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Prefatory Note

# The Embodied Call

Toward a Phenomenology of Interpellation Beyond Logos

A Dialogue with Dominique Janicaud from the Mahoukou Law

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This article was born of an improbable encounter — between a philosophical law forged in the flesh of educational relationships and a demand for phenomenological rigor formulated by one of the most rigorous thinkers of our time.

Dominique Janicaud devoted a decisive part of his work to defending the frontiers of phenomenology against what he called its theological turn: the drift of certain successors toward a phenomenology of excess, of saturated givenness, of absolute invisibility. His demand was simple — to remain within the limits of what shows itself — and philosophically unimpeachable.

But this demand left a territory unexplored. Not through negligence, not through any lack of rigor. Janicaud simply did not have the tools to explore it. He did not have the key.

“The space left by Janicaud is no accident. In reality, he had no other key to open and enlarge the territory of experimentation.” — Christian Mahoukou

This territory is that of subjects whose logos is impeded — those whose cognitive functions struggle to mobilize, and whose Call does not pass through the verbal channels that classical phenomenology has learned to recognize. Subjects that philosophy had left at the threshold of its reflection — not because they were inaccessible, but because it had not yet learned to read them.

This key, the Phenomenological Law of Interpellation — the Mahoukou Law — was not forged in libraries. It was forged in the concrete reality of a palm pressed against a wall, of a differentiated withdrawal, of a brief sound repeated twice. In those instants where something

passes between an educator and a young person with profound cognitive disability that nothing in the clinical protocols could name.

This is what gives it a philosophical legitimacy that no pure speculation could have produced. The phenomenology of embodied interpellation is not a theory applied to a practice – it is a theory that emerged from a practice, and that returns to it in order to transform it.

This article thus proposes a double movement: to honor Janicaud's demand, by taking it more seriously than he himself had carried it. To show that the Mahoukou Law is not a theological drift – it postulates no absolute invisible, no saturated givenness. It describes what shows itself, in the non-verbal, bodily, silent registers through which a human being whose logos is impeded calls out to those who accompany them.

Phenomenology began when Husserl asked his students to truly look at a cardboard box. It continues when Marc places his palm on the wall beside Liam's, and understands that something has just passed between them.

“Every being exists insofar as it is called, responds, and resonates.” — Mahoukou  
Law, founding principle

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### **Abstract**

This article brings the Phenomenological Law of Interpellation — the Mahoukou Law — into dialogue with Dominique Janicaud's conception of phenomenological experience, particularly his critique of the theological turn in French phenomenology. We argue that the Mahoukou Law does not contradict Janicaud's program — remaining within the limits of phenomenality, describing a non-dogmatic transcendence — but extends it toward a territory he did not explore: that of subjects whose cognitive functions struggle to mobilize, and whose Call takes non-verbal, bodily, and silent forms. We propose the notion of a phenomenology of embodied interpellation as an original contribution to the contemporary debate on the limits and resources of the phenomenological method.

### **Keywords**

Phenomenology — Interpellation — Embodiment — Janicaud — Cognitive Disability — Mahoukou Law — Call — Resonance — Indeterminate Experience — Professional Training.

## Introduction

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Dominique Janicaud stands as one of the most rigorous guardians of phenomenology's boundaries. His critique of the theological turn — first formulated in 1991, developed in 1998 — rested on a demand simple in appearance yet formidable in its implications: phenomenology betrays its own principles if it steps outside the limits of phenomenal experience. Everything that exceeds what is givable to intuition, everything that posits an absolute invisible, a radical transcendence, a givenness that overflows consciousness — all of this belongs to theology, not to philosophy.

This demand is legitimate. It has the merit of clarity. And yet, followed to its very edges, it reveals a considerable territory left in shadow — not the territory of theology, but that of relational experience with beings whose logos is impeded. What happens when the other who calls out to us cannot mobilize language, memory, adaptation to change? When their Call is real but does not pass through the channels classical phenomenology has learned to recognize? When the educational relationship is forged in the silence of a body that speaks otherwise?

It is this territory that the Phenomenological Law of Interpellation — the Mahoukou Law — explores. Not by evading phenomenality, but by inhabiting it to its most demanding zones. The triad Call-Response-Resonance, forged in the concrete reality of educational relationships with young people with profound cognitive disability, constitutes what we shall call a phenomenology of embodied interpellation. Our thesis is that it does not contradict Janicaud — it accomplishes his program where he stopped.

This article unfolds in five movements. We begin by faithfully expounding Janicaud's position as Robert Legros reconstructs it in his 2017 contribution to the journal *Noesis*. We then show the blind spot that this position leaves open: the subject whose logos is impeded. We then expound the Mahoukou Law in its phenomenological foundations. We propose embodiment as an enlargement of Janicaud's program. We conclude on the implications for phenomenology, professional training, and the question of universal humanity.

## I. Janicaud's Demand: Phenomenological Experience as Indeterminate Experience

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### 1.1 Remaining within the Limits of Phenomenality

Janicaud's position begins from a finding that Legros formulates as follows: phenomenology betrays its own principles if it steps outside the limits of phenomenal experience. This principle, apparent in its simplicity, is of a formidable exigency. It is not a matter of reducing experience to a passive reception of sensory data — Husserl and Heidegger showed this: we hear the door slamming in the house, not acoustic sensations. It is a matter of never allowing experience to be structured by a principle that exceeds what can show itself in and through experience itself.

It is within this framework that the critique of the theological turn takes shape. Lévinas, Marion, Henry, Chrétien — each in their own way — introduced into phenomenology a dimension of excess, of absolute givenness, of radical invisibility which, according to Janicaud, exceeds what the phenomenological method can legitimately describe.

“Phenomenology betrays its own principles if it steps outside the limits of phenomenal experience.” — Janicaud, *La phénoménologie dans tous ses états*, p. 199

### 1.2 The Kantian Detour: Experience and Idea

To clarify the meaning of this demand, Janicaud draws, “in a first analysis,”<sup>2</sup> on the Kantian distinction between concepts of experience and ideas. Concepts of experience structure experience by giving it a form to which sensible experience can be “adequate.” Ideas — God, soul, world, humanity — give experience its meaning, but no sensible experience can ever be congruent with them. Janicaud does not remain at this reading: he shows that certain experiences given meaning by an idea can nonetheless be considered sensible experiences — non-empirical, but sensible. The experience of the moral law, of the sublime, of the dignity of the other — all felt, sensed, lived.

### 1.3 Phenomenological Experience as Universal and Indeterminate

Janicaud's most original contribution is the notion of phenomenological experience as universal and indeterminate — not structured by a determinate concept drawn from a

particular understanding of the world. Phenomenological experience is universal because it is indeterminate: it is, in the decisive formula,<sup>3</sup> “an experience that any and every person can have.” This formula is the touchstone of our article.

“Phenomenological experience is universal insofar as it is “indeterminate”; insofar as it is not determined by a particular understanding of the world.” — Legros, from Janicaud, *Noesis*, 29, 2017, p. 42

## 1.4 The Suspensive Withdrawal as Condition

Indeterminate phenomenological experience does not go without saying. It presupposes what Legros, following Husserl, calls a “suspensive withdrawal”<sup>4</sup> — a suspension of the habitual categories through which the everyday world imposes itself as natural. It is within this framework that we shall situate the Mahoukou Law: not to validate it from outside, but to show that it belongs there by right, while extending it toward a territory Janicaud did not explore.

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1. Robert Legros, “L’expérience phénoménologique. Réflexions à partir de l’œuvre de Dominique Janicaud,” *Noesis*, 29, 2017, p. 33. The article reconstructs Janicaud’s thought primarily from *La phénoménologie dans tous ses états*, Paris, Gallimard, 2009 (abbreviated *Phéno*).
  2. Janicaud writes: “in a first analysis, can we not stay with the Kantian clarification?” (*Phéno*, p. 21). This formulation indicates that he intends to go further in a second moment.
  3. Janicaud, *Phéno*, pp. 53–54, cited by Legros, p. 48. Emphasis ours. This formula is the touchstone of our entire argument.
  4. Legros, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–44, drawing on the Husserlian notion of *epoche*. This suspensive withdrawal is not spontaneous — it is constructed, learned, practiced. This is the central thesis of our second section.

## II. The Blind Spot: The Subject Whose Logos Is Impeded

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### 2.1 The Logocentric Presupposition of Classical Phenomenology

Phenomenology, since Husserl, has constructed its analyses from a type-subject capable of perception, retention, anticipation, and speech. Merleau-Ponty considerably broadened this subject by making the lived body the ground of all experience — but even in his work, the subject remains fundamentally one whose perceptual and motor capacities are in a state of ordinary mobilization. Lévinas introduced the other as face — but this face speaks. It says: 'You shall not kill.' It bears a minimal logos.

What happens when the other who calls out to me cannot mobilize this minimal logos? When their Call does not pass through the Lévinasian face, nor through articulated expression, nor through a gaze that says 'I am here'? When it passes through a palm pressed against a wall, through a differentiated withdrawal, through a brief sound repeated twice, through the silence of a body seeking to regulate itself?

### 2.2 The Question Janicaud Did Not Ask

Janicaud writes that phenomenological experience is “an experience that any and every person can have.”<sup>5</sup> But does “any and every person” include the young person with profound cognitive disability? Does it include one whose attention is fleeting, whose episodic memory is fragmentary, whose verbal language is difficult to mobilize? The formula is universal in intention — but is it universal in fact? And if it is not, is this because such subjects lie outside phenomenology — or because phenomenology has not yet extended its gaze to reach them? Our thesis is that the second answer is correct.

“Phenomenology has not yet encountered the subject whose logos is impeded. Not because they are inaccessible — but because it has not yet learned to read them.”

— Mahoukou Law, manuscript

### 2.3 Profound Cognitive Disability as a Phenomenological Limit-Case

We work with the notion of difficulty in mobilizing one’s capacities, not deficiency. Health services evaluate six major cognitive functions: attention, memory, adaptation to change,

language, gnosis, and praxis.<sup>6</sup> But evaluating these difficulties does not mean that the capacities are absent. It means that their mobilization is variable, costly, dependent on conditions the subject does not always control. This conceptual shift has major phenomenological consequences: this subject's Call is real, complete. It takes unusual channels — but it shows itself.

## 2.4 The Silent Logocentrism and Its Consequences

We name silent logocentrism this unformulated presupposition of classical phenomenology: not a deliberate exclusion, but an effect of exclusion produced by the choice of exemplary situations.<sup>7</sup> This logocentrism excludes de facto — without saying so — subjects whose logos is impeded. The Mahoukou Law constitutes a response to this blind spot: not a general theory, but a response forged in the concrete reality of educational relationships, in the flesh of lived situations.

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5. Janicaud, Phéno, pp. 53–54, cited by Legros, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

6. International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD-11), WHO, 2019. In France, these evaluations are required by the MDPH for placement in specialized medico-social institutions.

7. The exemplary situations of Husserl (house, tree, wax), Merleau-Ponty (football player, pianist), Heidegger (craftsman, peasant): in all these cases, the type-subject has their cognitive functions in a state of ordinary mobilization. The subject whose logos is impeded appears nowhere.

## III. The Mahoukou Law: A Phenomenology of Embodied Interpellation

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### 3.1 Genesis and Structure: Zu den Sachen selbst

The Phenomenological Law of Interpellation was born in the concrete reality of educational relationships — in those instants where something passes between an educator and a young person that nothing in the clinical protocols could name. It is this concrete genesis that confers its phenomenological legitimacy: it departs from the things themselves — *Zu den Sachen selbst*. Its fundamental structure is a triad: the Call, the Response, the Resonance — three moments structurally intertwined in a fecund phenomenological circle.

### 3.2 The Call: A Phenomenon Given to Educative Intuition

The Call, in the Mahoukou Law, is an interpellation coming from the other — asymmetrical, normative, engaging whoever receives it. But unlike the Lévinasian face, it postulates no absolute invisible. It is phenomenally given: Liam's palm pressed firmly against the wall, the differentiated withdrawal when Marc tries to guide him, the pivoting of the face toward the educator. This ensemble constitutes an observable, describable, universally recognizable Call. It is precisely what Janicaud calls an 'invisible of this world': something that transcends the immediately empirical without leaving the immanence of experience.

“Liam’s Call is given in experience: it shows itself, it offers itself to the perception of one who has learned to receive it.” — Mahoukou Law, manuscript

### 3.3 The Response: From Protocol to Engagement

The Mahoukou Law distinguishes the protocolary Response — functional, correct, insufficient — from the engaged Response, which requires that the educator be truly affected by the Call and respond from their own presence. Marc’s stopping — that involuntary, pre-reflective stopping — is the concrete form of the suspensive withdrawal: a suspension of determinate categories that allows the situation to unfold in its properly phenomenological dimension.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.4 Triadic Availability and Open Intentionality

Triadic availability is the condition of possibility of the engaged Response. It is not a technical competence but a mode of being — a certain quality of presence that makes it possible to suspend determinate categories. Its phenomenological structure is that of an open intentionality: not the aiming Husserlian intentionality targeting a determinate object, nor Merleau-Ponty’s operative intentionality of the motor body,<sup>9</sup> but a waiting intentionality — a readiness to receive what gives itself under the form in which it gives itself.

### 3.5 Resonance: Indeterminate and Constitutive Experience

Resonance is the transformation that the relationship produces in the educator. It corresponds exactly to what Janicaud calls an indeterminate experience: not coded by a particular culture, capable in principle of being had by every human being.<sup>10</sup> But it adds a dimension Janicaud had not articulated: its constitutive dimension. Marc after the corridor scene is no longer quite the same Marc. Resonance is not only universally experienceable and describable — it is transformative of whoever undergoes it.

“Resonance is not a vague feeling. It is a transformation. Marc emerged from this exchange with a new certainty, fragile but real, that something had taken place between them.” — Mahoukou Law, *L’appel de l’autre*

### 3.6 Flesh as the Medium of Interpellation

We take from Merleau-Ponty the notion of flesh as the medium of experience<sup>11</sup> and displace it toward the interpellative relationship: in the relationship between Marc and Liam, flesh is the medium in which the Call gives itself and the Response is inscribed. But we go beyond Merleau-Ponty on a decisive point: flesh here is not the medium of perception of the world, but the medium of an asymmetrical relationship — the place where the other’s Call reaches me before I have constituted it as an object.

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8. Marc’s involuntary stopping corresponds phenomenologically to a passive experience — an experience that occurs before the subject has constituted it. It is in this pre-reflective space that triadic availability operates.
  9. The notion of open intentionality is to be distinguished from Merleau-Ponty’s operative intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*) — which is motor and pre-reflective. The open intentionality of triadic availability is relational: an openness to the Call of the other, not to the perceptual world.
  10. Legros, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–44. Marc’s Resonance is coded neither by the culture of specialized education, nor by a religious tradition — it is undergone below these determinations.
  11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, tr. A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), chapter “The Intertwining — The Chiasm.” Flesh designates the element in which the seer and the visible come together. We take this notion and displace it toward the interpellative relationship.

## IV. Embodiment as Enlargement of Janicaud's Program

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### 4.1 Three Theses in Dialogue

We can now formulate with precision the relationship between the Mahoukou Law and Janicaud's program: not a contradiction, not a simple continuity, but an enlargement. Three theses structure this enlargement.

First thesis: the Call of the subject whose logos is impeded is a phenomenon in the full sense of the term — givable to intuition, describable, universal in principle. It satisfies all of Janicaud's demands. But its reception requires a trained availability that Janicaud did not theorize.

Second thesis: the suspensive withdrawal — condition of indeterminate experience — is not spontaneous in educational relationships with a subject whose logos is impeded. It is constructed, learned, practiced. Education in educational relationships is phenomenological education.

Third thesis: Resonance is an indeterminate experience in Janicaud's sense — but it adds a constitutive dimension he had not articulated: authentic phenomenological experience changes whoever undergoes it.

### 4.2 Virtual Givability and Effective Givability

Liam's Call is givable to educative intuition<sup>12</sup> but is not automatically given. It requires triadic availability to move from virtual to effective givenness. The problem is not on the side of the phenomenality of the Call — it is on the side of the receiver's receptivity. Janicaud is right: Liam's Call is a phenomenon. But he failed to ask what enables a subject to receive it as such.

“The Call is always there. The question is not whether it exists — but whether someone is there to receive it.” — Mahoukou Law, manuscript

### 4.3 The Suspensive Withdrawal Is Constructed: Training as Phenomenological Education

In educational relationships with a young person whose logos is impeded, the suspensive withdrawal does not come of itself. Institutional pressure, relational fatigue, determinate clinical categories all oppose the withdrawal by offering ready-made explanations that short-circuit phenomenological reception. What makes the withdrawal possible is training — a transformation of the gaze, not an accumulation of knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Training in educational relationships is phenomenological education in the strong sense: it teaches one to suspend, to wait, to receive, to name what gives itself without crushing it under pre-available categories.

#### 4.4 Constitutive Resonance and Universal Humanity

Julien, in our third case study, says: “it transforms me. That is not the same as costing me.”<sup>14</sup> This distinction is philosophically crucial: it distinguishes destructive affection and constitutive affection. Resonance is the form of constitutive affection — the one that constitutes a professional identity forged by the lived experience of relationship with an irreducible other. And if the Call of the subject whose logos is impeded is capable of producing such Resonance, then this subject fully belongs to universal humanity in Janicaud’s sense. Liam’s palm on the wall is a manifestation of humanity as full and complete as the most elaborate philosophical discourse.

#### 4.5 The Institutional Paradox

The phenomenological experience of the embodied Call occurs in institutions that can either facilitate or impede the suspensive withdrawal. This poses a question Janicaud did not ask: what are the institutional conditions of phenomenological experience?<sup>15</sup> This is not an external critique of phenomenology — it is an internal consequence of the rigorous application of the method to the field of educational relationships.

“What the institution cannot name, it suspects. What it suspects, it regulates. What it regulates without understanding, it destroys.” — Mahoukou Law, *L’appel de l’autre*

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12. We take up the Husserlian distinction between given and givable. A phenomenon is givable when nothing in its structure prevents it from giving itself to intuition — even if, in fact, it has not yet done so.
  13. This thesis extends the phenomenology of education of Max van Manen (*Researching Lived Experience*, London: Routledge, 2016) toward the limit-case of relationships with subjects whose logos is impeded.
  14. This formula appears in our third case study (Jade and Julien). It spontaneously articulates a fundamental phenomenological distinction between two modes of being affected.
  15. This question meets, by a different path, the concerns of Alfred Schütz’s social phenomenology regarding the social conditions of intersubjective experience.

## V. What This Opens: Phenomenology, Training, and Universal Humanity

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### 5.1 Three Openings

The enlargements proposed designate philosophical tasks that remain to be constructed. We identify three: the implications for phenomenology itself, the implications for professional training, and the implications for a phenomenologically grounded ethics.

### 5.2 For Phenomenology: Extending the Circle of Exemplary Subjects

A rigorous and consistent phenomenology must extend the circle of its exemplary situations. Not out of social inclusion — however legitimate that imperative may be — but out of philosophical rigor: if it claims to describe universal structures of human experience, it must confront its descriptions with the limit-cases that put them to the test. How to phenomenologically describe the temporal experience of a subject whose episodic memory is fragmentary? The intentionality of a subject whose attention is fleeting? The intersubjectivity between two subjects of whom one does not have verbal logos?<sup>16</sup> These questions are not marginal — they touch the core of the fundamental structures that phenomenology has described until now by presupposing a type-subject that is too narrow.

### 5.3 For Training: A Phenomenological Education

A phenomenological education is not an academic initiation into phenomenology as a discipline. It is a practical transformation of receptivity. The triadic unfolding method developed in our A2R Training Kit<sup>17</sup> is its concrete implementation: it begins with the situation, not with the theory. It invites educators to enter the narrative situation before unfolding it with the tools of the triad. Theory arrives after experience — as its putting-into-words, not as its condition. This sequence is itself phenomenological.

### 5.4 For Ethics: The Call as Phenomenal Ground

If the Call of the subject whose logos is impeded is a phenomenon in the full sense, it grounds an ethical demand that exceeds the field of individual educational relationships: every human being whose Call is phenomenally given has the right to have that Call received. This phenomenological grounding of the ethical demand is distinct from that which Lévinas derives

from the face.<sup>18</sup> It does not require adherence to a particular conception of transcendence. It requires only the recognition that the Call shows itself — and that what shows itself deserves to be received.

## 5.5 A Phenomenology of the Threshold

The Mahoukou Law is a phenomenology of the threshold: it works where the ordinary categories of phenomenology meet their limits without disappearing. It shows that intentionality can be open rather than aiming, that logos can be silent and bodily, that constitution can be relational rather than solitary. And it shows that phenomenology is not only an academic discipline — it can be a grammar of educational relationships, a way of seeing that changes what one does.<sup>19</sup>

“Phenomenology begins when one stops. Marc stopped. He did not know why. But in that stopping, something began — something of the order of philosophy without knowing it.” — Mahoukou Law, manuscript

## Conclusion: “Every Being Exists Insofar As It Is Called”

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We began from a simple and rigorous demand: phenomenology must remain within the limits of phenomenality. We followed this demand to the territory Janicaud had not visited — that of subjects whose logos is impeded — and showed that it leads there not to an impasse, but to significant conceptual enlargements.

The Phenomenological Law of Interpellation has appeared as a phenomenology of embodied interpellation: rigorously phenomenal in its foundations, universal in its scope, transformative in its effects. It postulates no absolute invisible. It describes what shows itself — the palm on the wall, the differentiated withdrawal, the pivoting of the face — with the precision that the phenomenological method demands.

Along the way, we have introduced several new philosophical notions: the silent logocentrism of classical phenomenology; the distinction between virtual givability and effective givability; open intentionality; constitutive Resonance. These notions do not yet constitute a system — they constitute a program.

“He did not speak. Not a word since anyone had known him. But he communicated — God only knows how he communicated.” — Note from an educator, case file (anonymized composite)

This phrase is also a philosophical proposition. It says that communication — the Call — precedes language. That this something is real, observable, describable — even if “God only knows how.”<sup>20</sup> The phenomenology of embodied interpellation says how. It says that the Call shows itself in the palm on the wall, in the orientation of the face, in the brief sound repeated twice. And it says, finally, that this reception is possible — that it is learned, formed, practiced. This is not a metaphysical promise. It is a phenomenological description. And it is, we believe, a contribution to the program that Janicaud had traced — opened toward horizons he had not yet explored.

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“Every being exists insofar as it is called, responds, and resonates.” — Mahoukou  
Law, founding principle

Dominique Janicaud wanted phenomenology to remain faithful to what shows itself. The Mahoukou Law takes this imperative seriously — and shows that what shows itself is more vast, more embodied, and more universal than he had envisaged.

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16. These questions open what we would call a phenomenology of impeded cognitive experience — a descriptive task requiring collaboration between philosophers, neuropsychologists, and professionals in specialized education.
  17. A2R Training Kit — Mahoukou Law (Christian Mahoukou, 2026): transversal concept sheet and three paradigmatic case studies with complete triadic unfolding, designed for institutes of social work training (IRTS, IFTS). Available at [www.christianmahoukou.com](http://www.christianmahoukou.com).
  18. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, tr. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). The Mahoukou Law maintains the Lévinasê structure of asymmetry without the metaphysical excess that Janicaud critiques.
  19. This claim joins the work of Max van Manen on pedagogical thoughtfulness, while radicalizing it toward contexts (profound cognitive disability) he did not explore.
  20. It is significant that this phrase was written in an institutional file — the place of clinical language. The “God only knows how” is the admission of a wordless certainty. The phenomenology of embodied interpellation proposes to give it words — not to replace the intuition, but to extend and protect it.

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