

RESONANCE AT THE FRONTIER

Interpellation in Radically Asymmetrical Situations

The young person in a vegetative state · Prayer · Dialogue with a deceased person through their work

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Sixth founding text of the Mahoukou corpus

Triadic structure of interpellation (known as the Mahoukou Law)

Introduction

When One Cannot Respond in the Ordinary Forms

Nassim is twenty-two years old. A road accident eighteen months ago left him in a state of minimal consciousness. His mother comes every day. She speaks to him — of what has happened, of what she has cooked, of the song he loved. She holds his hand. She observes — a variation in his breathing, a slight movement of the fingers, a tear that sometimes appears. She does not know what he hears, nor what he understands. But she knows — with a certainty that needs no verification to be real — that she speaks to him and that he responds in his own way. And something in her has changed in these eighteen months. She is no longer the same person.

This scene poses to the phenomenology of interpellation a question that none of the earlier texts in the corpus had yet directly confronted: what happens to the triadic structure when one of the two subjects cannot respond in the ordinary forms of Response?

Three paradigmatic situations share this structure and will be examined. The first is the relation with a subject in a vegetative state or state of minimal consciousness. The second is prayer addressed to an interlocutor whose response is not verifiable by ordinary criteria. The third is dialogue with a deceased person through their work.

The phenomenology of interpellation proposes a third way: describing what actually takes place in these situations, without reducing or mythifying it. And this description reveals something precise: radically asymmetrical situations do not refute the triadic structure — they reveal it in its limit forms.

► **The central thesis of this text**

Radically asymmetrical situations do not constitute exceptions to the triadic structure of interpellation — they constitute its most revealing limit forms. In these situations, the Response gives itself otherwise: through the body, through silence, through the work. And Resonance may be unilaterally accomplished — that is, occur in only one of the two subjects without this constituting an impediment. Unilateral Resonance is a modality proper to certain forms of relation, not a failed triad.

Chapter 1

The Relation with the Young Person in a Vegetative State or Minimal Consciousness The Call of Presence

Pierre Bustany, neurologist, describes what he observed in PET scans on patients in vegetative states to whom personally emotionally charged phrases were read. In several cases, brain regions associated with emotional processing and language activated. The patient did not respond. But something in them received. The phenomenological question is not: what happens in the brain? It is: what happens in the relation?

1.1 What neurology of minimal consciousness states says to phenomenology

Contemporary neurology has revealed something that goes beyond behavioural distinction: patients diagnosed as vegetative on behavioural criteria may present coherent brain activations in response to significant stimuli — particularly emotionally charged stimuli, proper names, familiar voices. Adrian Owen and colleagues showed that certain vegetative patients can, through brain activity measured in fMRI, respond to simple questions with answers significantly above chance.

What these data say to the phenomenology of interpellation is precise: the Response does not necessarily require an observable behavioural form to be real. There may be a

Response that does not pass through the ordinary channels of speech, gesture, or conscious gaze — a Response that gives itself in the sub-verbal, bodily, infra-behavioural register.

1.2 The Call of presence: an originary form of address

In the relation with a subject in a vegetative or minimal consciousness state, the Call takes a form that the phenomenology of interpellation had not yet thematised with this precision: the Call of presence. Not a verbally formulated Call, not a deliberate gesture of address — but presence itself as Call.

Merleau-Ponty described intercorporeality — direct communication between two bodies in a shared space — as the most fundamental form of encounter. Before words, before conscious gazes, two bodies sharing a space mutually co-constitute each other. This intercorporeality is what makes the Call of presence possible: the mother's body addresses something to Nassim's body that precedes and exceeds any conscious formulation by either.

The Call of presence is not metaphorical. It is phenomenologically real — it is the most originary form of address, the one that precedes language and on which language grafts itself. In situations of minimal consciousness, it is this originary form that remains when all others have disappeared.

1.3 The sub-verbal Response: what responds without speaking

The Response in situations of minimal consciousness cannot take ordinary forms. But it is not therefore absent. It gives itself in what caregivers and relatives name — often hesitantly, as if naming risked de-realising it — the signs.

A variation in breathing rhythm when a familiar voice speaks. A slight movement of the fingers when a hand is placed. A tear that appears while a letter is read. A change in muscular tone when a loved piece of music is played. These phenomena are documented in the clinical literature.

What characterises the sub-verbal Response in minimal consciousness situations: it is contextual (it arises in connection with the specific Call), differential (it distinguishes familiar voices from unknown voices, loved music from indifferent music), and

sufficient to produce Resonance in the one who receives it. These three properties confer on it the phenomenological status of Response — not mere reflex.

1.4 Resonance in the caregiver and family

What is phenomenologically undeniable in the relation with a subject in a vegetative or minimal consciousness state is the Resonance on the side of those who accompany. Relatives who maintain regular presence, who speak, read, sing, hold the hand — these persons are transformed. Not by the effect of an illusion nor by the power of imagination. By the reality of the relation they inhabit.

These transformations are Resonances in the precise phenomenological sense: structural modifications of the subject's relation to themselves, to the other, or to the situation. They are not psychological effects of the situation — they are produced by the relation itself.

1.5 Specific impediment: when presence is treated as absence

The form of dialogical impediment specific to these situations is particularly grave: treating presence as absence. When caregivers, families, institutions decide — explicitly or implicitly — that the vegetative subject is no longer there, that they receive nothing, that they no longer have a relational life, they suppress the Call before it is even launched.

To treat presence as absence is to commit the most grave phenomenological error in these situations: to suppress the Call by prior decision. It is to decide that the triad is impossible before having even attempted it — and thus to produce oneself the impediment one believed merely to be observing.

Bibliographical note. Adrian Owen et al., "Detecting Awareness in the Vegetative State", Science, 313 (2006), p. 1402. Joseph Giacino et al., "The minimally conscious state: definition and diagnostic criteria", Neurology, 58 (2002), pp. 349–353. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible (trans. A. Lingis, Northwestern UP, 1968).

Chapter 2

Prayer The Call Addressed to an Interlocutor Whose Response Is Not Verifiable

Thérèse of Lisieux notes in her Journal: "I do not make meditation as devout persons do, I do not know how to recite beautiful prayers from books... I do as children who cannot read, I simply say to the good God what I want to say to him." And Simone Weil, in a letter to a friend: "To recite the Our Father with absolute attention is as if one were putting into contact the highest part of the soul with God himself, or with what is highest in the universe."

2.1 Prayer as the paradigmatic form of asymmetrical Call

Prayer is phenomenologically one of the purest forms of asymmetrical Call. It possesses all the properties of the Call identified by the phenomenology of interpellation: singularity of address, excess over all informational content, dialogical opening. But it differs from the ordinary Call on one decisive point: the Response cannot be verified by the criteria of ordinary intersubjective experience.

The philosophical tradition has developed numerous responses to this asymmetry. Negative theology says: God's response exceeds any form we could recognise as response. Theology of grace says: the response is already given in the very capacity to pray. Phenomenology does not settle these theological questions. But it can describe what happens in the praying subject — and this description is philosophically significant independently of the question of God's existence.

2.2 Fertile silence: a form of Response

What praying persons of all traditions describe with remarkable consistency — across very different vocabularies — is the experience of a silence that is not empty. A silence that responds. Not a silence that says something identifiable and transcribable — but a silence in which something gives itself that modifies the subject's relation to themselves, to the other, to the situation.

This fertile silence is phenomenologically distinct from empty silence. Empty silence is the absence of response — the orphaned Call, the cry that finds no echo. Fertile silence is a form of response that does not pass through the ordinary channels of communication — giving itself in the register of presence, of interior modification, of what mystics have

named in a thousand ways: consolation, illumination, the peace that surpasses all understanding.

► Fertile silence as a form of Response

Fertile silence is not the absence of response — it is a form of response that does not pass through the ordinary channels of communication. It has the structure of the phenomenological Response: it is contextual, differential, and it produces Resonance. What distinguishes it from empty silence is precisely the Resonance it produces or fails to produce — and it is the subject themselves who can recognise this, in the horizon of their lived experience, without this recognition being externally verifiable.

2.3 The distinction between prayer as monologue and prayer as interpellation

Prayer as monologue is a prayer in which the subject speaks without waiting for a response — they pour out, implore, recite, discharge an obligation — but without constituting themselves as the possible addressee of a response. They do not open the dialogical space.

Prayer as interpellation is a prayer in which the subject genuinely exposes themselves — in which they recognise themselves as the possible addressee of a response whose form they do not know in advance. They suspend their certainties, open themselves to being surprised, accept that something may arrive from the address they launch. It is this exposure that is the condition of Resonance.

Genuine prayer is not primarily a word pronounced — it is an exposure to response. It is the act of constituting oneself as the possible addressee of a return Call. This is why mystics insist on interior silence as the condition of prayer: not to fall silent, but to open oneself to what might come.

2.4 Spiritual Resonance as structural modification

Resonance in prayer — when it occurs — is phenomenologically one of the most profound structural modifications the triad can produce. The convergent descriptions found in mystical literature describe this Resonance in terms that can be read phenomenologically: a modification in the relation to time (contemplatives speak of an expanded present), in the relation to the other (an increased capacity to receive the

singularity of others), in the relation to death (no longer the threatening horizon but the limit that gives life its density).

Prayer as interpellation reveals a property of Resonance that ordinary situations left in shadow: Resonance does not require that the Response be verifiable in order to be real. It requires only that the Call have been launched with genuine existential engagement and that something has been structurally modified in the horizon of the subject's lived experience. This modification is the phenomenological criterion of Resonance — independently of all questions about the nature of the interlocutor.

Bibliographical note. Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul (trans. J. Clarke, ICS Publications, 1996). Simone Weil, Waiting for God (trans. E. Craufurd, Harper & Row, 1951). Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being (trans. T. Carlson, University of Chicago Press, 1991). Michel Henry, I Am the Truth (trans. S. Emanuel, Stanford UP, 2003).

Chapter 3

Dialogue with a Deceased Person Through Their Work The Deferred Call and Transmission

Étienne Gilson, medievalist, describes how his reading of Thomas Aquinas transformed his manner of thinking — not as if Thomas had transmitted information to him, but as if Thomas had addressed something to him. Hannah Arendt writes to Karl Jaspers after the latter's death: "You taught me to think." And Blaise Pascal notes: "I have no certainty about what Plato truly thought, but I am certain that he changed me." Three descriptions of the same phenomenon: a death has not prevented interpellation.

3.1 The work as deferred Call

A work — a philosophical text, a musical composition, a painting, a poem — is phenomenologically a deferred Call. The one who created it was not only addressing their contemporaries. They were addressing every reader, every listener, every viewer who would expose themselves to it with sufficient availability to receive its address.

This deferred Call has the three structural properties of every Call. Singularity of address: the genuine work does not address a generic reader — it seeks someone precise, someone ready to receive what it carries, someone whose existence will be touched in an irreplaceable way. Excess over all informational content: a work always carries more

than what it explicitly says. Dialogical opening: it opens a space in which something awaits — an unanswered question, an unresolved tension, an invitation to continue.

3.2 The response of the living reader

The Response to the deferred Call of the work is the response of the reader — or the listener, or the viewer. This Response has all the properties of the phenomenological Response: it is a free act, it engages the existence of the one who responds, it implies that they recognise themselves as the addressee of this particular Call.

What Gadamer names the fusion of horizons in hermeneutical interpretation is the moment when the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader meet and mutually modify each other. Phenomenologically: this is the moment of the engaged Response in dialogue with the work.

3.3 Resonance as transmission

Resonance in dialogue with a deceased person through their work takes a particular form that ordinary situations do not produce with the same intensity: transmission. When something transforms structurally in the reader of Pascal, in the listener of Bach, in the reader of Husserl — this transformation does not remain closed within the subject. It seeks to give itself in return, to transmit itself, to engender a new address.

Gilson transmitted what Thomas had given him — by commenting, defending, extending it in his own works. Arendt transmitted what Jaspers had given her — by developing a political thought bearing the imprint of their dialogue. Each reader transformed by a work becomes, to the extent of their availability and capacities, a relay of the original Call.

A deceased person's work continues to interpellate the living. The triad continues to be accomplished. And those who have been transformed become in turn callers — they launch Calls bearing the imprint of what they have received. This is the phenomenological form of cultural transmission: not the transmission of information, but the transmission of Resonances.

3.4 What death changes in the structure of the triad — and what it does not

Death suspends one thing precisely: correction in the course of dialogue. In ordinary interpellation, caller and called can adjust their relation in real time. This reciprocal adjusting is what death suspends.

But death does not suspend the triadic structure itself. The deferred Call of the work remains structurally a Call — it addresses, it engages, it opens a dialogical space. The reader's Response remains structurally a Response. And Resonance remains structurally a Resonance — it modifies the horizon of lived experience, it leaves a trace, it may be generative of new triads.

What death changes is the mode of Resonance: it can no longer be shared with the original caller. The Resonance produced in the reader of Thomas Aquinas cannot be received by Thomas — he will never know what he produced in Gilson. Resonance is unilaterally accomplished: it occurs in only one of the two subjects, without the other being able to be transformed in return.

What death reveals about the structure of the triad: Resonance may be accomplished unilaterally without this constituting an impediment. It is a modality proper to certain situations — those in which one of the subjects can no longer receive the other's Resonance. But this unilateral Resonance is real, transformative, and generative. It is not a failed triad — it is a triad accomplished under the conditions that death imposes.

*Bibliographical note. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (trans. J. Weinsheimer & D. Marshall, Continuum, 2004, Part III on language and hermeneutics). Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, Schocken, 1969). Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (trans. K. Blamey & D. Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, 2004).*

Conclusion

Unilaterally Accomplished Resonance : Fourth Property of Resonance — the Mahoukou Law Founded on Rock

The three chapters have conducted a phenomenological description of three radically asymmetrical situations. Each has revealed something precise about the triadic structure that ordinary situations left in shadow.

Chapter 1 showed that the Response does not require ordinary forms of communication to be real. The sub-verbal Response in minimal consciousness situations has the phenomenological structure of Response even if it does not have its ordinary form.

Chapter 2 showed that the Response does not require being verifiable in order to be real. The fertile silence of genuine prayer has the structure of a Response — it is contextual, differential, and produces Resonance.

Chapter 3 showed that the triad may be accomplished across time — beyond death. The deferred Call of the work, the living reader's Response, Resonance as transmission: death modifies the mode of accomplishment but does not suppress the structure.

The fourth property of Resonance

These three analyses converge toward the formulation of a fourth property of Resonance that existing canonical definitions had not yet isolated.

The three already established properties: Resonance is retroactive (it affects both subjects of the triad). Resonance is transformative (it modifies existential state, not only behaviour). Resonance is deferred (it reveals itself in duration, not necessarily in the instant of exchange).

The fourth property may now be formulated:

► Fourth property of Resonance: possible unilateral accomplishment

Resonance may be accomplished unilaterally — that is, occur in only one of the two subjects of the triad, without the other being able to be transformed in return — without this constituting a dialogical impediment. Unilateral Resonance is a modality proper to radically asymmetrical situations: minimal consciousness states, prayer, dialogue with a deceased person through their work. It is real, transformative, and potentially generative of new triads. It is not a failed triad — it is a triad accomplished under the conditions that asymmetry imposes.

What limit situations reveal about ordinary structure

Asymmetrical situations reveal that Resonance does not depend on the symmetry of exchange. It depends on the reality of the Call and the quality of the responding subject's exposure. They also reveal that Resonance is generative: it tends to transform itself into Call for others. The chain Aristotle → Aquinas → Gilson → his readers is the explicit form

of what every genuine Resonance carries within itself: the triad is constitutively generative of new triads.

The Mahoukou Law founded on rock

Radically asymmetrical situations do not constitute a refutation of the triadic structure — they constitute its most profound confirmation. By maintaining the structure in its most extreme forms, by revealing it where everything seemed bound to abolish it, they show that the triad describes something real that resists the most adverse conditions. The structure holds in the room of a vegetative patient. It holds in the silence of prayer. It holds across death and centuries.

The triad Call · Response · Resonance is not a description of the ideal exchange between two available, healthy, and lucid subjects. It is a description of the structure of existential encounter — in its ordinary form and in its limit forms, in reciprocity and in asymmetry, in life and in the proximity of death. This is why it is a phenomenological law and not a moral ideal. Limit situations have not broken it — they have tested it. And it has held.

The four properties of Resonance — reference formulary

▶ Property 1 — Retroactivity

Resonance affects both subjects of the triad, including the caller. The one who launches a genuine Call takes the risk of being themselves transformed by the relation they open.

▶ Property 2 — Existential transformation

Resonance is the phenomenological index of a structural modification of the subject's relation to themselves, to the other, or to the situation. It does not modify a behaviour or a representation — it modifies the very horizon of relational lived experience.

▶ Property 3 — Deferred temporality

Resonance reveals itself retrospectively, in duration, not necessarily in the instant of exchange. It is phenomenologically incompatible with a demand for real-time observability.

► **Property 4 — Possible unilateral accomplishment**

Resonance may be accomplished in only one of the two subjects of the triad — in radically asymmetrical situations — without this constituting an impediment. Unilateral Resonance is real, transformative, and generative of new triads. It is a modality proper to situations of minimal consciousness, prayer, and dialogue with a deceased person through their work.

Call · Response · Resonance

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