circumcision which disposes cuts, caesuras, ciphered alliances and wounded rings which ‘take place’ throughout the Celanian text (S 54). ‘*The wound, the very experience of reading*, is universal. It is tied to both the differential marks and the destination of language: the inaccessibility of the other returns there in the same, dates and sets turning the ring’ (S 54, emphasis added).

<sup>359</sup> Celan, ‘Einem, der vor der Tür stand’, cited in ‘S’ 56.

<sup>360</sup> Also translatable as ‘Time’s crevasse’ or ‘time crevasse’; literally ‘crack’ or ‘fissure’ in time.

<sup>361</sup> ‘Weggebeitz’, from *Atemwende* (1967). See Paul Celan, *Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1995), pp. 94-5; Felstiner, *Selected Poems and Prose*, pp. 246-47; and Hamburger, *Paul Celan: Poems* (New York: Persea Books, 1980), pp. 188-89. Somewhat surprisingly, Derrida does not speak of this poem. For an extended commentary on this poem in terms of testimony and trauma, see Ulrich Baer, *Remnants of Song*, esp. pp. 198ff. (Baer translates the title as ‘Corroded Away’.)

<sup>362</sup> Derrida speaks of the ‘**it carries across / the wound-read**’ of ‘Your Dream’ as ‘a passing beyond, over that which is *read* to the quick [emphasis in original], to the point of bleeding, to the point of wounding, reaching the place where the cipher is painfully inscribed on the body itself. [...] *The wound, or its scar, then becomes significant*, it is held by some thread to reading. To say that it is unreadable would be literally abusive, for it is also very unreadable, and this is why it wears out reading to the very marrow. *But it belongs to the experience of reading*’ (S 53-4, emphasis modified).

As in Chapter 4, the mark of circumcision is exemplary of the paradox of the one time: ‘There must be circumcision, circumcision of the word, writing, and it must take place once, precisely, each time one time, the unique time’ (S 63). And yet, this carnal mark is inscribed in a network of other marks and as such ‘at once endowed with and deprived of singularity’ (S 54). Thus, without dialectisable contradiction – again, the Blanchotian logic of the *neuter* and the *sans*; the ‘new contrapuntal equation’ or ‘metonymic composition’ of the *S is P* or *S-P* in Derrida’s reading of Barthes (DRB 37, 41) – Celan’s poems simultaneously ‘transcend’ historical context (the context from which a *given* meaning might be sought) and are marked or shot through by it, as we saw in the ‘reality-wounded and reality-seeking’ and ‘through time all the time’ citations given above. But when we speak of the date to-come of the poem (*as* the date of circumcision), ‘we are not yet speaking, not necessarily, of history. [...] of the date *in* the history of an individual [...] or *in* the history of Judaism’ (S 63). For the time of the circumcised word *awaits* a date, as an incision in the body of language; a date-to-come that we must read in light of the messianic promise of Chapter 4, as that which ‘remains to come, always’ (S 63). As with the ‘immemoriality of the desert in the desert’ or the ageless *khōratik* ‘non-place’ through which we introduced **6 August 1985, 11 September 2001, Hasbayya, Laguna, Chatila and Moriah** in Chapter 4, and as with the arche-promise or *yes* which ‘opens up’ all given speech as witnessed in Chapter 3, ‘the circumcision of the word is not dated in history.’ Ageless, it ‘opens the place of and for the date.’ For the recognizably calendrical, historical and archival date. As we read in the violence of ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, what is ‘terrifying’ is that it is the *cut* – in view of leaving some trace – which assures the survival of the work:

‘This cut is at once a wounding and an opening, the chance of a respiration, and it was in some way already there at work, *à l’oeuvre*. It marked, like a scar, the originary living present of this institution – as if the machine, the quasi-machine were already operating, even before being produced in the world, if I can put it that way, in the vivid experience of the living present’ (TR 134).

This ‘arche-date’, or ‘arche-wound’, as the unconditional and autoimmune *Come* whose terrifying dimensions we will soon be encountering, ‘opens the word to the other, and the door, it opens history and the poem and philosophy and hermeneutics and religion’ (S 63). But, and let us emphasise this, *opening onto* and ‘giving rise’ to some date to-come, it is *from a given*, exemplary wound-date that this opening or revealability is *revealed*.

Recalling the necessary *betrayal* of the date discussed above, this necessary *beyond* of absolute singularity, as the beyond of an unreadable cipher and thus as the autoimmune *chance* of the poem-testimony, is ‘not the simple effacement of the date in a generality, but *its effacement in front of* another date, the one *to which* it speaks [...] which is strangely allied in the secret of an *encounter* [*le secret d’une rencontre*], a *chance secret* [*un secret de rencontre*], with the same date’ (S 9).<sup>363</sup> With the same date that

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<sup>363</sup> Whilst this ‘strangely’ is not emphasised here, it is worth bringing attention to the notion of the ‘estranged I’ that features in ‘The Meridian’ (p. 179), which we must think both in terms of both the *body* of the

*might* well (this is the *perhaps*) come to supplement and replace it. Just as with the messianic promise (for the date marks both a memory and a promise, does it not?), the risk of ‘the worst’ is always entailed here, *both* when it concerns the functioning of the graphematic, poetico-testimonial dated and dating mark *and* when it comes to the *testimonial* ‘relation without relation’ between an ‘I’ and an other that just *might, perhaps*, be a ‘you’. In both cases, two senses of what Celan names ‘encounter’ (what we are naming ‘*passion*’) encounter one another as ‘two values without which a date would never take place’. Firstly, the encounter as random or *chance* occurrence (the *aleatory* of the *destinérance*), as ‘the conjuncture that comes to seal one or more than one event at *once*, at a particular hour, on a particular day, in a particular month, year, and region’. And secondly, the encounter *with the other*, ‘the ineluctable singularity from which and destined to which a poem speaks’ (S 9), as the ‘secret of encounter’ that we will soon be reading as the *terrifying* experience of the responsibility and decision of a ‘*passion without Passion*’ that is *borne witness to* by a *certain 20 January* (that of 1793) and a *certain ‘Long live the King!’*.

Whilst the point throughout this study has been that the two above-mentioned ‘encounters’ should be thought together, we will address the two in turns. But before doing so, it is worth pausing to elucidate this cry of Lucile’s – this ‘profession of faith’ or ‘tribute’ (Majesties 116) – that we are proposing just *might* be a translation of Satti’s ‘**I am the martyr**’, or in fact of the *I am the martyr* of every testimonial encounter. For Celan, when detached from its determined political code or counter-revolutionary meaning – in other words, when *abstracted* (index: the *kbōratic* messianicity of ‘Faith and Knowledge’), and hence the italics which we use here for clarity – this cry is a ‘counter-word’ or ‘counterstatement’ (*Gegenwort*) (Celan, Meridian 175, 183; Derrida, Majesties 116) which speaks in favour not of the monarchy but of what he names the ‘majesty of the present’, of the *Gegenwart* (Majesties 116-17),<sup>364</sup> precisely as an attempt to break free of the programmacity and scriptedness of supposedly revolutionary acts such as those of Danton and Camille or, as is our interest, of the serial-martyr-actor-witness. In other words, as the attempted *act of (testimonial and by inference poetic) invention* that we have been announcing for some while now, precisely as an act that nonetheless, as we will see, both *lets speak* both the other and time itself (see Majesties 118). And, moreover, as an act of testimonial and poetic invention that, as is exemplarily demonstrated by Lucile and Satti, is inextricably linked to a *certain* self-sentencing, potentially even to death.

We have spoken of the ‘majesty of the present’. Given everything witnessed thus far, are we reading correctly? Certainly, in a Derridean logic, there are *effects* of presence and actuality

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signatory and the body of the date, as graphematic mark (and thus in terms of the uncannily [*unheimlich*] near and far in *Monolingualism*). For it is here, in what Celan names ‘the secret of the encounter’, that ‘one and “same” date commemorates heterogeneous events, suddenly neighbors to one another, even though they remain, and must remain, strangers, infinitely’ (S 10).

<sup>364</sup> ‘This *Gegenwort* [counter-word] speaks in favor of the majesty of the *Gegenwart* [present]’ (Majesties 116). It is worth noting that the preposition *Gegen-*, which we should bear in mind whenever we read ‘counter-signature’ or ‘counter-word’, is translatable as ‘against’, ‘contra’ or ‘contrary to’, as well as ‘versus’ or ‘towards’ (*The Oxford-Duden German Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997 [1990])).

everywhere, above all in the televised, ‘live’ testimony or the supposedly ‘real time’ image.<sup>365</sup> But the *majesty* of the present?<sup>366</sup> And why ‘majesty’, given Derrida’s incessant deconstruction of sovereignty and power? Looking closer, however, one soon realises that this ‘majesty’, as with the *passion* we are following, is in fact deceptive and must be read *otherwise* (and here, perhaps is its ‘power’); that, as what Derrida names a ‘hyper-majesty’ (Majesties 117), must be thought in terms of the paleonymic *beyond* majesty, force and might of *passion*. In short, the proposal here is that the **20 January** (or **20 January**) that for Celan is *borne* by every poem, as the counter-word of Lucile’s oblique **‘Long live the King!’** and as a ‘bidding up that attempts to change the sense of *majestas* or of *sovereignty*, to displace its sense, while keeping the old word or claiming to restore its most dignified meaning’ (Majesties 117), is to be read as yet another translation of the *passional* logic of the *I am the martyr* that is *borne* by every (testimonial, poetic) signature, or of the logic of auto-immunity of the trio of texts with which we began in Chapter 4.<sup>367</sup> A quasi-suicidal *passion* which, as we shall see, *both* brings about the madness of the date and the terrifying experience of the impossibility of pure and reliable testimony *and* heralds ‘the majesty of poetry’ as ‘more sovereign and otherwise sovereign’: as the ‘hyperbolic bidding up’ or inescapable *acceleration* of the *dynamic* of a Celanian-‘Lucilean’-Cixousian-(Nietzschean-Bataille)-Derridean ‘mighty power of “might”’ (see Majesties 117).<sup>368</sup>

Having just used the term ‘autoimmunity’, it is worth pausing a moment longer to consider the significance of the Derrida-Celan encounter, above all in its dates and its (ana-)chronology. Somewhat surprisingly, this term does not appear (explicitly, at least) at any point in *Sovereignities in Question* (2005), despite its having been a prominent part of the Derridean corpus since the presentation and first publication of ‘Faith and Knowledge’ in 1995. Unnamed, it is nevertheless quite clearly legible across the texts collected herein, especially where it is a matter of circumcision, hospitality and the ‘hyper-majesty’ of the poetic (and ‘suicidal’) ‘counter-word’. And above all, where it is a matter of the ‘*one time*’ or ‘In One [*In Eins*]’. Recalling the proposition made in Chapter 4 regarding the ‘one time’ of circumcision and ‘doing history’ *after New York, 11 September*, can we not risk the hypothesis that it was in fact **11 September 2001** that served as the catalyst for Derrida to return to the Celanian mark/text, following his hitherto singular engagement with it

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<sup>365</sup> Derrida speaks of the ‘*false*’ or ‘*artificial*’ production or fabrication of actuality as an ‘*artifactuality*’ that can only reach us through fictional constructions [*factures*] (and we can think this ‘*arti-fact-uality*’ in terms of Mroué’s title, ‘The Fabrication of Truth’, and ‘Le facteur de la vérité’ of *The Post Card*) (DA 86).

<sup>366</sup> Even Derrida, in a disclaimer of sorts, states: ‘I would not privilege to such an extent the present, if, apart from all the reasons you can easily imagine, Celan had not himself kept coming back to it with an evident and, I believe, undeniable insistence’ (Majesties 118).

<sup>367</sup> Regarding this *majestas*, as a synonym of *sovereignty* and of the sovereign One, see for instance ‘R’ 81, 139, 168 n. 47. Derrida also reminds us that ‘majesty’ (*majestas*) designates sovereignty in Latin (BS I 253).

<sup>368</sup> ‘This hyperbolic bidding up is inscribed in what I will call the dynamic of majesty or sovereignty, a *dynamic* because it is a matter of a movement whose acceleration is inescapable, a *dynamic* (I choose this word deliberately) because it is a matter of the sovereign, precisely, of might, of power (*dynamis*), of the deployment of the potentiality of the dynast and of the dynasty. In other words, there is something “more majestic” than the majesty of the King, just as [...] the Nietzschean superman is above the superior man. As in Bataille, sovereignty, in the sense Bataille understands it and wants to give it, exceeds classic sovereignty, namely, mastery, supremacy, absolute power, and so forth’ (Majesties 117). Regarding the (terrifying) ‘tremor’ of the Nietzschean(-Celian) *perhaps*, see ‘PF’ 31.

(explicitly, at least) in the 1986 ‘Shibboleth?’ That it was, precisely, the necessity of engaging with the im-possible ‘one time’ of the *wound* of circum-fession, as the altogether *other* ‘majesty’ of the event (i.e. as the autoimmune sovereignty of a text such as *Rogues*, 2003<sup>369</sup>), together with the question of how to *respond* and *bear witness* to the trauma of a ‘major event’ – a question that, we are arguing, is responded to in Celan’s poetics and the *20 January* therein – that brought Derrida back to Celan’s poetic word and to the thinking of the (arguably Celanian) ‘poematic experience’ of the 1990 ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’ and the hero-martyr figure of the later *Monolingualism* that we are suggesting is silently pre-emptively evoked therein (see M 47)<sup>370</sup>

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‘Ash-glory [*Aschenglorie*]<sup>371</sup>

A date is mad, that is the truth.  
 And we are mad for dates.  
 For those ashes which dates are.  
 –Jacques Derrida, ‘Shibboleth’<sup>372</sup>

*Aschenglorie*, or *Aschen-glorie*. For whether legible or not, a silent hyphen ‘articulates and disarticulates the relationship between ashes and glory’ (PP 91).

Let us return to the *encounter* as that of the poetic and archival (martyred; dated and dating) mark and its necessary quasi-suicidal self-exposure, as, precisely, a heightened ‘revelation’ of the logic of self-exposure, risk and erasure that will have constituted the trace from the outset. In short, as in our earlier discussions of the testimonial ‘I’ or ‘martyr (x)’, can we not say that this poetic mark/date ‘functions’ within or under an ‘implicit’ erasure or bracketing, as a silent (*20 January*) *at the heart of* every poem-testimony? Following this autoimmune logic of the ‘mighty “might”’ – i.e. of the contradictory ‘power’ or ‘force’ of the self-erasure and self-exposure of the ‘internal’ date (see S 18 & N 35), thus also exposing the transitive and intransitive, as well as the constative and performative of ‘to date’ to each other (see S 47) – we read how the date and the singularity it

<sup>369</sup> Although ‘Majesties’ was first published in the same year as *Rogues*, in 2003, it had in fact been presented as part of the ‘Beast and the Sovereign’ seminar in 2002, and arguably leaves its silent mark on *Rogues*. The importance of the one time of the date and its anniversary return of ‘Shibboleth’ (this essay that is ‘political through and through’) is stressed at the very beginning of *Rogues* (R 7).

<sup>370</sup> Whilst the texts collected in *Sovereignities in Question* are certainly to be read in tandem with Derrida’s seminars on nationality and nationalism (1984-88) (this is very much apparent in ‘Shibboleth’), the secret (1991-92), testimony (1992-95) and hostility-hospitality (1995-97), it is striking how Derrida only re-commences his published engagement with Celan in 2001, with the interview ‘Language is Never Owned’. The remaining texts in *Sovereignities in Question* were published after this: ‘Majesties’ in 2002, ‘Rams’ and ‘The Truth That Wounds’ in 2003, and ‘Poetics and Politics of Witnessing’ in 2004. Without access to the Derrida archive, I am unable to say whether any sustained unpublished readings of Celan exist from between 1986 and 2001.

<sup>371</sup> Celan, ‘Ash-glory [*Aschenglorie*]’, from the collection *Atemwende*, op. cit.

<sup>372</sup> ‘S’ 37.

denotes must be effaced in order to be preserved and in order to preserve the commemoration of the event (S 9, 15). ‘Chance for the ring, and fatality for all archiving’ (S 35). Exposed in its very destination or ‘essence’, the date *offers itself up to annihilation, letting itself* be threatened in its conservation and its readability from *within*, rather than by any intentional suppression or some *external* accident that may come to destroy the archive’s material support (although this is also often the case) and against which precautionary insurance might be taken (see S 36, 41). Without the *endurance* of the temporal ‘rip’ there would be neither memorial nor commemoration, nor the fracturing open of infinite possible decipherments to-come. More terrifying is the possibility that, risking annulment of both itself and that which it saves from forgetting, both the date and the proper name *must* risk becoming *mere ash*, and that this risk of incineration takes place *prior* to any operation, burning ‘from within’ (S 44-5). What is *terrifying* is that the date *must* risk becoming an ‘absolute crypt’ (S 46), ‘remainder without remainder’ (S 41), ‘no one’s and nothing’s date, essence without essence of ash, about which one no longer even knows what was one day, only once, under some proper name, consumed there’ (S 36). ‘No one remains – *a priori*?’ (S 41). **‘No one / bears witness for the / witness’**, as ‘Ash-glory’ testifies to; for the witness that the date is (see S 32, 42).<sup>373</sup>

*Terrifyingly*, the experience of cinder is ‘the possibility of the relation to the other’ (Narcissism 209). But if the relation to the other is structured not only by an interruption but an interruption *as* an *a priori* mourning – a ‘*cogito* of adieu’ or a ‘salut without return’ that ‘signs the very breathing of the dialogue’ (Rams 140) – how to mourn if no one or nothing remains, not even a name or a date? Or, in the case of some of the victims of **11 September**, not even a body?<sup>374</sup> Opening onto and recalling place and time, the cipher of singularity risks ‘losing them in the holocaustic generality of return and in the readability of the concept, in the anniversary repetition of the unrepeatable’ (S 48). The hour returns upon itself, in the ring of circumcision that is also a singular incision and thus the taking place of a crypt (see S 15): ‘Consumption, becoming-ash, burning up or incineration of a date: on the hour, in the hour itself, at each hour’ (S 46, 48). Whilst ‘there is certainly today the date of that holocaust we know, the hell of our memory’ (what Derrida also names the ‘*all-burning*’),

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<sup>373</sup> Regarding the pertinence of this paradox of memory (in which remembering, keeping, risks coming back to better destroying) for historiography and the role of the media today, see ‘TG’ 49-52.

<sup>374</sup> Writing directly after **11 September**, Derrida prioritises the figure of the (serial) ‘loop’, in part because ‘the loop is the vicious circle of a suicide that avows itself in denial, that detests itself by attesting to itself, that gets carried away in its own testament, that bears witness to what will remain, on the side of the “suicides” (the hijackers and the “missing” cadavers), *without witness*’. Recalling the ‘evil of the traumatism’ being ‘to do with the fact that the *aggression is not over*’, Derrida speaks here of the illusion of comfort in creating ‘a complete and accessible archive, accessible at every moment, in a loop’, thus ‘reassuring ourselves that the dead are dead’ and denying ‘the irresistible foreboding that the worst has not taken place, not yet’; an illusion that is shattered once one takes into account the testimonies that *escape archivisation*: those of ‘the victims, not of the dead or of the cadavers (there were so few) but of the *missing*. By definition, the missing resist the work of mourning, like the future, just like the most recalcitrant of ghosts. *The missing of the archive, the ghost, the phantom – that’s the future*’ (RSS 188-89, n. 8 & 9, emphasis added). In other words, speaking of the future, whilst there may be no body, this does not mean that there is no haunting, no spectral injunction to mete justice: ‘But once dead, and without sepulcher, these words of mourning, themselves incinerated, may still come back. They come back then as phantoms’ (S 53).

there is also ‘a holocaust for every date, and somewhere in the world at every hour’ (S 46). Just as the ‘original’ or ‘authentic’ poem-testimony is exposed as always having been a sort of fiction or fable (see also S 47), the truth of this fiction, the ‘untrue truth of this truth’ is ashes. ‘Ashes in truth.’ ‘Here, this, now, is a *shibboleth*. This is – *shibboleth*’ (S 47).

### The truth that wounds

In what follows, we move from the *encounter* of the poetic mark to that of the ‘I’, thinking ‘the truth that wounds’ through the language of the hospitality and autoimmunity of *passion* that was our idiom in Chapter 4. As explored in Chapter 3, in the encounter of *iterability*, the mark must necessarily expose itself to the risk of potentially *fatal* mis-readings, far beyond the imaginable ‘intended meaning’ of the witness-poem, were such a thing truly possible (see esp. S 17, TTW 165-67, Rams 149 & PP 87). Rather than linger upon this, we might simply note Derrida’s emphasis on this being due to ‘the test of an interruption, of a caesura or of an ellipsis’, as an inaugural cut, that makes possible meaning and truth – a *test* that we can read both in terms of the *passionate* ‘ordeal’ of the undecidable (GD 5) and of the essential openness of the wound, ‘whose lips will never close’ (Rams 152-53; see also 148 & TTW 166-67). Never closing (unlike the scar of the *stigmata*), these lips form around a speaking mouth that, ‘even when it keeps silent, appeals to the other without condition, *in the language of a hospitality that can no longer be subject to a decision*’ (Rams 153, emphasis added). In other words, that says the silent *Come* that was our theme in Chapter 4. It is *perhaps* here, with this *Come*, that the poem-witness ‘hails or blesses, bears (*trägt*) the other’ (Rams 153).<sup>375</sup>

It is here that we return to the *implicit Long live the King!* (or *I am the martyr (x)*), as a bearing witness to the ‘majesty of the present’ that is constituted by *interruption* – as the hyphenated disjointure of a wounding *punctuation*, the *piercing* of ‘the very punctuality of the now’ – and a certain *turning toward* (again, the *gegen*) or *coming from* the other as a ‘turn of breath’ (*Atemwende*) (Majesties 119, 122). Whilst Derrida tells us elsewhere that *self-interruption* is another name for *différance*, this exposure to wounding of the dated poetic mark *gives to be read, exemplarily*, the law of caesura that is the condition for responsibility, decision and hospitality (HJR 81), which we can here think in terms of the ‘acti/passivity’ of *letting* the other (the addressee of some testimony; some future martyr, *perhaps*) speak. In ‘The Meridian’, we read the following:

‘In the here and now of the poem it is still possible – the poem itself, after all, has only this one, unique, punctual present – only in this immediacy and proximity does it let what the Other has as its most proper, its time, speak also [*noch in dieser Unmittelbarkeit und Nähe last es das ihm, dem Anderen, Eigenste mitsprechen: dessen Zeit!*]’ (Celan, Meridian 182; also cited in Derrida, Majesties 120).

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<sup>375</sup> This ‘bearing’ or ‘carrying’ (*trägt*) of the other (which we can think in terms of *bearing* witness and a *passion* to be *borne*) is a reference to the last line of Celan’s poem encountered above, ‘Vast, Glowing Vault’, ‘**The world is gone, I must carry you** [*Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen*]’, around which ‘Rams’ circumscribes itself. As Derrida relates, Celan had given him a copy of this *Atemwende* at the École Normale Supérieure shortly before his death (Rams 141).



Here, in this scene of clocks and calendars that is *already* spectral, revenant, virtual and tele-technological and thus *already* pertaining to the haunting ‘real time’ of ‘live’ televised debates (*as if* tele-porting Celan’s poetry forward half a century and into the global media), rather than it being a case of ‘applying’ or putting into praxis some determined politics or hospitality – some ‘politics of dialogue’ or ‘democratic debate’ in which one would learn to give the other ‘equal time’ to speak (equal television air-time, for instance) – what is at stake is not only *letting* the other speak but *letting time speak*, ‘its time, what its time, the time of the other, has as its most proper’ (Majesties 120-21). *Letting*, once again, as the condition of the event, as *more than* a simple passivity, as is signalled by the *lassen* in both Celan’s and Cixous’s German which indicates both *letting* and *making* (Majesties 121, HC esp. 66-7). ‘The mighty power this “might”’ as that which make the distinction between the *letting come* and *making come* of the event or/of the poetic address – between ‘what one glibly calls activity and passivity, provocation and expectation, work and passion, power and receiving, giving, taking, and receiving [index: *kbōra*]’ – ‘vanish at an infinite speed’ (HC 66).

The poem, for Celan, would be ‘the present, the here and now’ (Celan, Meridian 181), albeit a ‘present’ that participates in ‘the secret of an encounter’: a present which *needs* and wants to reach the Other (Celan, Meridian 181). At the heart of this ‘majesty of the present’, then, reigns divisibility and alterity, what we might call a ‘present/ce *without* present/ce’. The majesty of what would have been a monolingualism becomes that *of the other*, of the other in the present time of “my” poem’ or my testimony, as what both Glenn and Derrida translate as a ‘dialogue’ (*Gespräch*) but which, given our hesitation to use this term (in contradistinction to ‘encounter’), we might better translate as what Derrida calls ‘a speaking of two (*Gespräch*, a speaking together)’ – or, better, given our emphasis on *seriality*, of *more than one*,  $n+1$ , endless ‘I’s and ‘you’s (Celan’s ‘estranged I’s) to-come (see Derrida, Rams 123, Majesties 119 & Celan, Meridian 180). Recalling the appeal to come (*appel à venir*) of *Monolingualism* which gathers language together neither in identity, unity or ipseity but ‘in the uniqueness or singularity of a gathering together of its difference to itself’ (M 67-8) (and here we can only signal towards Derrida’s readings of the Heideggerian *Versammlung*; see ACTS 139, Majesties 119), this ‘encounter’ involves a movement of ‘gathering [*rassemblement*]’ and ‘being-together [*être-ensemble*]’. However, following the ‘relation without relation’ of the *interruption* of the circumscribed word, this ‘gathering’ *simultaneously* maintains the radical separation to and from the other, as unknowable secret: as an ‘assymetrical *partaking with*’ the other (Majesties 119, emphasis added), or as the *partage* of a Nancian-Derridean ‘shared division’ or ‘sharing as spacing’ (cf. the reading of *Rogues* in Chapter 4), this ‘majesty’ signals *both* a partaking (the ring of covenant within some community, for instance) *and* an exclusion (S 63).<sup>376</sup> As a *Gespräch*, the speaking of the poem

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<sup>376</sup> As Thomas Dutoit helpfully notes, if in ‘Shibboleth’ *partage* signifies ‘separation, parting, or division, it also can signify participation through sharing in what is divided up, and the share apportioned, not to mention one’s lot’ (S 4 trans. note e). For a close reading of Celan’s poetry and poetological prose in light of Blanchot’s ‘relation without relation’, see Andrew Zawacki, “‘Relation without Relation’: Palmer, Celan, Blanchot”, *New German Critique*, No. 91, Special Issue on Paul Celan (Winter 2004), pp. 117-28.

'is originally, *a priori*, a speaking *with* the other or *to* the other, even before speaking alone', *and yet* 'this *mit* does not necessarily break solitude; we might even say it is its condition' (see Majesties 120-23). The poem, as with the witness, is always 'alone', 'solitary' and 'singular' (S 9, 10). Once again, **'No one / bears witness for the / witness'**.

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## II. Apocalypse of the now

The end approaches, now it's too late to tell the truth about the apocalypse. But what are you doing, all of you will still insist, to what ends do you want to come when you come to tell us, here now, let's go, come, the apocalypse, it's finished, I tell you this, **that's what's happening**.

–Derrida, 'On A Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy'<sup>377</sup>

As we read in 'Typewriter Ribbon', this great text of the 'event-machine', the event supposes a certain exteriority or an irreducibility to desire, making it 'radically inappropriable' and resistant to the logic of the proper, following the logic of what Derrida elsewhere names 'exappropriation', as that which we might say 'structures' the entire demonstration of *Monolingualism*.<sup>378</sup> Unless, Derrida continues, nondesire (for instance, death, the inorganic; 'the machine') 'haunts every desire and there is between desire and nondesire an abyssal attraction rather than a simple exteriority of opposition and exclusion.' And it is the very (machinic) *trauma* with which we began that 'injures desire, whether or not desire desires or does not desire what happens' (TR 159-60).

Returning to the question of whether we will one day be able to think *together* the event and the machine, Derrida proposes that this 'event-machine', as an 'unheard-of conceptual form' and as a thinking that can only belong to the future, 'would resemble a monster', insofar as a monster may be a living being that is nonetheless a composite, i.e. *hyphenated*, figure of heterogeneous organisms *grafted* together (TR 73, Passages 385). Following which he immediately corrects himself, stating that it would no longer even be a figure and would resemble nothing, not even a monster; first of all because, as with the event of the *revenant*, one does not *see* (coming) and cannot identify or master the monster (TR 73, Passages 385-86). Looking to the earlier interview, 'Passages – from Traumatism to Promise' (1990), we read the following, returning us to the Celanian 'encounter': 'The coming of the monster submits to the same law as the one we were talking about concerning the date' (Passages 386).

'The absolute to-come can only announce itself in the form of monstrosity, beyond all forms and norms that could be anticipated, beyond all genres or kinds' (S 57).

As with the martyr-testimony and the series of calls and responses within which it is inscribed, the *Gespräch* of the poem, we recall, is always an *address* – an *already* tele-technical and virtual, and thus dislocating, deterritorialising and expropriating *envoi* – that moves *towards* the other as an injunction for a responding counter-signature, even if it fails and is not received.<sup>379</sup> Even if this 'sending' may well go fatally off-course, 'even if the despair of the other, or about the other, is always waiting, and even if it always must be waiting, as its very possibility, the possibility of the

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<sup>377</sup> 'AT' 168, emphasis added.

<sup>378</sup> The term 'exappropriation' was 'invented' in the 1984 *Signsponge* (see, for example, SS 132-33).

<sup>379</sup> Regarding the irreducible 'possibility-virtuality' of the promise, as that which calls for another logic of the virtual, see 'M' 93 n. 11.

poem' (Majesties 119).<sup>380</sup> And it is here, with the *despair* of this 'spectral errancy of words' (S 53), as *destinérance* and *clandestination* (see AT 162), that we can think the 'time of terror' with which we began, precisely as a time that is nothing *new* but rather is simply a more 'brutal' *acceleration* of 'a movement that has *always and forever* been at work' and that is *revealed more vividly, demanded* to be thought more urgently, in acts of 'terror' such as Satti's operation and the event of **11 September** (see NANN 388). For what must be 'acquiesced to' is the 'principle of ruin at the heart of the most utterly new' (PF 66). And this acceleration, moreover, as we read in 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)' (written in the **today** of the so-called 'nuclear age' of **1984**), is a 'structure of getting absolutely carried away, a quasi-infinite acceleration' of the interval of time (index: *kbōra*) which *makes possible* the 'always already' of the trace, in general (NANN 388; see also HC 62 & *passim*).

Furthermore, what a text such as 'Above All, No Journalists!' (**1998**) gives to be read is the manner in which such an *envoi* was *always already* not only virtual and archivable, but also 'televisualisable' (see AANJ 57). For before the televised and virtual media, was not all writing always 'news', 'evangelical', even if this news is not 'good' (see AANJ 66).<sup>381</sup> Despite being 'massive', is not the seemingly hyper-developed form of the media of **today** not in fact transitory, ready to develop into as-yet unthinkable (i.e. potentially monstrous) forms? (see AANJ 61). Whilst 'virtuality alone is enough to frighten, even terrify', as 'the ineradicable root of terror and thus of a terrorism that announces itself even before organizing itself into terrorism' (RSS 108-09), what is worse is that, whilst announcing the risk of ashes and the 'holocaustic generality of return' (S 48), the graphematic-testimonial mark, in its literary trait, always bears the total annihilation of nuclear war as its (absolute) referent (see NANN, esp. 402-03).<sup>382</sup> Moreover, as a *promise to make truth*, this poetico-testimonial *envoi* – as a missive that 'always includes the power of a death machine' (NANN 405) and as an autoimmune *Come* – is always already *apocalyptic* (AT 151).

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<sup>380</sup> The abovementioned 'deterritorialisation' is to be read in tandem with the threat of 'radical evil' implied by the 'forces of abstraction and dissociation (deracination, delocalization, disincarnation, formalization, universalizing schematization, objectification, telecommunication)', by 'those sites of abstraction that are the machine, technics, technoscience and above all the transcendence of tele-technology', as the spacing or abstraction of *kbōra*, discussed in 'Faith and Knowledge' (FK 43).

<sup>381</sup> *Evangel*, from Greek *euangelion* 'good news', from *euangelos* 'bringing good news', from *eu-* 'well' + *angelein* 'announce' (OED). To speak of this 'always already' is not to deny technological advances. Whereas there is nothing 'new' about the production of images, what *appears* new is the possibility of the transmission of the voice, and hence of being able to hear someone who is now dead (AANJ 70-1). But, recalling our discussion of an 'originary' *I am dead*, is this possibility really so 'new', given the death and *tekhne* – the martyr-testimonies as 'dead letters' – already 'at the heart of' speech?

<sup>382</sup> '[T]here is nothing purely "modern" in this relation between media and terror, in a terrorism that operates by propagating within the public space images or rumors aimed at terrifying the so-called civilian population' (RSS 109). Regarding this necessary thinking *together* of today's missiles and the missive structure of the graphematic mark and the correspondence between writing and the power of destruction, without reducing today's missiles and warheads to 'the inefficacy that some would rush to see in books', see again Cadava's 'Lapsus Imaginis' (Cadava, Lapsus 58).

## The seven seals of passion

Through what place must all these different meanings, these *passionate* trajectories of literature, pass in order to mark there the inscription of their seven seals?

–Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*<sup>383</sup>

As Derrida points out in ‘On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy’ (1980), in which he writes both *on* and *in* the apocalypse, in the Greek and Hebrew, the word ‘apocalypse’ nowhere has the sense in which we know it, **today**: fearsome catastrophe (AT 117, 120). And yet we can argue that in its ‘originary’ sense, insofar as it concerns the (*arche*-)secret and the potentially fatal derailment that Derrida had earlier named ‘clandestination’, it is fearsome – *terrifying* even – nevertheless. And yet, once again, this *terrifying* aspect is simultaneously its chance. What ‘apocalypse’ essentially signifies is an *uncovering, disclosure or revealing*, originally of the YHWH (the unpronounceable name of God, Yahweh, in the Hebrew Bible) or Yéshoua (Christ), the Messiah (AT 120) in the Book of Revelation, the book which bears the news of the complete and final destruction of the world, with its *seven seals*.<sup>384</sup> *Apocalypse*, then, as a *revealing*. But as a revealing of that which

‘might be hidden, a secret, the thing to be dissimulated, a thing that is neither shown nor said, signified perhaps but that cannot or *must* not first be delivered up to self-evidence’ (AT 118).

Once again, what is at stake is the ‘religion without Religion’ of this ‘passion without Passion’, insofar as our argument is that *passion*, which in ‘*Sauf le nom*’ is allied with the *arche*-secret (‘the most secret secret’; SN 38), ‘operates’ in this movement of apocalypse. For what this ‘essential’ apocalypse signifies is both the structure of *sending* (*through* time, *towards* the other) without which no testimony or poem-date would be possible, and of the *evangelical*, as the *bearing* and *revealing* of news, part of an ‘originarily’ *postal* exchange that always carries the possibility of holocaustic burning and ‘the disorder or delirium of destination (*Bestimmung*)’ (AT 150). Whilst the Apocalypse is traditionally associated with St. John of Patmos, *all* writing is *evangelical*, with the ‘news’ being borne by the general narrator – Satti, for instance – who ‘will call himself the witness (*marturōn, testimonium*)’ (AT 163), whether or not this ‘news’ is purported to be reported ‘live’.

Here, in this always already postal and mediatised scene, ‘as soon as one no longer knows who speaks or who writes, the text becomes apocalyptic.’ Who, for instance, was the ‘real’ narrator of *The Instant of my Death*? Or who is speaking when Mroué first enters the scene and testifies, from

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<sup>383</sup> ‘D’ 26.

<sup>384</sup> ‘Apocalypse’, from Greek *apokalupsis*, from *apokalupein* ‘uncover, reveal’, from *apo-* ‘un-’ + *kaluptein* ‘to cover’ (OED). Derrida speaks of St. John’s message as testimony to the testimony (and martyrdom) of Jesus (AT 155). Regarding the *seven seals*, it is worth recalling that the opening of the fifth seal releases the cries of martyrs for the ‘word of God’: ‘And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.’ Revelation 6:9, *King James Bible* (London: HarperCollins, 2011), p. 1393.

within the frame of the television screen, *in the name of* Khaled Rahhal? This uncertainty becomes all the more heightened when we do not know if the narrator is alive or, as in the case of Blanchot and Satti, speaking *of* death but also *from* death (again, the *testes* as *superstes*). If, as in the poem-testimony, the destination of the *envoi* always remains to come, ‘then isn’t this angelic structure of Johannine apocalypse [...] the structure of every scene of writing in general’, and thus ‘of all experience even, of every mark or every trace?’ In this case,

‘the genre of writings called “apocalyptic” in the strict sense [...] *would only be an example*, an exemplary *revelation* of this transcendental structure. In that case, if the apocalypse reveals, it is first of all the revelation of the apocalypse, the self-presentation of the apocalyptic structure of all language, of writing, of the experience of presence, in other words, of the text or of the mark in general: *that is, of the divisible envoi for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination*’ (AT 156-57, emphasis modified).

### *X without X*

‘Religion without religion’, ‘truth without truth’ and, above all, ‘passion without passion’: such have been our telegraphic signposts, which we recall and ‘gather together’ here as we approach a conclusion, and to which we will add one last ‘formula’, which by no means offers any resolution to the desire for an im-possible invention that we have been following: ‘apocalypse without apocalypse’. Moving swiftly, our proposal here is that the ‘seven trajectories’ of *passion* that traverse not only Blanchot’s testimony but also *every* text and *all* experience – as the experience of the testimonial and of survival – must be read precisely as seven apocalyptic sendings that nevertheless, as *seals*, and as has been demonstrated through a reading of the poetico-testimony of Celan, must always *bear* some essential secret. Thus it is a case of what Derrida names ‘apocalypse *without* apocalypse’, insofar as this sending that is also an autoimmune word of welcome – *Come*, ‘a drift [*derive*] underivable from the identity of a determination’ (AT 166) (and we recall here Malabou’s remarks on ‘derivation’ in *Monolingualism*) – must necessarily be a vision *without* vision, a truth *without* truth and a revealing *without* revelation.<sup>385</sup> Rather, if it reveals anything, any truth, it would be a revealing of ‘the mask *as* mask’, as the manifestation *of* the secret *as* secret, as is ‘revealed’ exemplarily, *more vividly*, in the poetics of Celan, above all in the enigma of the lines ‘**No one / bears witness for the / witness**’ (see PP *passim*, esp. 68, 87, 91, 96).<sup>386</sup> ‘Revealing the mask *as* mask’, Celan’s poetico-testimony *shows* the wound, as a reading-wound (*Wundgelesenes*) to be deciphered and which *makes possible* all reading, ‘there’ where there ‘is’ no *essential* and *authentic* truth

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<sup>385</sup> “**Come**” [*sic.*] does announce this or that apocalypse: already it resounds with a certain tone; it is in itself the apocalypse of apocalypse; **Come** is apocalyptic’ (AT 167).

<sup>386</sup> Derrida takes the motif of ‘revealing the mask as mask’, around which this essay unfolds, from Murray Krieger, who proposes not only that the poem constitutes its own poetic, but that ‘it is the role of art to play the unmasking role – the role of revealing the mask as mask.’ Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), as cited in the exergue to ‘Poetics and Politics of Witnessing’ (PP 65). As is demonstrated in the highway-crossing scene of ‘Che Cos’ à la poesia?’, it is insofar as the poetic mark is *without truth* that it is exposed to the accident, catastrophe even (Che 293).

to be revealed.<sup>387</sup> For there is no access to the essential crypt at the heart of the poem, and hence the ‘unpower’ of a silent, *testimonial perhaps* that deconstructs the phenomenological *as such*, for instance of Heidegger’s phenomenological attestation (see PP, esp. 80).<sup>388</sup> Testimony, as Celan’s poetry and Satti’s video ‘reveal’, is not open to the order of the *comme tel* [*as such*], but rather to the ‘*as if*’ of the *perhaps*, or the ‘*as mask*’ (PP 77, 96).

And yet, as Celan tells us, the poem nonetheless *does speak*. As with Celan’s *Aschen-glorie*, even if we do not know or understand to what Satti’s ‘**I am the martyr**’ bears witness, we nevertheless feel ‘at work in the economy of the ellipsis a power more powerful than that of meaning and perhaps even than that of truth, of the mask which would manifest itself *as mask*.’ And it is here, in the desire for and limit to intelligibility, that the reciting compulsion that the poem-testimony incites in us, as gestured towards in Chapter 1, arises (PP 87). If ‘truth’ is the destination or aim, then the structure of truth would be apocalyptic, ‘there would not be any truth of the apocalypse that is not the truth of truth’ (AT 151). ‘Truth’, if there is any, would be this overturning of the apocalypse. Once again, as Celan’s poems tell us: ‘Ashes in truth.’ Were the truth (the secret) to be revealed, this would spell the annulment of the possibility of testimony, as *promise*, and indeed of the other. A *worse* violence, then; *more* terrifying, as the suturing of the wound.

This ‘without’, which Derrida underlines here as being ‘the necessary syntax of Blanchot’,

‘marks an internal and external catastrophe of the apocalypse, an overturning of sense that does not merge with the catastrophe announced or described in the apocalyptic writings without, however, being foreign to them. Here the catastrophe would perhaps be *of* the apocalypse itself, its fold [*pl*] and its end, a closure without end, an end without end’ (AT 167-68).

*Come*, says the poem-testimony, in the terrifying, suicidal and testimonial madness of the ‘secret of the encounter’ that ‘is’ the anachronistic, out-of-jointed time of the event-machine; of the *passion* of the wound-hyphen that *makes possible* history and testimony. *Come, perhaps*, it says, as the ‘oblique offering’ of a *passion*; to the other, to the future, to an un-heard of thinking, with all the terrifying risks this *might* entail.

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<sup>387</sup> ‘We speak here *in and on* a language that, while being opened by this *ference*, says the inadequation of the reference, the insufficiency or the lapse of knowing, its incompetence as to what it is said to be the knowing of. Such an inadequation translates and betrays the absence of a common measure between the opening, openness [*aperité*], revelation, knowledge on the one hand and on the other a certain absolute secret, non provisional, heterogeneous to all manifestation. This secret is not a reserve of potential [*potentiel*] knowing, a potential [*en puissance*] manifestation’ (SN 59).

<sup>388</sup> Unable to even begin a reading of (Derrida’s reading of) Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and the effects that the phenomenon of martyr-testimonies might have on this here, we simply note the role that the value of testimony or attestation plays in this text, above all around the passages concerning *Dasein*’s attestation [*Bezeugung*] to its *originary possibility* and its *authenticity*. Very schematically, such an attestation is brought to light, manifested, phenomenologically presented as ‘the phenomenology of an experience that is itself phenomenological, in other words, consists in a presentation.’ Unlike the ‘apocalypse without apocalypse’, ‘[i]t is the presentation of a presentation, the testimony of or about a testimony: here is the witness for the witness, testimony for the testimony’ (PP 80).

## Conclusion

In Chapter 1, we asked whether we would ever be able to truly read this ‘magisterial locution’, ‘**I am the martyr x**’; whether we might ever really know *to what* this ‘watchword’ which we have read and re-cited over and over again, in all its various guises, *bears witness*. Whilst what has been demonstrated over and over again is ‘a power more powerful than that of meaning and perhaps even than that of truth’ (as Derrida says of Celan’s poetry, but which we can nonetheless ‘apply’ to the enigma of this testimony; PP 87), some conclusions can – or rather, must – nonetheless be drawn. For although the unreadability of testimony, as the interruption of philosophy’s *Savoir absolu*, has been shown across each chapter from Chapter 3 onwards to be the very condition of testimony’s possibility, and of the possibility of any given or promised meaning (for instance what it ‘means’ to be a ‘martyr’), this by no means diminishes the ever-urgent necessity to read and respond, above all to a testimonial and martyrological act as ‘scandalous’ as Satti’s. Countering the detractors for whom Derrida’s writings are but a mere alibi for skepticism, relativism or even nihilism (as the second voice in *Monolingualism* was seen to have claimed, as if Derrida were putting himself to the test or even on trial), what has been at stake here in the *passion of testimony* that we have sketched out is not a questioning of truth as a dismissal of the value of and need for testimony but a questioning of truth in order to move *towards* it (as we saw in the readings of Celan and the emphasis throughout on voyage, destination and desterrance), as desiring of and *passion for* truth. As we saw, above all in Chapters 4 and 5, what demands to be thought is an altogether *other* truth that is simultaneously cut off from *and* bound to truth, following the *testimonial*, *circumcisional* and *circumfessional* logic of a ‘relation without relation’ or the *passion* of an ‘X without X’ that, despite (or because of) its un-power, ‘operated’ as the condition of possibility for this study.

What, then, has been given to be read by the ‘fabulous economy’ of this ‘very simple little sentence’? If martyrdom *in general* has traditionally implied the witnessing and bearing witness to some truth, as a revelation, this *particular* martyr-testimony has prompted us to question the very nature and possibility of the concepts of both truth and revelation (culminating with the ‘apocalypse without apocalypse’ of Chapter 5), as well as the possibility not only of any ‘successful’ act of martyrdom or sacrifice (as, in particular, in Chapter 4) but also of any ‘successful performance’ of the ‘I’ *per se* (as, above all, in Chapter 3). As the chapters unfolded, we saw how gradually each element of ‘**I am the martyr x**’ was revealed to place itself, *auto*-matically, under erasure or within parentheses – from the spectrality of the ‘**I am**’ and the self-erasure of the *différential* ‘**is**’ or ‘**(is)**’ of the *S is P* in Chapter 2, through the re-markability and hence ‘martyred existence’ of the ‘**(x)**’ in Chapter 3 and the cross that it or ‘**I**’ must bear, and through the impossibility of the intentionally suicidal or sacrificial ‘**(martyr)**’ in Chapter 4, arriving eventually at the ‘**x without x**’ of a generalised *passion* in Chapter 5 – thus bearing witness to the *auto*-deconstruction at work in every ‘**I**’; every proper name and date as the ‘referent’ to some unique event; and every text, be it a work of literature or a historical document.



Insofar as the ‘reflections’ of our title are concerned, martyrdom and testimony were shown not only to reflect each other but also, when thought together, to function as the *quasi*-transcendental ‘place without place’ of the hyphenated and différential arche-trace that – itself, as with the ‘(x)’, translatable and infinitely substitutable; as a ‘place’ of secret, wound and, as Derrida proposes in ‘Passions’, of *passion* – made dialectics and oppositions tremble, ‘giving rise’ (literally ‘giving place’) not only to the ‘martyred existence’ to which *Monolingualism* testifies but also to the possibility of any *articulation* (as both communication *and* the dividing and joining of the ‘relation without relation’) or singular event *per se*. If one of our central questions was that of the doubly genitive ‘possibility of’ this sentence then, shockingly, as the unbearable that must be borne, the violent scandal that is **‘I am the martyr’** revealed itself to both bear witness to the impossibility of any ‘act’ (of testimony or martyrdom) *and*, in its principle of ruin or the *quasi*-suicidal death-drive lodged at its heart, to be the only chance not only for any meaningful or ‘authentic’ testimony but also for any relation of responsibility. As such, our proposal was that **‘I am the martyr’** functions as the deconstructive condition of possibility of philosophy, so-called ‘ethics’ and history. And if at the outset we were concerned that Derrida’s sententious, fabulistic and parodic performance in *Monolingualism* might be to commit an injustice against the violences of ‘real’ instances of suffering and martyrdom, what we have subsequently seen is how the hyperbole and drama of Derrida’s oblique offerings, both in *Monolingualism* and beyond, enact the very law of excess and destitution before which any witness must stand.

In Chapter 4 we proposed that corporeal ‘logics’ such as autoimmunity and circumcision are revealed as the very *passions* of philosophy. Our contention has been that what is borne witness to by the con-jugation of these two testimonies and the ‘grammar of the event’ they have produced is the manner in which philosophical and historical enquiry are not merely conducted in the constative presentation of theoretical certitude (for instance *S is P*) but are ‘enacted’ or ‘performed’ through *passion* – through desiring, suffering, taking pleasure and lamenting – and that the madness or ‘*contre-sense*’ of a certain irreducible and undeconstructible faith or promise is not as far divorced from philosophical or scientific Reason as it may at first sight appear.

Whilst taking leave from religious sets of beliefs and never fully distancing ourselves from the formal structures, at least, of ‘the religious’ (even when speaking of operations that claim to be wholly – militantly, even – secular), we have seen how the promise of afterlife and immortality given by all discourses surrounding ‘martyrdom’ (be they religious or secular) is in itself suicidal, albeit a suicide that is ‘worse’ than the *quasi*-suicidal logic set out in Chapter 4, insofar as *this* ‘impossible’, as a passion for immortality, would spell an immunity to auto-immunity that would annul life itself and the possibility of any future. Rather, the infinitely finite *passion* and *testimony* herein was based upon an unconditional hospitality not only to the inorganic and ‘non-living’ machine, but also to the possibility of ‘failure’ (for instance, of the militant operation) or even to the testimonial unknowability and unforeseeability of the monstrous ‘worst’.

Let us recall that following the opening sentence to each of his testimonies (**'I am the martyr...'**), Satti continues by lodging a complaint against the injustices of the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon and offering justification for his act, attempting to convince the audience of his motives and the virtue of his soon-to-be status as a living martyr. As stated at the outset, it was never our intention here to condemn such operations or pass judgement regarding whether his act should be esteemed as a 'martyrdom' or whether it constitutes a suicide or the crime of murder. Rather, our concern lay in the possibility of his testimony – or any testimony, regardless of its content; be it of the 'victim' or the 'victor' – falling on deaf ears, being fatally misunderstood or even simply never being heard at all. And yet, what was revealed all the more *vividly* – indeed by his very testimony, inadvertently – was that *perhaps* another passionate resistance (the paradoxico-poetic counter-word of *Long live the King!* by which we translated the 'originary' *I am the martyr* and which was 'revealed' by Satti's **'I am the martyr'**), in its very passivity, is more 'operative', 'defeating' the *sui-* and the sovereignty that Satti, *for instance*, sought to reclaim. As with 'my language' (as we saw in our reading of *Monolingualism* in Chapter 3), the sovereignty or majesty of my act is not a lack and cannot be reclaimed, for 'truth to tell, it never was' (M 2).

Without proposing that there is some 'meaning' or 'essence' of *passion* and *testimony* that is regulative of all others, 'in the destitution of all context', we have seen how these terms – in themselves infinitely substitutable – allowed us to move between revelation and revealability, revealing our 'habitat' as the space of undecidability in the reflections between the two. Cutting across the formal and the particular, the logic of exemplarity to which *Monolingualism* is both a hymn and a lament meant that concepts, genres, proper names, signatures and citations offered themselves up for substitution at each turn, with each chapter proposing one yet more exemplary scene or event, in the movement of a seriality not unlike that of a series of martyr-testimonies. Similarly, as witnessed in Chapter 3, this exemplarity meant that the event (for instance, the encounter between Satti's and Derrida's testimonies, or Blanchot's 'death') need not have ever 'actually taken place' in order for it to bear an exemplary value. In other words, that no 'real' martyrdom need have happened, but that a necessary internal possibility (*I am the martyr (x); I am dead; yes; come*) both contaminates and *makes possible* any eventual possibility (**'I am the martyr (x)', 'I am dead', 'yes', 'come'**), with the former making the latter happen before it ever 'actually' happens and the latter revealing or giving to be thought the internal necessity all the more vividly. What the fabulistic or proleptic encounter between the signature-testimonies of Derrida and Satti (as well as so many other voices) demonstrates is the virtuality and anachronistic dislocation (spatial and temporal; *différential*) *at the heart of* any event, even those that appear to 'take place' live or in 'real time', as we so easily say.

*And yet*, singularities and events *do* take place, all the time. Even if Blanchot survived death, the event of his testimony leaves its mark and undeniable consequences for literature, philosophy and literature. And is not the *punctum* of Satti's testimony precisely its 'failure' and its contamination

by the *studium* in its machine-like repetitions? Would this testimony have claimed such an enigmatic role, cited and re-cited and hence ‘kept alive’ within *Three Posters* and yet again within an infinite-finite host of responses, had he ‘successfully’ testified, *only once*? In other words, enacting exactly the logic of Derridean singularity which only ever takes place in its hyphenated, contaminated and serial relationship to generality, we propose that the singularity of this martyr-testimony – the *piercing effect* of this event – lies, precisely, in the machinic-studium of its *three times*. Machine *and* event, then, or what we have chosen to call ‘event-machine’: is not the impossible task of thinking *together* the machine and the event, the studium and the punctum, what this video-testimony, made in the space of tele-mediated miracles, enjoins us towards?

Whilst we have taken pains to demonstrate, across each chapter, certain ‘originary’ structures – spectrality, mourning, substitutability, hospitality and quasi-suicidal un-power, *for instance* (for these are infinitely supplementable, whilst all the while maintaining a certain specificity) – is not the emergence of the phenomenon of the martyr-video-testimony in the Lebanon of the mid-1980s and its conjugation of all of these within a space of both an originary *tekhne* and an irreducible faith not a historical and technological event? Certainly, as we saw in Chapter 3 regarding ‘originality’ and in Chapter 5 regarding ‘the contemporary’ (above all, the contemporary ‘time of terror’), such a situation cannot truly be called ‘new’ and ‘unprecedented’ (the term so commonly used to refer to the event of **11 September**). And yet, a determinable historical shift undeniably took place, at least in the speed and arrangement of this conjugation.

We began this study by invoking someone, you or me, who steps forward and states their desire to say ‘**I**’. Perhaps, in the *kbōratic* space of ‘the exemplary or testimonial singularity of a martyred existence’ that is borne witness to by Jamal Satti and Jacques Derrida, that *might* just be possible.

## Appendix

### The 'seven seals' of *passion*

Extract from Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 25-8.

If one were to unravel the lines of force that semantically traverse the word “passion,” one would discover at least *seven* knotted trajectories, which we will have to describe elliptically and at a telegraphic pace. My hypothesis is that these seven trajectories traverse the text *The Instant of My Death*, which Maurice Blanchot published several months ago, and which I will attempt to read with you a little later. I do not know whether this text belongs, purely and properly and strictly and rigorously speaking, to the space of literature, whether it is a fiction or a testimony, and, above all, to what extent it calls these distinctions into question and causes them all to tremble.

Through what place must all these different meanings, these *passionate* trajectories of literature, pass in order to mark there the inscription of their seven seals?

1. “Passion” implies a history in literature that displays itself *as such* in Christian culture. Literature forced upon the land of Christian passion – more precisely, in its Roman Period – linked to the history of rights, of the State, of property, then of modern democracy in its Roman model as well as its Greek one, linked to the history of secularization which takes over from sacrality, before and through the Enlightenment, linked to the history of the novel and of Romanticism.

2. “Passion” also implies the experience of love, of amorous, courtly, knightly, novelistic, romantic passion, where these have become inseparable from the desire to avow, from the confessional testimony and from truthfulness, from *telling the other everything* and *identifying with everything*, with everyone, opening up thus new problems of responsibility before the law and beyond the rights of a state.

3. “Passion” implies finitude, certainly (the whole Kantian moment of the determination of experience as sensibility, space and time, the receptivity of the *intuitus derivativus*), but also a certain passivity in the heteronomic relation to the law and to the other, because this heteronomy is not simply passive and incompatible with freedom and with autonomy, it is a matter of the passivity of passion before or beyond the opposition between passivity and activity. One thinks above all of what Levinas and Blanchot say of *archi-passivity*, especially when Blanchot, unlike Levinas, analyses the neuter and a certain neutrality of the “narrative voice,” a voice without person, without the narrative voice from which the ‘I’ posits and identifies itself.

4. “Passion” also implies liability, that is, imputability, culpability, responsibility, a certain *Schuldsein*, an originary debt of being-before-the-law.

5. “Passion” implies an engagement that is assumed in pain and suffering, experience without mastery and thus without active subjectivity. Because this passion, which is not active, is not simply passive either, the entire history without history of the middle voice – and perhaps of the neuter of the narrative voice – is opened in passion. If a *différance* can only be written in the grammar of a certain middle voice, even if it cannot be confined by such a historical grammar, one might be able to reduce “*différance*” to another name for “passion,” as well as to its interpretation, the formalization of this polysemy.

6. In memory of its Christian-Roman meaning, “passion” always implies martyrdom, that is – as its name indicates – testimony. A passion always testifies. But if the testimony always claims to testify in truth to the truth for the truth, it does not consist, for the most part, in sharing a

knowledge, in making known, in informing, in speaking true. As a promise to *make truth*, according to Augustine's expression, where the witness must be irreplaceably alone, where the witness alone is capable of dying his own death, testimony always goes hand in hand with at least the *possibility* of fiction, perjury, and lie. Were this possibility to be eliminated, no testimony would be possible any longer; it could no longer have the meaning of testimony. If testimony is passion, that is because it will always *suffer* both having, undecidably, a connection to fiction, perjury, or lie and never being able or obligated – without ceasing to testify – to become a proof.

7. Finally and above all “passion” implies the endurance of an indeterminate or undecidable limit where something, some X – for example, literature – must bear or tolerate everything, *suffer* everything precisely because it is not itself, because it has no essence but only functions. This is the hypothesis I would like test and submit to your discussion. There is no essence or substance of literature: literature is not. It does not exist.

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