ABSTRACT

SAYING SAYING: PERFORMATIVE LANGUAGE IN *AUTREMENT QU'ÊTRE*

by Lindsey Kay Hearon

This paper examines the performative nature of Emmanuel Levinas's *Autrement qu'être* as a means of understanding the relationship between ethics and language. Through a close reading of the text, it seeks the ethical not in the mere words on the page, but in their very escape from the fixedness of the text, primarily in the way Levinas links the word *Dire* to an ethics of movement and transcendence. Jacques Derrida's analysis of Levinas's paradoxical language is used to show the ways in which *Autrement qu'être* allows fissures to develop in its own language, as *Totalité et Infini*, a prior iteration of Levinas's language theory, did not do. These fissures, ruptures and interruptions in the Saying, the *Dire* of the text, are the place and the *non-lieu* of poetic language in *Autrement qu'être*. Levinas's essay on poet Paul Celan, written after *Autrement qu'être*, provides a counterpoint to the poetic interruptions present in Levinas's own text, and suggests that *Autrement qu'être* itself, a text saying saying, and not the said, performs a poetic ethics.
SAYING SAYING:

PERFORMATIVE LANGUAGE IN AUTREMENT QU'ÊTRE

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of French & Italian
by
Lindsey Kay Hearon
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2012

Advisor  ____ Dr. Jonathan Strauss
Reader  ____ Dr. Claire Goldstein
Reader  ____ Dr. Sven-Erik Rose
Table of Contents

Introduction.............................................................................................................................Page 1
Chapter I: Dire as au-delà.......................................................................................................Page 6
Chapter II: Dire as non-lieu.................................................................................................Page 14
Chapter III: Dire as interruption..........................................................................................Page 22
Conclusions: Autrement Dit..................................................................................................Page 31
Bibliography..........................................................................................................................Page 35
Saying Saying: Performative Language in Autrement qu' être

Introduction

Le discours interrompu rattrapant ses propres ruptures, c'est le livre. Mais les livres ont leur destin, ils appartiennent à un monde qu'ils n'englobent pas, mais qu'ils reconnaissent en s'écrivant et en s'imprimant et en se faisant pré-facer et en se faisant précéder d'avant-propos. Ils s'interrompent et en appellent à d'autres livres et s'interprètent en fin de compte dans un dire distinct du dit (AE 269).

Stehen im Schatten
Des Wundenmals in der Luft.
Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn.
Unerkannt, für dich allein.
Mit allem, was darin Raum hat, auch ohne Sprache.
Paul Celan

To stand in the shadow
of the scar up in the air.
To stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized, for you alone.
With all there is room for in that, even without language.
Trans. Michael Hamburger

In Autrement qu’être, Emmanuel Levinas proposes two seemingly language-based concepts, the Dire and the Dit. Yet as each term evolves in the text, the Dire seems to detach itself from language, and certainly from systems of language. The best way to begin to understand the Dire would be not to understand it at all. First and foremost, its inalienable power of equivocation makes it an enigma. Understanding the Dire, in the sense of holding-in-the-mind, grasping it, is not Levinas’s objective, nor defining it, which would fix it in language. Rather than attempting to define or make understood, the text demonstrates. If the Dire performs in the text, it does so as already other-than-language, anterior to systems of language. However, Levinas problematises language to the point of questioning the premise of Autrement qu’être. Even in analysing language, he acknowledges his own indebtedness to it. He minutely discusses the grammar of his title and the placement of the adverb. If the Dire, if ethics (which may be to say the same thing in Levinas's grammar of appositives), is antithetical to language, how then
can Autrement qu’être focus so intensively on language? If anything, Levinas surely invites a response, a responsibility, of carefully examining the language of Autrement qu’être.

Jacques Derrida’s essay on Totalité et Infini criticises Levinas’s position on language, particularly as a perspective from within language itself. From the beginning of “Violence et Métaphysique,” Derrida interrogates Levinas’s position on language, ominously asking “comme il s'agit de tuer une parole, saura-t-on jamais qui est la dernière victime de cette feinte?” (334). Although he praises Levinas in many instances, Derrida focuses on the inconsistencies he perceives in Totalité et Infini. He particularly observes Levinas’s tendency to situate himself in a Hegelian framework when attacking Heidegger and vice versa. The same problem arises with respect to the system of language: “Nous nous interrogeons sur le sens d'une nécessité : celle de s'installer dans la conceptualité traditionnelle pour la détruire. Pourquoi cette nécessité s'est-elle finalement imposée à Levinas ?” (Violence et Métaphysique 427). Some of the issues Derrida raises, such as a skepticism of language, shift in Autrement qu’être, which resolves the internal incoherency present in Totalité et Infini. At other times, however, Derrida seems to miss the strength of Levinas’s position within a system he critiques. He similarly attacks Levinas for abusing vocabulary: “Pourquoi faut-il oblitérer sans l'effacer, sans la rendre illisible, cette notion d'extériorité en disant que sa vérité est sa non-vérité, que la vraie extériorité n'est pas spatiale, c'est-à-dire n'est pas extériorité ?” (Violence et Métaphysique 428). Indeed, Autrement qu’être enacts precisely the same ‘misuse’ of language when Levinas uses the word proximity, which does not indicate a spatial measure or a physical presence. Yet that unsaying of a word, which is not erasing it, inaugurates the Dire, the trace within even language qua Dit. Derrida seems to find it disturbing that perhaps “il faille dire dans le langage de la totalité l'excès de l'Infini sur la totalité, qu'il faille dire l'Autre dans le langage du Même” (Violence et Métaphysique 428). Levinas broaches this exact problem in Autrement qu’être with the problem of speaking about the Other, and even of speaking to the Other. Ironically, Derrida criticizes Levinas, for dans ce combat, il s'est déjà privé de la meilleure arme : le mépris du discours. En effet, devant les classiques difficultés de langage que nous évoquons, Levinas ne peut se donner les ressources classiques. Aux prises avec des problèmes qui furent aussi bien ceux de la théologie négative que ceux du bergsonisme, il ne se donne pas le droit de parler comme eux dans un langage résigné à sa propre déchéance” (Violence et Métaphysique 431).
Is not Levinas’s ‘misuse’ of spatial terms, still germinal in *Totalité et Infini*, ripening only in *Autrement qu’être*, just such a language resigned to its own deposition?

With reference to the problem of spatiality and the larger theme of language, Derrida asks “mais quelle est la nécessité de cette inscription du langage dans l'espace au moment même où il l'excède?” (Violence et Métaphysique 339). This quality of being at once in language and exceeding it proves essential to *Autrement qu’être*. After all, the trace in language, leading to the beyond, the *au delà de l'essence* of the title, is the *Dire*. By the same token, a language acknowledging its own degeneration also exceeds itself, not only by referencing itself, but by calling to something beyond itself. An auto-referential language, however, still does not suffice for the language Levinas seeks, according to Derrida: “le langage non-violent, selon Levinas, serait un langage qui se priverait du verbe être, c'est-à-dire de toute prédication. La prédication est la première violence” (Violence et Métaphysique 466). Interestingly, one of the most evident qualities of the *Dire* in *Autrement qu’être* is its infinite apposition. Levinas never defines the *Dire*, but it connects itself stylistically with almost every other important term in the text through hyphens, commas, the punctuation of the appositive. The language of *Autrement qu’être* does in fact deprive itself of *être*, in the sense that it chooses apposition over definition, over apophasis or predication. The *Dire* answers for the problem of the verb *être* through its appositive nature, which will be linked to substitution. Derrida’s inquisitively close reading of the text also questions at the level of grammar, the grammar of the word “autre”:

* est-ce seulement un nom commun sans concept ? Mais d'abord est-ce un nom ? Ce n'est pas un adjectif, ni un pronom, c'est donc un substantif - et ainsi le classent les dictionnaires - mais un substantif qui n'est pas, comme d'habitude, une espèce de nom : ni nom commun, car il ne supporte pas, comme dans la catégorie de l'autre en général, de Pexepov, l'article défini x ; ni nom propre, bien que son anonymat ne signifie que la ressource innommable de tout nom propre (Violence et Métaphysique 350).

*Autrement qu’être* better equips us to answer for the grammar of the Other by seeking a language of the Other, anterior to systems of language, yet still language. And this language of the Other, the *Dire*, escapes ontology and predication.

In his movement away from ontology, Levinas also enters into grammar. Even his title, *Autrement qu’Étre*, consists of a play on words, a play on words which is not at all a game. The adverb catapults his analysis afield of the *être/non-être* distinction and into something other, an
otherwise than being. Transcendence must escape the overshadowing of the *esse*, not by a
negation, not being, but by an elliptical grammar evading the verb and separating the adverb
from its habitual subordination to the verb. Thus Levinas’s analysis casts itself immediately into
language, and not only as the written word but at the heart of the structure which the *Dire*
precedes. Grammar, a grammatical manoeuvre, triggers the movement beyond being, towards an
otherwise than being. The *Dire* is anterior to the linguistic, the semantic, the verbal. Levinas
repeatedly recasts it as the approach, etc., yet always this linguistic term, the *Dire*, resurfaces.
Even as he recognizes the dependence of his own analysis on the *Dit*, Levinas also seems to
resign himself to the *Dire* having some kind of language quality. Certainly it is the signifyingness
of signification; it lies behind all communication; it is the prelingual. The *Dit* itself is merely a
translation, a betrayal of the *Dire*. If the *Dire* is something other than language, why does
Levinas continue to describe it through the vocabulary of language, relating it to concepts such
as *expression*? He separates it from the *Dit* even to the point of questioning whether the *Dire* can
in any way exist unsubordinated within the realm of the *Dit*. Nonetheless, Levinas chose to name
this form of language, which is *signifiance*, or signifyingness, nothing other than the infinitive
verb *Dire*, to say. The *Dire* may not involve language qua words, but still Levinas defines it as a
sign signifying signification, or a saying saying saying. If the *Dire* remains exterior to all
communication, why indeed is it called the *Dire*? Can there be a language or form of expression
outside of the *Dit*, the ontological, and words themselves? The *Dire*, as the verbality of the verb,
resonating within the verb, maintains some inherently language-based characteristic even as
antecedent to structures of language as we know them. Or, we might say that language maintains
a trace of the *Dire*, an echo of the *face-à-face* that precedes language.

This thesis will seek the ways in which the *Dire* does not describe a kind of language but
rather performs a language that evade ontology and moves toward the other. After all, the *Dire*
is a giving-of-signs to the point of becoming a sign, and so also *Autrement qu’être* itself becomes
a sign. If we are to take Levinas at his word, or more properly, at his Saying, we must explore the
text in its grammar, its autoreflexivity, and its call to other texts. In the end, can *Autrement
qu’être* do as Levinas suggests and interpret itself in “dire distinct du dit?” Chapter one will
address the grammar of the *Dire* as an infinitive and its infinite substitution, which unites it with
the Infinite, a term always surpassed by its ideatum, the reality to which it refers. Levinas
connects the *Dire* to hyperbole, a speech which surpasses itself, and through mobility, the *Dire*
performs because it se passe within the text of Autrement qu’être. Ricoeur’s work on excess serves as an intervention point to interrogate the violence of the Dire as a hyperbole that constrains the non-ethical to speak the ethical. In chapter two, that taking-place will become a taking non-place. Place is inherently ontological, and the Dire, repeatedly associated with the non-lieu, may yet escape the fixedness of the Dit. In the body, which Derrida rightly observes is the zero point of spatiality (Violence et Métaphysique 340), we find a non-lieu vacated by the self, who resides nowhere. Derrida’s essay “En ce moment” reveals the textual diachrony present in Autrement qu’être. This chapter also bridges an ethics of language and an ethics of l’homme.

Chapter three, a departure that is ultimately a return, will reference Levinas’s essay on poet Paul Celan to illuminate interruption in Autrement qu’être. Desire, a red thread through many of Levinas’s major works, functions in both texts as the catalyst for the rupture in being. “De l’être à l’autre” represents a rare instance of Levinas relating poetry and the Dire. Through an analysis of the essay and through the work of Gabriel Riera on intrigue, the poetics of Autrement qu’être come to light. The Dire, ex-cess, non-lieu, response-ibility, interrupts being, not by a recounting, but by a poetical intervention in language.
Chapter 1: Dire as au-delà

Le corps d'un texte fautif a-t-il lieu? - J. Derrida, “En ce moment même”

The exposition of Autrement qu’Être opens with a discussion of being (être) and non-being:

Mais on se demande aussitôt si dans la formule autrement qu’être, l’adverbe autrement ne se rapporte pas inévitabllement au verbe être, simplement éludé dans une tournure artificiellement elliptique. En sorte que le signifié du verbe être, serait inéluctable dans tout dit, dans tout pensé, dans tout senti. Nos langues tissées autour du verbe être ne refléteraient pas seulement cette royauté indétrônable plus forte que celle des dieux, elles seraient la pourpre même de cette royauté. (AE 4)

Levinas immediately entertains the impossibility of escaping the être, already hypothesising our (perhaps irreversible) entanglement in being, which would be the instantiating quality of language. However, Autrement qu’être moves forward upon the conditionality of these clauses, seeking to untie our tongues and our languages from being. This very possibility launches the book, hinting at a language unwoven from ontology, and autrement que langage. What might be the alternative that lurks in the conditional verbs of Levinas’s introduction? He immediately rejects as autrement qu’être the peace of étants, beings, still driven by the conatus. Shortly thereafter, he introduces the Dit and the Dire: “Le destin sans issue où l’être enferme aussitôt l’énoncé de l’autre de l’être ne tient-il pas à l’emprise que le dit exerce sur le dire, à l’oracle où le dit s’immobilise ?” (AE 6). The explicit connection between Dit and être, Dire and l’autre de l’être, as well as the ensnarement of the Dire, echo the unweaving of language from ontology.

Words return us always to the Dit, yet Levinas displaces the Dire from both the Dit and the non-dit: “Le Dit et le Non-Dit, n’absorvent pas tout le Dire, lequel reste en deça - ou va au-delà - du Dit” (AE 29). How can Levinas’s distinction between Dit and Dire not already fall into the same jeu of amphibology as être and étant? As Adriaan Peperzak explains, “the opposition between Saying and Said is neither a difference of two species belonging to one genus nor a dialectical contradiction like that between Being and non-Being. It is simultaneously a separation and an intimate relation between two dimensions that cannot be synthesized or integrated into a totality” (60). Levinas acknowledges that his study itself is indebted to the Dit, as any analysis which takes place by the medium of language: “la corrélation du dire et du dit, c’est-à-dire la
subordination du dire au dit, au système linguistique et à l'ontologie est le prix que demande la manifestation” (AE 7). However, this chapter will explore the ways in which the Dire, not only as a concept but also as a word, a sign, within the text, transcends the Dit to draw the reader back toward the pre-ontological and antecedent approach, which is the event of the Dire.

One of the earliest evident qualities of the Dire in Autrement qu'être is its deixis, through endless appositives and redefinitions. Even in its first iteration, the Dire “est proximité de l’un à l’autre, engagement de l’approche, l’un pour l’autre, la signification même de la signification” (AE 6), a piling-on of the book’s linchpins. The permutations of the Dire in the text develop alongside the argument, not describing, which would be naming, but saying, instantiating, as substitution, verbality, motion. In the initial stages of his Exposition, Levinas questions whether être is a verb or a noun, nom, which in French means both name and noun. Language, “aussi un système de noms” (AE 44), verbs frozen into nouns, as the Dire inscribed in the Dit, becomes a game of names. Yet the Dire does not name, and “précisément n’est pas un jeu” (AE 6). Verbs come into their verbality “en cessant de nommer” (AE 44). In the same way, Dire does not name, is not a symbol, but rather moves, motivates, escapes the frozenness of the Dit. It substitutes itself, performing verbality. If it recurs in conjunction with many of Levinas’s major terms, it does so as a verb:“dire - mon expressivité, ma signification de signe, ma verbalité de verbe” (AE 17). Even in this list, Dire is not naming, standing-for, defining. Though Levinas calls it “le dire,” its mobility in the text makes it a different part of speech, an otherwise than noun.

Notably, Levinas characterises the Dit as a fixedness of the Dire. Within the Dit, everything “s’immobilise, se fixe” (AE 29). To understand these concepts, we must set them back in the context of grammar, to which Levinas continuously returns. As a past participle, the Dit is frozen in time. The Dire, infinitive of the verb ‘to say,’ intimates mobility, both as the verbality of the verb and as infinite substitution. There is no fixedness in the Dire, which continuously substitutes itself within the text of Autrement qu’Être, a deictic play that is no game, but the very gravity of Levinas’s ethics. In fact, the Dire itself is deixis, which is to say, not only the concept ever exploding out of the word Dire, but the word itself. The Dire is presence, denuding, subjectivity, sign, l’un-pour-l’autre, approach, expression, etc., and always substitution. Still, this wordplay is not play, but rather interrupts the play of signifiers. It may be best understood through Levinas’s discussion of exposure, an exposure of the self to the Other, but also of language itself: “Non pas Dire se dissimulant et se protégeant dans le Dit, se payant
de mots en face de l’autre - mais dire se découvrant - c’est-à-dire se dénudant de sa peau - sensibilité à fleur de peau, à fleur de nerfs, s’offrant jusqu’à la souffrance - ainsi tout signe, se signifiant” (AE 18). The Dire is the face denuded of skin, but perhaps even more so a language denuded of the Dit, a sign that signifies itself, or saying saying saying. If the Dire engages in grammatical play, it does so in serious pursuit of an “exposition de l’exposition, expression, Dire” (AE 18). Here we might also observe a distinction between Levinas and other philosophers, such as Heidegger. If Heidegger repeatedly redefines his terms to add on to them, Levinas’s redefinitions of the Dire serve rather to strip it, denuding it even of its skin.

When Levinas describes a language issued out of the verbalness of the verb, which “ne consisterait pas seulement à faire nommer, mais aussi à faire vibrer l’essence de l’être” (35), he describes a language of Saying, or at least within which resounds an echo of the Saying. Yet within the text of Autrement qu’être, the Dire does not name a particular kind of saying, nor of language; it is never defined in such a way. Dire speaks the verbality of the verb, installing the Dire sans Dit, the sign that is not a word, in the text. By continual transformations, substitutions that do not name, the event of Dire manifests a language of verbality devoid of the fixedness of nouns, names. As the word thanks, which is an event of thankfulness, the Dire itself establishes its own possibility:

Les hommes ont pu rendre grâce de ce fait même de se trouver en état de rendre grâce; la gratitude actuelle se greffant sur elle-même comme sur une gratitude déjà préalable. Dans une prière où le fidèle demande que sa prière soit entendue, la prière se précède en quelque sorte ou se suit elle-même (AE 12)

The Dire also proceeds from and precedes itself, is inscribed upon itself. The Dire, as a concept not defined in the traditional sense, springs from the very fact of its occurrence, its recurrence in the text, transcending language by surpassing the term Dire. By being, or better yet, by performing, more than the mere word Dire could ever define, the Dire transcends through its own performativity.

In his analysis of Autrement qu’être, Ricoeur specifically focuses on the ‘autrement que’ that not only titles the book but also structures much of the argument. Ricoeur develops several problems he sees in the text, but repeatedly returns to the Dire and the Dit. The ‘épilogue’ particularly interests him as a response to the rest of the text, response in which “l’autrement que dit du Dire se cherche - et peut-être se donne - un autrement dit” (Ricoeur 3). Both in the
in the au-delà, he discovers the *Dire*, linked to a transcending which may not be entirely positive. However, he immediately marks the interconnected terms “Dire, verbe Dire, ajointé à ‘proximité de l’un à l’autre,’ à ‘désintéressement,’ à ‘responsabilité de l’un pour l’autre,’ à ‘substitution.’ La gerbe de ces maîtres mots est nouée en une seule page” (Ricoeur 5). Yet the *Dire* and its ex-cess trouble Ricoeur: “les pages consacrées à la triade *proximité, responsabilité, substitution* sont prononcées sur un ton qu’on peut dire déclaratif, pour ne pas dire kérygmatique, soutenu par un usage insistant, pour ne pas dire obsédant, du trope de l’hyperbole” (Ricoeur 20). The excessiveness of the *Dire*, this word that surpasses, passes itself, proves to be violence in Ricoeur’s analysis. Hyperbolic not only in its surpassing of itself, but also in its demands of the subject it establishes, the *Dire* moves from nakedness to exposure to hostage-taking. “Pourquoi cette montée aux extrêmes: obsession, blessure, traumatisme?” (Ricoeur 21) For Ricoeur, the answer lies in the violence of the *Dire* resulting in the passivity of subjectivity. If “l’ex-cession, l’excessif se concentrent dans le mouvement de la proximité à la substitution” (Ricoeur 23), it does so by taking hostage, by inflicting violence. Arguing that “le non-éthique dit l’éthique en vertu de sa seule valence d’excès” (25), Ricoeur identifies a crescendo of violence that ultimately exhausts the saying of responsibility. Yet Levinas argues that the *Dire* cannot be exhausted in any *Dit*, in any language, though in “la Philosophie occidentale le Dire s’épuise en Dits” (AE 260). If the *Dire* does not exhaust itself, but remains an excess, a hyperbole, then the responsibility for the Other would seem to spring not from violence but from this very excess which Ricoeur himself describes, demanding response, demanding response-ability. Rather than violence or malice being the unethical that says the ethical, the *Dit* itself is this *non-éthique*, which by being surpassed, exhausted, allows the *Dire* to speak itself. In overflowing and eclipsing its written form, the *Dit*, the *Dire* resonates with the ethical. Ricoeur himself postulates that “C’est bien, si l’on ose dire, une trahison de la trahison que Levinas exprime par le terme ‘dédire’” (9). Yet rather than a reduction that would unsay all saying or all language, might not this betrayal of betrayal be to *faire se trahir le Dire*? The *Dit* itself witnesses the *Dire*, and “through this witnessing the Infinite surpasses the finite and comes to pass” (101), as Anselm K. Min describes; a trace of the *Dire* remains in the *Dit*, though that trace must be surpassed by the *Dire* itself. Levinas rejects the proposal that “se dire” be reduced to “être dit.” In the same way, unsaying betrays, makes visible, the *autrement que dit* which is the *Dire*. Peperzak argues that “transcendence touches us by leaving traces which challenge and resist our comprehension”
The *Dire*, traced even in the *Dit* that attempts to immobilise it, ultimately surpasses by its call to responsibility for the other: “the positivity of the trace left by illeity is an excess: the Infinite exceeds the essence by its exorbitant demand” (Peperzak 107). It must be acknowledged that this exorbitant demand is a violence, insofar as it calls for nudity, exposure, homelessness, but not Ricoeur’s violence of the non-ethical. Rather, the *Dire* demands an ethical interruption of being in its infinite excess.

Ricoeur analyses another example of *irruption* which overflows the text - the name of God - in his conclusion: “ce retour du nom a une signification plus large, liée à la question de la *signification* du Dire, en tant qu’ex-ception à ce qui est appelé la signification du Dit” (Ricoeur 36). Tied to, or perhaps even catalysing, the signifyingness of the *Dire*, the name of God emerges in the conclusion to *Autrement qu’être* as perhaps the only word in which the *Dire* can remain unabsorbed by the *Dit*. As an enigma, “l’énoncé de l’au-delà de l’être, du nom de Dieu, ne se laisse pas emmurer dans les conditions de son énonciation” (AE 243). Indeed, if one word can represent the *Dire*, it would seem to be the name of God, in which “glory of the Infinite lies in the excess over the present” (Min 101). Ricoeur questions: “[Dieu] n’est-il pas le Nom? Le Nom qui signe la signification sans quoi le Dire sans dit virerait à l’ineffable?” (37). The ex-ception of *Dieu* qualifies signification, creating an inroad into the *Dit*, into language qua *Dit*. Even the Infinite depends on *Dieu*, because “c’est sous le signe de ce Nom que l’‘Infini’ peut tomber en éthique” (Ricoeur 37). Might then the final event of the *Dire* in *Autrement qu’être* be to become ex-ception like the word *Dieu*? Levinas acknowledges the limitations of the written form, of the *Dit* to which even his study has recourse, yet *Dire* as concept and particularly as word escapes the *Dit* of the text. Ricoeur proposes that Levinas’s “*Autrement Dit,*” the concluding section, in effect discovers its *autrement que dit* in the *Dire*, which has not veered into the ineffable, but instead surpasses text through text, as *Dieu*, “l’apparoir même du visage comme individu” (Ricoeur 36).

In his book *L’un-pour-l’autre*, Didier Franck suggests that the word *Dieu* “dit le dire, est le mot pour le dire” (208). Levinas makes the startling assertion in *Autrement qu’être* that the word *Dieu* escapes the typical fate of words, of the *Dit*, “le seul qui n’éteigne ni n’absorbe son Dire, mais qui ne peut rester simple mot” (192). Yet in the course of *Autrement qu’être*, *Dire* also, perhaps said by *Dieu* as Franck claims, becomes this “bouleversant événement sémantique du mot” (192). If “dans les limites d’un mot et de son présent, le mot Dieu dit alors l’infini qui les
excedent toutes” (Franck 210), the Dieu speaks the Dire, the Dire speaks also the infinite, the hyperbole, which transcends language. Here Franck resituates the unsaying in language, as does Ricoeur, so that rather than necessitating silence, the dédire in fact requires language, words, which nonetheless are transcended by their own ideatum. Even when present in a sentence, Dieu “s’en absente avant de s’y présenter - c’est l’énigme même - et ne peut par conséquent dire ce qu’il dit sans déjà toujours le dédire” (210). Thus Dieu in saying saying always already unsays saying. The Dire itself is unsaid, but not in order to escape language completely, for Levinas insists on an au-delà which is not an essoufflement de l’esprit, and an autrement qu’être rather than a non-être (AE 15). Dédire is not unsaid from language, but rather from the Dit. From the dédire as énigme, Franck proposes that “bref, ‘me voici’ est une phrase qui n’est pas un phrase” (210). In this new vocabulary of words that are not words and sentences that are not sentences, the Dire by which reduction takes place, “une remontée du dit au dire” (Franck 211), becomes a semantic event.

So rather than the unsaying or nonsaying interpreted by some readers of Levinas, we find a Saying, Dire, whose ultimate destiny is to enter into the Dit. The reduction of the Dit, not a silence or an absence of signs, is a “réduction qui est donc un incessant dédit du Dit, au Dire toujours trahit par le Dit dont les mots se définissent par des mots non-définis” (AE 228), undefined words like the Dire, reducing by superseding. As the infinite (another mot non-défini) is not hiding within the finite, nor can it be limited to the finite, so too the Saying is in relationship with the Said. Min expresses this as an explosion, for “the form of the cogito is interrupted by the content it cannot contain. Thus the idea of the Infinite signifies with a meaning prior to presence, an an-archy, signifying within the trace, neither exhausting itself in showing itself nor deriving its meaning from manifestation” (102). In the same way, the Dire cannot be found ‘within’ the Dit, explodes out of it, because the Dire inhabits a non-space of interruption, of rupture, the space which is the subject, null-site of substitution. The Infinite ‘se passe,’ passes or surpasses itself, the word ‘infinite,’ numbered among the said. Yet in passing itself, in exceeding the Dit of the word ‘infinite,’ it happens, transpires like an event. As a word which is continuously ‘passed’ in its significance, the Dire also se passe, and in surpassing itself, takes place, or in this case, takes non-place, as will be discussed below.

In his essay on Levinas, Jacques Derrida describes the text of Autrement qu’être as a protocol, a knot: “L’intérêt que je porte à la manière dont [Levinas] écrit ses ouvrages peut
paraitre déplacé: écrire, au sens courant de ce mot, faire des phrases et composer, exploiter une rhétorique ou une poétique, etc., ce n’est pas ce qui lui importe en dernière instance; c’est un ensemble de gestes subordonnés” (ECM 165). Within this ensemble of gestures, the Dire also signifies to the reader as a wink, an enigma, rather than as a word or phrase, yet escaping subordination to the Dit. And the Dire is the mode of this writing which is not exploitation, “pour dire ce qui ne se présente pas et n’aura jamais été présent, le dit présent ne se présentant qu’au nom d’un Dire qui le déborde, au-dehors et au-dedans, infiniment” (ECM 166). An overwhelming, a brimming over, the Dire is only ‘present’ as excess to the present. It presents itself through a beyond the present, and the infinite, never present, thereby presents itself in and through the finite. Even “le passage au-delà de la langue requiert la langue ou plutôt le texte comme lieu des traces pour un pas qui n’est pas présent ailleurs” (ECM 170). The bursting-forth Derrida describes takes place as an overflowing of the text. “Texte fautif” that Autrement qu’être may be, its rupturedness is that of a text shot through with the au-delà. If the Dire is to avoid being subsumed in the Dit, it must do so as the very word Dire does, in a surpassing that brims over the Dit, as an unsubordinated Infinite irreducible to the word itself.

Levinas identifies the Dire as an “hyperbole de la passivité” (AE 83) in its radical difference from thematisation. Yet the Dire does not describe, thematise, hyperbole, rather it in fact is hyperbolic in the text, exceeding, surpassing. As an alternative to ontology, “dans l'hyperbole, dans le superlatif, dans l'excellence de signification auxquels elles remontent – dans la transcendance qui s'y passe ou s'y dépasse” (AE 231), the Dire also passes, surpasses itself in hyperbole, activating the au-delà which Autrement qu’être approaches. If “cette hyperbole, cette ex-cellence, n'est que le ‘pour- l'autre’ dans son désintéressement” (AE 231), it moves toward the other in the passing of itself. Indeed, Levinas acknowledges that “c'est cela que cherchait à dire l'étrange discours tenu ici sur la signification dans l'un-pour-l'autre du sujet” (AE 231), making explicit the connection between the language of Autrement qu’être, a strange discourse, and the Dire, hyperbole by virtue of that very strangeness. In the Saying of a subjectivity responsible for the Other, the Said overflows, creating a surplus of meaning. This surplus of meaning is pure signification, meaning beyond the logos, meaning that surpasses the logos. The Saying initiates a surplus of meaning escaping words, the Said, in an overflow leading to transcendence, to the infinite. The Saying “overflows” (OB 70). Like the infinite, it surpasses the understood. Saying, transcendence, is also hyperbole. Hyperbole ruptures, breaking out of the Logos in the
exorbitance of its overflow. So too Infinity proves hyperbolic, surpassing the Logos in excess of meaning. *Dire* enacts a similar interruption, irruption of language, which breaks beyond the *Dit* of *Autrement qu'être*. 
Chapter 2: Dire as Non-lieu

A l’utopisme comme reproche - si l’utopisme est reproche, si aucune pensée échappe à l’utopisme - ce livre échappe en rappelant que ce qui eut humainement lieu n’a jamais pu rester enfermé dans son lieu. -Levinas, Autrement qu’être

So we have seen that the Dire both as concept and as word overflows the Dit, se passe, taking place, or taking non-place as this chapter will explore. If the Dire moves us by its deixis and verbality into an au-delà, how might we characterize this ‘beyond,’ and how does the event of Dire take non-place? For place, Levinas tells us, like time, belongs to the Dit and to ontology. Inevitably, diachrony and entre-temps must play a role in this ‘between place,’ space of the interval, which, like diachrony, seeks an otherwise than place. As rupture leads us from overflow to non-lieu, so it will draw non-lieu to interruption, another enigma winking in the text. The non-lieu, the interstitial, verges upon interruption, which will connect it back to the larger question of language. Here, however, it is still the Dire that intervenes to de-situate the subject, and indeed to shake its very foundations. Ultimately, subjecthood depends on the non-lieu.

Levinas introduces the non-lieu in response to the question of an overflow, leading where? If we depart from ontology, toward what are we departing? “Il s’agit de penser la possibilité d’un arrachement à l’essence. Pour aller où? Pour aller dans quelle région?” (AE 9). However, as with a proposed otherwise than being which depends itself on being, Levinas redefines the question itself, rejecting a location grounded in geometric or geographic structure: “Mais l’arrachement à l’essence conteste le privilège inconditionnel de la question: où? Il signifie le non-lieu” (AE 9). As the text develops, the non-place recurs in conjunction with the Dire and particularly with the problem of subjectivity. Indeed, Levinas’s subject pertains explicitly to the problem of place, instantiating itself in the proclamation “me voici,” here am I. Yet time and place correspond to ontology's synchrony that would ultimately eliminate subjectivity by its very synchronizing. The Dire signifies another order, “une pensée diachronique” (AE 8-9). The autrement qu’être sought in the text, then, does not not ask ‘where,’ but introduces a non-place. The ripping-away-from being rips toward a null-site, created, as we will see, by the Dire. Non-lieu, entre-temps, interval, the Dire catalyses these ruptures in ontology, in being.

If place is inherently ontological, the au-delà is neither a heavenly realm nor another
dimension. Why must the Dire de-situate? The de-positioning becomes apparent with several of the terms, spatial in nature, which will be important in this chapter. In the Dire’s substitutive progression, proximity and the approach define a language which must be for-the-other, “le Dire - en tant qu’approche - la déposition ou la dé-situation du sujet” (AE 61). The Dire, in surpassing, taking place, creates a non-place which in fact dislodges the subject. In fact, “le sujet dans le Dire s’approche du prochain en s’ex-primant, au sens littéral du terme en s’ex-pulsant hors tout lieu, n’habitant plus, ne foulant aucun sol” (AE 62). The taking-beyond enabled by the Dire, the approach to the neighbor, happens by a rejection of place. No longer ‘chez soi,’ at home within himself, the subject in fact no longer has a place anywhere. With each negation, Levinas evicts the subject from possible locations until he has evicted the subject from place entirely. This man who stomps no ground is the subject of the Dire, the non- or pre-ontological moi. At the heart of his expulsion lies passivity, as a subject who does not signify but becomes a sign. If place indicates self-ness, the non-lieu to which the Dire expels the other exists for-the-other.

In the same way, proximity, a word seemingly spatial in nature, does not ask the question ‘where.’ Rather, “La proximité n’est pas un état, un repos, mais, précisément inquiétude, non-lieu, hors le lieu du repos bouleversant le calme de la non-ubiquité de l’être qui se fait repos en un lieu” (AE 103). So the Dire as approach does not move toward a place, but rather toward proximity, which is precisely a non-place. The restfulness of place must be agitated by the Dire “qui dérange l’eau qui dort” (AE 63), the movement described in the previous chapter, which is restlessness, for “la proximité ne se fige pas” (103), like the Dire never frozen in the Dit. Likewise, proximity defines no place, does not take place except by the surpassing of the Dire. Proximity “atteint son superlatif,” which is to say se passe, “comme mon inquiétude incessible” (AE 103). By its hyperbole and mobility, precipitating the approach, the Dire enables proximity to take non-place, to become the non-lieu.

Thus the Dire animates the approach, the expulsion from place which ultimately leads to proximity. Levinas writes that subjectivity itself is grounded in proximity, in this non-lieu. So in fact, in desituating the subject, the Dire brings the subject into being. A responsible being, a being called to respond, becomes a subject: “La responsabilité illimitée où je me trouve vient d’en deçà de ma liberté... ...La responsabilité pour autrui est le lieu où se place le non-lieu de la subjectivité et où se perd le privilege de la question: où?” (AE 12) - again a play on words: the responsibility in which I find myself, yet also the responsibility in which the je is found, the moi,
the self. The location of the *je*, not fielding the question where, places the *non-lieu* of subjectivity in responsibility.

Still, proximity, approach, *non-lieu*, each is instantiated by the *Dire* and finds its true locus, null-site though it be, in language, in one phrase: “me voici.” Levinas defines the *je* through that response: “le mot *Je* signifie *me voici*, répondant de tout et de tous” (AE 145). Through the ‘place’ of the *ici* in the exposure of the self, the *je* that speaks the “me voici,” the *Dire* transcends the place of the text. *Me voici*, rather than locating the subject, displaces it. *Ici*, itself a deictic, does not signify a place, but rather placelessness, the null-site of subjectivity. *Me voici* is a response, a ‘here am I’ without a here, a presence without present.

Through the *me voici*, the *Dire* instantiates human contact. The surpassing, overflowing of the *Dire* situates itself, through a rejection of place, in subjectivity, in personhood. If *Autrement qu’être* begins by constructing an ethics of language, launched as it is by the grammar of adverbs, nouns, and verbs, it incarnates an ethics of human beings in the *me voici*. Subjectivity cannot be founded on liberty. Yet in the *me voici*, the inescapable responsibility to the other, the *Dire* becomes more than an ethics of language: “le mot *je* signifie *me voici*, répondant de tout et de tous” (AE 145): the *Dire* is an ethics of the subject and of the body.

In the *non-lieu*, the *Dire* takes on flesh. If the *Dit* comprises words and systems, the *Dire* signifies an ethics not only of language but of approach, of one to another. Thought is always already language, and so also the body enters into the Levinasian grammar: “dans l’approche du visage, la chair se fait verbe, la caresse — Dire.” (AE 120). In the approach, which transforms the place of the body into a *non-lieu*, the flesh becomes a verb, and the contact of the caress is in fact the *Dire* itself. However, the caress does not indicate the presence of the other: “La caresse est le ne pas coïncider du contact, une dénudation jamais assez nue. Le prochain ne comble pas l’approche. La tendresse de la peau, c’est le décalage même entre approche et approché, disparité, non-intentionalité, non- téléologie: d’où le désordre de la caresse, diachronie, plaisir sans présent” (AE 110). The caress, the *Dire*, does not depart from language by physical contact, but by stripping-down, allowing the *avoir-l’autre-dans-sa-peau*. Still, the *avoir-l’autre-dans-sa-peau* is not presence, but *décalage*, the distance between the *je* and the other. Although not presence, which would draw back to the category of place and of ontology, nor physical contact, the caress *surpasses* through interruption, toward the null-site of subjectivity, which is the body. The body, the enfleshed placelessness of the *Dire*, carries this distance between approach and approached in
the *non-lieu*. The caress is:

le superlatif, plus que la négation de la catégorie, qui interrompt le système, comme si l'ordre logique et l'être qu'il arrive à épouser gardaient le superlatif qui les excède : dans la subjectivité la démesure du non-lieu, dans la caresse et la sexualité – la « surenchère » de la tangence, comme si la tangence admettait une gradation, jusqu'au contact par les entrailles, une peau allant sous l'autre peau. (AE 17)

The skin beneath the skin, the contact, not removing disparity, reaching all the way to the entrails and the core of the body, instantiates a relation with the other by the *Dire*, which continually exceeds the Dit even when held within it.

The ‘location’ of the Other, no place, a null-site, emerges as the body itself, as “être-dans-sa-peau, comme avoir-l’autre-dans sa peau” (AE 146). *Dire* takes on flesh through the *me voici*, itself an instance of the *Dire*, surpassing the words *me voici* as the *Dire* also surpasses itself. The *Dire* is not language, the Dit, but the Other in my flesh, my responsibility for the Other. The Saying says “me voici - dire de l’inspiration qui n’est ni le don de belles paroles, ni de chants. Astriction au donner, aux mains pleines et, par conséquent, à la corporité” (AE 181). But we find the *ici* of *me voici* in the body. The *Dire* is bodied, corporeal, enfleshed: no gift of words, but of the space which is no longer the place of the self, the body, although no confusion or fusion of the Other and the moi occurs. The je of *me voici* stands accused; the self exists and takes place only by responsibility for everything and for everyone: “abordée à partir de la responsabilité pour l’autre homme, le psychisme du sujet - l’un-pour-l’autre - serait la signification ou l’intelligibilité - ou la signification elle-même. Subjectivité de l’homme de chair et de sang” (AE 181). Levinas dislocates man, the self, from the place of the body, a place which becomes a non-place and the seat of the Other. The *Dire*, wounding the self to the quick with restlessness, “me pourchassee hors le noyau de ma substantialité” (AE 181), which is to say, my body. In her article on transcendance and corporeality, Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela calls the body “a vital metaphor—a living image, a Said escaping through its very Saying” as a space of transcendance (44). The body, wounded by the *Dire*, no longer exists as the seat of subjectivity, but rather as vacated, an exit from ‘place.’ Altez-Albela argues that, “while it is oftentimes said that ethics starts with the encounter of the Other in the Face; it could have started at corporeality, at the moment of self-embodiment” (44), but not self-embodiment as habitation. Rather, the denuding of the body to the point of exposure makes the self a subject.
The flesh-and-blood subject lies at the heart of the **Dire**, and therefore of **Autrement qu’être**. Still, “l’homme de chair et de sang” arrives at his subjectivity through the **Dire** of the me voici, a phrase which escapes thematising and thematisation. **Me voici** gives no pretty words, but rather signifyingness, the self become sign, carrying the Other in the skin. The “hors,” **non-lieu**, the human is chased away from place by the **Dire**:

Dire ainsi, c'est faire signe de cette signification même de l'exposition; c'est exposer l'exposition au lieu de s'y tenir comme dans un acte d'exposer; c'est s'épuiser à s'exposer, c'est faire signe en se faisant signe sans se reposer dans sa figure même de signe.

Passivité de l'extra dition obsidionale où se livre à l'autre cette extradition même, avant qu'elle ne s'établisse; itération préréflexive dans le Dire de ce Dire même; énoncé du « me voici » (AE 182)

The surpassing, overflowing, restlessness of the **Dire** dislocates the Other into my very skin. The **Dire** must become subjectivity, or become frozen into **Dit**; it has no other mode, no other locus but place or non-place. Humanity itself, l’homme, is utopia, **non-lieu**, for it is restlessness: “ce qui eut humainement lieu n'a jamais pu rester enfermé dans son lieu” (AE 232).

The **Dire**, both as word and as concept, performs in the text of **Autrement qu’être**. Several theorists have attempted to understand the **Dit** and the **Dire** in terms of a speech event. Carrol Clarkson’s article “Embodying ‘you’: Levinas and a question of the second person” addresses the roles of pronouns, art, and the speech event in the distinction between **Dit** and **Dire**. Her analysis will also prove helpful in order to understand the limitations of conceptualising the **Dire** as a speech act. In the I of Levinas’s **Autrement qu’être**, an I signifying at once Levinas himself, and also the self, responsibility instantiates subjectivity. By referring to Clarkson’s analysis of the speech act, we can also recognize the utopism of the I. Beginning with a discussion of pronouns, she explains that shifters, as described by Jakobson, depend on and create the context which defines them. For Clarkson, the distinction between ‘he’ and ‘you’ divides along the lines of presence and absence, and thereby to speech or to narrated act: “Whereas ‘you’ are always instantiated as present to my utterance, I can refer to ‘him’ in his absence.” (Clarkson 96). If ‘he’ is not present to my speech, it objectifies him rather than approaching him. Or, as she explains in a reflection on the work of Emile Benveniste, “pronominal forms such as ‘I’ and ‘you’ ‘do not refer to ‘reality’ or to ‘objective’ positions in space or time but to the utterance, unique each time, that contains them” (Clarkson 96). As deictics, shifters, 'I' and 'you' connect back to the **Dire**, and
like it, escape place and time. Indeed, the utterance cannot contain them, nor limit them to the instance at hand. Through grammar, Levinas relocates subjectivity to a *non-lieu*, but one which is Pro-nominal, the flesh and bones of the body into which the Other enters. Yet a naming obligates near omnipresence: “in your name, or as a third person, you need not be present to my utterance, to my speech event, but ‘you,’ the second person, are obliged to be in the presence of this very discourse” (Clarkson 97). As Derrida’s *en ce moment*, which pluralises the present and yet perpetuates it, the Other named as a deictic is multi-present, a multi-located being who is thus dislocated, who ultimately becomes utopic, a *non-lieu* by that poly-presence. This is not unlike Foucault’s mirror in *Les Espaces Autres*, by which I am present in multiple places, or non-places, and thus create a heterotopia. But if the mirror is the instigator and null-site of the heterotopia, my body is the non-place, Levinas’s *non-lieu*.

For Clarkson, the Saying invokes, as “a performative interlocutionary event that is to be carefully distinguished from the constative communication that Levinas locates in the Said” (Clarkson 98). She argues that the *Dire*, a speech event, orients the self toward the other, the addressee. In fact, we see that the orientation and movement away from the self is a movement toward the *non-lieu*, which ultimately occurs in the body. Clarkson emphasizes the Saying’s connection to language: “Levinas states the matter deftly, and with even greater clarity: ‘Language is above all the fact of being addressed … which means the saying much more than the said’ (Levinas 1988 et al.: 170). Thus the Saying, even while it is associated with the ethical in Levinas, is also always a linguistic event.” (Clarkson 99). Clarkson has connected the speech event with Buber’s Thou, and with the presence of the Other. Certainly *Dire* is an event; Levinas not only describes the performative force of the *Dire* but also inscribes its performative force into the very texture of *Autrement qu’être*. Yet he explicitly rejects Buber’s Thou in favor of the third person: “exclusive du « tu » et de la thématisation de l'objet, l'iléité néologisme formé sur *il* ou *ille* indique une façon de me concerner sans entrer en conjonction avec moi” (AE 15). Buber’s Ich/Du describes a relationship built on reciprocity, while Levinas’s *je* has no liberty and no choice in its responsibility to the other.

Clarkson concludes her article by attributing Levinas’s choice of the third person over the second to his “failure to take due cognizance of the logical performative operation of the second person linguistically” (Clarkson 100). As other scholars have done, she remarks on the fact that Levinas did not read Buber’s afterword to *I and Thou*. Still, she lays the blame for the illeity of
the *Dire* at the feet of linguistic misunderstanding:

Levinas’s inattention to linguistic performatives leads to his blanket distinction between proper names on the one hand, and personal pronouns on the other, without his taking heed of the implications of the different subject positions that can be occupied in the first, second and third persons through pronouns and through proper names. (Clarkson 100). This does not resonate with the densely grammatical discussion in *Autrement qu’être*. Has not Levinas’s extreme attention to linguistic performatives marked, and even put in motion, the distinction between *Dire* and *Dit*? It seems we must take him at his word and move away from the ‘you’ of even the “Ich bin du / wenn ich bin” from Paul Celan which launches the chapter on substitution. That epigraph gives lie to Clarkson’s claims about the second and third persons in *Autrement qu’être*. The pronoun and the proper name, variously incarnated by the *Dire*, the name of God, or the author himself, maintain a certain flexibility.

Clarkson observes that “‘you’ signals a curious type of embodiment: you, the referent, are simultaneously embodied and suspended in this sign” (97). The *Dire*, restlessness that chases the self toward the *non-lieu*, cannot become suspended in the sign, in the *Dit*. The embodiment of the *Dire* does not suspend or thematise, but makes itself a sign: “L'iléité de l'au-delà-de-l'être, c'est le fait que sa venue vers moi est un départ qui me laisse accomplir un mouvement vers le prochain. La positivité de ce départ, ce par quoi ce départ, cette diachronie n'est pas un terme de théologie négative, c'est ma responsabilité pour les autres” (AE 15). Illeity demands a departure from the self. Yet the departure returns to the self, or rather to the body of the *je*, the *non-lieu* existing outside of place and history, and therefore not suspended.

To embody the Other, Clarkson turns to Levinas’s essay on Paul Celan, a text which will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter. For Clarkson, however, “De l’être à l’autre” provides an instance of the Saying in art, unlike “La Réalité et son ombre,” in which Art speaks the language of the *Dit*. In “De l’être à l’autre,” “the accent falls on the relation of the writer to the reader, rather than to the characters represented, and in this context, it is possible to see the literary work as instantiating an event of the Saying” (Clarkson 101). In fact, *Autrement qu’être* similarly references itself and its reader, and foregrounds “the dynamic positionings of addressee and addressee in relation to the event of reading/writing” (Clarkson 101). Derrida shows that the text becomes Saying through an autoreferentiality that creates diachronia, *non-lieu*. The repetition of “*en ce moment*” doubles the present moment, the same moment which is
also two different moments of writing. Peperzak similarly connects the non-lieu to an ahistorical diachronia, freed from place but also from time: “non-lieu also refers to the verbal expression avoir lieu, which means ‘to happen’ or ‘to take place.’ The word can thus be read as a polemical neologism for the exceptional out-of-placeness or ‘nonplace’... ...the question ‘where’ transcendence will bring us is then answered by the remark that it cannot be dated or located in time either (n’a pas lieu)” (97). Diachronie and non-lieu never escape the appositive of Dire, substituting itself for each. Levinas does not embody and suspend his readers in Buber's Thou, but en chair et en sang, in his own je, his responsibility to the other, the reader, “le peu d'humanité qui orne la terre” (AE 233). Clarkson argues that “Levinas still uses the vocabulary of a third person 'Other,' while claiming for this Other the linguistic operations that I have shown (thanks to Benveniste) belong rightly to the second person” (102). However, the reciprocal je/tu, which suspends an ever-present tu, in no way captures Levinas's illeity, “avoir-l’autre-dans sa peau” only through the restlessness, placelessness of the Dire. Only in the Other that infinitely surpasses can invocation be a response, can interpellation precede understanding. Clarkson perhaps inadvertently inverts Autrement qu'être's utopia when she argues that “you are in a certain way, 'freed and vacant,' as Levinas puts it (1996b: 41); 'you' are constituted precisely in your diachronous relation to the lyric 'I'”(102). In fact, the je is freed and vacant, dislocated of self and identity to be a non-lieu en chair et en sang.
Chapter 3 – Dire, Interruption

Mais l’ultime discours où s’énoncent tous les discours, je l’interromps encore en le disant à celui qui l’écoute et qui se situe hors le Dit que dit le discours, hors tout ce qu’il embrasse. Ce qui est vrai du discours que je suis en train de tenir en ce moment même. Cette référence à l’interlocuteur perce d’une façon permanente le texte que le discours prétend tisser en thématisant et en enveloppant toutes choses. -Levinas, Autrement qu’être

In another of his infinite appositives, Levinas terms the Dire an “interruption de l’essence” (AE 74). Interruption is not only the Dire’s irruption in ontology, it in fact draws together hyperbole, transcendence, and the non-lieu, and itself irrupts in the text of Autrement qu’être. In another of his essays, Levinas addresses interruption more directly, and demonstrates it on a textual level. “De l’être à l’autre” responds to a speech made by Jewish poet Paul Celan. Levinas’s interest in Paul Celan seems contradictory given his condemnation of the arts to the Dit in many essays. His essay, interspersed with quotes and near-metaphors, is as elliptical as Celan’s “Meridian,” written in acceptance of the Georg Büchner prize. “De l’être à l’autre” often echoes Autrement qu’être, not only its themes but its very phrases. Even more uncannily, citations from “the Meridian” haunt the text, trailing at Levinas’s footsteps, their voices intermingling to the point of disorientation. The ethical poetics, the poetical interruptions of “De l’être à l’autre” respond to the problem of interruption in Autrement qu’être

In her book Altered Readings, Jil Robbins addresses Levinas’s complex relationship with the arts, and particularly with literature. She argues that to understand the relationship of the work of art to the ethical, we must read Levinas’s text, “attending not just to the constative level of his statements about art but to their performative dimension as well” (Robbins 77), or we might say the dire of his dit poétique. Although Levinas sets apart few works of literature as Sayings, those texts which avoid the thematising of the Dit may not be the expected ones:

that the very literary authors who traffic in a figured sense of language are credited with the Saying is remarkable to the extent that the classical theory of metaphor, understood since Aristotle as an analogy between two objects based on their resemblance necessarily assumes that metaphor relies on a knowledge of essences. (Robbins 80)

Metaphor then, like poetry, holds a trace of the Dire, despite the clear problems in separating it from ontology and autonomy. Robbins also emphasises Levinas's definition of ethics, which
differs from the typical philosophical definition, and is rather “ethics - as an interruption on a
primordial and originary level” (Robbins 7). Indeed, l’éthique in Autrement qu’être most often
occurs in conjunction with interruption, rupture, and, of course, the Dire. And this rupture always
interrupts being as an “éclatement,” a movement toward an otherwise than being: “interruption
signals the putting into question of the totality” (Robbins 144). In a return to the reflexive, we
will see that interruption also functions through interrupting oneself, a passive or in-turned
rupture. For Robbins, this is because “self interruption is the trope for a form of ethical discourse
in which the interruption is not reabsorbed into the thematization and totality, namely, an ethical
discourse that performs its own putting into question” (Robbins 145). Autrement qu’être, then,
not only addresses interruption, but also interrupts itself, questions itself, in seeking the
possibility of ethical discourse.

Levinas quotes Celan to say that “La poésie nous dévance, brûle nos étapes” (EA 21). He
writes that Celan frames poetry in terms of transcendence in “The Meridian.” For Levinas,
transcendence is a movement: an already-in-front or a “saut par-dessus l’abîme ouvert dans
l’être” (EA 27). This abyss ruptures being. Thus the poem can “découvrir un ‘lieu ou la personne,
dans le saisissement du moi - comme étranger à elle - se dégage’” (EA 24). However, this lieu
quickly reveals itself as a “lieu entre terre et ciel” (EA 20), a non-lieu not dissimilar to the one in
Autrement qu’être. The abyss in being takes hold of the self, disgorges it from place.
Transcendence must move beyond. Levinas writes in “la Philosophie et l’idée de l’infini” that
“l’expérience ne mérite son nom que si elle nous transporte au delà de ce qui reste notre nature”
(73), experience and perhaps also philosophy itself. The transcendence of which he speaks, a
transporting-beyond-the-self, is already rupture, a divide within the self. Necessarily, “le
mouvement ainsi décrit va du lieu vers le non-lieu, d’ici vers l’utopie” (EA 23). The man of
Autrement qu’être, the man who stumps no ground, experiences the same exile, an “apatridie
comme authenticité” (EA 29). If it exceeds, surpasses, then hyperbole transcends the text, and
approaches no place, but a “dehors insolite” (EA 29). Yet this non-lieu ruptures place; a
“déhiscence du monde” (EA 31), it interrupts esse. Because of that very interruption, opening to
an interpellation of the other, Levinas names the poem a “dire sans dit” (EA 25). If Celan’s
poetry can say without entering into the Said, Levinas’s texts, both “De l’Être à l’Autre” and
Autrement qu’être, seek a Dire that leaves a trace, a Dire not immobilised by the thematising of
the Dit.
Levinas hints at desire in his essay on Celan, using words like ‘extaze,’ and desire permeates any discussion of a rupture in being. In fact, it is desire that opens a chasm in being. In order to understand the connection between desire and the other, we must turn to Levinas’s essay “La Philosophie et l’idée de l’infini.” He explains that to think of the infinite, which is always to think of something greater than the thought itself, is desire, the motion of going beyond, a transcendence. It is this very “désir inassouvissable, qui, par la même, prend acte de l’altérité d’Autrui. Il la situe dans la dimension de hauteur et d’idéal qu’il ouvre précisément dans l’être” (La Philosophie et l’idée de l’infini 83). Levinas shows that desire opens the interruption, the abyss in being. The poem, which goes toward the other, does this by situating the other in a different dimension, in a rupture in being. Much like the Dire, it must avoid the ontological fixedness of place. The poem, like the Dire, proves restless, an “impossibilité de se pelotonner” (EA 33). If poetry can speak as Dire, at least the poetry of Celan, comparison will show how the text of Autrement qu’être may similarly interrupt its Dit and introduce the language of Dire.

Desire approaches the absolutely other that exists “par-delà ces satisfactions, sans que le corps connaisse aucun geste pour apaiser le désir, sans qu'il soit possible d’inventer aucune caresse nouvelle” (EA 83). Levinas removes the possibility of the gesture satisfying this desire that leads to the other. The gesture, the handshake, and therefore the sign, exists beyond satisfaction. Desire seems fruitless, incapable of achieving satisfaction. Yet Levinas would caution against the idea of satisfaction as peace: the significance of the human condition lies in the impossibility of satisfying both need and desire. This resonates with the concluding page of Autrement qu’être: “ce qui eut humainement lieu n’a jamais pu rester enfermé dans son lieu” (AE ). Humanity and mobility, unenclosed, are connected through unsatisfiable desire. Levinas describes the way that pleasure consists of a progressive movement; it exists because of its own continuing expansion, and not in completion or satisfaction. Just so the handshake and the poem: “Les choses apparaîtront certes - le dit de ce dire poétique ; mais dans le mouvement qui les porte à l’autre, comme figures de ce mouvement” (EA 26). Only in movement toward the other does the poem find meaning, and the Dire poétique carries it forward.

The essay “De L’Evasion” comprises one of Levinas’s earliest confrontations of the autonomous conceptualization of being. Using need and pleasure to show unresolved incongruities in the self-sufficient I, he questions the conclusion that pleasure finds its end in peace:
Le mouvement progressif constitue un trait caractéristique [du plaisir], qui n’est rien moins qu’un simple état. Mouvement qui ne tend pas à un but car il n’a pas de terme. Il est tout entier dans un élargissement de son amplitude, qui est comme la raréfaction de notre être, comme sa pâmoison. Dans le fond même du plaisir commençant s’ouvrent comme des gouffres, toujours plus profond, dans lesquels notre être, qui ne résiste plus, se précipite éperdument... ...l’être se sent se vider en quelque sorte de sa substance. (De l’Évasion 82)

The progressive movement in which pleasure exists recalls the perpetual motion of the poem, but also the trace of the Dire echoing ‘dans le fond même du’ Dit. Levinas observes within it a rarefaction of being in which chasms open up, reminiscent of his statements in “la Philosophie et l’idée de l’infini” that desire cannot be quenched, and that it does not fill up, but hollows out. The description of transcendence in “De l’Être à l’Autre” bears a striking resemblance:

A moins que le poème permette au moi de séparer de lui-même. En termes de Celan: découvrir un lieu ou la personne, dans la saisississement du moi - comme étranger à elle - se dégage. A moins que le poème qui va à l’autre tourne, face à lui - différe son extase, s’aggrave dans l’entretemps - en termes de Celan, mais combien ambigus, persiste aux confins de lui-même. (24-25)

This persisting-at-the-boundaries-of-the-self, which defers its desire in the same way that pleasure progresses, might recall the non-lieu opened by the Dire. The parallel quotations also show why Levinas rejects the supposed solution of plenitude, and accordingly the idea of a conquering and indivisible self. The “insomnie dans le lit de l’être, impossibilité de se pelotonner et s’oublier” (EA 33) he sees in Celan’s writing corresponds to the main concept in “De l’Évasion,” the necessity of escape. Poetry, however, denies this escape, because the transcendence catalyzed by poetry is “sans pouvoir d’évasion” (EA 26), not unlike responsibility. Ultimately, we must remember that the unsatisfiable nature of Desire is not negative for Levinas. By its ever deeper abysses, unbridgeable rifts, Desire ruptures the being. Poetry enacts a more complex movement toward the other, allowing the self to become ‘desubstantiated’ and move away from itself, ‘comme étranger à elle.’

When we allow “De l’Être à l’Autre” to ‘interrupt’ Autrement qu’être, the poetics of the latter text can be framed not as the frozenness of art Levinas reproaches, but rather as “conversion en infini de la mortalité pure et de la lettre morte” (EA 23). The relationship of Dire
and *Dit* is not unlike that of desire and pleasure. Desire leads toward pleasure, as the *Dire* inevitably births the *Dit*. Yet desire unendingly opens rifts in pleasure, never becoming satisfied, never finding repose. Similarly, the *Dire*, though it enters into the *Dit*, continually interrupts it, and can never be mummified in the *Dit*. It is restlessness, interruption, movement. “De l’Être à l’Autre” confronts Celan’s poetry, his *Dire*, interrupting it with what are nearly citations from *Autrement qu’être*. The deferring of Desire, constraining the subject to motion, drawing him toward a *non-lieu*, avoids “plaisir, c’est-à-dire complaisance en soi” (AE 104), which would fix him in place. The *Dire*, as “significance même de la signification” (AE 16 and EA 35-36) is a “désir du non-désirable” (AE 194), of the absolutely other. “De l’Être à l’Autre” appositively describes this *signification* as “signification plus ancienne que l’ontologie et la pensée de l’être et que supposent savoir et désir, philosophie et libido” (EA 36). The pair desire and knowledge recurs in *Autrement qu’être* in the form of

un élément qui tranche sur la pure thématisation : l’intuition comble (c'est-à-dire contente ou satisfait) ou déçoit une visée visant à vide son objet. Du vide que comporte un symbole par rapport à l'image qui illustre le symbolisé, on passe au vide de la faim. Il y a là un désir en dehors de la simple conscience de... (AE 106).

Not seeking *conscience de...*, the *Dire*, an unsatisfiable desire beyond knowledge, is the *Dire poétique*, in both “De l’Être à l’Autre” and *Autrement qu’être*.

Levinas brings rupture to bear not only on a thematic level, betrayed by the *Dit*, but also on a textual level. “De l’être à l’autre” is a particularly rich example of his philosophical poetics. Although not a poem, Celan’s *Meridian* resounds with language as poetic as his elusive verse. Levinas seems fascinated by this text

s'interrompant sans cesse pour laisser passer dans les interruptions son autre voix,
comme si deux ou plusieurs discours se superposaient avec une étrange cohérence qui n'est celle d'un dialogue, mais ourdies selon un contrepoint qui constitue – malgré leur unité mélodique immédiate – le tissu de ses poèmes. (EA 18-19)

In this sentence, he sets up a convincing argument: his analysis of the *Meridian* functions for Celan’s poetry as well, because of the very interruptions which characterise both writings, and which are the focus of this chapter. Not only does he study these interruptions, he replicates them in his own text, which is no less a study of interruption in its content than in its form. Levinas weaves quotes from the *Meridian* so tightly into his essay that it can seem at times almost
impossible to tease the two apart. Hardly a paragraph passes without quotations from Celan, and often multiple citations from the “Meridian” pierce a single sentence. The constant interruptions echo exactly the above quotation, as if Levinas also superimposes Celan’s voice on his own. In fact, Levinas’s saying corresponds perfectly to his said. In Celan’s “qui trace [le poème] s’avère a lui dédié,” Levinas hears a “singulière de- substantiation du Moi” (25). The poem, in being a sign to the other, a handshake, is a “dire sans dit” (25), a poem “ohne Sprache.” Levinas describes the Dit as the material of language, consisting of the signifier, the signified, and the referent, but erasing the differences between them in a way that allows language to describe the world. The said represents. The saying, which Levinas connects to the poem, lies in the action of language, the fact of speaking, not unlike the poem, which Levinas calls “le fait de parler à l’autre” (27). The Dit is an ontological closure to the other, while the Dire is an ethical openness to the other. The Dire enacts an ethical interruption of being.

The saying of the poem interrupts the said. Levinas calls the poem “l’interruption de l’ordre ludique du beau et du jeu des concepts et du jeu du monde” (EA 35). The Dit is exactly that play of concepts and of the world, for it establishes the world in language and language in the world. The Dire, the poem, disrupts that play. According to Levinas, that allows it to become “l’interrogation de l’Autre, recherche de l’Autre. Recherche se dédiant en poème a l’Autre” (EA 35). It seeks out the other by interrupting the play of the world. In Levinas’s lurid terms, a “déhiscence du monde” (31), as ripe fruit splits open, or a wound opens up. Das Wundenmal in der Luft. The poem, dehiscence of the world, ruptures the play of concepts, the conquering which the said enacts, the possession of things by use of ideas. Rather than attempting to dominate the other, it searches for the other. The handshake, the saying without the said, and the poem are “importants par leur interpéllation plutôt que par leur message” (EA 25). The Saying, which is ethical concern for the other, is more important than the message, the Said, which stands in ontological closure toward the other.

How then does this affect the reading of Autrement qu’être? Interestingly, Levinas embeds the very title of that text in “De l’être à l’autre:” “[Celan] ne suggère-t-il pas la poésie elle-même comme une modalité inouie de l’autrement qu’être?” (EA 35) In response, we must ask the shocking question: is Levinas suggesting that his book, written several years before, is itself an unheard-of poetry, a modality of the otherwise than being? In his book Intrigues: From Being to the Other, Gabriel Riera discovers similar instances of poetics to the ones evident in
“De l’être à l’autre.” He argues that “[Levinas] employs a series of ‘poetic recourses’ - a wide range of practices that make evident the textual dimension of philosophical writing: semantic, pragmatic, rhetorical, and intertextual” (Riera 93). Focusing primarily on interruptedness in a passage near the end of Autrement qu’être, he explores the ways in which the text performs the Dire it describes. However, as Riera observes, Levinas does not define the Dire. Instead, he allows it to substitute itself for other terms in repeated appositions. Through this lack of signified, “the text announces and, at the same time, performs an interruption of synchrony, of the correlation between the saying and the said” (Riera 139). Riera’s argument that “Otherwise than Being does not consist of a progressive narrative but rather of an emphatic or hyperbolic rewriting of the ‘argument’ transformed into an intrigue or ex-position” (139) reconnects interruption to both hyperbole and the non-lieu. The text, “lieu et non-lieu de cette rupture, se passe comme une passivité plus passive que toute passivité” (AE 29). Only as a non-lieu, a rupture, an ethical interruption of being, can the Dire surpass assimilation by the Dit. “The crux of Otherwise than Being is both to allow the vibrations of this echo to reach the reader and for the inscription of its trace to interrupt the all-encompassing assimilation of the saying by the said” (Riera 140), and the trace remains in the Dit despite its immobilising, because of the Dire’s ethical interruption. The performative textuality of the Dire causes Riera to ask, “is poeticity a case of saying or is saying a case of poeticity?” (143). The Dire, by its nature, performs, raising the question whether it exists, ‘se passe,’ outside of its performativity. Riera analyses a particularly striking instance of interruptive poetics in Autrement qu’être: “En relatant l'interruption du discours ou mon ravissement au discours, j'en renoue le fil. Le discours est prêt de dire en soi toutes les ruptures, de les consommer comme origine silencieuse ou comme eschatologie” (AE 215). Not only autoreferential,

Levinas’s repetition interrupts the expository line of his argument and this interruption is preserved at a different level than that of a philosophical exposition. The interruptions of the said (discourse, ontology, knowledge, narration) occur as the tearing of a continuous tissue or fabric now preserved in a discontinuous surface in which the series of interruptions can no longer be retied by the unifying thread of discourse. Further, the reduction interrupts these series of interruptions by saying it to the interlocutor, to the other. (Riera 151)
As shown by Riera, “De l’être à l’autre,” and through the transcendence of the Dire, the text of Autrement qu’être does not merely say philosophy, but performs it through interruptedness and autoreferentiality.

Nonetheless, near the end of the Exposition section, Levinas seems to despair of interruption’s power over discourse: “Toute contestation et interruption de ce pouvoir du discours est aussitôt relatée et inverse par le discours. Il recommence donc dès qu’on l’interrompt” (AE 215). The Dit says even silences, even the Dire’s ethical interruptions. After all, is that not what Autrement qu’être does? It says the Dit and the Dire, perhaps trapping the Dire in language. How can it avoid doing so when Levinas argues that the Dire is pre-linguistic? If Autrement qu’être seeks to be the ethical interruption of being it describes, it already fails by virtue of its linguistic nature. The text relates its own interruption, relates its relating of interruption. But is not the Dire a Saying saying saying, a “Dire disant le dire même” (AE 222) by exposing it? Levinas wrestles with the inevitability of the Dit’s immobilising:

Et ne sommes-nous pas, en ce moment même, en train de barrer la sortie que tout notre essai tente, et d'encercler de toutes parts notre position? Les mots exceptionnels par lesquels se dit la trace de la passée à l'extravagance de l'approche - Un, Dieu - se font termes, rentrent dans le vocabulaire et se mettent à la disposition des philologues au lieu de désarçonner le langage philosophique. Leurs explosions mêmes se racontent. (AE 215).

Even the words which, by hyperbolic extravagance, exceed the Dit, become terms, common nouns. The Dire of Autrement qu’être becomes a stakes in the “jeu frivole de la syntaxe” (AE 73). Yet previously in Autrement qu’être, Levinas posits that “La vérité du sujet serait la vertu d'un Dire où l'émission de signes - insignifiants dans leur figure propre - se subordonnerait au signifié, au dit” (210). And interrupting his meditations on the inescapable Dit is the “vertu qui se met à nu dans le dit poétique et l'interprétation qu'il appelle à l'infini. Vertu qui se montre dans le dit prophétique” (AE 216). The text of Autrement qu’être, autoreferential, ex-posing, reflects the virtue of the poetic and the prophetic. The word Dire surpasses the text to approach the other, and by surpassing itself in the Dit, becomes itself an instantiation of Dire. “C'est par l'approche, par l'un-pour-l'autre du Dire, relatés par le Dit, que le Dit reste équivoque insurmontable, sens se refusant à la simultanéité, n'entrant pas dans l'être” (AE 216); thus the Dire redeems even the Dit of the text as a non-lieu for passage to the au-delà. Ultimately, Levinas concludes that “les
interruptions du discours retrouvées et relatées dans l'immanence du dit, se conservent comme
dans les noeuds d'un fil renoué, trace d'une diachronie n'entrant pas dans le présent, se refusant à
la simultanéité” (AE 216). Discourse knots up the interruptions enacted by the Dire, yet those
very knots remain as traces of the Dire's interruption. Not only as interruption of discourse, of
the play of concepts, but also as subjectivity, “le noeud et le dénouement - le noeud ou le
dénouement - de l'essence et de l'autre de l'essence” (22). Just so, even Levinas's own relating of
his interruptions leaves textual knots: his questioning of the the premise of Autrement qu'être
doubly interrupts, both literally and by interrupting himself, an ethical interruption, which cannot
be absorbed by discourse, by the Dit.
Conclusions: *Autrement Dit*

Que cette signification du Dire sans Dit, soit la signification même de la signification, l'un-pour-l'autre ce n'est pas là une pauvreté du Dire recu en échange de l'infinie richesse du Dit, fixe et admirablement mobile, de nos livres et de nos traditions, de nos sciences et de notre poésie, de nos religions et de nos conversations, ce n'est pas un troc de dupe. La caresse de l'amour, toujours la même, en fin de compte (pour celui qui pense en comptant) est toujours différente et déborde de démesure, les chants et les poèmes et les aveux où elle se dit sur tant de modes différents et à travers tant de thèmes où, en apparence, elle s'oublie. (AE 232)

The *Dire* ethically interrupts being through a transcendence of ontology, erupting in the performative text of *Autrement qu’être*. In several instances, *Autrement qu’être* expresses the limitations of its form, autoreferentially acknowledging the impossibility of escaping the *Dit* even in the study at hand. Yet its hyperbolic language, in form as much as vocabulary, overflows the page in excess of the *Dit*. The substitution which the *Dire* does not describe, but incarnates, liberates it from definition. In the grammar of the text, appositives erase the verb *to be* and structure a relationship between *Dire*, exposure, nudity, *non-lieu*, presence, sign. The *Dire* is no avatar, but an appositive, and behaves appositively. Levinas emphasizes the fixedness of the *Dit* and the mobility of the *Dire*, the one-for-another. If we are to read *Autrement qu’être*, we must read more than its *Dit*; we must allow it to interpret itself and reveal its *dire distinct du dit*. Its excess is not excessive; it leads to an ethical language, a trace within language, and not to an unsaying of all language nor a destruction of words. As a written text, betrayed by the *Dit*, it can betray and leave behind its own passing, surpassing. Unsaying, reduction, yes, but of the *Dit*, and as “une remontée du dit au dire” (Franck 211). The *remontée*, however, is to a height beyond height, a *non-lieu*. The subject that obsesses *Autrement qu’être* stomps no ground, for place and time are categories of ontology. Instead, the *Dire* casts him out as no-longer *chez-soi* and into responsibility, the inevitable response to the other that instantiates subjectivity. The mobility of the *Dire* infects the subject with restlessness, and his only location is the “me voici” that names him accountable for all. The repeated use of reflexives signifies a subject passive beyond all passivity. Not giving signs, the subject makes himself a sign. The *Dire*, ethical interruption of *esse*, effects these ruptures in time and place, the diachronia and the *non-lieu*. By examining “De l’être à l’autre,” we can see a textual form of interruption by which Levinas expresses the ethics
of Celan’s poetry. As the poem moves toward the other, it has no end point, nor does it find rest. Like Desire, never exhausted in satisfaction, the poem persists at the boundaries of itself, denied escape. The responsibility to the other, the call of the poem, cannot be evaded. It could be argued that the Desire is one more appositive for the Dire. Even in the midst of pleasure, Desire opens new abysses, toujours plus profonds. Just so the Dire opens new ruptures in the Dit, even when sublated by it. In this sense, it is doomed to the Dit and cannot escape partial immobilisation within the Dit. But that is not its end point: it continually escapes the Dit, interrupting essence, making itself a sign of the au-delà, of the autrement qu’être. Levinas hints at this destiny of the Dire, which is no less its responsibility:

Le Dire étonnant de la responsabilité pour autrui est contre 'vents et marées' de l'être, une interruption de l'essence, un désintéressement imposé de bonne violence. Mais la gratuité cependant exigée de la substitution - miracle de l'éthique d'avant la lumière - il faut que ce Dire étonnant se fasse jour de par la gravité même des questions qui l'assaillent. Il doit s'étaler et se rassembler en essence, se poser, s'hypotasier, se faire éon dans la conscience et le savoir, se laisser voir, subir l'emprise de l'être. Emprise que l'Ethique, elle-même, dans son Dire de responsabilité, exige. (AE 75)

If indeed the Dire is to be ethical, it must enter into the Dit. Despite its resistance to being and to ontology, it must suffer being’s hold. And it is Ethics that demands the Dire make itself seen, even to the point of dawning on knowing. These “questions qui l'assaillent,” Levinas’s, Derrida’s, ours, draw the Dire into the light. How can ethics mandate such a betrayal?

In his work on of Totalité et Infini, Derrida argues that Levinas’s logic of rupture moves along the cracks in language, the unthinkable truths that

la parole philosophique ne peut tenter d'abriter sans aussitôt montrer, dans sa propre lumière, de misérables lézardes, et sa rigidité qu'on avait prise pour une solidité. On pourrait sans doute montrer que l'écriture de Levinas a ceci en propre qu'elle se meut toujours, dans ses moments décisifs, le long de ces lézardes, progressant avec maîtrise par négations et négation contre négation. (Violence et Métaphysique 336)

Indeed, Levinas more fully betrays these ruptures in Autrement qu’être by accepting the fallibility of the very language which betrays the Dire, as Derrida challenged him to do in “Violence et Métaphysique.” He exposes the ruptures in his own work, but by those ruptures, the text progresses le long de ces lézardes. The violence Levinas acknowledges inflicts itself, not on
the Other, nor directly on the self, but rather on language, ontology, the Dit, wounding them to the quick. The Dire, a poetic force not as the immobilising of art, but as Celan’s poetry, ethically interrupts being when betrayed by the Dit. Autrement qu’être fulfills Derrida’s demands for an acknowledgement of the deposition of language. Surely language must be deposed, depositioned, in order to usher in the language of the Dire, which is no unsaying of all language, but which transcends all systems of language. If truly “avant d'être procédé rhétorique dans le langage, la métaphore serait le surgissement du langage lui-même” (Violence et Métaphysique 428), and if the poet can redeem metaphor, as we have seen in Robbins’ work, then we might say that the Dire is indeed a surging, an overflowing of language, a “métaphore d'un son qui ne serait audible que dans son écho” rather than a rhetorical process.

Returning to the Other’s grammar in “En ce moment,” Derrida connects it to the gift, to the giving of giving itself. In Autrement qu’être Derrida recognizes a response to his question about the Other and language, a response which is not merely linguistic. He observes that, after all, giving is not le donner; an impersonal infinitive, for “ce ‘donner’ ne doit être ni une chose ni un acte: ce doit être d’une certaine façon quelqu’un(e) qui ne soit pas moi” (En ce moment 164). Instead, donner, like the Dire, gives itself to the Other, to the completely Other, in a surfeit of language that is no rhetorical process. Derrida comments, “étrange, non, cet excès qui déborde la langue à tout instant et cependant la requiert, la met en mouvement incessant au moment même de la traverser” (En ce moment 164). The interconnectedness of language with the Dire does not entrap the Dire in language, nor is it dependent on language. Still, the Dit bears the trace of the Dire; even in surpassing language, the Dire in some way requires it. The Dire disturbs the placidity of language, and incessantly changes it as it moves through it. This quality of Celan’s poetry, its infliction of an “impossibilité de se pelotonner,” its restlessness, identifies it with the Dire. The poet auch ohne Sprache enacts a similar surpassing of language even while using language. Autrement qu’être negotiates a similar boundary, or we might say, as in Celan’s interruption of Levinas, Autrement qu’être “persiste aux confins de lui-même” (EA 24-25).

Derrida asks “[l’autre] est-ce seulement un nom commun sans concept ? Mais d'abord est-ce un nom ?” (Violence et Métaphysique 350), and Levinas responds in Autrement qu’être. Nouns, verbs, adjectives all seem to belong to the Dit. Of any part of speech, Levinas singles out pronouns repeatedly in special instigations of the Dire. The pronom réfléchi, hyperbolic in its repeated use, sign of a passivity more passive than all passivity, signifies “le soi-même qui
repousse les annexions de l’essence” (AE 20). We could easily align the recurring ‘se’ with the concept of illeity, the third-person Other who instantiates my subjectivity. The pronominal, a passive form, confounds the Dit; its part and its recurrence “ne peuvent être compris uniquement à partir du Dit” (AE 74). This repetition, an interruption of the Dit as a part of speech that has no place in it, resonates with the Dire rather than defining it. Furthermore, the pronoun intertwines with the Dire again in the form of the “me voici,” a non-sentence residing no-place that holds me accountable for all. The pronoun stands accused in responsibility that cannot be evaded. The je declines to make way for the Other. Levinas’s concluding paragraph in Autrement qu’être marks the Other, the il:

Dans cet ouvrage qui ne cherche à restaurer aucun concept ruiné, la destitution et la dé-situation du sujet ne restent pas sans signification: après la mort d'un certain dieu habitant les arrière-mondes, la substitution de l'otage découvre la trace – écriture imprononçable – de ce qui toujours déjà passé - toujours 'il' - n'entre dans aucun présent et à qui ne conviennent plus les noms désignant des êtres, ni les verbes où résonne leur essence - mais qui, Pro-nom, marque de son sceau tout ce qui peut porter un nom. (AE 284)

The il of illeity is the Other to whom the je declines, neither noun nor verb, but a pro-nom. Not the pronoun tu, before whom I have a claim of presence, intimacy, and reciprocity, but the il that I am helpless to evade, and to whom I can only give a donation de signes to the point of becoming, myself, a sign. The Dire, which transcends and profoundly ruptures being, is this declining of the je to a pronominal reflexive, an accusative, me. A grammar of declension and accusation, the Dire does not describe a new language, but demonstrates through the pronominal verbs, repetition, hyperbole, and interruption, a language that lives on its own boundary lands.
Works Cited
Greisch, Jean, and Jacques Rolland. Emmanuel Lévinas L'éthique Comme Philosophie


Lévinas, Emmanuel, and Arno Münster. La Différence Comme Non-indifférence: 36
Peperzak, Adriaan Theodoor. Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Evanston,


