

IN THE MIDDLE

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I was in the middle before I knew I *had* begun.¹

AFTER

As Emmanuel Lévinas suggested, the work of Jacques Derrida can be seen as a marking a “line of demarcation” for a new understanding of philosophy akin to the Kantian break between the critical and the dogmatic.² I am not sure that Derrida himself would have been happy with such a confident assertion of this line of demarcation, keenly aware as he was of the proliferation of preisms and postisms that such an absolute break invites – and requires.³ Nonetheless, one could characterise this line – which would be neither linear nor swerve on a given vertical axis, but more than likely oscillate between and interlace all the preisms and postisms that it generated – as a recognition that philosophy can no longer sustain a system that sustains itself.⁴ My friend William Watkin and I often talk about what is *beyond* Derrida. Some have turned to Nancy, Agamben or Badiou to answer this question. From his very different readings of Lévinas and Blanchot, Derrida was preoccupied with the lure or temptation of the calculated absence of the step beyond, the *pas au-delà*.⁵ But as Nicholas Royle has suggested, it is perhaps more a question of what it means to be *after* Derrida.⁶ Being haunted by what is after, as Derrida himself said of Heidegger, is to endure what seems at once perpetually behind *and* ahead, before *and* in front.⁷

Derrida was preoccupied with the history of philosophy as a history that could not sustain an absolute system.⁸ Mindful of the dangers of our preisms and postisms, one might also say that this task dominated his work in the twenty years from *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* (1954) to *Glas* (1974).⁹ And while the task of reading a history of philosophy that cannot sustain its system went on without rest for the next thirty years – notably in the readings of Heidegger from the late 1970s to the late 1980s on the recollection or gathering back towards the logos – there is perhaps a new emphasis in the later work on an *a-venir* or *revenance*, a to come that is always coming back towards us from the past, which could be taken as a gesture towards a philosophy “after” system.¹⁰ However, I’d like to take a different prompt from Derrida’s work in the mid 1970s to think about the possibility of a philosophy after – behind *and* in front – system in relation to the old question of the object or thing.

A philosophy after system could not be taken as a philosophy without system. As Derrida argued in his work from the late 1960s, such a gesture above or beyond philosophy remains itself a quintessential gesture of metaphysics at its most resilient. Such a philosophical gesture must begin with the recognition that it can never make its own system or lack of system. On the contrary, as Derrida suggested in “Ja, or the *faux-bond* II”, an interview from 1975, “when I write ‘what interests me’, I am designating not only an *object* of interest, but the place that *I am in the middle of*, and precisely this place that I cannot exceed” (*Quand j’écris ‘ce qui m’intéresse’, je ne désigne pas seulement un objet d’intérêt mais le lieu au milieu de quoi je suis, et précisément ce lieu que je ne peux pas déborder*).¹¹ Stepping beyond, or rather after, the assumed subject engaging with an assured object, a philosophy without system always finds

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itself, and finds itself finding, “in the middle”. It does not find itself without a system, or in the confidence of an immunity from all systematisation, but it does find itself after any system because it is always “in the middle”. It is neither beyond nor above, but always *in the middle*.

Nor does this *in the middle* invite the mean (*mésos*) or medium of Aristotle: a middle that returns to itself and gains the middle ground or middle point, as vantage point or secure ground above everything else. Finding itself “in the middle” would also differ from the narrative legacy of the *Ars Poetica* and Horace’s celebration of *in media res*, of starting in the midst of things as the assurance or insurance of a middle that always finds itself between a beginning and an end.¹² “In the middle”, as I understand Derrida’s use of the phrase, offers neither a promise of beginning nor the redemption of an end.

I have long been fascinated by Derrida’s careful and persistent emphasis in his work on the phrase “what interests me”, and his attempts to retranslate the traditional opposition of interest and disinterest. As Derrida suggested, Kant himself kept turning to strategies and idealities of disinterest because he could not resolve the necessity for reason to have at once an interest and a disinterest.¹³ A philosophy *after* system would be a philosophy of dis-interest, but only in the sense of always finding itself in the most interesting of places, “in the middle”: I am *dis*-interested, divested of my own interest *as* I take an interest in “what interests me”. As I take an unavoidable interest, I am unavoidably dis-interested and find myself only finding that vast “ocean of words” of Plato’s aging Parmenides, ebbing and flowing, oscillating with what Lévinas called in his readings of the *Talmud*, an “oceanic rhythm”.¹⁴

A philosophy after system, an interest that dis-interests, a finding itself finding “in the middle”, would constantly be tempted by many life rafts. It would need to resist the lure of the manifold that could never be managed as much as the comfort of the fixed grid; it would also have to be on the watch not only for the self-evidence of the self-evident present, but also for those endless attempts to calculate on absence as another *resource*, as a pure and carefully calibrated resource of the other. It is also a question of finding oneself “in the middle” *with edges*.¹⁵ Finding myself in the middle “and precisely this place that I cannot exceed”, there is neither the apparent singularity of the edge nor the supposed hyperbolic alterity of the double edge, but there are always edges. I am always in the middle of what dis-interests me.

NO DOUBLE EDGES

We must start with the legacy of the concept of the edge. In the remarkable and difficult novel *The Last Jew* (*Yehudi ha-aharon*) (1982), the Israeli novelist Yoram Kaniuk describes a meeting between the narrator Obadiah Henkin and a nameless guest in a neighbour’s house, a refugee and a survivor from Europe. Kaniuk writes:

The guest was paralyzed, waving his arms like a double-edged sword, I don’t know why that image came into my mind, or a sword of the Lord of Hosts, in a Jew of all people a sword is like a shattered sanctuary, and that smashed shard muttered vague words that nobody understood but when he met my eyes, and maybe he saw there was a pain that touched his own pain, he told me in a few sentences about the Last Jew, but then he didn’t know who he was.¹⁶

Kaniuk raises the question here of the religious heritage of the phrase “double edged sword”. While there are references to swords that have been sharpened on both edges in *Judges* (3: 16) and in the *Proverbs* (5: 3-6), it is in the *New Testament* that one encounters an explicit link between God and the double edge.

Hebrews 4: 12-13, for example, reads in the *Authorised King James Version*: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”.¹⁷ While this older meaning of double-edged sword differs from the notion of a double action, of a simultaneous gain and loss that may

or may not be co-ordinated or gathered into some kind of resource, this two-edged sword suggests a unique sharpness, a sharpness on both sides that has the force to divide what cannot be divided. This double-edged sword acts as an analogy for the *logos*, for “the word of God”, that is even “sharper than any two edged [*distomos*] sword”. It is the analogy for a *logos* that is always *more* than double mouthed (*distomos*). This double edge as theological analogy has the force to distinguish and to divide those most metaphysical of concepts, the soul (*psuchê*) and the spirit (*pneuma*). The double action of the double edge remains a metaphysical concept *par excellence*.

As Derrida suggested in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000), the Christian tradition, and indeed Nancy’s proposed “deconstruction of Christianity”, presumes that there is *already* a Christian body to be deconstructed.¹⁸ As a metaphysical concept, the double-edged sword presents us with the presumption that there is *already* a double edge, an edge that is doubled and sharpened enough to presents us with a clear and agonising dilemma, with a clearly apparent alternative of cost and benefit or a self-evident impasse or even a doubling that registers the pure or certain effect of alterity. Like the head of John the Baptist, this double edge is handed to us on a plate.

If there is a metaphysical tradition of double edges one cannot separate this from the ideality of empiricism. It is very interesting to note for example that, as far as I am aware, none of the great British empiricists – Hobbes, Locke or Hume – use the word or concept of the edge in any of their principal works. There are no edges to the seventeenth and eighteenth century construction of the object or the thing in Britain. It is almost as if this invention of a comprehensive and reasonably cohesive empiricism requires the *absence* of the edge, of double edges. I find this absence of edges quite remarkable. One possible explanation for this absence is the reverberating influence of Aristotle’s reflections in the *Metaphysics* on the *aporia* that there are no straight edges in nature, which exposes the gap between our sciences and the objects they describe. Aristotle writes: “Nor, again, can astronomy be concerned with sensible magnitudes or with this heaven of ours; for as sensible lines are not like those of which the geometrician speaks (since there is nothing sensible which is straight or curved in that sense; the circle touches the ruler [straight edge] not at a point, but along a line as Protagoras used to say in refuting the geometrician), so like the paths and orbits our heaven are not like those which astronomy discusses, nor have the symbols of the astronomer the same nature as the stars.”¹⁹ The *aporia* of the edge confronts the would-be empiricist with a gap that cannot be bridged.

But this is not quite the whole story. Berkeley, and before him, Descartes have something to say about edges and double edges, as if it is only those who place something beyond or above the *epistêmê* of the empirical who can admit edges into their philosophy. In his interminable replies in the *Meditations* to the interminable presentation of the hyperbolic *cogito*, Descartes writes: “doubt is a two-edged sword, and while avoiding one edge, it cuts itself on the other.”²⁰ This is the cost of doubt: it avoids and it still “cuts itself”. But this is also the assurance of doubt, of the radical doubt that is used as a tool, as a weapon even, to guarantee the unavailability of that which does not cut: the *cogito*. The double action of the double edge is part of the invention and refutation of the senses, the sensible and the body to-be-refuted.

BERKELEY: IDEAS AND THINGS

Berkeley’s use of the edge is different from the more obvious theological tradition of the double edge: his edges are more mundane, more technical. In *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709), for example, there is question of what happens when we are looking at “the extreme edge of the horizon”.²¹ Some twenty-four years later in *The Theory of Vision, or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained* (1733), Berkeley is still interested in what happens during the “experiment of hanging up a ring edge wise to the eye”.²² These passing references to edges are hardly remarkable or indeed critical, but in the absence of edges from the philosophy of Hobbes, Locke and Hume, they take on a distinct resonance in the period that constructed the language and concepts of British empiricism. As Derrida says of Berkeley in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, “in truth I never stop of thinking of him while writing about touch”.²³

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In *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley includes the “edge of the horizon” in his general argument that our perception of “the distance, magnitude, and situation” of an object is “rather an act of judgement grounded on experience, than of sense”.²⁴ Berkeley uses the example of the moon appearing to be larger when seen on the horizon and smaller when seen at the meridian to explain this distinction between perception as a composite judgement rather than an immediate sense impression. Because, of course, the point is that the moon never changes its size. “What is it that can put this cheat on the understanding?” Berkeley asks.²⁵

For Berkeley, there can only be one answer: the unavoidable association and disassociation of sense and experience. When it comes to seeing, he writes: “The visible object absolutely, or in itself, is little taken note of, the mind still carrying its view from that to some tangible ideas, which have been observed to be connected with it, and by that means come to be suggested by it.”²⁶ The edge, in this case the edge of the horizon, is part of this process of not seeing, or of not needing to see a visible object, because the experience of the mind – and its mechanisms of the association of ideas – has already done the work for us.²⁷ I cannot see the edge of an object or the edge of a thing, because I do not need to see it. I already have an idea of an edge. The edge is only an effect of an associative relation between sense and experience.

This view of the edge of an object or thing being in the midst of a complex set of relations is itself only part of Berkeley’s wider narrative, which he makes explicit in the later *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710). In Berkeley’s work, the relation to the edge of objects and things is always set in a larger framework, a framework that stands *above or beyond* what is “in the middle”. In other words, when it comes to what is “in the middle” there is always a meta-narrative. With a single mindedness that one would almost associate with Heidegger, Berkeley refutes the metaphysical construction of the concept of matter, of a spiritless non-perceived or unthinking substratum that supports all so-called external material objects and things. He also rejects the notion of general autonomous abstract ideas that have taken on the status of universal deductions or truths (that are somehow more than the sum of all gathered particulars) due to the misuse and abuse of language.²⁸

These two errors are of course related – the worst general abstract idea is the idea of matter – but they are also quite distinct and require different solutions. If we can sort out language, Berkeley argues, we can take care of abstract ideas. If we recognize that our individual ideas shape and determine our perceptions, giving *existence* (extension, figure and motion) to objects and things, and that these ideas are in turn shaped and determined by spirit – both our own active spirits and the spirit of God – then we can dispense entirely with any concept of matter. As Berkeley says, we can then *interchange* the word idea and the word thing: a thing can be an idea and an idea can be a thing.²⁹ When we are talking about the edges of things, we are really talking about the edges of ideas. The edge is no more and no less than an idea.

Berkeley leaves us with the edge of an object or thing that always exceeds the middle in which it finds itself. It is an edge without matter, as an idea of the mind that is configured, regulated and animated by active spirit.³⁰ Despite this, Berkeley’s idea of an edge is quite different from Descartes’ double-edge. Berkeley insists that it is absurd for us to think that there is an unperceived material object or thing with edges that is just somehow “out there”. At the same time, because there are other spirit driven minds with ideas beyond us, and because there is always the spirit of God – “the ultimate recourse” grounding Berkeley’s philosophy, as Derrida observes in *On Touching* – there are enough crossing and repeating perceptions to give our thing or object with edges a consistency and stability.³¹ Though I think Berkeley would argue that the spirit of God fills all the gaps, one can see Hume’s later anxiety about the continuity of our sense shaped perceptions as a response to Berkeley.³² With all of us having ideas of edges, as Derrida suggests, there would still be the chance or mischance of gaps, of patches where objects are without edges or even edges are without objects.³³ If there is an edge to what is “in the middle”, Berkeley suggests, it is always our idea of an edge, an edge imbued with existence only by our perception. Like the size of the moon, the edge is always changing in our own minds. This remarkable reaction to the empiricism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century leave us with this curiosity: the immaterial edge that still has an edge.

HEIDEGGER: X IS NOT Y

If Berkeley suggests that we make our own edges, and that these edges are only possible because they are ideas in our minds activated by spirit, Heidegger begins his 1950 lecture on “The Thing” with an extraordinary general assertion, a grand all x is y . “All distance in time and space are shrinking”, he announces.³⁴ *Techné* is triumphing and yet, Heidegger insists, it still cannot overcome or master nearness and remoteness, or what he had described in *Being and Time* (1927) as the movement of the *Entfernung*, the withdrawal that reverses distance to make proximity possible.³⁵ We might travel to the moon, Heidegger argues in 1950, but the remoteness of the moon still resists the epoch of technological and scientific domination. As is well known, Heidegger uses a jug as an example of a thing that retains its nearness and remoteness. This jug has a base and it has sides. It also has a handle. Heidegger gives little attention to the handle, but he makes much of the fact that with a jug we pour “wine between the sides” and “over the bottom”.³⁶ He does this because he wants to emphasize that the jug is first and foremost a container or holding vessel. The jug is a void that gathers and gives or outpours. For Heidegger, a thing is a giving gathering.³⁷ This giving gathering reiterates that the jug-as-a-thing is distinguished not by “the material of which it consists, but in the void that it holds.”³⁸ The jug as a thing stands on its own, Heidegger argues, and supports itself as a thing that only becomes an object “if we place it before us”. Berkeley’s world is clearly a world only of objects. Heidegger, in contrast, is interested in that which does not define itself as “a represented object”.³⁹

There are, at the very least, a number of questions that one could raise here. Can a void hold? Can a void maintain itself – and the other that it holds? Can a thing stand on its own? Can we be assured that a thing only becomes an object “if we place it before us”? How do we place an object *before us*? Despite its status as a more than material self-supporting free standing giving gathering void that resists the most banal forms of modern technology, how much can a thing avoid becoming an object or an object find itself becoming a thing? But most of all, why does the thing have no edges?

The jug has sides, a bottom and a handle, but Heidegger – much like the key figures of the British empirical tradition – is not *interested* in the edges of the jug. The Heideggerian account of the thing dispense with edges. At the very least, it is possible that the edge – which is neither simply inside nor outside of the jug – would resist being gathered into a giving gathering void as an example of the thing that things. Taking an interest in the jug, Heidegger may dispense with the assumption of the representational object that is always found in its relation to a subject, but how far can the Heideggerian thing avoid being found in a giving that gathers, a gathering that always gives itself *as* gathering? As Derrida remarked in his 1989 essay “Heidegger’s Ear: Philopolemology (*Geschlecht IV*)”, “At bottom logocentricism is perhaps not so much the gesture that consists in placing the *lógos* at the center as the interpretation of *lógos* as *Versammlung*, that is the gathering that precisely concentrates what it configures”.⁴⁰

There are also some structural or even systematic similarities between Berkeley and Heidegger. Both define their reflections on the thing or idea of an object through a reaction against a philosophical tradition: Berkeley against Hobbes and against Locke, Heidegger against Kant.⁴¹ Both undertake to separate and discriminate x from y . For Heidegger, the thing is not an object perceived by a subject. For Berkeley, the idea of the object is a not a material object. With or without edges, the object as idea or the thing that is not an object repeats the structural assurance that x cannot be y , that x can be completely separated from y . Objects or things in the Berkeleyian or Heideggerian inheritance tell us that it is possible to take a vantage point or third position above and beyond finding oneself “in the middle” so that we can always keep x away from y . What is the idea of the represented object or of the thing that things? Keeping x away from y .

THIS PLACE THAT I CANNOT EXCEED

When Heidegger writes in *Being and Time* that, “as being, Dasein is something that has been thrown; it has been brought into its “there”, but *not* of its own accord”, it is tempting to treat Derrida’s emphasis on taking an interest in “the place that *I am in the middle of*, and precisely this place that I cannot exceed” as a form of *Geworfenheit* (thrownness).⁴² Despite this apparent association of thrownness with a finding oneself in a middle that one cannot exceed, Heidegger’s initial definition of *Geworfenheit* reiterates the structure of keeping x away from y that he will use in his later account of the thing. When it comes to thrownness, Heidegger argues, “the pure ‘that it is’ shows itself, but the ‘whence’ and the ‘whither’ remain in darkness”.⁴³ Resisting the present-at-hand, thrownness is the showing of a “pure ‘that it is’ ” that can be distinguished from an epistemic orientation or direction. Heidegger writes: “This characteristic of Dasein’s Being—this ‘that it is’—is veiled in its ‘whence’ and ‘whither’, yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the “*thrownness*” of this entity into its ‘there’; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is ‘there’ ”.⁴⁴

Thrown in a particular and necessary way so that it always *arrives* “there”, *Geworfenheit* is already a stage or way station, a mechanism, in a meta-narrative with very definite and determined ends. To cite only a few of these narrative ends: thrownness already operates as a form of the veiling and unveiling of *alêtheia*; it will play an important role in constituting the possibility of the necessary inauthenticity and absorption in the “they” which leads to the structures of care and Being-towards-death; and, despite Heidegger’s caution, it still relies on a concept of world.⁴⁵ Most significantly, thrownness “belongs to Dasein”.⁴⁶ In other words, *Geworfenheit* belongs to Heidegger’s remarkable attempt to define Being-in-the-world beyond the categories of subject and object and interiority and exteriority. Heidegger writes:

When Dasein directs itself towards something and grasps it, it does not somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally encapsulated, but its primary kind of Being is such that it is always ‘outside’ alongside entities which it encounters and which belong to a world already discovered. Nor is any inner sphere abandoned when Dasein dwells alongside the entity to be known, and determines its character; but even in this ‘Being-outside’ alongside the object, Dasein is still ‘inside’, if we understand this in the correct sense; that is to say, it is itself ‘inside’ as a Being-in-the-world which knows.⁴⁷

At the same time, *Geworfenheit* also belongs to Heidegger’s attempt to describe Being-in-the-world as “a structure which is primordially and constantly *whole*”.⁴⁸ While this narrative of thrownness resists the present-at-hand, it also never ceases to tend *towards* a spatiality of proximity and closeness, a being-in-the-midst or a being-alongside that begins and ends its journey at home with itself, *chez-soi*.⁴⁹ Situated by the distinction between the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand, Dasein’s relation to things is predicated on the structure of the *Entfernung*, on withdrawal as the possibility of a proximity that remains with *Dasein*. As Heidegger writes, “*in Dasein there lies an essential tendency to closeness*”.⁵⁰

Derrida’s *au milieu de* takes quite a different journey from *Geworfenheit*. For Derrida, “when I write ‘what interests me’, I am designating not only an *object* of interest, but the place that *I am in the middle of*, and precisely this place that I cannot exceed”. In other words, “in the middle” indicates both taking an interest in objects or things that dis-interests me *and* finding myself in the place “that I cannot exceed”. Dis-interested from what interests *me* and yet still unavoidably interested, I *remain* in the midst of what I cannot go beyond. If this “in the middle” has edges, they are only the edges of what I cannot exceed, the edges where I remain in the midst, the edges that cannot be maintained, sharpened, avoided or erased. If “in the middle” has edges, these are edges that cannot keep x away from y, nor enable a Hegelian colonisation of the negative which puts x and y to work for an assured meta-narrative. I am “in the middle”, because x already cannot be kept away from y.

 THE TWINKLING HEAVEN OF THE BOWL

F. Scott Fitzgerald's extraordinary story, "The Cut-glass Bowl" (1920) offers a different narrative for addressing the question of objects or things from an "in the middle" *with* edges, edges that cannot go beyond "the place that *I am in the middle of*". From the first lines, Fitzgerald creates a fictional world of the 1890s in America in which we find ourselves in the middle of a vast array of objects or things with edges. He writes: "There was a rough stone age and a smooth stone age and a bronze age, and many years afterward a cut-glass age. In the cut-glass age, when young ladies had persuaded young men with long, curly moustaches to marry them, they sat down several months afterward and wrote thank you notes for all sorts of cut-glass presents – punch bowls, finger-bowls and dinner-glasses, wine-glasses, ice cream dishes, bonbon dishes, decanters, and cases – for, though cut glass was nothing new in the nineties, it was then especially busy reflecting the dazzling light of fashion from the Back Bay to the fastnesses of the Middle West".⁵¹

As soon as these sharp-edged wedding gifts are *given*, as soon as they inhabited and fill the space or void of the home of the newly-wed couple, these objects or things begin to break and fracture, creating new and sharper edges as they are "scarred and maimed", and one by one are lost like some vulnerable and silent endangered species.⁵² As George Perec eloquently observed in his novel *Life: A User's Manual* (1978), objects and things are always breaking and always getting lost, always inviting chance and accidents, and yet the bits and pieces, the small sharp jagged edges remain concealed and misplaced in the corners of rooms – a detritus that will outlive us all.⁵³ Fitzgerald is, I think, more interested in the relation between a prominent object or thing – in this case a large glass bowl on the side-board in the dining room of Mrs and Mrs Harold Piper's home – and the span of a human life from marriage to death.

At first, as Mrs Piper herself explains, the cut-glass bowl is given a history as a represented and representative object. It had been given as a gift by a disappointed suitor who said to her that it was "as hard as you are and as beautiful and as empty and as easy to see through".⁵⁴ But this Berkeleyian phase of the idea of the cut-glass bowl, which only exists as it is perceived and represented by – and represents – Mrs Harold Piper, is soon superseded. As the story opens, Evelyn Piper's lover Fred Gedney is hiding in the living room when her husband returns from work. It is only when "Gedney's arm had struck the big cut-glass bowl", and "a hollow ringing note like a gong echoed and re-echoed through the house", that he is discovered.⁵⁵ Unseen, the void of the cut-glass bowl rings out, not as the encircling and gathering "ringing of the world's mirror play" with which Heidegger ends his essay, but with a death knell, a *glas*.⁵⁶ This is of course is the title of Derrida's 1974 work on Hegel and Genet, a work with a thing or object as a title and the background to his 1975 interview "Ja, or the *faux-bond*". The *glas* is the resonance of the unseen object that belongs neither to a subject nor to a thing that is kept safe and held away from the object. The *glas* marks the refusal of an edge – double or otherwise – that would *lead us out of* the middle of things, in the middle where we find ourselves.⁵⁷

After this terrible ringing out of the thing or object as death-knell, the broken marriage of Harold and Evelyn Piper survives as a marriage without love. As Derrida noted in *Glas*, for Hegel "love is a unity that feels itself", and the first impact of the *glas* in Fitzgerald's story is a union without unity.⁵⁸ The cut-glass bowl next appears when the Pipers' young daughter cuts her thumb on the bowl on the evening of a dinner party. She then contracts blood poisoning, which leads to one of her hands being amputated.⁵⁹ Far from the hand privileging the human and mastery of tools and equipment, here the edges of things or objects take the hand away and put an "artificial hand" – a prosthetic – in its place.⁶⁰ For Fitzgerald, this is the edge, the sharpest edge that always cuts: we can never find an edge or even a double edge to get out of the middle where we find ourselves. The void of the thing outpours, giving and gathering, Heidegger says. But for Fitzgerald, as one might expect, the punch that is mixed in the large cut-glass bowl on the night of the dinner party at the Pipers' house gives and does not gather, it only separates and spreads out, scattering, breaking and shattering. The harvest, the saturnalia that Derrida traces in his reading of Hegel's attempts to find the safe edge of absolute knowledge above and beyond the things and objects of this world, destroys this critical dinner party engineered to save Mr Harold Piper's failing company. The guests scatter, never to reunite, and the business venture collapses.⁶¹

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Finally, at the end of the story, some years later there is a letter with “an edge of white” lying in the cut-glass bowl informing Evelyn Piper that her son has been killed in the First World War.⁶² The *glas* glitters with a multiplicity of multicoloured edges that remain. Fitzgerald writes: “There was the bowl, reflecting the electric light in crimson squares edged with black and yellow squares edged with blue, ponderous and glittering, grotesquely and triumphantly ominous ... With its massive, brooding passivity it lay there in the centre of her house as it had lain for years, throwing out the ice-like beams of a thousand eyes, perverse glitterings merging each into each, never ageing, never changing”.⁶³ When Evelyn Piper then takes the cut-glass bowl out of the house and tries to smash it on the ground, she slips and is killed. She is killed perhaps by the fall and perhaps by the “ice-like” shards of the shattered glass bowl. Trying to remove the death-knell as thing or object that remains “in the middle”, she is killed by the promise or redemption of reaching the edge, of taking the middle out of the middle: the pure edge as death-wish. The story ends: “And all over the moonlit sidewalk around the still, black form, hundreds of prisms and cubes and splinters of glass reflected the light in little gleams of blue, and black edged with yellow, and yellow, and crimson edged with black”.⁶⁴

What matters in the end for Fitzgerald is perhaps not the curse of a “lost generation” brought down by a fateful series of disappointments, accidents and tragedies, nor that things and objects remain and never cease to announce our mortality – what matters is that the thing or object is that which leaves us, always, *in the middle* and, as Derrida said, “precisely this place that I cannot exceed”. Fitzgerald leaves us in the middle that cannot be exceeded, with the edges of the thing or object that have no beyond and which never stop cutting. He writes: “The bowl seemed suddenly to turn itself over and then to distend and swell until it became a great canopy that glittered and trembled over the room, over the house, and, as the walls melted slowly into mist, Evelyn saw that it was still moving out, out and far away from her, shutting off far horizons and suns and moons and stars except as inky blots seen faintly through it. And under it walked all the people, and the light that came through to them was refracted and twisted until shadow seemed light and light seemed shadow – until the whole panorama of the world became changed and distorted under the twinkling heaven of the bowl”.⁶⁵

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NOTES

1. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Vivien Jones (London: Penguin, 2003), 359.
2. Emmanuel Lévinas, "Wholly Otherwise", in *Re-Reading Lévinas*, trans. Ruben Berezdivin, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 3.
3. Jacques Derrida, "Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and other Small Scismsisms", in *The States of "Theory": History, Art and Critical Discourse*, ed. and intro. David Carroll, trans. Anne Tomiche (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 63-94.
4. On Derrida's critique of linearization and the *clinamen*, see: *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); "My Chances/*Mes Chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies", trans. Irene Harvey and Avital Ronell, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 344-76.
5. Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 79-153; "Pas", in *Parages*, nouvelle édition revue et augmentée (Paris: Galilée, 2003), 17-108.
6. Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
7. Dominique Janicaud, "An Interview with Jacques Derrida", in *Heidegger en France*, 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 2005), II: 115.
8. On Derrida's early reflections on philosophy as a system that cannot sustain itself, see for example: "Force and signification", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3-30; "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278-94; "The Ends of Man", in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 109-136; "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology", in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 69-108.
9. Jacques Derrida, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, trans. Marian Hobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavy Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).
10. Jacques Derrida, "The *Retrait* of Metaphor", *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 48-80; "Envoi", in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 94-128; "Geschlecht I: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference", in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, trans. Ruben Bevezdivin and Elizabeth Rottenberg, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 7-26; "Heidegger's Hand (*Geschlecht II*)", in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, trans. John P. Leavy Jr. and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 27-62; *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology (*Geschlecht IV*)", in *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, ed. John Sallis, trans. John Leavy Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 163-218. See also, "Pas".
11. Jacques Derrida, "Ja, or the *faux-bond II*", in *Points ... Interviews 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 67; "Ja, ou le faux-bond", in *Points de suspension: Entretiens*, choisis et présentés par Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 1992), 72.
12. Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 1929).
13. Sean Gaston, *Derrida and Disinterest* (London: Continuum, 2006), 55-68.
14. Plato, *Parmenides*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892) IV: 137a; Emmanuel Lévinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 8.
15. Derrida's interest in "the place that *I am in the middle of*" can also be distinguished from his earlier work on the margin. As he argued in "Tympan" (1972), the margin can be understood as both a traditional concept of a limit that "maintains itself within and without" and as that which can only mark itself as itself by doubling or re-marking itself and therefore exceeding itself. Derrida treats the margin as part of the series *marque, marche, marge* (mark, step, margin) that re-marks, steps beyond and exceeds itself as a limit. See, Jacques Derrida, "Tympan", in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xxiii-xxv.
16. Yoram Kaniuk, *The Last Jew*, trans. Barbara Harshav (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 26.
17. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
18. Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 218-

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19. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, 3 vols (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 1975), I: 998a.
20. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), II: 326.
21. George Berkeley, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, in *Philosophical Works*, ed. Michael R. Ayres (London: J. M. Dent, 1975), § 77.
22. George Berkeley, *The Theory of Vision, or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained*, in *Philosophical Works*, ed. Michael R. Ayres (London: J. M. Dent, 1975), § 66.
23. *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, 98.
24. *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, § 3.
25. *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, § 74.
26. *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, § 74.
27. One can see the legacy of this idea in Gombrich's notion of "the beholder's share". According to Gombrich, the viewer engages with and completes a pictorial representation by filling in the intended gaps or sharpening the blurred edges that have been left in the work by the artist. See, E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 154-244. This psychological theory relies on the concept of an assured and infinite incompleteness that Derrida criticised in his early readings of Husserl. See, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavy, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 117.
28. On this ground, for example, Berkeley refutes the idea of an absolute or pure space, George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), § 116.
29. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* § 38-9.
30. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 57.
31. *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, 99. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 70, 90, 145.
32. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 146. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Niddich, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 193.
33. I have addressed Derrida's work on the gap (*écart, béance, décalage*) in *The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida* (London: Continuum, 2006), and his work on chance in the forthcoming *Derrida, Literature and War: Absence and the Chance of Meeting* (London: Continuum, 2009).
34. Martin Heidegger, "The Thing", in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 165.
35. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), H 104-5. I have addressed Derrida's retranslation and critique of the Heideggerian *Entfernung* in *The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida* (61-2).
36. "The Thing", 168.
37. "The Thing", 172-74.
38. "The Thing", 169.
39. "The Thing", 167.
40. "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology (*Geschlecht IV*)", 187.
41. On Berkeley's complex relationship to Locke see, *Locke and Berkeley: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C. B. Martin and D. M. Armstrong (London: Macmillan, 1968).
42. *Being and Time*, H 284.
43. *Being and Time*, H 134.
44. *Being and Time*, H 135.
45. *Being and Time*, H 276, 285, 64-65. On the concept of the world, see also Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 47-57; Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone", in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, trans. Sam Weber (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), § 27.
46. *Being and Time*, H 179.
47. *Being and Time*, H 62.
48. *Being and Time*, H 180.
49. *Being and Time*, H 54. See also Macquarrie and Robinson's note, 80 n. 4. On Derrida's reading of space and time in

Heidegger's work, see "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" and "*Ousia* and *Grammè*: Note on a note from *Being and Time*", in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 29-67. I have attempted to trace this work in *Starting With Derrida: Plato, Aristotle and Hegel* (London: Continuum, 2007), 38-59, 60-80. On the question of the *chez-soi*, see also Jacques Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Anne Pascale-Braut and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

50. *Being and Time*, H 42, 69, 105. See also, *Starting With Derrida*, 49-50. On the question of the hand, see "Heidegger's Hand (*Geschlecht II*)".

51. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Cut-glass Bowl", in *The Collected Short Stories* (London: Penguin, 2000), 9.

52. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 9.

53. Georges Perec, *Life A User's Manual: Fictions*, trans. David Bellos (London: Harvill Press, 1996).

54. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 10.

55. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 12.

56. "The Thing", 182.

57. After the publication of *Glas*, Derrida devoted a three-year seminar to the question of the thing (*la chose*). Traces of these unpublished seminars can be found in *The Truth in Painting* (1978), *The Post Card* (1980), *Parages* (1986), *Siègneponge* (1988), *Given Time* (1991), and *Spectres of Marx* (1993). Michael Marder has addressed Derrida's unpublished seminar in his forthcoming book, *The Event of the Thing: Derrida's Post-Deconstructive Realism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). See also, Michael Marder, "Differance of the Real", *Parrhesia*, 4, Summer 2008.

58. *Glas*, 14a.

59. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 15, 20, 22.

60. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 23. See "Heidegger's Hand (*Geschlecht II*)".

61. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 21.

62. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 24-5.

63. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 25.

64. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 26.

65. "The Cut-glass Bowl", 25.