



With the word I

I WISH TO DO MORE than speak of conjuring. I wish to do a conjuring. I wish to conjure the ghost of Jacques Derrida.

At the start, the required know-how involves the performative aspect of philosophical discourse, the effectivity of putting it in writing.¹ To presume it can be accomplished out of respect for the ghost, in this case, of Jacques Derrida, is obligatory, an ethical directive. Interest in conjuration is focused on the ghost's part in putting the work in writing. Without the writing, no record of conjuration would exist, nor any conjuration nor anything to conjure. Since no formula or spell has been stated, it would be a surprise to discover his specter already haunting the writing, with its ghostly effulgence to alert the voice reading to its otherworldly supplementation. It must be avowed that the conjuring will not rely on trickery, sorcery, wizardry, or legerdemain, and will suppose no belief (or lack of it) in ghosts, the supernatural, or the occult—though there will be debt before a positive inheritance can be claimed. Although the scene won't rely on smoke and mirrors (dry ice and laser), it will provide an exhibition of Derrida's skill at thaumaturgy, although the proficiency conjures away the magician, leaving only a trace.² As far as magic is essential to conjuration, the ghost lives in it and is 'alive' in writing, for that is the site and situation in which conjuration currently is at work.³

A supplemental confession is needed on the part of the writer.⁴ The avowal is connected with the work of writing, which must appear in any writing if it is to rescue meaning from oblivion. The confession has to do with telling the to-be-accomplished aim, which cannot be said before realized and cannot be realized if said. The supplementary concern will, by the law of contamination, be a contaminant in each segment of writing, a smudge of unruly energy or spirit across the page. The avowal is said in that movement, and to that degree, the work accomplished. The supplemental

concern has a classical orientation in the search for a surviving element, a survivor, and looks for a guarantee of 'perpetual life' or immortality (as with the Greeks), where the writing outlives the writer. The writer retains a presence in it, as a presence to it, and thereby wins the continued privilege of presence by means of it. No event, it could be argued, more fully constitutes the writer's signature in writing than the living-on of the voice, listened to (modally) by the reader. The appointment of the proper name, given by the acoustic sign(al) of voice, shows the relation writing enjoys with ghosting. The voice (heard to whatever degree in the reading), whether absent, dead, unknown, or anonymous, addresses us to questions of 'Western metaphysics,' and the grammatics of philosophical discourse.⁵ An incontestable ghostliness is put in writing as soon as the obverse of presence, absence, is resonant in the writer's present voice. Then the other, other-than-own, secretly voices a work 'behind the scenes' unpinning the logic as soon as it is articulated in philosophical discourse.⁶ Thus, writing finds its vein of paradox, that is, thought's attraction to its other—the inconceivably absurd—familiar in Hegel, Kierkegaard, and differently, Heidegger. It is the voice writing in Derrida's extended meditation on philosophical work.⁷

A detour is as unavoidable at this point—and also the question of the detour. Is it the writer's predilection to detour, to go 'lateral,' or is a digression in reality an embedded preface ancillary to the design, but necessary to commence the text? Even as the first thought is put in writing, a supplement is added. It injects itself into discussion, presenting itself as an impasse *at the start*, (in the Greek) an *aporia*, that apparently cannot be circumvented by another route and requires beginning at a place other than the beginning. At the same time, a detour deceptively offers the impression that there is no way out, no way to bypass, skirt, or even prevent putting the detour in writing. The hidden appeal to the ubiquity of presence is worth noticing in the idea of an escape, what would void or avoid the possibility of no exit. Bracketing the beginning has the effect of the meaning of "impasse" in question, and of asking whether, through the non-passage or non-experience, the question of limits is correctly constituted. Already an occasion of profound irresolution, absolute indecision, and unsettled apprehension. The detour then initializes an interrogation of the idea of borders, boundaries, and ends.⁸ One such limit or delimitation of great interest (returning to the original question), is whether and to what extent the work is the writer's own, and to what extent, Derrida's. Whose work speaks through this voice and whose voice voices this work in order to exert influence on the idea of limits?⁹

To return the focus to presence: presence is not merely the premier term of metaphysics, but a double genitive—metaphysics is a metaphysics of presence and the presence of metaphysics puts it in writing. Whether

it is called “essence, existence, substance, subject, . . . , transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth,” metaphysics enjoys a presence, invisible, behind the scenes, rarely recognized.¹⁰ This means that writing of any genre, writing, period, is metaphysical in character. Metaphysics, or a similar term like (Western) philosophical discourse, owes its existence to the privilege accorded by thought to what presents itself, and in this special case, *in writing*. At the center of presence is the matter of identity. This or that thing, in the act of presenting itself (appropriating self-presence), comes necessarily to possess or appropriate a proper identity of its own.¹¹ Identity is the inalienable essence of a being, its proper name. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet; but if its proper name were known, its smell would be also. Derrida’s inquiry will focus on the implications of appropriation, deploying a counter-strategy that will render “enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words ‘proximity,’ ‘immediacy,’ ‘presence’”¹² The solid foundation afforded reality is cracked by the strategy as the underdetermined means of defining a well-defined boundary line disappear. Stage direction: enter the aporia. Its power to block passageways is far from obvious since whether it’s an experience, a non-experience, or nothing at all remains moot. Such a result (anticipated consciously or unconsciously or not anticipated at all) implies a lack of rule, standard, or criterion by which to say decisively whether something is present, absent, in between, or in defiance of the categories in use. Aporia: opposite to presence, still not an absence or an absconding of presence, but an undecidable question.¹³

It is important to recall the themes of ghosts, ghost-writing, writing in general, and the writer of the works of Jacques Derrida.¹⁴ The feature that unites the links of the chain lies with the voice. Voice refers to what puts it in writing, and at the same time to a supplementation to writing that is a voicification also engaged in *reading*. It has to do with that which ensures the readability of what is put in writing, that is, the possibility of reading. Whenever the identity of the writer of a work is in need of authentication—as the question of ghost-writing as raised—voice is implicated. The signature, putting the proper name in writing, is properly acoustic. At the same time an effacement of the mark is possible, and in Derrida’s case, likely.¹⁵ Along the search for authenticity lies a wreck of issues of contemporary import: plagiarism, the intellectual rights to works, and copyright laws. They will lure and divert the inquiry as it moves forward.

The question of putting what in writing authenticates these words as ‘my own,’ or what constitutes ‘owning’ these words, is important. They may belong to someone else, as in an act of ventriloquism, posthypnotic suggestion, dementia, or veiled coercion. The main problem lies in establishing an identity of the *who* that is writing “I am putting these words in

writing.”¹⁶ To believe that the first-person pronoun has a meaning given it by the thought of a first-person is to revert to a ‘private language argument.’ Conversely, an exterior cannot provide authentication of the meaning, a science or other field of knowledge whose signification could be ‘sublated’ in a Hegelian fashion, with the belief in an I. The two, inside and outside, are what Derrida calls “undialectizable.” There is no possibility in their otherness blending. The very theme of self-presence, the presence of the I, takes a decidedly vertiginous twist away from Heidegger’s thinking. When Heidegger asks what is it to be? he urges that in the case of *Dasein* (whose essence is its existence and which isn’t identical to the designation ‘human being’), one needs to differentiate between the specific being (you, me, Jacques Derrida) and its Being (capitalization noted), the Being of the being. This, the ontological difference, tells, very roughly, that an inclusion in the headcount of objects excludes that from which this privilege of being counted among beings derives. They are not the same, eminently differentiated from each other. The second is the onto(theo)logical crux that, by Heidegger’s argument, lies buried under a metaphysical amnesia since just after its pre-Socratic discovery and Platonic interment. To uncover it makes possible the possibility that authenticates self-presence. It allows presence to self *as self*, or more precisely (since *Dasein* ‘is always mine’), as myself. With Heidegger, it could be said that to seize the possibility is the affirmation of supreme individuation unto singularity. Only then does one *own* the experience suffered or enjoyed, writing, speaking, or whatever.

The presence of the *who*, an epicenter of Derrida’s thought, runs parallel to the writer’s vocality, the containment of voice by putting it in writing: Derrida: “The question of the self, ‘who am I’ not in the sense of ‘who am I’ but rather ‘Who is this “I” that can say ‘who’”? What is the ‘I’ and what becomes of responsibility once the identity of the ‘I’ trembles in secret?”¹⁷ By a deflection, substance is set in motion by a tremor and trembles in turn. The trembling of the ‘I’, the self’s tremulation, is acoustically translated into voice. The trembling broadcasts itself as voice in writing. Jacques Derrida’s self broadcasts the singular ‘I’ of Jacques Derrida, which gives voice to the reader who listens to the reading of what is put in writing. Ultimately, the trembling is in front of the mystery of existence (*mysterium tremendum*). Tremors of all kinds, the trembling of an ambiguous visual figure or the trembling in a difficult truth, have a reference in it.¹⁸ The ‘I’ that trembles in seizure of its voice always speaks while in the throes of blockage, a passage denied—*aporia*. *Aporia*, a conflictful shadow of the mystery and cause of the trembling, afflicts identity with ambivalence, fuzziness, indeterminacy, or indistinctness, chasing Leibniz (and the principle of identity of indiscernibles) away and casting off the arrogance of a politics of self-presence.¹⁹

In the truth of the aporetic lies a possibility that the singular is the only actual, but as an actual that must remain a possibility. A strange possibility, that does not behave like the (Aristotelian version) possibility as a pre-stage of actuality, a preliminary, preface, or pretext. For the canonical variety, if the act is done, the possibility no longer exists; if it isn't, it has been voided. It is a bizarre (and Kantian) possibility that belongs to the transcendental, which Heidegger puts aphoristically as, "Every disclosure of being as the *transcendens* is *transcendental* knowledge."²⁰ The possibility haunts each and every disclosure of being-there, each and every moment and movement, purposeful, spontaneous, or unconscious, of the I. A being-there conjured with the haunting possibility of the very undergoing (suffering, enjoying) whatever, fashioned out of (the logic of) presence. The possibility of actual appropriation (*Ereignis*) takes the form of an *obsession* with an apparition of being. It adds a double to the I, a secret life, possibly lapsed, rarely cherished, mostly overlooked, and its ghostliness concealed in the thicket of egology. Affirmation of it and rejection of the presence of the present, which happen simultaneously, invite the uncanny (*unheimlich*). Connected with the latter as a link in a chain already mentioned is a second chain of terms: *aporia*, enigma, being-possible (*Seinmöglichkeit*), trembling, and apparition. Phenomenologically, the uncanny enters the scene from nowhere, disperses, and conjures a mood of homeliness, displacement, and impropriety. Any memoir of a phantom contains a full description of being-not-at-home.

The writing invites a double (*doppelgänger*), a loosely attached, neither audible nor sonorous, but trembling aura, signifying the possibility of singularity, and incorporating the mark of 'selfhood,' which is announced in the voice of the ghost. The acoustics present a possible seizure that frequents (like now) the performance of writing. As a result, voice grows more voicified and uncanny as a doubling that is represented by the division into reading and writing, writer and reader. (It is the word "and" that contests the meaning of the distinction.) The reading gives voice to the voice of the writer, which does not simply copy the reader's effort. The voice is put into writing and is in writing, and when the difference is 'differenced,' reading repeats the essence (what-being) of the writing (distinguished from its existence [there-being]) as voice. But vo-ciferation—the giving of voice—is a ghost performance that refuses clarity and distinctness, revels in equivocity, and trembles in the intermittent seizure of owning itself qua itself. A correspondence with the tremor of the *mysterium* dwells in the ambiguity in the writing and with it an apprehension: fright at the ghost of voice. Put in writing, the phantom is inherently frightening; fright constitutes the basis of an avoidance whose deference requires a lengthy study.²¹

In this context, for Heidegger, the task of existence—*Ereignis*, appropriation or seizure of owning what takes place—is effectuated by an affiliation with death. The accomplishment results from resolute living in the face of “my death.” The strain of avoidance is apparent in the quotation marks that mention but avoid use of the expression. The avoidance is further masked and recast as “the possibility of the impossibility” of *Dasein*. The work of putting it in writing must graze against the fact of mortality and its indeterminate meaning, and trembles under the scrutiny of the revealed invisibility.²² From the start, such work belongs to mourning, and specifically, the burden that makes the writer’s inheritance difficult. Of several questions, let us name just two: does the possibility of appropriation (i.e., of the writer’s presence put in writing) cease with the admission of the ghost? Is ‘impossibility’ itself unleashed to haunt the rest of the writing with its apparitional quality? Both inquire again into the uncanny, revealed now in its affiliation with the impasse, aporia, paralysis, catatonics, and non-responsiveness. Using a discourse whose fundamental terms tremble in their places and grow distracted, the work—of putting it in writing, of mourning—is asked to embrace the undecipherable as a mark that exceeds its own marking to the degree of rendering it illegible. It is a work to put mourning in writing while in the dark.²³

The possibility that ghosts (and hosts) the performance of writing is found at the fringe, near the margin, by the boundary, of the line. It produces a trembling in the identity of the I (that writes, that reads) that induces a loss of distinctness, a sacrifice of definition, and a surrender of determination. The end of the line. The line blurs and disappears in the inked granules of an eraser. The line is presence and where presence is lost, effaced, rubbed away, the ‘natural’ progression of dear and departed presence, dead presence, and ghost follows suite. There, at the end of the line, where the idea of limit is put into question, blurring enclosures, the meaning of “limit,” and specifically, the limit of life, is left questionable. There, where the question “Is ‘my death’ the end?” comes to an end—aporia.

The possibility boils down to a spectral accompaniment to writing that enjoys a close affiliation with death and yet serves to authenticate writing. It isn’t always there (like “my death”) and not always not there. To speak about the trembling of its appearance (or nonappearance) seems to depend in part only on the seizure that makes presence present. The other aspect of dependence has to do with writing in the dark. To write then is never done with certainty, and even the encounter with incomprehensibility is indecisive. An appearance of tremor, beyond understanding, drawing on knowledge from the other side: putting it in writing *cannot* avoid the risk of misunderstanding. Flicker, shimmer, flutter, waver: this series designates the peculiar diaphanous effect of the specter put in writ-

ing. The words circumscribe the being/nonbeing's curious disrespect for limits and boundaries. Impassable borders in space-time fail to restrict its movements and do not serve to define its position. Much of the lore of ghosts follows from these facts. It is said that ghosts are said to be similar to entities in our dreams. They, as 'shades,' are believed to inhabit the 'land of the dead,' conceived as an afterlife realm of indeterminate location. Thinkers from Aristotle to Freud have composed treatises on the triangle whose apices are ghost, dream, death.

In "Literature and the Right to Death," Blanchot looks at a writer's work, the text, through an Orphic lens.²⁴ In itself, the text is situated in what he calls "night," signified by the trope of the land of the dead. To read is to be called thereto by those who dwell there. The act of reading is an echoic response to the ghost inhabitants whose 'vocalizations' make possible the acoustics of reading per se. It is the voiceless voice of what Blanchot calls "nothingness as being, the idling of being," which is related to Levinas's *il y a*.²⁵ Belonging to no person, the voice's recitation *sotto voce* relates to the spectral beings that inhabit the night and haunt the text. What are they, the haunts, and what do they want with the voice reading? The present scene of writing is hauntingly animated by words put in writing by Blanchot, Heidegger, and Derrida. At the end of the line as flesh-and-blood authors, banished to the night of the text (their own and others'), they reappear flickeringly in the acoustic interior of the haunted writing. That act of interiorization and memorialization comes to unsettle the proceedings that attempt to make it clear.

So, Jacques Derrida's ghost *might* be here if the interiorization were of sufficient force. The word "might" needs emphasis because of the trickiness of its presence (absence). The end, limit, boundary, or demarcation has faltered as a standard determination of the limn. This applies also to existence and the end to which 'my life' (quotation marks) will come, and an end interlaced with that with which Derrida's life came to an end, a mingling at least. He would go on to say that 'at the limit' is less an immovable barrier and more a chalk mark subject to blurring, effacement or erasure, flickering or wavering.²⁶ Insofar as it touches personal identity, that is, the *who*, the limit possesses built-in indetermination. The I trembles in the wake of the interminable misunderstanding of its terminus.

If to arrive at the limit is to arrive at a blur, the illegibility must condition each and every phase beforehand. The affliction of personal identity shows itself in a tremor. The condition provides the subject with no way to say with certainty whether the *who* is absent or present. If an identity, a self-identity, Derrida's, for instance, is to be situated in the tremulous play of being-there (or not), it's in neither nor both, but in a "something that escapes both being a something and not a something." The main point of

deconstructive *force* is precisely the expression of the radical oscillation, alteration, and ambiguity of things, principles, positions, and arguments. The *play* between presence and absence is a 'product' of forces whose work lets them be different, 'produces' differentiation (*per saltum*), and provides the array of distinction that constitutes the world. This third 'sign' (in addition to plus and minus; Derrida likens to the middle voice)—*différance*—presents itself only in self-effacement, and thus safeguards its undetectability. As a law of contamination (supplementation), *différance* ensures that absence is included in presence, that the 'integrity' of the I includes the not-I, and that the bearer of a proper name carries impropriety. Conversely, in simple form, to say that presence is a ghost of absence, or that life is a ghost of death, is a restatement of supplementarity. The question is not tangential to whether and to what degree the writer 'lives' in writing, and whether the reader partakes of the 'life.'

The argument that presence, properly a possibility, is ghostly follows from any discourse that propounds a transcendental philosophy. The reasoning lies at the heart of the canon of 'Western metaphysics,' which is an ungracious host to the ghost. When tradition asks about origin, it is on dangerous ground. Origin, ground, substance, principle, source, beginning; another chain of Derrida's. Each term plays on the concept of the *first* (as in Descartes' title, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*), which is necessary if philosophical discourse is to have foundational meaning. The beginning or *arche* functions as no more than a rule of exclusion that keeps other key notions out of play. The ghost can have no origin as long as the origin is held to be immune to mutation, indispensable, self-sufficient, incontrovertible, and pure—for the ghost is none of these. By contrast, the honorifics denote an elect precinct of thought that has been placed beyond further review. They constitute the 'inner' as opposed to the other, 'outer' or exoteric ideas. As philosophical atoms, or philosophemes, they have acquired a level of privilege as prized building blocks of discourse lining the logically 'anterior' interior.

In a way, this is another attack on the meaning of class membership, the "is" of predication, and an empowering of the copula.²⁷ Any set logically excludes that which is exterior to it. And it is the same question about the line that separates member from nonmember as well as one from the other. This again is the flaw in the idea of a self-contained presence, that it can't be said without elaboration, articulation, deduction, construction, or representation of its meaning that supplements its existential 'perfection.' To erect an edifice on perfectly solid grounds (Descartes' trope) implies that the grounds themselves need building on, and in themselves, are inadequate to the task of underpinning. A need always incorporates an insufficiency, which defeats the alleged purity of the principle. As the process reiterates, the first is sup-

plemented by a second, a third, and so on, implying its originarity was a phantom all along. If there is 'something' out of play, it would be the point, the *arche*, without supplementation, a mute and inaccessible point, Barthes' *punctum*. The muteness cannot be overemphasized.

How does a need for supplements ring in Jacques Derrida's ghost? The ghost is a non-acoustical replication of the voice put in writing that reading (out loud, 'silently') encounters, a sonic facsimile. Reintroduced in writing, the voice, eviscerated, depleted of its breath, and made a sub-vocal wraith duplicates the real exterior articulation of speech. Of course, no original exists to be replicated; there is only the existence of the iteration. Repetition without origin, the source infinitely removed. With destruction of an inside, separately constituted from outside, the thinking of foundations is void. If the ghost of reading is a copy (of a voice), it is a copy of a copy, not of an original. The identity of a voice that belongs uniquely to writing can no longer be conceived as that which the specter replicates—any more than the converse. The relation of ghost to voice, and voice to ghost, reaches an impasse. There, it is the aporia itself that opens what Derrida calls the "work of mourning."

The injection of a politics into a discussion of death is unavoidable. Once the grip of metaphysics on philosophical discourse loosens, the performative is again functional. That no presence, no substantial being, no life, no I, can be unequivocally signified leaves nothing to copy. Which makes everything a copy, in the sense of an audio reproduction. Within the sanctum of origin, the lack of ground threatens to disturb the 'sanctity' of life. But on the stage, in the scene, the pervasive uncanniness of the specter now bleeds to the edges of the page. Before, the meaning of the ghost seemed derivative: it was a second to the being that predated it. Now, with a refulgence of spectrality, the ghost, graced by Derrida with the French *revenant*, is one that comes back. The ghost lives in the aporia surrounding how the *revenant* can possibly begin by coming back. The mourning of the dead is the inheritance of putting it in writing as soon as the phantom is on the scene. And where a work of mourning exists, the dead lead the writing in interiorizing the voicification of life that was. In the domain of putting it in writing, the ghost always goes ahead and life follows, conjuringly. The ghost first, and the life it ghosts, second.

What is a work of mourning? To what extent is a conjuration of the dead a part of the work? The ghost of Jacques Derrida, which has 'always already' appeared, no longer a living personal entity/nonentity, the haunt of the French philosopher who died five years ago, appears to inaudibly mingle with the reading voice, a vibratory accompaniment to 'giving voice' to the writing. Even read aloud, the text is known both less and hauntingly more than assumed, leaving it undecidable what it would mean to say that

the reader's voice belongs solely to the reader. The inclusion of another voice, Derrida's, in writing cannot be reduced to simple memory, but elevated through interiorization to commemoration of what he calls an "unbearable paradox of fidelity."²⁸ The ghost can be memorialized "only by exceeding, fracturing, wounding, injuring, traumatizing the interiority that it inhabits or that welcomes it through hospitality, love, or friendship."²⁹

Conjuring. "Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same . . . the completely other, dead, living in me."³⁰