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ACTS OF
RELIGION
JACQUES DERRIDA

Edited and with an Introduction by
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have as their function to serve as proofs; but they do bear witness to a tradition and an experience. Do they not have a right to be cited at least equal to that of Hölderlin and Trakl? The question has a more general significance: have the Sacred Scriptures read and commented on in the West influenced the Greek scripture of the philosophers, or have they been united to them only teratologically? Is to philosophize to decipher a writing hidden in a palimpsest?

In Psalm 119 we read: "I am a stranger on the earth [*étranger sur la terre*], do not hide from me your commandments." Would historical criticism show this text to be a late one, and would it already date from the Hellenistic period, in which the Platonic myth of the soul exiled in the body would have been able to seduce the spirituality of the West? But the psalm echoes texts recognized as prior to the century of Socrates and Plato; in particular Leviticus 15:23: "No land will be alienated irrevocably, for the earth is mine, for you are but strangers, domiciled in my land." It is not here a question of the foreignness of the eternal soul exiled among passing shadows, nor of a displaced state which the building of a house and the possession of land will enable one to overcome, by bringing forth, through building, the hospitality of sites which the earth envelops. For like in Psalm 119, which calls for commandments, this difference between the ego and the world is prolonged by obligations toward the others. They echo the Bible's permanent *saying* [*dire*]: the condition (or the uncondition) of being strangers [*d'étrangers*] and slaves in the land of Egypt brings man close to his neighbor [*rapproche l'homme du prochain*]. In their uncondition of being strangers men seek one another. No one is at home. The memory of this servitude assembles humanity. The difference that opens between the ego and itself, the non-coincidence of the identical, is a fundamental non-indifference with regard to men. . . .

A stranger to itself, obsessed by others, dis-quiet, the ego is a hostage [*le Moi est otage*], a hostage in its very recurrence as an ego ceaselessly missing itself. For it is thus always closer to the other, more obliged, aggravating its own insolvency. This debt is absorbed only by being increased; such is the pride of non-essence! It is a passivity no "healthy" will can will; it is thus expelled, apart, not collecting the merit of its virtues and talents, incapable of recollecting itself so as to accumulate itself and inflate itself with being. It is the non-essence of man, possibly less than nothing. "It may be," Blanchot also wrote, "that, as one is pleased to declare, 'man is passing.' Man is passing, man has even always already passed, in the measure that he has always been appropriated to his own disappearance. . . . This then is not a reason to repudiate humanism, as long as it is recognized in the least deceptive mode, never in the zones of inwardness, power and law, order, culture, and heroic magnificence." (. . .) Man has to be conceived on the basis of the self putting itself, despite itself, in place of everyone, substituted for everyone by its very non-interchangeability [*substitué à tous de par sa non-interchangeabilité même*]. He has to be conceived on the basis of the

condition or uncondition of being hostage, hostage for all the others [la condition ou l'incondition d'otage—d'otage de tous les autres] who, precisely qua others, do not belong to the same genus as I, since I am responsible even for their responsibility. It is by virtue of this supplementary responsibility that subjectivity is not the ego, but me [la subjectivité n'est pas le Moi, mais moi].⁶⁴

Concerning the Arabo-Islamic tradition of hospitality,⁶⁵ aside from the three or four paths I just outlined (pre-Islamic nomadism, conditionality, deviation or halt and pervertibility), I would like to bring some additional, though clearly insufficient, details about some essential motifs that would obviously call for wider research. I always bring such details with shyness and prudence dictated by my incompetence, and while inviting those who can to make more precise, to discuss and enrich, these poor preliminary threads.

As to pre-Islamic hospitality, I would like to evoke, as I should have done earlier, the figure of the poet Ḥāṭim al-Ṭā'ī, who lived in the second half of the sixth century, and who seems to me interesting, among other things because of the scene of posthumous hospitality with which he is associated. At bottom, since the beginning, we have been trying to think not only the link between hospitality and death, mourning, spectrality, hospitality to the dead and hospitality of the dead.

ḤĀṬIM AL-ṬĀ'Ī b. 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd, Abū Saffāna or Abū 'Aḍī, poet who lived in the second half of the 6th century A.D., traditionally the most finished example of the pre-Islamic knight, always victorious in his undertakings, magnanimous toward the conquered and proverbial for his generosity and hospitality. . . . In the *adab* books there are a number of traditions giving instances of his generosity, and it is even said that after his death he used to entertain travelers who asked for hospitality; he would rise from his tomb, slaughter a camel, and his son 'Aḍī would be ordered in a dream to replace the dead animal. This tomb was probably on a hill where he had lived. Four stone figures stood on either side of his tomb, young girls with their hair loose, representing mourners.⁶⁶

64. *Ibid.*, 148–50.

65. *Translator's Note*: At this point, Derrida's notes provide the following:

Summary of previous session:

Islam (commented quotes) around a few themes.

Origin in nomadic law and its transformation in Qur'anic law. Qur'an citations

1. *Conditionality (three days)*
2. *the idea of deviation (path and road: chance, etc.)*
3. *pervertibility (and therefore perfectability), from which "sickness" ("lovesickness" in Song of Songs, quoted by Levinas. Analysis of lexicon of "pathology" (of the pathological in general, in opposition to the autonomous [l'autonome] in Autrement qu'être, where Levinas cites the Song).*

Sketch of a question: cloning and substitution.

66. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 274.

One would first have to engage the enormous semantic, historical, sociopolitical and, first of all, religious web that is organized and developed here around a few radiating notions.

1. Beginning with the notion of *da'wa*, from the root *da'a* (to call, invite: *heissen*, and thus, first, invitation). In the Qur'an XXX, 24: a call to the dead in order to take them out of their tomb at the time of the last judgment:

He bringeth forth the living from the dead, and He bringeth forth the dead from the living, and He reviveth the earth after her death. And even so will ye be brought forth. And of His signs is this: He showeth you the lightning for a fear and for a hope, and sendeth down water from the sky, and thereby quickeneth the earth after her death. Lo! Herein indeed are portents for folk who understand. And of His signs is this: The heavens and the earth stand fast by His command, and afterward, when He calleth you, lo! From the earth ye will emerge [*thumma idhā da'akum da'watan min al-ard*].⁶⁷ DA'WA, pl. *da'awāt*, from the root *da'ā*, to call, invite, has the primary meaning call or invitation. In the Kur'an, XXX, 24, it is applied to the call to the dead to rise from the tomb on the day of Judgement. It also has the sense of invitation to a meal and, as a result, of a meal with guests. . . . The *da'wat al-mazlūm*, prayer of the oppressed, always reaches God. The *da'wa* of the Muslim on behalf of his brother is always granted. The word is applied to a vow of any kind. It can also have the sense of imprecation or curse. . . . In the religious sense, the *da'wa* is the invitation addressed to men by God and the prophets, to believe in the true religion: Islam . . . Muḥammad's mission was to repeat the call and invitation: it is the *da'wat al-Islām* or *da'wat al-Rasūl*. As we know, the Infidels' familiarity with, or ignorance of, this appeal determined the way in which the Muslims should fight against them. Those to whom the *da'wa* had not yet penetrated had to be invited to embrace Islam before fighting could take place. . . . The word *da'wa* is also applied to propaganda, whether open or not, of false prophets. . . . In the politicoreligious sense, *da'wa* is the invitation to adopt the cause of some individual or family claiming the right to the imāmate over the Muslims.⁶⁸

2. Then the notion of *dhimma*, which names this kind of permanent contract, constant and indefinitely renewed commitment which obligates the Muslim community to grant hospitality to the members of the other revealed religions,

67. *The Meaning of The Glorious Koran*, XXX, 19–25.

68. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 2, 168.

conditional and strongly conditioned hospitality: hospitality is owed and granted only on the condition that non-Muslims respect the superiority of Islam.

DHIMMA. The term used to designate the sort of indefinitely renewed contract through which the Muslim community accords hospitality and protection to members of other revealed religions, on condition of their acknowledging the domination of Islam. . . . The bases of the treatment of non-Muslims in Islam depend partly on the attitude of the Prophet, partly on conditions obtaining at their conquest. Muḥammad is known to have first tried to integrate the principal Jewish groups at Medina into a rather loose organization, then opposed them violently, and finally, after the expansion of his authority across Arabia, concluded agreements of submission and protection with the Jews of other localities such as *Khaybar*, and with the Christians of *e.g.* *Naḍīrān*; this last action alone could and did serve as precedent in the subsequent course of the Conquest. The essential Kur'ānic text is IX, 24: "Fight those who do not believe . . . until they pay the *ḍjizya* . . ." which would imply that after they had come to pay there was no longer reason for fighting them.⁶⁹

We will return to this on the way, no doubt. Earlier, however, I was thinking about the lovesickness of which we spoke last time in the fervent echo or the melancholy wake of the *Song of Songs*, the *Poem of Poems*, as if the poetical of the poetical [*le poétique du poétique*] of all declaration of love had to do with this sickness of the other, if not of the foreigner in me, of another in me, outside of me, of the other who angers me and puts me out of myself [*qui me met hors de moi*], the other who puts me out of myself in me, of the other always both more ancient and more to come than me, whom I thus mourn [*dont je porte ainsi le deuil*] as a mourning of me [*comme le deuil de moi*], as if I carried with me the mourning of me carried by the other, there where would thus begin an ageless hospitality, or a hospitality of all ages, a hospitality which could only survive itself before its time, and of which the poem would say, in sum, from one to the other in me: I love you, I am sick of love from you, sick of love for you, for while wholly wanting, with all my desire, to die before you so that I don't see you die, for you know that one of us will see the other die, well then, while wholly wanting, with all my hopeless desire, to die first, I would also want to survive you, to have at least the time to be there to console you at the time of my death, to assist you and so that you would not be alone [*seul(e)*] at the time of my death: I would want to survive you just enough to help you, the time that it will take, to bear my death. "I love you" would thus signify

69. *Ibid.*, 227–28.

this impossible grammar, a grammar that one can find at once tragic and comic, as time itself: I would want to survive you at my death, to survive me in you, to guard in me your mourning of me, etc. And this "I love you, and therefore I guard you/keep you in surviving you" is unforgivable, therefore I ask you for forgiveness there where it is possible to ask for and to grant forgiveness, there where only, you recall, it is unforgivable.⁷⁰

This is what I was saying to myself, when I arrived, about the possible/impossible hospitality (writing from now on: im-possible: in/possibilizing). Another thought of the possible and of the virtual . . . avowing the im-possible (for example the unforgivable—does it make the impossible possible? I cannot forgive you, I cannot give you, I cannot receive you, etc.).

Another example of the im-possible: to be present or absent for the hôte, close or far (*fort/da*). Absent as present, present as absent (example of the plane: how much time is needed to speak of the hôte as hôte? No rule: invention, but invention of the possible: impossible).

Being-present as absent to the hôte? Must one be there (living, or surviving, or not)? *Unheimliche*: absence as presence. Must one be present or not, and how, to the hôte? The hôte always passing through (road and itinerary, iterability: come: come back [*viens: re-viens*]). But must one hold back [*re-tenir*] the passing hôte? When does holding back and retaining [*retenir*] him become detaining [*détenir*] the other as hostage? (to hold, to hold the other, to entertain and support [*entre-tenir*] the hôte (entertain and sustain⁷¹: art of conversation, without labor nor program, no constraint nor commerce: leisure, gratuitousness, grace, art salon, music salon, etc.)

— Moments of hospitality follow each other but do not resemble each other.

The question: does hospitality presuppose improvisation? Yes and no.

The unforeseen [*l'imprévu*], providential hospitality, the messianic "unawares [*à l'improviste*]."

Greetings (who greets first?). "A-dieu": what does the *à* signify? Analyze at length: Latin (*ad, toi*, intentionality, direction, sense, movement, to come, opening, etc. Ah, but also belonging [*appartenance*] and dative: I am God's, for and to God [*à Dieu*], yours, for and to you, the infinite, for and to the infinite. Therefore, substitution and

70. *Translator's Note*: At this point, Derrida has the following note:

Comment on the first strophe of the Song of Songs in both [French] translations while insisting upon the differences in time and in mode (future indicative or subjunctive and future perfect) and the name/the thing, the symbolical/the physical . . . and above all "rightly do they love you [*c'est avec raison qu'on t'aime* (Dhormes)/*Les rectitudes t'aiment* (Chouraqui)]" (*Song of Songs* 1:5). Straightforwardness [*droiture*] and face-to-face, love and betrayal (reason of the infinite, reason and sickness, . . .).

71. The words *entertain* and *sustain* are in English in the text.

cloning, series and irreplaceability: is a clone identical or different only *solo numero* (homozygotic twin). Without entering the scientific debate (contestation as to the novelty, the consequences, etc.). Ask whether this changes anything for ethics of substitution (Levinas-Massignon), birth and death, letting be born, letting die.

Two questions: 1. Where and when does the living begin? Let live, let be born, let die, leaving in peace: a seminar on hospitality is a mediation and an exercise of language or of writing about all the possible statements that one can let "hold" (to hold dear, to maintain, retain, entertain and support, detain [*tenir à, maintenir, retenir, entretenir, détenir*] but also "letting [*laisser*]") (*lassen, let*, which do not play in the same way with their Latin root *laxare*, to let go, to loosen, to relax [*lâcher, relâcher, détendre*], Italian *lasciare*, with its enormous semantic tree: not to prevent, letting be or *laisser faire*, to let pass, to wait, to allow, to abandon (and therefore also: to lose or bequeath, to transmit or to give) to abandon oneself, but also to maintain ("let them together [*laissez les ensemble*]"). 2. Second question: Where does the human begin (the "thou shalt not kill": the human or the living? abortion: subject *hôte*-hostage? Father and infinite fecundity. Clone without father?

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What is a substitution? Can one speak of substitution as such [*La substitution*]? Does it have an essence, an essence that would be one? A unique model, unsubstitutable to itself? Can one ask the question What is it? on the subject of substitution? Can one ask this question there where the very proximate words substance or subjectivity (to wit, what is *under* [*ce qui se tient sous*], what comes under [*ce qui vient sous*], the *hypokeimenon* that situates itself "below," places itself or poses itself underneath, takes places and occurs [*prend place et à lieu*] under qualities, attributes or predicates) not only calls (for) the ontological question, the question What is? What is the being of? but already gives an answer to this question: substance is the very being of that which is because it sustains every thing that occurs. Why does the substitute, why does the substitution of the substitute appear thus to resist the prerogative of philosophical or ontological interrogation?

I do not know why—(I entrust you with this symptom in confidence, I give it to you, and you will do with it as you please)—I do not know why the first example that came to my mind to illustrate the concept of substitution, the first among all the examples of substitution for which one could infinitely substitute any other (and an example is always a kind of substitutable substitute: when I say "for example," I immediately say that I could substitute an other example; if I say "you, for example," I imply that it could be someone else; which is why it is such a terrible

phrase that says to someone "you, for example," since it inscribes chance and substitution, possible replaceability in the address to the other. It is often the violent address of who has the authority and power to take hostage: "you, for example," says the teacher in his class at the time of asking a question and verifying knowledge, while authoritatively designating someone summoned to respond, someone who can no longer avoid and must say "present," "here I am." "You, for example, tell me what does 'substitution' mean?" or the attitude of the occupier designating hostages: "you, for example, get out of the lineup," etc.). Well, I admit then that the first example that came to my mind, if one can say so, to my consciousness, when I thought of giving you an example of substitution, is the example of child substitution: when one steals a child from his parents and substitutes another instead. For some, this is the utmost violence possible, an exceptional and exceptionally cruel violence. For others, this welcoming [*accueillir*] the substitute child, the child who replaces another or who is taken from his parents in order to be welcomed [*accueilli*], to be taken in [*recueilli*] by others, is the gift of hospitality *par excellence*. One is more hospitable toward the adopted child than toward the so-called natural or legitimate child. And one can also attempt to demonstrate, as we have in the past, that there is no such thing as a natural and immediate filiation: every child is a substituted substitute [*tout enfant est substitut substitué*].

Let us leave this for now, but this example will catch up with us quickly. I wanted therefore to entrust you with this example, the first that came to my mind whereas there are so many other possible examples of substitution, by definition (the sign, the representing, prosthesis, money, everything that comes in the place of, etc.). But immediately after having lent my attention to the fact that the first example of substitution that came to my mind was the child, I wanted to search the dictionary, as I do often, as a matter of duty and to verify, to search for example. First in *Littré*, I looked for the examples given, the exemplary phrases too, cited in order to illustrate what one calls substitution. What, then, do I find as a first definition or as first example? Child substitution. As if child substitution were not an example among other, a substitution for which one could substitute as many others as one would want, but were rather substitution *par excellence*, the exemplary substitution, paradigmatic or arche-substitution, irreplaceable substitution, there where the logic of substitution seems, on the contrary, to place under question the irreplaceability of *arkhè* and of the originary.

If the first substitution remained child substitution, then any substitution would amount perhaps to re-produce, to figure, to recall some child substitution, what would lead one to think or dream that the child itself was the *first* substitute. One is all the more encouraged in the direction of this dream when, as

if by chance, the same *Littré*, after this first example of substitution, child substitution, the first citation is from Rousseau, the very same Rousseau who said—you will recall this phrase from *Emile* that we have commented on at length: “there is no substitute for a mother’s love,”—which implies that it is irreplaceable, nonsubstitutable.⁷² Then the same Rousseau, thinker of the substitutive supplement, said in the *New Héloïse*, “It would seem life is a possession one receives only on condition of passing it on, a sort of substitution which must pass from generation to generation [*une sorte de substitution qui doit passer de race en race*].”⁷³

This sentence inscribes in any case the process of substitution in a *genealogy*, in a genealogical sequence of the genealogic, even of the genetic. Substitution would be, first of all, a living replacement of life by life, of the living by the living, of a living by another: a living one for another [*un vivant pour un autre*] (which is not far from the sacrifice of life and thus from “dying for the other”—we will return to this). To replace something with something, a number or a figure [*un nombre ou un chiffre*] with another in a homogenous series, would not be a substitution, in any case not a grave substitution. A substitution worthy of the name would be not of something but of someone with someone, even with something [*la substitution non de quelque chose mais de quelqu’un par quelqu’un, voire par quelque chose*]. Unless the most terrifying stakes lied, with this equivocation, the ineluctable substitution of someone with something [*la substitution ineluctable de quelqu’un par quelque chose*] (fetishism would be only a figure of this), with substitution itself, as if substituting someone with someone always amounted to contaminating the logic of the *who* with the logic of the *what*, or ethics with arithmetic (one would have to write *arithmétique*, with an *h*). One *for* the other: the three senses of the “for” (all of which inter-cross, over-determine or ally themselves, more or less underground in Levinas in order to speak substitution: the prosthetic sense (one thing put—or putting itself—in the place of the other, for the other), the dative sense (one giving itself, devoting itself, sacrificing itself for the benefit of the other, for the other), the phenomenological or ontophenomenological sense (the “for the other [*pour autrui*]”, the appearing or being “for the other”). These three “for” intercross as in the expression “witness for the other [*témoin pour l’autre*]”; “no one is a witness for the witness” (Celan).

72. *Translator’s Note*: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile ou de l’Education* in *Œuvres complètes* 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 257, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Everyman’s Library, 1950), 13. See also *De la grammatologie*, (Paris: Minuit, 1967)/*Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 209/E145.

73. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie or the New Heloise*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 6 (Hanover, N. H.: Dartmouth College/University Press of New England, 1997), 539.

There is nothing fortuitous in that, immediately after the arche-example of the child—of substitution of child if not of substitution as child—the same dictionaries would mention substitution as a legal matter, but not just any legal matter. After all, in the (French) legal code, the *substitut* is he who is granted the right to replace the other in the latter's functions, and more precisely, in French law, the justice [*magistrat*] in charge of replacing the attorney general. There is a long tradition, a French and literary tradition, which complains and accuses, complains of *substituts*, of deputies [*représentants*] of the law as *substituts*. Molière compares them to clawed beasts [*animaux à griffes*], these clerks [*greffiers*]⁷⁴—another figure of life, of animal life. “How many beautiful animals the claws of which you must pass: sergeants, attorneys, advocates, registrars, deputies [*substituts*], assessors, judges and their clerks!”⁷⁴ (There would be much to say about zoological figuration, the animal representation of men of law in general, the representation of the space of law as animal space, from Molière to Kafka). As for Rousseau, who has composed a great list of charges against the substitute in politics, against the elected who alienates the popular voice and the general will, he also writes in *The Social Contract* that: “everyone knows what happens when the King appoints agents [*quand le roi se donne des substituts*].”⁷⁵

There is nothing fortuitous, then, in the mention of substitution as a matter of law, not just any legal matter but of it as it concerns inheritance, family succession, the parental chain or filiation, substitution as filiation—jurisprudence concerning here those who are called upon to substitute for the first heirs. Substitution also signifies, in the case of the child, succession. It then designates the disposition according to which one calls upon the heirs to succeed—themselves, in a way—in such manner that the first child, the first heir will be unable to alienate the property promised or subject to substitution. This word has an entire legal history, from Roman law, where substitution often designates the replacement of the heir (*substituere heredem*, to designate an heir replacing the first designated heir, even the eldest), a history into which we will not delve but that I had to recall because, even though the word substitution belongs to as many codes as one wills, and for reasons which we will discuss, to codes of law, law of things and law of persons [*droit des choses et droit des personnes*] (to substitute is to replace something or someone, even someone with something: one would perhaps say “killing” in so doing, killing to substitute a thing for someone, a dead thing for a living one), nevertheless, therefore, its privileged link to law and right, to rights of inheritance and of family succession, did deserve to be noted, for reasons that will not cease to

74. Molière, *Les fourberies de Scapin* II, 8; trans. G. Graveley in *Six Prose Comedies of Molière* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 349.

75. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, trans. Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters, and Christopher Kelly, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 4, 177.

reappear and to be important to us. Besides, most literary examples given by *Littré* for the verb “to substitute” are also borrowed from estate law [*droit de succession*]. Of course, this presupposes that the chain of successive inheritors would be sufficiently alike to substitute for each other, with the required family resemblance, but would not substitute each other serially, as in a series of clones. You see the question returning. Bossuet was not naming clones but apostles when he said, “They [the apostles] will leave heirs behind; they will not cease to substitute successors for each other and this race will never end.” The word “generation [*race*],” as in Rousseau’s phrase quoted earlier, does indicate nevertheless the call to a genealogy or to a quasi-genetics that reproduces itself infinitely as the same, that inherits itself thanks to substitution, to a kind of autosubstitution. What can this mean: an auto-substitution? Can one, must one, substitute oneself to oneself? What then does oneself mean in this case? Obviously, the “generation” in question, as a site of substitution, defines a space of inheritance as space of the same. To the same extent, the simple reproduction of the identical by autosubstitution (the phantasm of cloning) forbids the inheritance, which it otherwise seems to make possible; it interrupts parental filiation, which seems to announce itself with substitution. One finds in the vocation to inheritance which announces itself under the word *substitution* and under the operation of substituting, this crossing of natural and reproductive automaticity, and of perversion or institutional artificiality, of natural or institutional reproduction—unless substitution were the very thing that ruins or threatens this opposition between nature and institution. At the heart of the logic of substitution or of the supplement, there is, therefore, apparently, this crossing of natural reproduction and technological reproductibility, of natural series and institutional deviation, of bio-engineering and freedom, of so-called natural filiation and adoption as legal fiction.⁷⁶ One finds all this in this sentence by Vertot (in his *Révolutions Romaines* XIV, 282) quoted again in *Littré*: “One found [in Caesar’s will] that he had adopted Octavius, the son of his sister’s daughter, as his son and primary heir, and that he substituted to him, in the case of death with progeny, Decimus Brutus, one of the main conspirators.” And there is Montaigne: “In case one of them [i.e., instituted heirs] were to die [*vienné à défailir*, that is to say, to miss or lack, to default for one reason or another, one of which being death, disappearance by death; and the substitute always replaces a fault, supplements a disappearance —J. D.], I substitute he who survives him for his share.” I quote this sentence because of the allusion to surviving, because the substitute, as inheritor (and that too is the dream of a certain cloning) ensures the surviving, even the indefinite surviving of what it replaces et repeats at once, what it serves as.

76. *Translator’s Note*: Derrida adds the English “legal fiction” to the French “fiction légale.”

The word *substitution* has occupied us much in the previous sessions. I say “the word” rather than the concept, because under this word one can substitute more than one concept of substitute and of substitution. The word and the presumption of a concept or a logic of substitution, a certain substitution, in any case, enabled us to link to each other these thoughts of hospitality that are at once ethics of substitution and ethics of holy or sacred hospitality—of Jewish filiation or of Christian and Islamic filiation, such as they are represented, under the common sign of Abraham, the father of nations, by the discourses of Levinas and of Massignon. Yes, under the sign of Abraham, of father Abraham, the absolute Patriarch, since the reference to Abraham the foreigner but also to Abraham the hôte, who receives the hôtes or messengers of God in Mamre, this reference to inheritance, to memory and to the founding example of the patriarchal hôte Abraham, was central and unerasable in both discourses, on both “prayer fronts,” to recall Massignon’s phrase, the Christiano-Islamic prayer front and the Jewish prayer front. But from the perspective of hospitality, these thoughts of substitution were turning toward Abraham the hôte or the stranger, to whom Yahweh said; “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house” (Genesis 12:1) and be a stranger. Or yet Abraham, to whom Yahweh said later, “Know this for certain, that your offspring [*ceux de ta race*] shall be aliens [*des hôtes*, or strangers: it is always the word *ger* that designates the stranger received in a land, the immigrant, the alien [*mètèque*]⁷⁷ — J. D.] in a land that is not theirs” (Genesis 15:13), words that Abraham will recall at the time of Sarah’s death, in Hebron, when addressing the Hittites to ask for a burial ground: “I am a stranger and an alien [*je suis hôte*] residing among you [Chouraqui says: “I am an alien [*je suis un mètèque*], a resident with you” —J. D.]; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight [Chouraqui: “and I will bury my dead in front of me” —here too, if we had time for a digression, we would insist on the taking root in a foreign land not by way of birth but by way of death and burial, displacement upon which we reflected last year around *Oedipus at Colonus*—and here too, it is a question, if not of a secret burial, at least of a burial with which one parts in order for it to be distant from the bereaved (“in front of me,” says Chouraqui) or invisible to him (“out of my sight” says Dhormes) —J. D.]” And every time, one has the impression that the work of mourning and of fidelity will only be possible if the other is separated from the bereaved, out of me [*hors de moi*], before me or, if not out of me, out of my sight; as if the work of mourning, often presented as an interiorization, an idealizing incor-

77. *Translator’s Note:* The word *mètèque* in its common French usage is a pejorative for foreigner. Etymologically, it is related to the Greek *metoikos*, one who changes home.

poration, that is to say also a substitution of the image of the other with the other in me, had a chance to operate, had a chance to shelter the memory or the I of the other in me only to the extent that the dead other remains in his place out of me—in me, out of me. If mourning is hospitality, a burial in oneself and out of oneself, it is necessary [*il faut*] for both burials, and therefore for both hospitalities, to remain quite distinct, separated, split, that the decomposition of the body (external hospitality of physical burial) occur elsewhere in order to let the idealizing memory appropriate the hôte dead in oneself, in an operation that is entirely one of substitution. In both founding references to Abraham that I have just cited, however, it is a question of hospitality to the stranger Abraham, in a foreign land [*à l'étranger*] (the two messengers of God in Mamre). It is not a question of sacrifice, nor of sacrificial substitution like the moment of Isaac's sacrifice, to which I will return once more.

However, in the scene of Genesis 23, Sarah's burial, as a scene of hospitality—since Abraham opens by saying, "I am myself an alien among you" when he asks for a burial ground—this scene which follows the so-called interrupted sacrifice of Isaac, that is the substitution of the ram for the son ["Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son (22:13)—"in place of (*à la place*)," says Dhormes, "at the site (*au lieu de*)," says Chouraqui, his "unique son," "your only one" as God said: it is a matter of substituting an animal for the unique beloved, the preferred unique one —J. D), the scene of Sarah's burial, Sarah whom Yahweh had, you recall, "visited" (Dhormes), "sanctioned" (Chouraqui), in order to give her Isaac in her old age—the scene of Sarah's burial can also be read as a scene of sacrifice and of substitution. Indeed, Abraham absolutely insists on paying for the field and the cave, the site of burial that the Hittites absolutely insist on giving him. In this extraordinary scene (that I will read in part) in which one insists on paying, the others on giving without being paid, one has the feeling that Abraham insists on sacrificing what he calls "the full price" or "four hundred shekels of silver," in order at once to mourn Sarah and to owe nothing. Both parties want to cancel the debt with a gift, but a sacrificial gift, a gift that presupposes some sacrifice. And it is Hebron, the site of Sarah's burial but also of Abraham's, upon which the scene of sacrificial appropriation has not ceased perpetuating itself until now, just yesterday, through so many *substitueries*.⁷⁸

Let us start again. What is a substitution? What does one say when saying "substitution"? What does one do when substituting? If, to this question, I substitute, as I

78. *Translator's Note:* This untranslatable neologism combines "substitution" with "tueries," killings.

must, its development, to wit, "who substitutes what?" it risks still not being enough: one must [*il faut*] add, "Who substitutes what to what? To what, and to whom?"

In all the substitutions I have just performed (regarding the subject and the object of the verb, "Who substitutes? And what? And to what or to whom?), you will have noted the suspended indecision between the "what" and the "who." It matters to us first and foremost. Besides, if one opens the *Littré* at the definition for *substitution*, one will read just this alternative between the "who" and the "what"; more precisely, between the person and the thing. You will also notice that the living said to be animal is here absent, who is neither a person nor a thing, but who nonetheless occupies, as you know and as we will explore, the most significant place regarding sacrificial or fetishistic substitution. I read *Littré*, therefore: "Substitution: action that consists in putting a thing, a person *in the place of* [*à la place de*] another. A child substitution."

In the place of—locution which names the occupied space, the destined location [*emplacement*], natural or not, even the lodging, the habitat, the *lieu* (one also says, for substitution, "*ceci au lieu de cela*"), "at the place of" [*à la place de*, "*au lieu de*," "*en lieu et place de*"], this can also be said "for [*pour*]": this *for* that, the one *for* the other, and so on. And this *for* is in itself sufficiently equivocal, indicating both substitution and gift, the dative ("one for the other" is both substitution and dative destination); this *for* is equivocal enough to offer us some resistance, entering and not entering in an economy of gift and sacrifice, entering it in order to [*pour*] exceed it.

Let us reconsider this flat definition: "action that consists in putting a thing, a person in the place of another." Through the indefinite multiplicity of the examples of substitution, which one can justly substitute for all the others (signs instead of things, words instead of sense, a word for another, prostheses serving as what they replace, representatives [*représentants*] and lieutenants of everything,⁷⁹ representations in general), we see some invariables settling. First, the number or the multiplicity, at least two, at least a series of two, one plus one, even one plus one plus one infinitely. This "one +"—its substitute may be what one calls a "what" and not a "who," even a "what" instead of a "who," where one usually hears, in the word *what*, an inert object-thing, without consciousness and without speech, without humanity, and in the word *who*, a human *existant* (person, subject, I, ego, conscience, unconscious, although the "id [*ça*]" of the unconscious could be situated under the category of the "what"). Here too, one would encounter difficulties—

79. *Translator's Note*: Aside from etymological connections (*lieu-tenant*, place-holder), a lieutenant is, according to the *OED*, "one who takes the place of another; usually, an officer civil or military who acts for a superior; a representative, substitute, vicegerent."

and this is, no doubt, the heart of the problem—in situating the living in general, for example, in the figure of what one commonly calls the animal, in this alternative of the “what” and the “who.” We will return to this. For the moment, I want to underscore a warning. Since we are going very quickly, coming back to the problem of Abrahamic hospitality, the hôte and the hostage, the thought of hospitable substitution, for example, in Levinas and Massignon, the difference between the “what” and the “who” does not amount simply to the difference between the thing (what) and the person (who), the object (what) and the subject (who), the not-conscious and the not-free (what) and the conscious or the free (who), not even, above all, between the common and the proper, even between on the one hand the common, the general, the generic or the homogenous (what) and, on the other hand, the singular, the heterogeneous or the exceptional. It is of this last distinction that we must be suspicious, for one could indeed think that when Levinas and Massignon speak of substitution—what they have in mind—the terms of substitution are not common, substitutable things which enter into a homogeneous series (as if I replaced a stone or a brick by another resembling it, or even a numerical identity, three with four, a white ball by a black ball, a ballot paper by a ballot paper). When they speak of substitution, it is a matter of an absolutely singular and irreplaceable existence that, in a free act, substitutes itself for another, makes itself responsible for another, expiates for another, sacrifices itself for another outside of any homogeneous series. Substitution is not the indifferent replacement of an equal thing by an equal or identical thing (as one can, for example, imagine—ideological phantasm—that a clone can replace the individual from which it comes or another identical clone, the difference between the two being null, save the number; the difference between them being only in the number, *solo numero*, as one says). No, the Abrahamic substitution implicates [*engage*] exceptional, elected existences that make themselves or expose themselves of themselves [*s'exposent d'elles-mêmes*], in their absolute singularity and as absolutely responsible, the gift or the sacrifice of themselves. That they would be implicated [*engagées*], that they would give themselves as pledge [*comme gage*] does not mean that substitution would be a free and voluntary act. It is also a grace and a certain passivity, a reception or a visitation, but in any case, it is not the passivity of an effect to which an inert thing would be submitted. It is a matter of another passivity, anything but a mechanical reproduction or this biotechnological reproductibility of phantasmatic cloning.

To underscore this point better, in order to settle it before moving on to complicate things further, I would like to quote and comment successively on some passages by Massignon and Levinas regarding substitution (in passing we will encounter some

motifs that will matter to us and that we could problematize, such as compassion, sacrifice, fraternity, and above all, expiation. These significations of sacrifice and expiation, which cross all the Abrahamic thoughts of substitution, would suffice to make them into something else than arithmetologies of cloning series.

"The why? We are told that the Badaliya is an illusion, since one cannot put oneself in the place of another, and that it is a lover's dream. One must answer that it is, that it is not a lover's dream, but a suffering that one receives without having chosen it and of which one conceives the grace, the hidden visitation from the bottom of the anguish of compassion which grabs us, and that it is the entrance to the Kingdom of God and that this suffering grabs us. Indeed, it appears powerless, but because it demands everything Someone who is on the Cross shares it with us, and He will transfigure it on the Last Day. This is suffering together human pain often not apparent for beings such that they have no pitiable companions such as us."⁸⁰

Since we are talking about Massignon, and about the Abrahamo-Arabo-Islamic prayer front, I would like, during a brief digression, to answer a concern that you might share with me, I imagine, regarding the ellipsis, if not the exclusion, in any case the active silence within which this Badalya suppresses [*tait*], walls in, chokes all fraternity with those who have, after all, some right to figure in an Abrahamic prayer front—to wit, the Jews. Why are they so visibly absent from the compassion and the substitution of Massignon? Without advancing too much, but also without withdrawing, I could say that the general sociological configuration of this trajectory (Bourgeois French Catholicism, the filiation of "Huysmans, Claudel, Father de Foucauld," etc.), to which one could add other characteristics, leaves us with the feeling of some probability of anti-Semitism, one that would be vaguely sociological and atmospheric. I would have stayed with this hypothesis and with this probability, I would have kept this statistical feeling for myself had I not found under Massignon's own pen, on the significant date of March–April 1938, just before the war, therefore (and one must be very attentive here), the two following confidences, which are also two confessions, both close to expiation and both turning toward Abraham, toward a still incomplete prayer to Abraham:

One must know how to harden the will (regarding France and the Christians of the East), back to the wall, face-to-face with danger. I am thinking less of external perils than of the internal danger—where, to thank us for having given them asylum, so may Jewish refugees are working toward our destruction. Singular destiny of this

80. Massignon, *L'hospitalité sacrée*, 293.

unsatisfied people, non-social and yet predestined (when will I conclude my third prayer of Abraham!). [March 15, 1938]

The intrigues of Jewish refugees in France have pushed me into a crisis of anti-Semitism in which I fought with the Maritains and with Georges Cattawi. [April 15, 1938]⁸¹

We were saying that the substitution of which Massignon and Levinas speak, in the name of hospitality, is not the simple, objective and technological replacement of a homogenous element by another homogenous element in a series, through the effect of a simple, functional calculation, as one replaces a chess-board piece by another which comes in its place, something which a calculating machine could do, like the computer against which Kasparov was recently playing. There is no general equivalence for the substitution of which Massignon and Levinas speak, no general equivalence, no common currency, which would ensure this exchange as replacing two comparable values. And yet, and yet (Christ for Massignon, money for Levinas, the third, justice, whoever, subject in the current sense, election, etc.)

One would also have to make an additional step while in a way displacing the axiomatic certainty with which we have opposed the ethical substitution to arithmetic substitution. The criteria of exceptionality, of irreplaceable singularity, of unicity, does not seem to me sufficient.

At bottom, in every substitution, whatever its terms, the units or identities, the conceptual equivalence of the contents, the homogeneity of seriality, in every substitution, one finds singularity and exceptionality of the units of the substitutions. Even if I replace a grain of sand by a grain of sand, an hour by another, a hand by another (to recall the Kantian example of dissymmetry), each unit, each identity, each singularity is irreplaceable in its factual existence; it is even elected in a certain manner, even if this election becomes precarious or unconscious. It is therefore not the criteria of irreplaceability, of singularity and unicity (*solo numero*) which distinguishes the "ethical" substitution—let us call it that, to go quickly—from simple, arithmetic substitution. One must take into account, if one can say so, with these values of compassion, expiation and sacrifice, another deal or hand [*une autre donne*]. And with it, we will find ourselves again at the heart of the question of hospitality, of hostipitality [*hostipitalité*].

For it does not suffice that the subject of substitution (the term, the X subject to substitution) be unique, irreplaceable, elected to come or to offer itself in the place of the other, irreplaceable for being replaced. It is also necessary [*il faut aussi*]

81. Massignon, *L'hospitalité sacrée*, 206–207.

that this irreplaceable be aware of *itself* [*se sente*], that it be aware and be aware of itself [*qu'il sente et se sente*], and therefore that it be a self with a rapport to itself, which is not the case of every unique and irreplaceable being in its existence. This self, this ipseity, is the condition of ethical substitution as compassion, sacrifice, expiation, and so on.

The question is, therefore, once again: What is a self? An ipseity? What is it if auto-affection, auto-motion, the fact of being able to move oneself, to be moved [*s'émouvoir*] and to affect oneself, is its condition, in truth, the definition? It is the proper of what one calls the living in general, and not only of man but also of the animal, of the compassion for the animal. It is the measure of this question that we will address next time, first in a discussion, the problems of the double, cloning, genealogy and kinship, filiation and sacrifice (animal and/or human) and "thou shall not kill."

I ask you therefore to prepare this discussion.

Translated by Gil Anidjar