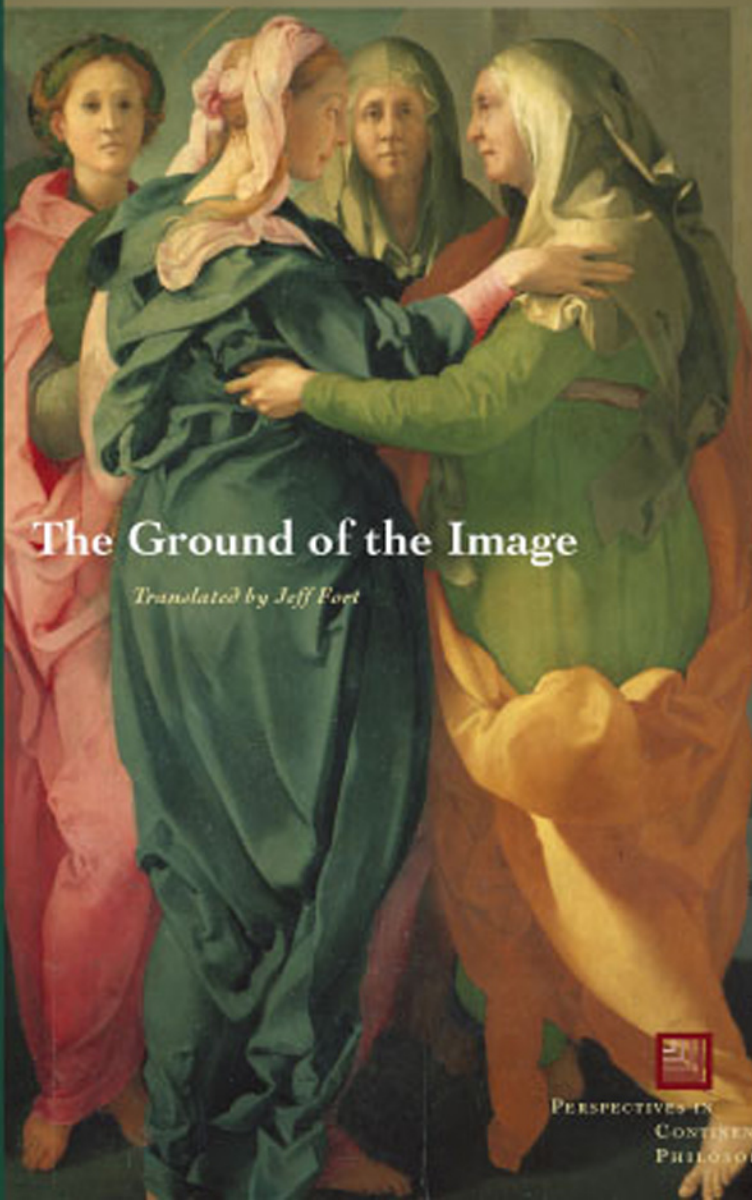
JEAN-LUC NANCY



The Ground of the Image

Translated by Jeff Fort

Perspectives in Continental Philosophy

The Ground of the Image

John D. Caputo, ***series editor***

Perspectives in
Continental
Philosophy

JEAN-LUC NANCY

The Ground of the Image

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The closer he came to this deceptive image of the island's shore, the more this image receded; it continued to flee from him, and he knew not what to think of this flight.

—Fénelon, *Adventures of Telemachus*

In the depths of the forest your image follows me.

—Racine, *Phaedra*

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Note on the Texts

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The Ground of the Image

1

The Image—the Distinct

The image is always sacred—if we insist on using this term, which gives rise to so much confusion (but which I will use initially, and provisionally, as a regulative term in order to set into motion the thought I would like to develop here). Indeed, the meaning of the "sacred" never ceases to be confused with that of the "religious." But religion is the observance of a rite that forms and maintains a bond[1] (with others or with oneself, with nature or with a supernature). Religion in itself is not ordered by the sacred. (Nor is it ordered by faith, which is yet another category.)

The sacred, for its part, signifies the separate, what is set aside, removed, cut off. In one sense, then, religion and the sacred are opposed, as the bond is opposed to the cut. In another sense, religion can no doubt be represented as securing a bond with the separated sacred. But in yet another sense, the sacred is what it is only through its separation, and there is no bond with it. There is then, strictly speaking, no religion of the sacred. The sacred is what, of itself, remains set apart, at a distance, and with which one forms no bond (or only a very paradoxical one). It is what one cannot touch (or only by a touch without contact). To avoid this confusion, I will call it *the distinct*.

One attempt to form a bond with the sacred occurs in sacrifice, which as a matter of fact does belong to religion, in one form or another. Where sacrifice ceases, so does religion. And that is the point

where, on the contrary, distinction and the preservation of a distance and a "sacred" distinction begin. It is there, perhaps, that art has always begun, not in religion (whether it was associated with it or not), but set apart.

The *∂istinct*, according to its etymology, is what is separated by marks (the word refers back to *στigma*, a branding mark, a pinprick or puncture, an incision, a tattoo): what is withdrawn and set apart by a line or trait,[2] by being marked also as withdrawn [*retrait*]. One cannot touch it: not because one does not have the right to do so, nor because one lacks the means, but rather because the distinctive line or trait separates something that is no longer of the order of touch; not exactly an untouchable, then, but rather an impalpable. But this impalpable is given in the trait and in the line that separates it, it is given by this *∂istraction* that removes it. (Consequently, my first and last question will be: is such a distinctive trait not always a matter of art?)

The distinct is at a distance, it is the opposite of what is near. What is not near can be set apart in two ways: separated from contact or from identity. The distinct is distinct according to these two modes: it does not touch, and it is dissimilar. Such is the image: it must be detached, placed outside and before one's eyes (it is therefore inseparable from a hidden surface, from which it cannot, as it were, be peeled away: the dark side of the picture, its underside or backside, or even its weave or its subjectile), and it must be different from the thing. The image is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it, essentially.

But what distinguishes itself essentially from the thing is also the force—the energy, pressure, or intensity. The "sacred" was always a force, not to say a violence. What remains to be grasped is how the force and the image belong to one another in the same distinction. How the image gives itself through a distinctive trait (every image declares itself or indicates itself as an "image" in some way), and how what it thus gives is first a force, an intensity, the very force of its distinction.

The distinct stands apart from the world of things considered as a world of availability. In this world, all things are available for use, according to their manifestation. What is withdrawn from this world has no use, or has a completely different use, and is not presented in a manifestation (a force is precisely not a form: here it is also a ques-

tion of grasping how the image is not a form and is not formal). It is what does not show itself but rather gathers itself into itself, the taut force on this side of forms or beyond them, but not as another obscure form: rather as the other of forms. It is the intimate and its passion, distinct from all representation. It is a matter, then, of grasping the passion of the image, the power of its stigma or of its distraction (hence, no doubt, all the ambiguity and ambivalence that we attach to images, which throughout our culture, and not only in its religions, are said to be both frivolous and holy).

The distinction of the distinct is therefore its separation: its tension is that of a setting apart and keeping separate which at the same time is a crossing of this separation. In the religious vocabulary of the sacred, this crossing is what constituted sacrifice or transgression: as I have already said, sacrifice is legitimated transgression. It consists in *making sacred* (consecrating), that is, in doing what in principle cannot be done (which can only come from elsewhere, from the depth[3] of withdrawal).

But the distinction of the image—while it greatly resembles sacrifice—is not properly sacrificial. It does not legitimize and it does not transgress: it crosses the distance of the withdrawal even while maintaining it through its mark as an image. Or rather: through the mark that it is, it establishes simultaneously a withdrawal and a passage that, however, does not pass. The essence of such a crossing lies in its *not* establishing a continuity: it does not suppress the distinction. It maintains it while also making contact: shock, confrontation, *tête-à-tête*, or embrace. It is less a transport than a *rapport*, or relation. The distinct bounds toward the indistinct and leaps into it, but it is not interlinked with it. The image offers itself to me, but it offers itself as an image (once again there is ambivalence: only an image / a true image . . .). An intimacy is thus exposed to me: exposed, but *for what it is*, with its force that is dense and tight, not relaxed, reserved, not readily given. Sacrifice effects an assumption, a lifting and a sublation of the profane into the sacred: the image, on the contrary, is given in an opening that indissociably forms its presence and its separation.[4]

Continuity takes place only within the indistinct, homogeneous space of things and of the operations that bind them together. The distinct, on the contrary, is always the heterogeneous, that is, the unbound—the unbindable.[5] What it transports to us, then, is its very unbinding, which no proximity can pacify and which thus remains at a distance:

just at the distance of the touch, that is, barely touching the skin, *à fleur de peau*.[6] It approaches across a distance, but what it brings into such close proximity is distance. (The *fleur* is the finest, most subtle part, the very surface, which remains before one and which one merely brushes against [*effleure*]: every image is *à fleur*, or is a flower.)

This is what all portraits do, in an exemplary manner. Portraits are the image of the image in general. A portrait touches, or else it is only an identification photo, a descriptive record, not an image. What touches is something that is borne to the surface from out of an intimacy. But here the portrait is only an example. Every image is in some way a "portrait," not in that it would reproduce the traits of a person, but in that it pulls and *draws* (this is the semantic and etymological sense of the word), in that it *extracts* something, an intimacy, a force.[7] And, to extract it, it subtracts or removes it from homogeneity, it distracts it from it, distinguishes it, detaches it and casts it forth. It throws it in front of us, and this throwing [*jet*], this projection, makes its mark, its very trait and its *stigma*: its tracing, its line, its style, its incision, its scar, its signature, all of this at once.

The image throws in my face an intimacy that reaches me in the midst of intimacy—through sight, through hearing, or through the very meaning of words. Indeed, the image is not only visual: it is also musical, poetic, even tactile, olfactory or gustatory, kinesthetic, and so on. This differential vocabulary is insufficient (though I cannot take the time to analyze it here). The visual image certainly plays the role of a model, and for precise reasons, which will, no doubt, emerge later. For the moment, I will give only one example of a literary image, whose visual resources are evident, but which remains no less a matter of writing:

> A girl came out of lawyer Royall's house, at the end of the one street of North Dormer, and stood on the doorstep.
>
> The springlike transparent sky shed a rain of silver sunshine on the roofs of the village, and on the pastures and larchwoods surrounding it. A little wind moved among the round white clouds on the shoulders of the hills, driving their shadows across the fields.[8]

Framed by a door opening onto the intimacy of a dwelling, a young girl, whose youth is all we see of her, already exposes the imminence of a story and an unnamed encounter, an unknown shock, happy or painful: she exposes this in the light from the sky, and this

sky provides the wide, "transparent," and unlimited frame in which the successive frames of a street, a house, and a doorway are embedded. It is less a matter here of the image, which we do not fail to imagine (the one that each reader forms or forges in his or her way and according to his or her models): it is a matter of an image function, of light and the proper relation of shadow, of framing and detachment, the emergence and the touch of an intensity.

What happens is this: with the "girl" (whose name is an intensity unto itself) an entire world "comes out" and appears, a world that also "stands on the doorstep," so to speak—on the threshold of the novel, in its initial traits and in the "opening lines" of its writing—or that places us on its threshold, on the very line that divides the outside and the inside, light and shadow, life and art, whose division [*partage*][9] is at that moment traced by something that makes us cross it without eliminating it (the distinction): a world that we enter while remaining before it, and that thus offers itself fully for what it is, a *world*, which is to say: an indefinite totality of meaning (and not merely an environment).

If it is possible for the same line, the same distinction, to separate and to communicate or connect (communicating also separation itself . . .), that is because the traits and lines of the image (its outline, its form) are themselves (something from) its intimate force: for this intimate force is not "represented" by the image, but the image is it, the image activates it, draws it and withdraws it, extracts it by withholding it, and it is with this force that the image touches us.[10]

The image always comes from the sky—not from the heavens, which are religious, but from the skies, a term proper to painting: not heaven in its religious sense, but sky[11] as the Latin *firmamentum*, the firm vault from which the stars are hung, dispensing their brightness. (Behind the vault are the gods of Epicurus—to mention him again—indifferent and insensitive even to themselves, therefore without images, and deprived of sense.)

The painted sky contains within itself what is sacred in the sky insofar as it is the distinct and the separated par excellence: the sky is the separated. It is first of all something that, in the ancient cosmogonies, a god or a force more remote than the gods separates from the earth:

> When the Sky was separated from the Earth
> —Firmly held together up to then—
> And when the goddess mothers appeared.[12]

Before the sky and the earth, when everything is held together, there is nothing distinct. The sky is what in essence distinguishes itself, and it is in essence distinguished from the earth that it covers with light. It is also itself distinction and distance: extended clarity, at once distant and near, the source of a light that nothing illuminates in turn (*lux*) but by which everything is illuminated and brought into distinction, which is in turn the distinction of shadow and light (*lumen*), by which a thing can shine and take on its brilliance (*splendor*), that is, its truth. The distinct *distinguishes itself*: it sets itself apart and at a distance, it therefore marks this separation and thus causes it to be remarked—*it becomes remarkable*, noticeable and marked as such. It also, therefore, attracts attention: in its withdrawal and from out of this withdrawal, it is an *attraction* and a *drawing* toward itself. The image is desirable or it is not an image (but rather a *chromo*, an ornament, a vision or representation—although differentiating between the attraction of desire and the solicitation of the spectacle is not as easy as some would like to think . . .).

The image comes from the sky: it does not descend from it, it proceeds from it, it is of a celestial essence, and it contains the sky within itself. Every image has its sky, even if it is represented as outside the image or is not represented at all: the sky gives the image its light, but the light of an image comes from the image itself. The image is thus its own sky, or the sky detached for itself, coming with all its force to fill the horizon but also to take it away, to lift it up or to pierce it, to raise it to an infinite power. The image that contains the horizon also overflows it and spreads itself out in it, like the resonances of a harmony, like the halo of a painting. This does not require any sacred place or activity, nor any magical *aura* conferred on the image. (We could also say: the image that is its own sky is the sky on earth and as earth, or the opening of the sky in the earth—that is, again, a world—and that is why the image is necessarily not religious, for it does not bind the earth to the sky but rather draws the latter from the former. This is true of every image, including religious images, unless the religiosity of the subject degrades or crushes the image, as happens in the pious bric-a-brac produced by every religion.)

The celestial force, a force that the sky *is*—namely, the light that distinguishes, that renders distinct—is the force of the passion that the image immediately transports. The intimate is *expressed* in it: but this expression must be understood in the most literal sense. It is not the translation of a state of the soul: it is the soul itself that presses

and pushes on the image; or rather the image is this pressure, this animation and emotion. It does not give the signification of this pressure: in that sense, the image has no object (or "subject," as one speaks of the subject of a painting), and thus it is devoid of intention. It is therefore not a representation: it is an imprint of the intimacy of its passion (of its motion, its agitation, its tension, its passivity). It is not an imprint in the sense of a type or a schema that would be set down and fixed.[13] It is rather the movement of the imprint, the stroke that marks the surface, the hollowing out and pressing up of this surface, of its substance (canvas, paper, copper, paste, clay, pigment, film, skin), its impregnation or infusion, the embedding or the discharge effected in it by the pressure applied to it. The imprint is at once the receptivity of an unformed support and the activity of a form: its force is the mixing and resistance of the two.

The image touches me, and, thus touched and drawn by it and into it, I get involved, not to say mixed up in it. There is no image without my too being in its image, but also without passing into it, as long as I look at it, that is, as long as I show it *consideration*, maintain my regard for it.

The image is separated in two ways simultaneously. It is detached from a ground [*fond*] and it is cut out within a ground. It is pulled away and clipped or cut out. The pulling away raises it and brings it forward: makes it a "fore," a separate frontal surface, whereas the ground itself had no face or surface. The cutout or clipping creates edges in which the image is framed: it is the *templum* marked out in the sky by the Roman augurs. It is the space of the sacred or, rather, the sacred as a spacing that distinguishes.

Thus, through a process repeated innumerable times in painting, an image is detached from itself while also reframing itself as an image—as in this painting by Hans von Aachen, in which the painting is doubled in a mirror that is held out, as though to us, while at the same time, within the image, it is held out to the woman it reflects.

In this double operation, the ground disappears. It disappears in its essence as ground, which consists in its not appearing. One can thus say that it appears as what it is by disappearing. Disappearing as ground, it passes entirely into the image. But it does not appear for all that, and the image is not its manifestation, nor its phenomenon. It is the force of the image, its sky and its shadow. This force exerts its pressure "in the ground" of the image, or, rather, it is the pressure

1. Hans von Aachen, *Joking Couple* (in fact, the painter and his wife; ca. 1596), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

that the ground exerts on the surface—that is, under this force, in this impalpable non-place that is not merely the "support" but the *back* or the *underside* of the image. The latter is not an "other side of the coin" (another surface, and a disappointing one), but the insensible (intelligible) sense that *is sensed as such*, self-same with the image.

The image gathers force and sky together with the thing itself. It is the intimate unity of this assemblage. It is neither the thing nor the imitation of the thing (all the less so in that, as was already said, it is not necessarily plastic or visual). It is the resemblance of the thing, which is different. In its resemblance, the thing is detached from itself. It is not the "thing itself" (or the thing "in itself"), but the "sameness" of the present thing as such.

With his famous phrase "This is not a pipe," Magritte merely enunciates—at least at first sight or at first reading[14]—a banal paradox of representation as imitation. But the truth of the image is the inverse of this. This truth is, rather, something like the image of the pipe accompanied by "This is a pipe," not in order to replay the same paradox in reverse, but, on the contrary, to affirm that a thing pres-

ents itself only inasmuch as it resembles itself and says (mutely) of itself: I am this thing. The image is the nonlinguistic saying or the showing of the thing in its sameness: but this sameness is not only not said, or "said" otherwise, it is an *other sameness* than that of language and the concept, a sameness that does not belong to identification or signification (that of "a pipe," for example), but that is supported only by itself in the image and as an image.

The thing *as* image is thus distinct from its being-there in the sense of the *Vorhanden*,[15] its simple presence in the homogeneity of the world and in the linking together of natural or technological operations. Its distinction is the dissimilarity that inhabits resemblance, that agitates it and troubles it with a pressure of spacing and of passion. What is distinct in being-there is being-image: it is not here but over there, in the distance, in a distance that is called "absence" (by which one often wants to characterize the image) only in a very hasty manner. The absence of the imaged subject is nothing other than an intense presence, receding into itself, gathering itself together in its intensity. Resemblance gathers together in force and gathers itself as a force of the *same*—the same differing in itself from itself: hence the enjoyment [*jouissance*] we take in it. We touch on the same and on this power that affirms this: I am indeed what I am, and I am this well beyond or well on this side of what I am for you, for your aims and your manipulations. We touch on the intensity of this withdrawal or this excess. Thus *mimesis* encompasses *methexis*, a participation or a contagion through which the image seizes us.

What touches us is this self-coincidence or self-fittingness [*convenance à soi*] borne by resemblance: it resembles *itself* and thus it gathers *itself* together. It is a totality that fits and coincides with itself [*se convient*]. In coming to the fore, it goes within. But its "within" is not anything other than its "fore": its ontological content is sur-face, ex-position, ex-pression. The surface, here, is not relative to a spectator facing it: it is the site of a concentration in co-incidence. That is why it has no model. Its model is in it; it is its "idea" or its energy. It is an idea that *is* an energy, a pressure, a traction and an attraction of sameness. Not an "idea" (*idea* or *eidolon*), which is an intelligible form, but a force that forces form to touch itself. If the spectator remains across from it, facing it, he sees only a disjunction between resemblance and dissimilarity. If he enters into this self-coincidence, then he enters into the image, he no longer looks at it—though he does

not cease to be in front of it. He penetrates it, is penetrated by it: by it, its distance and its distinction, at the same time.

The self-coincidence of the image in itself excludes its conformity to a perceived object or to a coded sentiment or well-defined function. On the contrary, the image never stops tightening and condensing into itself. That is why it is immobile, calm and flat in its presence, the coming-together and co-inciding of an event and an eternity. The musical, choreographic, cinematographic, or kinetic image in general is no less immobile in this sense: it is the distension of a present of intensity, in which succession is also a simultaneity. With regard to the image, the exemplarity of the visual domain lies in its first being the domain of immobility as such; the exemplarity of the audible domain, by contrast, is that of distension as such. At one extreme, immobility—immutability and impassability—at the other, distension and the passionate movement of separation: the two extremes of sameness.

There is an expression in French: *sage comme une image*, literally, "wise as an image."[16] But the wisdom of the image, if it is indeed a kind of restraint, is also the tension of an impetus or impulse. It is first offered and given to be taken. The seduction of images, their eroticism, is nothing other than their availability for being taken, touched by the eyes, the hands, the belly, or by reason, and penetrated. If flesh has played an exemplary role in painting, that is because, far beyond the figuration of nudity, flesh is the spirit of painting. But penetrating the image, just as with amorous flesh, means being penetrated by it. The gaze is impregnated with color, the ear with sonority. There is nothing in the spirit that is not in the senses: nothing in the idea that is not in the image. I become the ground and depth of the painter's eye that looks at me, as well as the reflection in the mirror (in Aachen's painting). I become the dissonance of a harmony, the leap of a dance step. "I": but it is no longer a question of "I." *Cogito* becomes *imago*.

But at the same time each thing, in the distance in which its self-coincidence is separated in order to coincide with itself, leaves behind its status as a thing and becomes an intimacy. It is no longer manipulable. It is neither body, nor tool, nor god. It is outside the world, since in itself it is the intensity of a concentration of world. It is also outside language, since in itself it is the assembling of a sense without signification. The image suspends the course of the world

and of meaning—of meaning as a course or current of sense (meaning in discourse, meaning that is current and valid): but it affirms all the more a *sense* (therefore an "insensible") that is *selfsame* with what it gives to be sensed (that is, itself). In the image, which, however, is without an "inside," there is a sense that is nonsignifying but not insignificant, a sense that is as certain as its force (its form).

One could say that the image—neither world nor language—is a "real presence," if we recall the Christian[17] use of this expression: the "real presence" is precisely not the ordinary presence of the real referred to here: it is not the god present in the world as finding himself there. This presence is a sacred intimacy that a fragment of matter gives to be taken in and absorbed. It is a real presence because it is a contagious presence, participating and participated, communicating and communicated in the distinction of its intimacy.

That is in fact why the Christian God, and particularly the Catholic God, will have been the god of the death of God, the god who withdraws from all religion (from every bond with a divine presence) and who departs into his own absence, since he is no longer anything but the passion of the intimate and the intimacy of suffering [*du pâtir*] or of feeling and sensation: what every thing gives to be sensed insofar as it is what it is, the thing itself distinguished in its sameness.[18]

So it is as well, according to another exemplarity, with what is called the "poetic image." This is not a decoration provided by a play of analogy, comparison, allegory, metaphor, or symbol. Or else, in each of these possibilities, it is something other than the pleasant game of an encoded displacement.

When Rilke writes (in French):

> Au fond de tout mon coeur phanérogame
> At the bottom of my phanerogamus heart[19]

The simultaneously sexual and botanical metaphor of an open heart exposing itself creates a certain collision of meaning and sound, and a slightly humorous effect, somewhere between the noun and the adjective: this collision communicates the density of the word *phanérogame*, its foreign substance, both in relation to the French language and to the language of sentiments, in a double withdrawal that at the same time lays the heart open as a plant or a flower, a botanical plate. But in this way it also communicates its visibility, which gives both the sense and the sound of the word, as well as the contours of a sort of indecency in poetic form. It does this even as it discreetly carries away the "coeur phanérogame" in the decasyllabic rhythm of which

it forms one hemistich, in a discreet but distinct reference (all the more distinct for being discreet, not crushed by a noisy rhythm) to the French prosody that the German poet is playing with here. The image is all of this—or it is this, at least, in the cutout of the verse and in the pulling apart of the language, in the suspense of rhythm and attention, and in this *fond* whose *f* is repeated in the *ph*, a muted consonance. This is an echo of another verse (also a decasyllable) in a variant from the same poem:

> les mots massifs, les mots profonds en or
> the massive words, the deep golden words

Here it is poetry itself that becomes the matter of the image.

For the image is always material: it is the matter of the distinct, its mass and its density, its weight, its edges and its brilliance, its timbre and its specter, its pace and step, its gold.

But *matter* is first *mother* (*materies* comes from *mater*, which is the heart of the tree, the hardwood), and the mother is that from which, and in which, there is distinction: in her intimacy another intimacy is separated and another force is formed, another same is detached from the same in order to be itself. (The father, on the contrary, is a reference point and marker of identification: figure, not image, he has nothing to do with being-a-self, but with being-such-and-such in the homogeneous current of identities.)

The image, clear and distinct, is something obvious and evident. It is the obviousness of the distinct, its very distinction. There is an *image* only when there is this obviousness: otherwise, there is decoration or illustration, that is, the support of a signification. The image must touch on the invisible presence of the distinct, on the distinction of its presence.

The distinct is visible (the sacred always was) because it does not belong to the domain of objects, their perception and their use, but to that of forces, their affections and transmissions. The image is the obviousness of the invisible. It does not render it visible as an object: it accedes to a knowledge of it. Knowledge of the obvious is not a science, it is the knowledge of a whole as a whole. In a single stroke, which is what makes it striking, the image delivers a totality of sense or a truth (however one wishes to say it). Each image is a singular variation on the totality of distinct sense—of the sense that does not link together the order of significations. This sense is infinite, and each variation is itself singularly infinite. Each image is a finite cut-

ting out, by the mark of distinction. The superabundance of images in the multiplicity and in the history of the arts corresponds to this inexhaustible distinction. But each time, and at the same time, it is the *jouissance* of meaning, the jolt and the taste of its tension: a little sense in a pure state, infinitely opened or infinitely lost (however one wishes to say it).

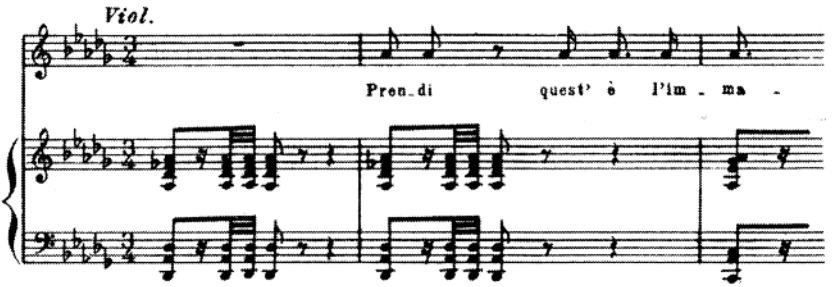
Nietzsche said that "we have *art* in order *not to be sunk to the depths* by truth."[20] But we must add that this does not happen unless art touches on truth. The image does not stand before the ground like a net or a screen. We do not sink; rather, the ground rises to us in the image. The double separation of the image, its pulling away and its cutting out, form both a protection against the ground and an opening onto it. In reality, the ground is not distinct as ground except in the image: without the image, there would only be indistinct adherence. More precisely: in the image, the ground is distinguished by being doubled. It is at once the profound depth of a possible shipwreck and the surface of the luminous sky. The image floats, in sum, at the whim of the swells, mirroring the sun, poised over the abyss, soaked by the sea, but also shimmering with the very thing that threatens it and bears it up at the same time. Such is intimacy, simultaneously threatening and captivating from out of the distance into which it withdraws.

The image touches on this ambivalence by which meaning (or truth) is distinguished without end from the bound network of significations, which at the same time it never ceases to touch: every phrase that is formed, every gesture made, every act of looking, every thought puts into play an absolute meaning (or truth itself), which does not cease both to separate itself and to absent itself from all signification. More than that: each signification that is constituted (for example, this proposition, and this entire discourse) also forms by itself the distinctive mark of a threshold beyond which meaning (truth) goes absent. It goes absent not in an elsewhere, in fact, but right here.

It is in this sense that art is necessary, and is not a diversion or entertainment. Art marks the distinctive traits of the absenting of truth, by which it is the truth absolutely. But this is also the sense in which it is itself disquieting, and can be threatening: because it conceals its very being from signification or from definition, but also because it can threaten itself and destroy in itself the images of itself that have been deposited in a signifying code and in an assured beauty. That is why there is a history of art, and so many jolts and

upheavals in this history: because art cannot be a religious observance (not of itself or anything else), and because it is always taken back up into the distinction of what remains separate and irreconcilable, in the tireless exposure of an always unbound intimacy. Its unbinding [*déliaison*], its endless flourish [*délié*],[21] are what the precision of the image weaves together and disentangles in each case.

Let us remain with a final image, which speaks of an image's gift of love and death:[22] "The Image of My Past Days," which Violetta holds out, and sings, is an image of youth and of lost loves, but it is their truth at once eternal and now absent, inalterable in its distinction. But again, and finally, this image is none other than the opera itself which is now reaching its end, the music that has just *been* love and tearing apart, and which expires by showing them, infinitely distinct in their distance.



2

Image and Violence

Two assertions about images have become very familiar to us. The first is that images are violent: we often speak of being "bombarded by advertising," and advertising evokes, in the first place, a stream of images. The second is that images of violence, of the ceaseless violence breaking out all over the world, are omnipresent and, simultaneously or by turns, indecent, shocking, necessary, heartrending. These assertions lead very quickly to the elaboration of ethical, legal, and aesthetic demands (and there is also now the specific register belonging to the arts of violence and violence in art), for the purpose of introducing regulations that would control violence or images, the image of violence or the violence of images. My intention here is not to enter into the debate concerning such demands. Instead, I want to get behind the assertions themselves in order to interrogate what can link, in a particular way, the image to violence and violence to the image. If we can expect from our inquiry some clarification at least in our thinking on this matter, it will no doubt relate to the ambivalence that pervades, in a parallel and therefore remarkable way, our general sense of both terms. There is something good and something bad in both violence and the image. There is something necessary and something unnecessary. It is as if there were constitutively two possible essences of the image and of violence, and consequently also two essences of the violence of the image and of the image of violence. It would be easy to list instances and configurations of these

double dualities or redoubled duplicities in the history of the modern world.

To broach this question, I will not start with the pair "image and violence." I will first for a moment consider violence on its own, setting out to examine the proper mode in which violence operates in relation to *truth*. From there we will gradually discover the traits that will lead us to the image.

"Violence and Truth"

Violence can be defined *a minima* as the application of a force that remains foreign to the dynamic or energetic system into which it intervenes. Let us take an anodyne example, but one that testifies to violence in the sense of a violent temperament, or in the sense in which one becomes violent in the face of an objective constraint: namely, feeling the need to extract a recalcitrant screw by pulling it out with pliers, instead of loosening it with a screwdriver. Whoever does this no longer follows the logic of the screw's thread, nor that of the material (the wood, for example) that he tears out and renders unusable at that place.

Violence does not participate in any order of reasons, nor any set of forces oriented toward results. It is not quite intentional and exceeds any concern with results. It denatures, wrecks, and massacres that which it assaults. Violence does not transform what it assaults; rather, it takes away its form and meaning. It makes it into nothing other than a sign of its own rage, an assaulted or violated thing or being: a thing or being whose very essence now consists in its having been assaulted or violated. From elsewhere or beyond, violence brandishes another form, if not another meaning.

Violence remains outside; it knows nothing of the system, the world, the set-up that it assaults (whether it is a person or a group, a body or a language). Rather than compossible, it wants, on the contrary, to be impossible, intolerable within the space of compossibles that it rips apart and destroys. Violence "doesn't want to hear it"; it has no interest in knowing. It is not interested in being anything but this ignorance or deliberate blindness, a stubborn will that removes itself from any set of connections and is concerned only with its own shattering intrusion. (But let us put this on hold: it is as the very figure and image of the outside that violence declares its irruption.)

This is why violence is profoundly stupid. It is stupid in the strongest sense, the thickest and most irremediable sense. It is not the stu-

pidity that comes from a lack of intelligence, but much worse: it is the stupidity of the stupid twat [*con*]. It is the calculated absence of thought willed by a rigid intelligence. (I am deliberately using the word *twat*, which is doubly violent: it is violent as slang, but also because of the obscene and invasive image that it evokes.)

Violence does not play the game of forces. It does not play at all. Violence hates games, all games; it hates the intervals, the articulations, the tempo, the rules governed by nothing but the pure relations among themselves. Just as violence splits open and destroys the play of forces and the network of relations, so it needs to exhaust itself in its raging. It falls short of power; it is beyond act. The violent person wants to disgorge all his violence; and he wants to disgorge himself with it. He has to get rid of all his thickness, to be nothing but the one who strikes, breaks, the one who tortures to the point of senselessness—not only his victim's senselessness, but his own. His force is no longer force; it is a sort of pure, dense, stupid, impenetrable intensity. A mass, gathering and shaping itself to strike, an inertia gathered up and launched in order to shatter, dislocate, and crack open. (Let us put something else on hold: violence exposes itself as figure without figure, as a "monstration," an *ostension* of something that remains faceless.)

Just as violence is not the application of a force in conjunction with others, but the forcing open of the whole relation of forces, destroying it for the sake of destroying it—and thus a furious weakness—so violence does not serve a truth: it wants instead to be itself the truth. In place of the established order, about which it wants to know nothing, violence substitutes not another order, but itself (and its own pure disorder). Violence—that is, its blows—is or makes truth.

Racist violence is exemplary. It is the violence that knocks someone in the face, simply because—as the stupid twat might say—it "doesn't like the look" on this face. This face is denied truth. The truth meanwhile lies in a figure that reduces itself to the blow that it strikes. Here, truth is true because it is violent, and it is true in its violence: it is a destructive truth in the sense in which destruction verifies and makes true.

It is important to highlight the ambiguity on which all direct or indirect approval of violence feeds. There is no doubt that truth itself—what might be called, dare I say, the true truth [*la véritable vérité*]—is violent in its own way. It cannot irrupt without tearing apart an es-

tablished order. Truth ruins method despite all the latter's efforts. Truth does not operate through arguments, reasons, and proofs; these are more like the necessary but obscure flipside of truth's appearance. Philosophy, throughout its history, has concerned itself with the way in which truth is a violent irruption (already truth forces Plato's prisoner to leave the cave, only to dazzle him with its sun). This ambiguity is also the reason why one could speak of good and necessary violence, and of loving violence, interpretative violence, revolutionary violence, divine violence.

It is a terrible ambiguity; we know only too well how it lends itself to all sorts of lies and confusions. But this ambivalence is without doubt constitutive of violence, or at any rate of its modernity,[1] if modernity as a whole is defined by an effacement of simple oppositions and a transgression of boundaries. Central to this transgression would be, in particular, the penetration of being itself by violence (whatever the name of being: subject, history, force . . .).

However, difference seems to assert itself here with just as much force as does ambivalence. The difference is that the true truth is violent because it is true, whereas the other type, its thick double, is "true" only insofar as it is violent. In the second case, truth is reduced to the mode of violence and exhausted in that mode, whereas in the first case, violence is unleashed in truth itself, and thus contained in it.

The truth of violence both destroys and destroys itself. It shows itself to be what it is: nothing other than the truth of the fist and the weapon. It is the thick twat's kind of truth. It is the kind that snickers, spits, and yells, that enjoys its display of violence (enjoyment, for violence, is without pleasure and without joy; it feeds on the very image of its violence). The violence of truth is something completely different from this. It is a violence that withdraws even as it irrupts and—because this irruption itself is a withdrawal—that opens and frees a space for the manifest presentation of the true. (Once again, let us put something on hold: are there not, corresponding to each side, two kinds of image?)

There is, therefore, a proximity between the difference and resemblance between the two kinds of violence. A single principle governs the twofold allure of violence (if violence is singular), or of the two violences (if they can be called by the same name): namely, the impossibility of negotiating, composing, ordering, and sharing. It is the principle of the intractable. The intractable is always the mark of truth. But it can be the mark of truth's closing or of truth's opening.

On the one hand: the intractable can be the mark of truth's being brutally encased in concrete, the bottom of a stupid and self-satisfied bunker (self-satisfied in that the self is purely in itself, not coming out of itself, identifying itself in truth with a bludgeon, or, in fact, coming out of itself in order to bludgeon). On the other hand: the intractable can be the opening of truth. It can be the sending or offer of truth's opening, of a space where a singular irruption of truth might emerge (where truth is beside itself, where the self is the leap outside the self). The identity and difference between one kind of intractable and the other must be kept separate. But can this separation take place without any violence, if truth is what must bring it about?

Violence of violation or of desire? Some would have us believe that the two are interchangeable. That is why there is a certain erotic or pornographic register in which the image of violation (of rape) is so readily invoked. It is also why there is, as we know too well, a mythico-ethnic register in which violation is presented as the result of the legitimate anger of "national" affirmation. To say nothing of many other discourses on sublime or heroic violence. It is, however, impossible to confuse the violence of violation with that of desire. The distinction between the two is blindingly obvious. Nothing can seek to be the truth immediately, without having thus already violated all possibility of truth. Conversely, nothing can seek the truth without having already been exposed, through this will or desire, to the outside from which truth can irrupt.

The following question remains. If the violence of truth is without violation, would it therefore be without violence?[2] But if it is without violence, why call it violent? On the other hand, if the term *violence* is justified here, how can we think the difference that cuts across violence? To put it another way, we cannot do away with the ambiguity of violence, with a violent ambiguity that always returns and that can threaten the most certain distinctions. Where does violation begin, and where does the penetration of the true end?

This raises many questions, among them all those that surround "the right to intervene." Where does it begin? Where does it end? What right justifies the violence of nations? What superior constraint imposes itself on their supposed sovereignty? Then there are all the questions linked to "terrorism," starting with that of knowing where this denomination begins and ends. Then there are the questions posed by the uncontrolled irruption—particularly via the Internet—of all sorts of aggression and incitement to violence, along

with their economic and instinctual drives. The list is truly endless. We are surrounded now by a massive, general question of violence (whether it is legitimate or not, whether it is truthful or not), a question about all the spaces of authority and power, political or scientific, religious or technical, artistic or economic. Violence is the ambivalent name of that which exercises itself without guarantor and without being accountable. It is the ambivalent name of that which defines, in all its problematic character, the *habitus* if not the very *ethos* of our world: one that has no other world behind or above it.[3]

"Image and Violence"

This is what leads us to the problem of the image. If violence is exercised without responsibility to anything other than itself, without reference to any higher authority (including, of course, when violence invokes such a moment of authorization and justification), this becomes apparent through the essential link that violence maintains with the image. Violence always makes an image of itself, and the image is what, of itself, presses out ahead of itself and authorizes itself. It is this fundamental character of the image that should concern us, rather than the mimetic character that the *doxa* attaches, above all, to the term *image*. Even when the image is mimetic, it must fundamentally, by itself and for itself, count for more than an image; otherwise, it will tend toward being nothing but a shadow or a reflection (indeed, philosophical antimimeticism treats the image as a shadow or a reflection; in so doing, however, this antimimeticism manifests its sensitivity to the self-affirmation of the image and to the affirmation of the self in the image).[4]

Now violence, as we have begun to see, always completes itself in an image. If what matters in the exercise of a force is the production of the effects that one expects from it (the triggering of a mechanism or the carrying out of an order), then what matters for the violent person is that the production of the effect is indissociable from the manifestation of violence. The violent person wants to see the mark he makes on the thing or being he assaults, and violence consists precisely in imprinting such a mark. It is in the enjoyment [*jouissance*] of this mark that the "excess" defining violence comes into play. The excess of force in violence is nothing quantitative; it does not come from miscalculation, and it is not really even an "excess of force": it consists in imprinting its image by force in its effect and as its effect. Divine violence is the visibility of a thunderbolt or of one of the

plagues of Egypt. The torturer's violence is the exhibition—at least for his own eyes—of the wounds of the victim. The violence of the law must make its mark in the exemplary character of the punishment. In one way or another, where force is simply executive, where authority is simply imperative, where the force of law is (in principle) simply coercive, violence adds something else: it wants to be demonstrative and "monstrative." It shows itself and its effect. So, for example, for Georges Sorel, that theorist of positive violence, the completed form of violence that is the "general strike" has all its power in the fact that it realizes what he calls "a myth": a totality in which the entire image of the social project that violence would serve immediately presents itself.

The imaging trait or mark of violence comes from its intimate relation to truth. From the above, we can conclude that if, according to another remark from Pascal, "violence and truth have no power over each other,"[5] then this is because each draws upon the resources of the other, in addition to its own. Violence has its truth just as truth has its violence. Now truth is also, essentially, self-manifestation. Truth cannot be simply "being," and in a sense it *is* not at all, since its being is entirely in its manifestation. Truth shows or demonstrates itself (and, as in any *demonstration*, even in the logical sense, there must be the display and the "show of force").[6]

Violence and truth have in common a self-showing act; both the core of this act and its realization take place in the image. The image is the imitation of a thing only in the sense in which imitation *emulates* the thing:[7] that is, it rivals the thing, and this rivalry implies not so much reproduction as competition, and, in relation to what concerns us here, competition for presence. The image disputes the presence of the thing. In the image, the thing is not content simply to be; the image shows *that* the thing is and *how* it is. The image is what takes the thing out of its simple presence and brings it to pres-ence, to *praes-entia*, to being-out-in-front-of-itself, turned toward the outside (in German: coming out of presence-at-hand, *Vorhandenheit*, and into presence as *Gegenwärtigkeit*). This is not a presence "for a subject" (it is not a "representation" in the ordinary, mimetic sense of the word). It is, on the contrary, if one can put it this way, "presence as subject." In the image, or as image, and only in this way, the thing—whether it is an inert thing or a person—is posited as subject. The thing *presents itself*.

Thus the image is, essentially, "monstrative" or "monstrant." Each image is a monstrance (or pattern)—what in French is called *ostensoir*

ɔoir.[8] The image is of the order of the monster; the *monɔtrum* is a prodigious sign, which warns (*moneo*, *monɔtrum*) of a divine threat. The German word for the image, *Bild*—which designates the image in its form or fabrication—comes from a root (*bil-*) that designates a prodigious force or a miraculous sign. It is in this sense that there is a monstrosity of the image. The image is outside the common sphere of presence because it is the display of presence. It is the manifestation of presence, not as appearance, but as exhibiting, as bringing to light and setting forth.

What is monstrously shown [*monɔtré*] is not the aspect of the thing; it is, by way of the aspect or emerging from it (or drawing it up from the depths, opening it out and throwing it forward), its unity and force. Force itself is nothing other than the unity woven from a sensory diversity. The aspect is in this diversity, it is the relation that extends between the parts of a figure; but the force lies in the unity that joins them together in order to bring them to light. That is what all painting shows us, tirelessly and in constantly renewed modes: the working of or the search for this force.[9] A painter does not paint forms unless, above all, he paints the force that takes hold of forms and carries them away in a pres-ence.

Under this force, forms too deform or transform themselves. The image is always a dynamic or energetic metamorphosis. It begins before forms, and goes beyond them. All painting, even the most naturalistic, is this kind of metamorphic force. Force deforms (and so, therefore, does passion); it carries away forms, in a spurt that tends to dissolve or exceed them. The monstrous showing or *monɔtration* spurts out in *monɔtruation*.[10]

No doubt there is violence in all this, or at least there is always the possibility that violence might surface. The image not only exceeds the form, the aspect, the calm surface of representation, but in order to do so it must draw upon a ground—or a groundlessness—of excessive power. The image must be *imagined*; that is to say, it must extract from its absence the unity of force that the thing merely at hand does not present. Imagination is not the faculty of representing something in its absence; it is the force that draws the form of presence out of absence: that is to say, the force of "self-presenting." The resource necessary for this must itself be excessive.

Thus the famous *Handgriff* (the quick movement of the hand or, dare I say, the hand that claws [*coup de griffe*]) by which Kant declares that we will not be able to extract the secret of imagination

from nature, so that it remains "an art concealed in the depths of the soul."[11] We cannot violate the intimacy of this secret because it is nothing less than the power of the "schema." That is to say, it is nothing less than the power of the "pure image," which is the sole means by which a form, whichever one it might be, or the unity of a composite, whichever one it might be, is possible, and with it experience in general: the presence of a world and presence to a world. The "transcendental schematism" is the force of the object in general and of a world of objects. Now the object in general is nothing less than the improbable irruption in itself of a unity in the midst of a chaotic, general dissemination and the perpetual flux of a sensory multiplicity.

The image is the prodigious force-sign of an improbable presence irrupting from the heart of a restlessness on which nothing can be built. It is the force-sign of the unity without which there would be neither thing, nor presence, nor subject. But the unity of the thing, of presence and of the subject is itself violent.[12] It is violent by virtue (that is, by *force*) of an array of reasons that are part of its very being: it must irrupt, tear itself from the dispersed multiplicity, resisting and reducing that multiplicity; it must grasp itself, as if with claws or pincers, out of nothing, out of the absolute non-unity that first is given as the *partes extra partes* of a dispersed exterior; unity must thus relate *itself* to *itself* in *itself* in order to present *itself* and thus *externalize itself*, while also *excluding from itself* that which it is not and ought not to be, that of which it is the refusal and the violent reduction.

If for Kant "the pure image . . . of all objects of the senses in general is time," this is because time is the very movement of synthesis, of the production of unity.[13] Time is the very unity that anticipates itself and succeeds itself in projecting itself endlessly in advance of itself, grasping at each moment—in this ungraspable instant—the present in which the totality of space presents itself, in which its curving expanse is surveyed in a single view, from a perspective in which time is both the blind spot and the obscure vanishing point.

This pure image is the image of images, the opening of unity as such. It violently folds together the dismembered exterior, but its tightened folds are also the slit that unity cuts in the continuity of extension. The pure image is the earthquake in being that opens the chasm or the fault of presence. There where being was in itself, presence will no longer return to itself: it is thus that being is, or will be,

for itself. One can understand how time is, in many respects, violence itself . . .

Unity forms (*bildet*) the image or the picture (*Bild*, *tableau*) of that which in itself is not only without image, but without unity or identity. Consequently, the phrase "the image of" signifies, not that the image comes after that of which it is the image, but that "the image of" is, above all, that within which what is presents itself—and nothing presents itself otherwise. In presenting itself, the thing comes to resemble itself, and therefore to be itself. In order to resemble itself, it assembles itself, it gathers and brings itself together. But to assemble itself it must withdraw from its outside.

Therefore being is torn away from being; and it is the image that tears itself away. It bears within itself the mark of this tearing away: its ground monstrously opened to its very bottom, that is, to the depthless underside of its presentation (the picture's back or "blind side").

Thus when Heidegger undertakes to analyze the constitution of the Kantian schematism, the specific image that he invokes in order to make visible the image as such is at first, and without justification, the death mask. The death mask makes the "image" of death visible, that is to say, its *Bild* as well as its *Sicht*, its "look" [*vue*]: how it shows itself or appears, its aspect, or the aspect of a death in general.[14] All images in reproduction—for example, as Heidegger notes, the photograph of a death mask—are images insofar as they present and show this primary *monstration*. Image of the image, then—and even image of the pure image of the schema, since it is a question of analyzing the schema: the *look* in which there comes to be seen the unlooking face of someone who can no longer see. The *Gesicht* (face) of one without *Sicht* (sight), such is the exemplary image.[15]

If no image can exist without tearing apart a closed intimacy or a non-disclosed immanence, and if no image can exist without plunging into a blind depth—without world or subject—then it must also be admitted that not only violence but the extreme violence of *cruelty* hovers at the edge of the image, of all images.[16]

Cruelty takes its name from bloodshed (*cruor*, as distinct from *sanguis*, the blood that circulates in the body). He who is cruel and violent wants to see blood spilt. He wants to see the internal life principle externalized, with all its colorful and flowing intensity. He who is cruel wants to appropriate death: not by gazing into the emp-

tiness of the depths, but, on the contrary, by filling his eyes with red (by "seeing red") and with the clots in which life suffers and dies.

Perhaps every image borders on cruelty. The art galleries of the West are full of images of bloodshed, especially images of the god who shed his blood to save mankind and images of his martyrs, though nowadays there are also images of "body art" artists, who spill their own blood and cruelly mutilate themselves.[17] In a world ordered and organized by sacrifice, bloodshed quenches the thirst of the gods or irrigates their fields; its coagulation seals the passage beyond death. But once this world has been taken apart, once sacrifice is impossible, cruelty is no more than the extreme violence that closes itself in upon its own coagulation; and that coagulation does not seal any passage beyond death, but seals only the violent stupidity that believes it has produced death immediately before its eyes in a little puddle of matter.

Every image borders on such a puddle. The ambiguity of the image and of violence—of the violence at work [*à l'oeuvre*] in the image and of the image opening itself in violence—is the ambiguity of the *monstration* of the ground, of its monstrosity or its *monstruation*. The image cannot but have the duplicity of the monster: that which presents presence can just as well hold it back, immobile and dense, obstructed and stuffed into the ground of its unity, as it can project presence ahead of itself, a presence always too singular to be merely self-identical.

The violence of art differs from that of blows, not because art is semblance, but, on the contrary, because art touches the real—which is groundless and bottomless—while the blow is in itself and in the moment its own ground. Knowing how to discern a groundless image from an image that is nothing but a blow is an entire art in itself (*c'est tout un art*, as one says in French); way before or way beyond any aesthetics, this is the responsibility of art in general.

Such discernment must reach into the interior of a unity—inasmuch as there is no ambivalence that is not sustained by a certain unity, if only an infinitesimal and infinitely fleeting one. We have not ceased dealing with this unity buried under the ambivalence of violence as under that of the image, and equally under the close link between the image and violence, between art and the image, and therefore between art and violence; and in a way, as we have seen (at least to some extent), this enigmatic unity is nothing other than unity in itself or absolute unity, this "being-one" that can only emerge with a cer-

tain violence and in a certain image (or rather *as* a violence and an image). In a sense, then, it is unity "itself" that we must be able to traverse in order to discern the opening onto groundlessness [*sans-fond*] from the blow delivered out of an enclosed ground. Unity "itself"—the thing or its presence, the real or its truth—is constitutively that which assembles and gathers itself into itself by going beyond the whole order of signs; it is that which is no longer derived from any economy of returns or any kind of mediation, but which purely gives itself [*se donne*].

The phrase *to give oneself* [*se donner*] can be understood in two senses, however. It can mean either to give oneself *to* oneself and *by* oneself (principially and before all external presentation), or it can mean to give one's "self" to the outside, before all else. Consequently, it can also mean "being given" [*être donné*], being thrown outside without ever having previously secured one's ground. It is between these two senses, at their indiscernible limit, that the narrow blade of discernment must pass.

Violence is always in excess of signs (it is or it wants to be its own sign, like the truth that *nullo egeat signo*). The image is also such an excess; and without doubt art can be defined in no other way, in the first instance, than as a transgression and a being carried away beyond signs. In this view, art doubtless "gives a sign" (in the sense of the German *winken*: to wink, warn, signal), but it is not the sign of something and does not signify anything else. It exceeds signs but without revealing anything other than this excess, like an announcement, an indication, an omen—of groundless unity. As Borges writes: "that imminence of a revelation that does not come about is, perhaps, the aesthetic fact."[18]

Violence without violence consists in the revelation's not taking place, its remaining imminent. Or rather it is the revelation of this: that there is nothing to reveal. By contrast, violent and violating violence reveals and believes that it reveals absolutely. Art is not a simulacrum or an apotropaic form that would protect us from unjustifiable violence (from Nietzsche's Gorgon-truth or Freud's blind instinct). It is the exact knowledge of this: that there is nothing to reveal, not even an abyss, and that the groundless is not the chasm of a conflagration, but imminence infinitely suspended over itself.

3

Forbidden Representation

Memo

Ein Mann, den manche für weise
hielten, erklärte, nach Auschwitz
wäre kein Gedicht mehr möglich.
Der weise Mann scheint
keine hohe Meinung
von Gedichten gehabt zu haben—
als wären es Seelentröster
für empfindsame Buchhalter
oder bemalte Butzenscheiben,
durch die man die Welt sieht.
Wir glauben, dass Gedichte
überhaupt erst jetzt wieder möglich
geworden sind, insofern nämlich als
nur im Gedicht sich sagen lässt,
was sonst
jeder Beschreibung spottet.[1]

(Our question will be: just what is it that "mocks description"? That is, what is it that mocks the type of representation known as "description," and what other representation takes place in the poem?)

Oh you, thieves of the authentic hours of death,
Of the last breaths and of eyelids falling to sleep,
Be sure of one thing:

"The angel gathers together
What you cast away"[2]

(And our interpretation shall be: the angel that gathers together these stolen deaths is the poem itself.)

Concerning the representation of the camps or of the Shoah, one poorly formulated claim continues to circulate in the sphere of public opinion with particular insistence: either one is incapable of representing the extermination, or one is not allowed to do so. Either it is impossible or forbidden, or it is impossible and, in any case, forbidden (or forbidden and, in any case, impossible). On the basis of this indecision alone, the claim is already confused. The confusion gets even more difficult when attempts are made to establish connections with what we call the biblical prohibition on representation. (Here is not the place to go looking for the written traces of these pronouncements. Suffice it to recall the ways in which they circulated in the controversy that surrounded the release of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and even more so in what opposed this film to Lanzmann's *Shoah*. We could recall many other episodes besides, ones involving other films or works of art.)

The discourse that rejects the representation of the camps is confused because its content is not easily circumscribed and because its motives are even less clearly determinable (to say nothing of the fact that, in addition, the discourse is often enveloped in a sacred aura, a point to which we will return later).

Is it, finally, a question of impossibility, or is it one of illegitimacy? If it is a question of impossibility, so long as we disregard the question of technical difficulties, to what does this impossibility point? Does it have something to do with the unbearable nature of what is to be represented? Yet we are not made indignant by the David Olère painting that represents the deportees in the gas chambers under the first blasts of Zyklon B.[3] (Even if we call David Olère a survivor in order to recognize in him a right that we do not have, that still does not touch the painting itself. Nor does it touch the point of knowing what this "right" would be, or the point of knowing the extent to which the painter who survived is exactly the same as the deportee.) In quite another sense, we do not object to Goya's depiction of the horrors of war, or to the awful scenes of death and dying that take place in so many films.[4] Nor do we condemn the episode in D. M. Thomas's *White Hotel* written from the point of view of a

woman who, after narrowly escaping a firing-squad execution, finds herself still alive on top of piles of corpses in a mass grave—whatever the ordeal of reading it might be.[5] (In a slightly different but highly suggestive register, we could, I think, also say this: the question lies in whatever distinguishes the never-contested possibility of the countless representations of the dead and dying in the monuments of World War I especially, but also in those of World War II—including those dedicated to resistance-fighters—from the sudden emergence of problems and debates regarding the camps, which, finally, have nothing whatsoever to do with war.[6])

If, alternatively, it is a question of illegitimacy, one can only be referring to a religious prohibition that one has taken out of context with no justification for having done so. The result is a slippage of the prohibition, whereby its jurisdiction—usually restricted to images of God—is extended to include images of exterminated Jews, then those of other victims. This slippage ought to be interrogated, not necessarily because it is illegitimate, but rather because a displacement from God to the creature and then from the believer to the nonbeliever can only be justified through an analysis of what is meant by "forbidden" as well as what is meant by "representation."

A clarification is therefore necessary in order to be able to think rigorously the question so often expressed as the "representation of the Shoah." In order to begin, I shall sketch it out in a very simple way here, starting with the minimal formulation of three arguments:

1. The "forbidding of representation" has little or nothing to do with forbidding the production of figurative works of art. It has, however, everything to do with the most assured reality or truth of art itself: that is, it has everything to do with the truth of representation that is, paradoxically, brought to light by this "forbidding."
2. Not only is the "representation of the Shoah" possible and legitimate, it is, in fact, urgent and necessary—on the condition that the idea of "representation" be understood in the strict sense that is its own.
3. The death camps are an act of super-representation, in which the will to complete presence plays out the spectacle of the annihilation of the very possibility of representation.

1. The forbidding of representation is not necessarily—or better, is not at all—to be understood under the regime of an iconoclasm.

Although iconoclasm (or the simple abstention from images, which I include here under this term) was and in some ways still is one of the great traditions for interpreting the commandment articulated in the book of Exodus,[7] it is by no means the only one, either in the Jewish tradition or in the various Christian traditions (the same is true of the Islamic tradition, where, moreover, it should be pointed out that the commandment as such does not figure in the Koran but has been extrapolated out of it through interpretation). However, this is not the place to take up a detailed examination of the question. I shall limit myself to highlighting a few of its features that are relevant to our purposes.

Let us first recall that the commandment forbids the making of images "of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth," that is, of anything at all. Above all, however, it forbids the making of *sculpted* images (the insistence on sculpture and on sculpting is striking, in all the texts related to the biblical corpus as well as those in the Talmudic and Hassidic traditions). The commandment therefore concerns the production of forms that are solid, whole, and autonomous, as a statue is, and that are thus destined for use as an idol. The question here concerns idolatry and not the image as such or "representation." The idol is a fabricated god, not the representation of one, and the contemptible and false character of its divinity derives from the fact that it is fabricated.[8] It is an image to be valued for itself and not for what it represents, an image that is itself a divine presence and must, for that reason, be made of the most precious and durable materials (wood that is rot-resistant, gold, silver, and the like[9]). In particular, it should consist in a well-built form: a stele, a pillar, or even a tree or bush. As well, it has several different names depending on the context and, although they are all translated into Greek as *eidolon*, most of these words do not, in fact, belong to the lexicon of vision.[10] It is not the image of god that is condemned here: on the one hand, these gods are nowhere else than in these statues, and, on the other hand, the Jewish god, having no form at all, has no image either.[11] He has no resemblance other than that of man, but this is neither a resemblance of form nor one of content (man is therefore made in the image of that which has no image).

What is condemned, therefore, is not that which is an "image of" but rather that which asserts its presence only through itself, a pure presence in a certain sense, a massive presence that amounts to its

being-there: the idol does not move, does not see, does not speak, "yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer"[12]—and the idolater, facing the idol, also does not see and does not understand.[13] Quite the opposite of the idol, the "real god" is, in short, only word (addressed to his people), vision (of the heart of man), and movement (in order to accompany his people).

Thus the idol is not condemned as imitation or copy, but rather in terms of its full and heavy presence, a presence of or within an immanence where nothing opens (eye, ear, or mouth) and from which nothing departs or withdraws (thought or word at the back of a throat or in the depths of a gaze). Later on, Talmudic commentaries will specify that if it is permissible to paint—more than to sculpt—faces (the question being limited to that which has openings . . .), once again these faces must never be complete: completion is an end or culmination that closes, without access and without passage. What is actually forbidden is the sculpted image of a complete face,[14] whereas in the Temple two cherubim of gold are permitted to have their faces turned toward each other and then together in the direction of the "Ark of Testimony,"[15] that is, in the direction of the word of God or, more exactly, of the god-who-is-word (and whose name, for this reason, is unpronounceable since it has nothing to say but the act of saying itself[16]).

Regardless of the position one takes with respect to this "forbidding of representation" or, in a more general way, with respect to its religious context, it must nonetheless be recognized that the iconoclastic interpretation involves a *condemnation* of images to the precise extent that it also presupposes a certain *interpretation* of the image: it must necessarily be thought of as a closed presence, one completed within its own order, opened onto nothing and by nothing other, and so isolated within a kind of "stupidness of the idol."[17] Thus the image is degraded as secondary, as imitative and therefore as inessential, as derivative and lifeless, as deceitful and weak: nothing could be more familiar to us than this motif. In fact, for the duration of the West's history, this motif will have resulted from the alliance (and it is doubtless this that has so decisively marked the West as such) forged between the principle of monotheism and the Greek problematic of the copy or the simulation, of artifice and the absence of the original. Of course, this alliance is also the source of the mistrust toward images that continues unabated into our own time (and this in a culture that produces images in abundance), a mistrust that has, in its turn, produced a deep suspicion regarding "appearances" or "the specta-

cle," as well as a certain self-satisfied critique of the "civilization of images"—to the extent that, *a contrario*, even all attempts at a defense or at a characterization of the arts and all of their phenomenologies are also its result.[18]

In order to understand the problem known as "representation," one must therefore be attentive to this alliance, which is constitutive of our history. One must also be attentive to what simultaneously creates connections and disconnections within it, that is, to what joins the two motifs, but also to what disjoins them and to what provokes passages and divisions between them, which are more complex, more subtle, and more enigmatic than they seem.

If we are not mistaken either regarding the biblical prohibition or the Greek problematic, this double motif involves, on the one hand, the motif of a God who in no way challenges the image but who gives his truth only through the retreat of his presence—a presence whose sense is an *absense*, if one may be permitted such a shorthand.[19] On the other hand, however, it also involves the motif of a logical *ideality* (in the sense in which the order of the logos and, if you like, reason is constituted by a relation to ideality), that is, very precisely, the motif of an intelligible form or image, that is, one that *forms* intelligibility itself. In one respect, *absense* condemns the presence that offers itself as the completion of sense; in another respect, the *idea* debases the sensory image, which is only its reflection, the degraded reflection of a higher image. But then again, *absense* also opens its retreat onto the world itself, whereas the sensory image indicates or indexes the *idea*. What follows is a logic that is twice doubled, whose values exchange places with each other, contaminate and confront each other. First Christianity, then the art of the modern world will have been the sites of this entanglement—that is, if they are not one and the same place, in the end.

Not wanting to disentangle this intrigue from this intricate knot, I shall first provisionally offer the following concerning the course that awaits us: if art can always fall victim to the operations of an idolatrous intimidation (for which even the idea of art, when taken in an absolute sense, can also be the motivating force: one must definitely not forget this), it is no less so that, within what has since the Renaissance gradually come to be named "art" (and in knotting up all the strands of the entanglement there), what will always have been at stake is the production of images (visual, auditory) that are exactly

the opposite of a making of idols and exactly the opposite of an impoverishment of the sensory: not a thick and tautological presence before which one prostrates oneself but rather the presentation of an open absence within the given itself—within its sensory presentation—of the so-called work of "art." This presentation is called *représentation* in French.[20] Representation is not a simulacrum; it is not the replacement of the original thing—in fact, it has nothing to do with a *thing*. It is the presentation of what does not amount to a presence, given and completed (or given completed), or it is the bringing to presence of an intelligible reality (or form) by the formal mediation of a sensory reality. The two ways of understanding it do not exactly coincide with each other, neither in the divisions they afford nor in their intimate entanglement. Nonetheless, they must be taken together, and the one taken against the other, in order to think the dispute, or the secret, of "representation."

2. Consequently, to declare that the representation of the Shoah is impossible and/or forbidden can have no meaning *other* than to declare that it is impossible and/or forbidden either to reduce the reality of the extermination to a massive block of signifying presence (to an "idol"), as if there were still a meaning possible, or to offer a sensory reality, a form or a figure that would refer to an intelligible form as if there had once been one. Granted, this is precisely what results when monuments and memorials proceed out of a will literally to bury in bronze (or in concrete or in film) the horror of the deportees, who are about to throw themselves onto the electrified barbed wire or who are delivered en masse to the gas and then to the flames. (I am thinking of a certain group of sculptures at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and of another at the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Los Angeles, as well as of certain paintings, including those of David Olère.) I do not want, however, to give the impression that these works would be open to critique or discussion: in a sense, they eschew all aesthetic criteria (as does the American television series *Holocaust*, which was aired some fifteen years ago, but in an entirely different sense). These works do not "represent"; they commemorate, which is to say that they restrict themselves to being "signs." And yet they do not accept that status in as strict a sense as was done in the 1980s in Berlin with the signposting method that listed the names of the camps under the heading *Orte des Schreckens*, or in Baden-Baden with the stele that dryly lists the facts of *Kristallnacht*. The strategy of the latter works involves expressing their embarrassment or disgrace at the same time

as they express their own powerlessness to represent, their artistic failure, and their resistance even to appear as if they were setting themselves up as artworks.

Thus what must be understood here and what we shall have to reconsider is not exactly the horror or the sanctity that we think representation would not know how to touch (whereas, perhaps, no representation ever touches at all except at the extreme, which risks taking the form of a kind of grimace, a gesticulation, or an illustration). More precisely, what is at stake here is the following: What the camps will have brought about is, above all, a complete devastation of representation or even of the possibility of representing, to such an extent that there is not even any way to represent this devastation or to put representation to its own test—to the test, that is, of making what is not of the order of presence come to presence. (It is in this precise sense—to say it for the first time—that the expression "forbidden representation" in my title should be understood: "forbidden" in the sense of surprise, suspended before what is forbiddingly other than presence. We shall come back to this.)

The question of the representation of Auschwitz—supposing that it must be maintained in these terms as a question—cannot be resolved (if, indeed, it can be at all) through a reference, be it negative or positive, either to an extreme horror or to an extreme sanctity. Rather, this question must pass through the following one: What became of representation itself at Auschwitz? How was it brought into play there?

Assuming that there is a question specific to the representation of the Shoah—or else there isn't one, except by virtue of an emotional appeal that is certainly understandable but utterly without rigor—then it must hold to the condition that the Shoah creates for representation. This amounts to saying that it must be a question of what this event *represents* within (or of) the West's destiny. (Admittedly, "the West's destiny" is a formulation heavy with latent representations, which are not at all clear. Doubtless, however, they can only become clear by passing through the analysis of the conditions for a "representation of the Shoah"). The Shoah is, then, an ultimate crisis of representation. (Saying this does not imply any abstraction or cold conceptual conversion here.)

I will, therefore, move away from the perspective of the camps for a short time in order to consider the question of representation in itself.

As will have already become clear, the task involves thinking "representation" not only as a particular operational or technical regime but also as a general name for the event and configuration ordinarily called "the West"—which is also to say, for the configuration whose history is rushing toward its completion before us, having already undergone the total crisis that beset the order of representation. (I realize that for some I am simply repeating banalities here—but even so, have we sufficiently scrutinized what is at stake in them?—whereas others will be surprised to see such a historical place accorded to mere "representation": I ask the latter to think for a moment about the amplitude and intensity of the transformation to which the history of the arts has exposed us within a single century—let us say, from 1850 to 1950, therefore cutting across Auschwitz and various other events.)

At this point, greater precision is needed: if I ask that one think the course of a history in the strong sense of the word and not only of distinct histories, that does not mean that I am claiming a strict historical necessity for Nazism. Nonetheless, it is important that Nazism be denied the status of a monstrous accident that took place within history and to history, for one thereby cuts it off from every possibility of thought. Undoubtedly, this proviso is beginning to be recognized, but, nonetheless, its importance cannot be affirmed often enough. One need not create a vision of history of the kind that one calls "Hegelian" to demand that our thought, in order to be thought, bring together and tie up the lineaments of a provenance with those of a movement: something other than a destiny, but also something other than a myriad of contingencies (both are ways of relinquishing the task of thinking a freedom and a humanity).

The simplest way to enter into the problematic of representation is by way of its name. I have already alluded to it, primarily in terms of how it is understood by philosophy. For all that, however, it is not always easy to avoid confusions or debates, even within philosophy (but this is also because the issue is itself constituted by the singular knot that both has been built up within our history and has built up that history, that has woven it and that has also bound and strangled it).

The *re-* of the word *representation* is not repetitive but intensive (to be more precise, the initially iterative value of the prefix *re-* in Latinate languages is often transformed into an intensive or, as one says, "frequentative" value). The Latin *repraesentatio* is an accentuated pre-

sentation (highlighted in the direction of its line and/or in its address: destined for a specific gaze). The word also takes on its first meaning from its use in the theater (where it has nothing to do with the number of performances [*représentations*] and where it is clearly distinguished from "rehearsal" [*répétition*]) and from its use in the ancient judiciary—the production of a paper or a document—or, as well, from the sense of "to make observable, to expose with insistence."[21] The Latin word translates the Greek *hypotyposis*, which designates a sketch, a scheme, the presentation of the lines of a figure in the largest possible sense without any suggestion of repetition or rehearsal (in rhetoric, the word designates the *mise-en-scène* of people or of things as if they were alive before us: once again, it is almost a question of the theater . . .).

The psychological and philosophical usage of the term arises here as well. At the intersection of the image and the idea, mental or intellectual representation is not foremost a copy of the thing but is rather the presentation of the object to the subject (to say this otherwise: it involves the constitution of the object as such, recalling that some of the greatest debates of modern thought are crystallized around this nucleus, those of empiricisms and idealisms, those of scientific knowledge and sensory consciousness, of political representation and artistic presentation, etc.). Representation is a presence that is presented, exposed, or exhibited. It is not, therefore, presence pure and simple: it is precisely *not* the immediacy of the being-posed-there but is rather that which draws presence out of this immediacy insofar as it puts a value on presence *as* some presence or another. Representation, in other words, does not present something without exposing its value or sense—at least, the minimal value or sense of being there before a subject.

It follows that representation not only presents something that, either by rights or in point of fact, is simply absent: in truth, it presents what is absent from presence pure and simple, its being *as such* or even its sense or truth. It is on this point that confusions, paradoxes, and contradictions often come to be formed. In the absence that constitutes the fundamental characteristic of represented presence, the absence of the thing (thought as the original, the only valid and real presence) intersects with the absence that exists *at the very level of* the thing isolated within its immediacy; that is, it intersects with what I have already called *absense*, or sense inasmuch as it is precisely not a thing.

Of course, to be even more precise one would need to analyze how pure immediacy is itself a thought—a representation—produced by the general system of representation, that is, by the West's originary "monologotheism." Outside of this monologotheism (or theologomonism, etc.), there is no silent and isolated immediacy: there are worlds made up entirely of what we call "living presences," "spirits," or, at the very least, "signs." But our world is the world of a sense that hollows out presence and makes itself absent from it or absent within it. (In a corollary manner, one could say that outside of the West, there is order based on signifying forces, whereas for the West there is disorder and quest for sense. Or, yet again: there are worlds configured into schemes of action, position, and force, and then there is our history, configured into schemes of presence and absence and of representation, that is, into schemes of schemes, drawings, traces and lines . . .)

The entire history of representation—that entire fevered history of the gigantomachies of *mimesis*, of the image, of perception, of the object and the scientific law, of the spectacle, of art, of political representation—is thus traversed by the fissure of absence, which, in effect, divides it into the absence *of* the thing (problematic of its *re*production) and the *absense within* the thing (the problematic of its [re]presentation).

It is there that our history gets restless and buckles—where it breaks, even—within the division, the encounter and the confrontation of two logics: that of the subjectivity for which there is *phenomenon* and that of the *thing in itself* or "real presence." The one and the other must be the one for the other, even as they are shown to exclude one another. It is here that we find our crux, one might say, and this would be all the more justified in that the Christian cross is at the very center of all this: representation of the divine representative dying to the world of representation in order to give it the sense of its original presence . . .

The double absence of/within presence that structures this double logic makes the monotheistic absence (that of a sanctity that is no longer primarily sacred—a given present within a distinct reality—but which does not stop creating itself through its withdrawal:[22] this is what is at stake in the opposition to idols) intersect with that of the Greeks: that of a sun of truth that dazzles beyond all appearances, the heart of the light instead of the things that are brought to light, or, again, beauty "not in the likeness of a face or hands or any part of the body,"[23] toward which Plato the Eros-philosopher soars. One

could tighten up—and represent—the entire matter in this way: a double non-face, at once Jewish and Greek, whose portrait will be drawn by its Roman destiny.

If, therefore, what is essential to representation is the relation to an absence and to an *absense* upon which all presence sustains itself—that is, upon which it exhausts itself, hollows itself out, radiates, and comes to presence—on what grounds could the representation of anything at all be subject to condemnation? By the same token, however, how is it that not all representation is forbidden [*interdite*], in the sense of surprised, taken aback, struck dumb [*meduśée*],[24] confounded, or disconcerted by this forbidding hollowness at the heart of presence?

At this point we must return to the camps.

3. My point of departure will be to contend that representation occupies a decisive place within Nazism and within its ideological and practical system.

On one level, there is no need to dwell on the subject at length. After all, we know how Nazism cultivated representation in every respect,[25] including its use of monumental art and the parade as well as its "representation of the world" (*Weltanschauung*, vision of the world). In relation to the latter, Hitler himself emphasized the political importance of a "vision" that can be presented to the masses and so is not confined to the sphere of philosophical discourse.[26] Certainly, it is a question here of media and their efficacy. More than that, however, it is a question of a world that could be placed before the eyes and given presence in its totality, its truth, and its destiny: a question, therefore, of a world without fissure, without abyss, without withdrawn invisibility. Representation as *hypotyposis*, as placed right before the eyes, and as *mise-en-scène*, as production of the truth *in præsentia*: in all these respects, representation plays a decisive role within the framework of a vision of the regeneration of "race," of Europe, of humanity. Furthermore, although I cannot dwell on it here, we must nonetheless not forget how an entire epoch called for and inaugurated such a role for (re)presentation.[27]

The figure of the "Aryan" is the very principle of this vision; it entails nothing less than the presentation of man regenerated as super-man. I propose that we call this regime "super-representation" to emphasize that it is not simply a matter of representing triumphant humanity as a type (as is also the case, in the same era, with Stalinist art). Rather, what is involved here is the (re)presentation of a type

that is itself a (re)presentative, not of a function like the hammer and sickle, but of a nature or an essence (the Aryan body). It is in this body that the presence of a self-creating humanity would truly consist (a humanity that is, in this sense, divine, but with no separation of the divine, that is, with no "sanctity"). The Aryan body is an idea identical to a presence, or it is the presence of an idea without remainder: precisely what the West has, for centuries, thought of as the idol. In the terms employed by Hitler, moreover, it is called "idealism": the idealism of the founder of civilization (*Kulturbegründer*), whose supreme virtue is that he gives himself over to the service of the community upon which he has bestowed "the civilizing spirit."[28] "The Aryan alone can be considered as the representative [*Vertreter*] of the race of the founders of civilization."[29] "Civilization," here, has no other meaning than the conformity of a world to its representation. The Aryan is the representative of representation, absolutely, and it is in this precise sense that I propose the term "super-representation."[30]

(By contrast, for Hitler the Jew is the representative of representation in its ordinary, pejorative sense: the only art in which the Jew succeeds is that of an actor or, rather, a charlatan—an art of unrefined illusion.[31] The supreme Nazi art can therefore involve only an incarnation or a real incorporation, which is why Nazism must push the delicate problematic generated by the West's configuration to its very end: the "taking part" [*le partage*]—but also the "taking apart"—of representation-exposition and representation-imitation.[32] According to this double meaning, the "taking part" prevents the strict separation of the simulating representation (or copy) from the visible (re)presentation (or a kind of "putting-into-play") but at the same time, the "taking apart" somehow demands their opposition . . . This complex system structures the whole constellation of problems regarding "representation." This constellation tends toward and ruptures at two extremities: that of fanatical iconoclasm and that of fascist creation. Either what is without image or the complete idol . . .)

Thus super-representation consists in more than a colossal scale, out of all proportion to the means of representation, demonstration, or *mise-en-scène* of the *Anschauung* (vision) and the *Anschauer* (viewer): it is, rather, a kind of representation whose object, intention, or ideal is fully completed within what is manifestly present. In order to best outline this character of total, saturated presence, we must think about how distinct the systems and processes of glorification used by traditional orders of sovereignty and/or sanctity are from the systems

and processes of Nazi super-representation (though less so than one usually thinks): the Nazi order, its Führer, its Aryan archetype, the SS and the entire *Weltanschauung* cannot simply shine with glory, they must be present and with a complete presence.[33] The point here is decisive: this entire order refers to nothing outside of its own being-present, its immediacy or immanence. Finally, it refers to nothing outside of its own conspicuousness, one that emerges from itself (like the truth for Spinoza) but that thus shows nothing outside of this very emergence. In one sense, it is an exact replica of the monotheistic revelation, and that is, of course, no coincidence. Nazi super-representation *is* the inverse of revelation: it is a revelation that, in revealing, does not withdraw what is revealed but, on the contrary, exhibits it, imposes it, and fills every one of its fibers with presence and with the present.

Set in contrast to both the *Kulturbegründer* and the simple *Kulturträger* (the "bearers of civilization") that are the other peoples, the Jewish people is the destroyer of civilization (*Kulturzerstörer*). It is a destroyer insofar as it has no real "vision" of its own: it knows only how to live parasitically on other peoples and other cultures. Any vision that it does have is limited to the preservation of its "race" through this parasitism; its activities are only so much trickery and deceit calculated to ensure its own survival by infecting other peoples (and by instrumentalizing the misery of modern workers—thus giving rise to the Marxist vision, which does not even merit the name of *Weltanschauung*[34]). Even if not entirely unique in this respect (the gypsy is also characterized this way), the Jew is the representative par excellence of the destruction of the representation that we are calling super-representation.

The death camp constitutes the stage on which super-representation plays out the spectacle of the annihilation of what, in its eyes, is non-representation. What distinguishes this act of total destruction from all others with which one could compare it—camps and genocides—is that it aims directly and explicitly at the "sub-human," not so much or not only at an "inferior race" and/or enemy but, above all, at the gangrene or miasma that is capable of corrupting the very presentation of authentic presence. Auschwitz is a space organized in such a way that Presence itself—that which shows itself and also shows the world without remainder—plays out the spectacle of annihilating what, in principle, is so forbidding to representation. This is what I am calling "forbidden representation." The SS is there to suppress what could surprise, what could call out to or what could shat-

ter the super-representative order. (In no way does this render other camps and other genocides of secondary importance; rather, it opens to discernment that which invokes an identical or comparable logic elsewhere, but perhaps in more secretive ways: once again, not a logic of superiority or enmity but a logic of bringing to light and to presence humanity as such—or the world's order and destiny. In other words, at the extreme limit of the "crime against humanity," we must learn to discern not only persecution and liquidation on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, and so on, but persecution and liquidation also on the grounds of the representation of an attack on authentic presence: I exterminate you because you infect the body and the face of humanity, because you represent it emptied and bled of its presence.)

The Nazi must play out the spectacle of this annihilation and must, as it were, bring this super-representation, one that is already saturated in itself, to its climax: it is to this that Himmler's dreadful speech, delivered on October 4, 1943, to his principal lieutenants, attests:

> Most of you know what it means when 100 corpses lie there, or when 500 corpses lie there or when 1000 corpses lie there. To have gone through this, and, apart from a few exceptions caused by human weakness—to have remained decent, that has made us great. That is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and which is never to be written.[35]

This horrible speech is striking in every point: the succession of figures, which opens up a perspective of endless increase in the number of victims, the precision of the formulation regarding the corpses, which shows just how unbearable the visions and the spectacles have become (ones that the officers must nonetheless continue to bear). In truth, the lieutenants who are present have already entered into the hardness of this representation. For them, human weakness has only ever been an exception. As "honest men," they are above the human condition: for them, it is not a question of acting like barbarians, but rather one of enduring the mission of the Reich, for "We had the moral right vis-à-vis *our* people to annihilate [*umzubringen*] *this* people which wanted to annihilate us."[36]

The fulfillment of duty must pass through the vision of the intolerable: through a kind of representation wherein the unbearable double character of a theophany and/or a Platonic sun would come to be inverted in the horror. This is why the result is a somber "glory,"

which cannot be written but which is, nonetheless, engraved into these hardened hearts. How is it that this glory—one that is too shameful for so many (doubtless insofar as the people itself is not formed and hardened enough)—comes to take on the glare of the death's-head insignia worn by the *SS-Totenkopfverbände* units[37]? In fact, it receives its blinding glare right here, in the self-image that Himmler is sharing with his administrative staff. According to this representation, one must prove oneself capable of a brand of heroism whose sign—but also whose real stakes—is a spectacle that must close the eyes and raise the heart.[38] What the SS must see, in other words, is the steeliness of their own gaze.[39] (The entire organization of the camp works toward this representation of the self to others and to oneself: the entire dramaturgy[40] of the arrival on the ramp, the selection, the roll calls, the uniforms and the speeches, the slogans on the gates, "work is liberty" or "to each his due," etc.)

To be sure, such a gaze and such a power (over oneself, over others) are sustained by the vision of a mission. In actual fact, however, the fulfillment of the mission is right there, unmediated, in the masses of corpses and in the smoke and ashes. It is also for this reason that the glory here is so somber, as if it were suffocating under the sense of satisfaction that the extermination was supposed to bring about. The vision of self that secures the annihilation fulfills the Aryan *Weltanschauung*: at the outermost limit, there is no meaning projected beyond the extermination. The hardened exterminator is himself his own meaning; the exterminator is a cold block of meaning whose affirmation and triumph take place in silence.[41]

Thus, the complete image of the SS has a double valence: on the one hand, viewed from the outside, it must be "a shining example for the prisoners";[42] for itself, on the other hand, it must reflect the perfect image of a black light back onto itself, one that is the reflection of death in its eyes. The gaze of the SS is lying in wait for the gaze of the other, for his face, for the presence of a life and of a presence with its singular distinction. A deportee reports: "I tried to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, not too erect yet not slouching; not too smart, yet not too sloppy; not too proud, yet not too servile, for I knew that those who were different died in Auschwitz, while the anonymous, the faceless ones, survived."[43]

What the *Weltanschauung* requires most of all is the (re)presentation of a non-face: that of anonymity or death—to settle the matter, of course, always the non-face of death. Not even death [*la mort*], really, but rather the dead [*le mort*], dead bodies by the thousands

and by the millions, for death is precisely what is not seen or (re)presented. But the SS requires the dead body in order to play out the spectacle of its own ability to command death and to plunge its own gaze into it.

(To avoid any misunderstandings, I should perhaps emphasize that the considerations being pursued here are not to be taken as some dramatic variation on the horror of the camps, a variation that would perhaps even embellish that horror, finally, by giving us all the shivers. On the contrary, we must hold firm to our conviction that these considerations are strictly and utterly necessary, for it is truly a question of nothing other than these stakes of death. At Auschwitz, the West touched the will to present to itself that which is outside presence. Hence, it also touched the will to a representation without remainder, without hollowing-out or withdrawal, without a line of flight. To that extent, it is exactly the opposite of monotheism, as well as of philosophy and art. This means that it was right in the midst of our Western history—once again, without one having to pose it as a destined or mechanical necessity—that this "exact opposite," this contorted and revolting contraction, suddenly appeared and unleashed its fury. And (if this must be added) *that* alone suffices to justify a careful distinction between Auschwitz and the Gulag without, for all that, granting the former any special status. At the Gulag, a military-police order was being carried out by means of monstrous and grisly acts, whereas at Auschwitz, the West was exacting revenge upon itself and upon its own opening—the opening, precisely, of [re]presentation.)

The camp is thus a system of representation wherein two faces are put face-to-face with each other, both bearing death in their eyes:[44] that of the dead or of the living dead (the "Muslim" or, in any case, the condemned) and that which wears an officer's cap with the death's head on it. The SS represents itself as death and gives itself the representation of the dead as if they were its own production, its own work.

This implies that death has indeed been "stolen," as it is put in Sachs's poem.[45] Put otherwise, this means that death can no longer enter into the narrative of a life for which it would be the access—that is, the exit and the entrance, the opening.[46] Generally speaking, it can no longer even enter into a representation, which means that this representation is henceforth opened onto the very ground of absence—and of *absense*—of presence. (Of course, the real difficulty

here lies in the question of how to confront death after the "death of God," and in the task of understanding that what Nietzsche called "the death of God" is precisely the end of death at the horizon of its (re)presentation, the end of tragic death or of death as salvation, as well as the beginning of the necessity for another [im]mortality.)

Jean Améry, an Austrian resistance fighter, was deported at roughly the same time as Primo Levi and, like Levi, was a survivor who committed suicide after publishing his testimony. In that act of witnessing, what he calls his "attempt to surmount the unsurmountable,"[47] he writes:

> The first result was always the total collapse of the *aesthetic* view of death. . . . For death in its literary, philosophic, or musical form there was no place in Auschwitz. No bridge led from death in Auschwitz to *Death in Venice*. Every poetic evocation of death became intolerable, whether it was Hesse's "Dear Brother Death" or that of Rilke, who sang: "Oh Lord, give each his own death" . . . the death of a human being finally lost so much of its specific content. . . . Dying was omnipresent, death vanished from sight.[48]

Améry is, of course, writing as an intellectual and as a man of culture: it is expressly from this point of view that he understands the writing of his testimony. In particular, his testimony is that of a man whose upbringing was entirely Germanic but for whom the experience of Auschwitz, and of the Gestapo before that, would entail the stripping away of his German heritage and culture. In a way, it would also compel him to identify with Judaism—or at least to develop a certain preoccupation—although he had been largely indifferent to it prior to this time. But the point of view of the intellectual here is not one of belonging to a caste, nor even one involving reflection or thought: it is the point of view of representation or, again, that of sense. What Améry experiences is the breakdown of both the ability and the inclination to represent, that is, not only what makes it possible to have a "vision of things" either in the sense of an arrested *mise-en-scène* or in the sense of a regulated interpretation, but in the sense of the regime of the idea and of the image where simple presence can be opened and made absent within itself. Thus, in a ferocious and, at the level of affect, certainly understandable attack on Heidegger, Améry writes: "You could *be* hungry, *be* tired, *be* sick. To say that one purely and simply *is*, made no sense. . . . To reach out beyond concrete reality with words became before our very eyes a

game that was not only worthless and an impermissible luxury but also mocking and evil."[49] And, a little further on: "I would like to cite the words that Karl Kraus pronounced in the first years of the Third Reich: 'The word fell into a sleep, when that world awoke.'"[50]

The exterminated is he who, before dying and in order to die as the exterminator's representation would have it, is himself emptied of the possibility to represent—or, finally, of the possibility of meaning. Yet he has not completely ceased being a man; he has not become an object for a subject. Rather, he has become another presence that is closed onto itself and that comes face-to-face with his executioner—the face-to-face of two pure thicknesses that reflect one another just as death can be reflected within itself. The face-to-face, therefore, of two idols or of two empty masses, neither things nor ideas but a double thickening that coagulates this double presence sunken into itself.

It is in this sense that we can follow, with Améry, the way in which the *mise-en-scène* of the torturer involves the destruction of the representation of the other: "in the world of torture," he writes, "man exists only by ruining the other person who stands before him."[51] In this ruin, the torturer, whose face appears "concentrated in murderous self-realization," "has expanded into the body of his fellow man and extinguished what was his spirit." The victim no longer has a space of representation, while his torturer has no representation other than that of himself, first in the process of accomplishing this obliteration of space, and then of filling it up again. Thus, in the final instance, SS "representation" or *Weltanschauung* no longer has anything to do with the order of representation: it fits exactly into an eye, crushed and turned into itself, as into an empty orbit.

The "Muslim" of the camps is the representative itself here: he exposes his death to its own exhausted life. He is a "faceless presence."[52] And this presence is faceless because it has been de-faced by the gaze of the death's head, which is why Primo Levi can also describe the Muslims as "those who have seen the Gorgon."[53] In this blind face-to-face, which is a face-to-face with the gazeless (the death that will not have been allowed to come), there is a third figure, which gathers into itself the intersection of these two empty gazes: a member of the Jewish *Sonderkommando*, charged with emptying the gas chambers. About them, the prisoners could say: "They no longer had human expressions. They were contorted, crazy faces. . . . The people of the *Sonderkommando* lived separately from us. We had little contact with them, if only because of the disgusting smell that they

gave off. They were always filthy, completely neglected and unkempt, brutal and without scruples. It was not unusual for one of them simply to beat another one to death."[54]

(In a sense that remains to be verified, the question of the representation of the camps is the question of the representation of a face that has lost representation and gaze, a face permeated only by a stench, a face, finally, that bears within it the expansion of the extermination as a final reduction of meaning.)

At Auschwitz, the space of representation was shattered and reduced to the presence of a gaze appropriating death for itself, filling itself up with the dead gaze of the other—a gaze filled with nothing other than a dense emptiness within which the *Weltanschauung* in its entirety came to implode.

How, then, can one represent devastated representation, representation that is blocked, stuck, petrified? In a 1982 interview, Joseph Beuys speaks of Auschwitz as "that which cannot be represented, that awful image, that which cannot be presented as an image but which could only be presented in the actual process of its happening, while it happened, which cannot be translated into an image. This can only be remembered as it were via a positive opposite image, that is, by humans removing this blemish from the world."[55] First, Beuys describes the reality of the camp as an ("awful") "image" so as to distance it, paradoxically, from every possible image. Immediately after that, however, he effects a contrast between this non-image and another "positive opposite image." The indecision here, though clearly not intentional, seems to me significant: we "see" something of the camps—their horrible character—but at the same time this horror cannot be placed within an image and thereby (re)presented without letting the reality of it escape, for the whole of this reality resides in the execution itself. All one could really do in this case is to oppose that execution to another actual deed in the opposite direction. Curiously, this deed is also qualified as "image," doubtless because its effect would be to show all there is to see and know of Auschwitz: its real obliteration.

There is "image," however, precisely because there is no real obliteration, and there is no real obliteration because the world that created Auschwitz is still our world. It remains the terminal history, perhaps interminable, of the West. There is image, therefore, of a haunting, and with it comes the knowledge that nothing of the camps

can be represented, because the camps themselves were the execution of representation. Its *execution* in both senses of the word, that is, both its completion (through a presentation saturated with itself) and its exhaustion without remainder: without the remainder that had, up until that time, constituted the possibility of one fixed representation of death among others—tragic or glorious deaths, romantic deaths, or deaths of deliverance. To say even more, perhaps this remainder has always been the sole grounds for and motive of all representation: death opening onto absence and onto *absense*, or finitude opening onto the infinite.

To gain greater precision, our thinking must go still further: the execution of representation without remainder implies its exhaustion in fact, for it must push the logic to its end, according to which presence resolves itself in a pure act or in force. The double Judeo-Greek constitution of representation (which I have called "Roman") implies an internal distance that in no way excludes force (the very image of Rome reminds us of this) but that orders it in some way so as to come to presence (whether we like it or not, the order of the sacred is followed by the legal order).[56] Presence implies appearance, and appearance implies a doubling or putting of a "self" beside itself: hence, representation opens itself up, unfolds and divides itself. Hence the "subject" wins its finite truth at the cost of an infinite wandering. Hence it ends up wanting to take leave of presence, not by making itself absent, by retreating or by exposing itself, but by super-presence and by a return to self. This "self," however, can no longer even have the structure of a "self" and so makes itself into a pure force: not "power" in the sense of authoritative power, not *conatus*, not even "will," but power that is exhausted [*la puissance épuisée*] in its own act.[57] Everything has been thrown into the gesture of an executioner, who thereby appeases and perfects a being reduced to a fatal blow.

As Beuys indicates, there remains only the task of thinking an unthinkable re-presentation, even a repetition or rehearsal of the event. To show the most terrible images is always possible, but to show who or what kills every possibility of the image is impossible, except by recreating the gesture of the murderer. What forbids representation in this sense is the camp itself.

Perhaps this is also the reason why one or another representation comes to be suspected of a kind of complicity or of a disquieting kind of complacency, intentional or not. This complicity has often been discussed in relation to certain films or novels (*Night Porter*, *Sophie's*

Choice). The figuration that takes place in these and other cases seems to be modeled upon disfiguration. The complacency, however, is not somehow lessened if one believes oneself capable of evoking the sweet dreams of a deportee in which the deportation is detoured away from the camps by trickery and sent toward Israel instead (as in *Train of Life*, by Radu Mihaileanu). For the dream was forbidden in the camp; the sweet dream was an even greater improbability. By the same token, it is simply impossible for the spectator to give himself over to such a ridiculous farce.

The representation that is forbidden by the camp, however, is precisely the representation that I have wanted to call "forbidden" in order to make clear that bringing-to-presence divides presence and opens it onto its own absence (opens its eyes, its ears, and its mouth). More precisely, this representation allows itself to be surprised and allows itself to be *forbidden*, that is, to be *interdicted* in the sense of the *interdictio* of the Roman judge who renders his arrest *between* two parties: putting being-there into abeyance in order to allow sense or *absense* to get through.[58] In this sense, rather than subjecting representation to prohibition or to prevention, this representation itself *forbids itself* or *is forbidding to itself*. It is the subject of its own retreat, of its own interception, indeed, of its own deception. Instead of throwing itself outside of itself and outside of presence in the furor of the act, this representation hollows presence out and retains it within itself.

Such a representation then, does not want to be "of the camps" but rather puts into play their (un)representability as such: for example, in different media, which one can appreciate to varying degrees, one could evoke Jochen Gerz's cobblestones bearing the names of destroyed, abandoned, or vanished Jewish cemeteries engraved on the side turned non-visibly toward the ground, or Emmanual Saulnier's upright glass plaques in *Rester, Résister*, or even Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (which relentlessly poses the question of its own staging of a refusal to stage). And, although the juxtaposition may be shocking and its status debatable, in this regard one could also consider Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful*, which puts into play the crushing of sense at Auschwitz by means of an absurd reversal (even though this film is certainly the only one to present the camp as a backdrop: as a space of or for representation). Perhaps it is even permissible to mention Zbigniew Libera's controversial fake-real Lego game in this regard,[59] although I do have certain reservations about this work (I find it presents an even more difficult case than does

Benigni's film). It seems to me, however, that one could do an analysis of its thematization of the unrepresentability that is produced by the devastation of representation and/or the reduction of representation to mockery.[60] In any case, one would have to do a case-by-case analysis for what in each work permits or prevents the deciphering of a resistance to "represent" (and, therefore, also of a resistance to deliver the final or definitive work). Of course, it would never be possible to arrive at a definitive interpretation: at the very least, however, this question of representation must be posed, and any potential criticism of a particular work—indeed, any condemnation as well—must resist adopting the stance of an idolatrous mysticism of the "ineffable."

Insofar as the West tirelessly beckoned sense to a presence that was complete and without remainder (whether as power or knowledge, as divine essence or human authority), and insofar as it ended by suturing being to itself—that is, filled in the gap that it itself had opened as its own source and as its own dispatch or, at the very least, unleashed the will to fill in that gap (if it is only ever from itself that it can create such a gap)—our history took the risk in which it has foundered. The question known as "the representation of the camps" belongs to that history. We can no longer exempt ourselves from discerning the stakes in it as those belonging to a truth that must be left open and incomplete so that it can be truth. *This must be so*: in fact, it would have to constitute the primary ethical axiom. The criteria of a representation of Auschwitz can only be found in this demand: that such an opening—interval or wound—not be shown as an object but rather that it be inscribed right at the level of representation, as its very texture, or as the truth of its truth.

In closing, I shall simply say that I try to hear something of this demand in the hoarse sound and labored breathing of the following poem, one of many:

> There are the fields of Poland, there is the Kutno plain
> with the hills of corpses burning
> in clouds of naphtha: there are the barbed wire fences
> for Israel's quarantine,
> the bloody refuse, the scorching eruption,
> the chains of wretches long since dead,
> struck down in the pits their own hands opened;

Buchenwald is there, the gentle beech wood,
with its foul ovens; Stalingrad
and Minsk on its marches and rotting snow.
Poets do not forget.[61]

Translated by Sarah Clift

4

Uncanny Landscape

Pays, paysan, paysage (country, peasant, landscape): this is like the declension of a word or, rather, of a semanteme that would not be any of these three words, each of which would be one of its cases. There would thus be the case of location (*pays*), the case of occupation (*paysan*), and the case of representation (*paysage*). The location, occupation, and representation of a single reality. This reality would be nothing other than what is indicated by the Latin origin of the word *pays*: *pacus* or *pagus*, the canton, that is, again—and this time in conformity with the word *canton* itself—a "corner" of land. The country is first of all the space of a land considered from a certain corner or angle, a corner delimited by some natural or cultural feature (as one says when one thinks one can tell the difference): a row of trees or a road, a river or a ridge, a pass, a glacial constriction, a formation of alluvial deposits, a passing herd or an armed horde, an encampment. But first a corner: something that depends on a geometry as yet without ideality or analysis, the laying out of at least two axes of reference and thus of an opening separated by whatever angle they create, more or less wide or narrow, only exceptionally a right angle. Already a cadaster emerges: partitions, divisions, delimitations of cultures or of passages, of circulations and sojourns. But it is a cadaster without any administration. There is no need for the immediate invocation of property as an imperious act of takeover or extortion ("this is mine"); that will come later. For the moment we can imagine that

the proper or the appropriated, though not yet the possessed or the exploited, is confused with what is occupied by the occupation. But of course that is for the convenience of exposition: it is perhaps not so easy to disentangle the proper itself from all its appropriations, expropriations, and depropriations, although they cannot simply be collapsed together. (How is it possible to confuse what cannot be collapsed together? This is perhaps a general question regarding the landscape: the question of a general mixing together of the proper and the inappropriable, of the common, as divided up and shared out [*partagé*], and what is settled and separate [*départagé*], isolated, delimited . . . Or indeed: How does the landscape distinguish the indistinct and indistinguish the distinct?)

The corner, then, of the country. The country as a sector cut out of an indistinct expanse, like a portion of space that becomes separated out and placed above the general spacing. Which means, immediately: that spacing ceases to produce space purely as *partes extra partes* and that it effects an involution, that it spaces a *pars* for itself, in itself. A garden, a plot, or an enclosure, not, however, one that is first closed, in the sense of enclosed in itself, but disclosed: opened to a capacity that belongs to it but that does not preexist it so long as it is not made available within its closure. With this closure, it is not simply closed: it is also opened, and the opening as such lays out the edges, the demarcations that it needs.

Thus it is not a garden, for a garden belongs to a presupposed, preexisting space, which is the space of a dwelling. The garden is domanial; it belongs to the order of the courtyard: the house and its outbuildings open onto it, but it does not open onto anything. Paradise is a garden (that is the original sense of the word) because it is the common dwelling place of man and God. That is, moreover, why it can be closed to those who were expelled from it, which is to say, those whose own freedom drove them out of the domain.

In the garden, there cannot be any landscape (in the sense of countryside). There can only be the positing of reminders, citations of certain types of landscape (that is one of the principles of the Chinese garden). This is not merely a question of scale; it is a question of the relation to what is far and near, in a sense that is not simply that of measurable spatial distance. There are gardens—parks, if you prefer—of vast dimensions, whose perspectives, regular or not, can stretch far out of sight [*à perte de vue*]. But if sight gets lost, consciousness does not; it maintains itself as the consciousness of a domain and

as a self-assurance with respect to what is off in the distance. You yourself won't get lost there.

The landscape begins with a notion, however vague or confused, of distancing and of a loss of sight [*une perte de vue*], for both the physical eye and the eye of the mind. And so it is, already, with the *pays*. What constitutes a land or a country escapes any clear and distinct determination—whether geographical, juridical, or political. For a country is not a nation, nor is it a fatherland or a state. We often tend to confuse it with one or several of these notions, whereas it is very sharply distinguished from them. Even today, in many local areas [*campagnes*] in France (that is to say, among the *country people* or *paysans*), the word *pays* designates a hamlet or a canton as often as it refers to France itself. It thus designates in each case the place—the corner—from which one, or someone, comes: the place one comes from, where one was born, or where one lives. People used to say "un pays, une payse," meaning "a man or woman from the same place as oneself—the village, hamlet, or corner." In this sense, the country has some relation to the region, and yet the latter refers to an orientation rather than to a belonging. The region is at times the entirety of the surroundings, the area or vicinity as a space in which one finds oneself or which one traverses, and at times a space defined by the traits and features of a certain unity or identity, at once geographic, economic, and administrative: the region results from the establishment of a perspective, a directing of the gaze, and a conception. By contrast, the country manifests itself as something based on a belonging, but a belonging that can only come from one who "belongs" insofar as, and because, he is related to what he calls his "country." "To belong" means "to hold to [*tenir à*]," both in the sense of "being attached to" and in the sense of "having one's own pertinent relation to." "My country" is for me a matter of holding [*la tenue*] (I hold to it, it holds me, it holds together) and pertinence (it corresponds, it responds, it makes sense at the very least as a resonance). That is why "my country" can be, at the same time and with no contradiction, a town and a nation, a region, a neighborhood, a city. One also says *une terre* [literally, an "earth" as an area of land] in a sense close to this. The country is the corner of earth that one is attached to, by which one is held: as a son or daughter of the earth—which we all are—one can only be from one corner or another; one cannot be from the entire earth. The earth is made up entirely of countries and of the other spaces that are not corners of earth in that sense: open seas,

high mountains. When one is taken out of one's country, one feels estranged, unsettled, uncanny: one no longer knows one's way around, there are no more familiar landmarks, and no more familiar customs.

With the country, then, one is not in the garden, or in the courtyard, or in paradise, or in citizenship, or in any consideration determined by perspective, orientation, management, or administration. Before any other relation to the country, one is *in* it. When we speak of other countries, it is above all to designate the countries of other people, the countries to which others belong. But within the concept of a country is included the fact that it is the country of some particular set of people or another: it is "each time my own," one might say, invoking Heidegger's *Jemeinigkeit*. Taking this borrowed or detoured notion, I would even add that the country thus understood can be considered an existential in the sense of the existential analytic. And yet it has nothing to do with any nationalism or patriotism, nor with the community of a people—let this be said in order to prevent any political misunderstanding.

It remains true, nonetheless, even when all such misunderstandings are set aside, that the country and the people refer to one another. Perhaps the people is the country that speaks, and perhaps the country is a language when it is set outside of meaning. Be that as it may, they are both "each time my own," and they are both only vaguely determinable: thus my people [*peuple*] (I mean my own people for me, those I make my own) are a mixture of people [*gens*] from the north and from the south of France, French speakers and German speakers, with a Catholic (or, if you prefer, a baroque) sensibility and a theoretical disposition (or a philosophical or conceptual one, as you like), and also "country people" and "peasants" from my family and my childhood. Just as, for each person, the "people" and the "country" are a mixed and changing composite of signposts, signals, and connectives, which may be more or less logical, and just as, therefore, each person most often has (or is from) more than one people and more than one country, likewise each country and each people can be identified in several ways, and—reciprocally and symmetrically—the "each time my own" does not at all presuppose that a "my own," nor, therefore, a "me," is given in advance. There is no "me," identical to myself and present before all else, who would, then, recognize "my country." Quite the contrary: in "my country" (as in "my people," "my language") the possessive "my," and the whole "me" or ego that goes with it, is possible only on the basis of

an appropriation of the singular "So-and-so [*Untel*]" (a kind of "your name here") on the basis of the country, the language, and so on. Hence we see that everything is concentrated in an exemplary way in what makes up "my name": in what composes, destines, appropriates, declares a name in such a way that I have the task, for the sake of history, adventure or legend, of making it "each time my own," each day of my life, knowing that I will never have done with this appropriation. (As for this *I* who will never have done, it is precisely neither "me" nor another; it is nothing but the one who can say, "I am from this or that country, language, people," a statement in which the "I" is each time also empty and identical to the mere enunciation, and in which the "country," the "language," etc. can vary each time, can multiply and recompose itself otherwise in every case.)

That is indeed why the statement "I am"—Descartes' *ego sum*—never says anything about me: it says merely that there is here, in this here-and-now, a point from which speech is emitted, a speech that can continue, "I am from this or that country, of this or that language . . ."

The countryman, the peasant, is someone whose occupation is the country and the land. He occupies it and takes care of it, and he is occupied with it: that is, he takes it in hand and is taken up by it. *Occupy* comes from *capio*, "to take, to grasp." Being a peasant means taking in hand the place and the time of the country. Its culture and cultivation, as one says; that is, the fashioning of one by the other—the occupier and the occupied, the toiler and the toiled (which are by turns the one called "the peasant" and that which surrounds him, which is called "the land," "the countryside [*le campagne*]," in the sense of the field [*le champ*], which, for its part, is also a corner or a piece of earth, but opened, extended, cleared by and for the occupation of growing and grazing). The peasant is the one who occupies himself with the land, but he is not, for all that, necessarily someone who works in agriculture. He can be the landsman of all sorts of lands, languages, peoples. What defines him is that he is occupied by or with belonging. Thus there are peasants of the cities or even of science or philosophy. There is some peasant in anyone who belongs and who is taken up with time-and-place, in anyone who makes his own some corner of the here-and-now: it can be a machine, a highway, or a computer as much as a field of beets or a stable. (To be sure, the peasant is, properly speaking, someone who is occupied

with an immobile land, and this extension of the concept that I am proposing is only acceptable if we "immobilize" the machine or the computer: if we make of them a sort of ground or region [*contrée*] that one can dig into, dig up, uncover . . . Why wouldn't the Internet also be a kind of movable earth?)

A peasant is a worker who works time-and-place at the same time as the object of his work. It is in this sense that there can be a peasant in the city, a peasant in thought or in art: as the one who not only produces, but who above all cultivates, that is, who makes something come about and lets something grow. The peasant is also the one who is not at all in his work, the one who gives place and time to operations other than his own, to ripenings and stretches of waiting, to very ancient buried memories or to sudden mutations, to unforeseeable intersections and to the vagaries of the sky. Even if he cultivates with fertilizer or if he prevents the birds from coming into his fields, even if he manipulates genetic sequences or the crossing of varieties, the peasant works with the land, he works *on*, *at*, and *in the land*. Or else, the land is itself the set of forces that play off one another, against one another, and in one another.

It is not a question of "nature." "Nature," as it is most often understood, is an abstraction, as is the idea of man standing before it. What is real is the earth, the sea, the sky, the sand, one's feet on the ground, and one's breath, the smell of grass and of coal, the crackling of electricity, the swarming of pixels . . . There is no real except for the earth, with all its corners and recesses [*coins et recoins*], all its lands and their peasants. In this sense, the country represents the order of meaning that is posited selfsame with the earth, equally separated from the order of language and from that of nature. It is an order of the body, of embodied extension, disposed and exposed: the earth such that it has nothing other than itself outside itself.

But the peasant is also the pagan: both words are doubles for the single word *paganum*. The pagan is the one who knows and worships the gods of the country, the gods who are present in each corner of the field, at each limit of the domain, or in the spring, in the hollow of the oak, along the side of the road or in the stable, among the reeds of the pond or even as a toad, a slowworm, or a barn owl. The pagan lives in the continuous presence of the gods, or he is someone for whom the gods are presence itself: someone for whom the divine is distributed among numerous gods because it is the divine of presence. The pagan does not have a religion with multiple gods, as if this

were a possible choice in relation to other religions with only one god or even without any gods. There are, in fact, only two possibilities: either the divine is present, and it is so immediately in a crowd of gods who populate the land; or the divine is absent, and there is only one god withdrawn into an elsewhere—or else no god, which, in the end, amounts to the same. Being a pagan, the peasant is occupied with the gods as much as with the sowing of barley, the bulls, or the thunder. In all things, in every respect, each time distinct and singular, there is a presence that acts, that lurks or gives signs, that occupies the place, the plant, or the animal that encounters (and sometimes counters) the occupation of man. This occupation in each case reckons and comes to terms with the presence that is nothing but the earth itself as an inexhaustible reserve of presence and presentation, that is, the non-mortal or the immortal that gives and takes, that provides and that threatens, in which everything rests or lies buried.

In a certain way, the peasant can only be pagan. But when the country is transformed in such a way that its land and occupation become urban and industrial, even in the countryside—in its cultures and its exchanges—then the divine withdraws from presence. Meaning is no longer a matter of presence but of another regime, suspended between pure absence and infinite distancing. A general estrangement occurs, in which pagans and peasants can find themselves unsettled, straying and lost.

It is thus that we encounter the question of landscape, that is, of the representation of the country and the peasant, but perhaps also of estrangement and uncanniness. Two orders of representation are possible here. The pagan order, properly speaking, does not give us what we call a "landscape." It gives us scenes played out among characters and figures: spring nymphs, forest satyrs, a goddess surprised at her bath by a hunter, the north wind, or the mossy hollow in the trunk of an oak. This is the reason why antiquity seems hardly, or not at all, to have known the genre we are calling "landscape" (whether understood in terms of painting, literature, or even music). When there is something that resembles a landscape—in Virgil's *Georgics*, for example—it is the activity of the peasant that comes to the foreground, not the "land" or the corner of earth for itself: the activity of the peasant is situated between the divine presences and the tutelary presence of the empire. In what we know of ancient painting, we can find pastoral and sometimes exotic settings, but this

goes no further than a setting that takes its meaning only from an action (work or pleasure) and from presences at work (which one could call theologico-political). The same is true for painting all the way up to Giotto. To specify these ideas, and because it is a very well-known work, consider *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (1412–16): there the landscape is clearly subordinate to the organization of theologico-political signs.

We could say that landscape begins when it absorbs or dissolves all presences into itself: those of the gods or of the princes, and also the presence of the peasant, at least insofar as this figure is in dialogue with those just mentioned. In the landscape, the landsman can appear, but as an element of the landscape: he is entirely given over to his occupation there, is lost in it, and that is also why he can be replaced by a traveler or a walker, in any case by figures who are occupied only with the land as such and to no other end, figures whom, by the same token, the land occupies, takes hold of and, as one says, "absorbs" into itself. Despite the importance of the natural framework, Millet's *Angelus* or Breughel's *Fall of Icarus* are clearly not landscapes. Or else—and in order to remain with familiar references—consider the background of the *Mona Lisa*: it shows two allegories of the human relation to the world, on one side a path of life, on the other an engineer's bridge, and there is no landscape in any of this, not even that of a background. This is because, quite precisely, the landscape is the contrary of a ground: the "land" in it must be entirely surface, and that alone throughout.

A landscape contains no presence: it is itself the entire presence. But that is also why it is not a view of nature distinguished from culture but is presented together with culture in a given relationship (of work or rest, of opposition or transformation, etc.). It is a representation of the land as the possibility of a taking place of sense, a localization or a locality of sense, which makes sense only by being occupied with itself, making itself "itself" as this corner, this angle opened onto an area opposite or onto a spectacle already laid out; but it is an angle opened onto itself, creating an opening and thus a view, not as the perspective of a gaze upon an object (or as vision) but as a springing up or a surging forth, the opening and presentation of a sense that refers to nothing but this presentation.

For this situation to be in place, an originating condition is necessary: an absenting of all presence that would possess any authority or any capacity for sense. This means that the landscape can be neither

theological nor political, neither economic nor moral. It appears in history, in a very precise manner, at the moment when these different registers of meaning are changing, to the point of overturning the entire order of landmarks in the European world—and this is perhaps also the very birth of Europe.[1] In his own way, Chateaubriand clearly grasped what was at stake: in *The Genius of Christianity* he explains that the landscape belongs specifically to Christianity in art.[2] Indeed, Christianity drives the pagan gods out of nature "in order to give the caves their silence and the woods their revery." Thus "the true God, by returning back into his works, has given his immensity to nature." What Chateaubriand does not notice is that this penetration of God into nature, along with the unbounded enlargement that accompanies it, also constitutes a withdrawal of all divine presence and thereby of all presence in general: what is henceforth present is the immensity itself, the limitless opening of place as a taking place of what no longer has any determinate place, that is, of what no longer corresponds to determinate figures, circumstances, or actions. But Chateaubriand touches on this motif nonetheless: evoking the poetry of the "American forests," he notes that "the traveler . . . feels disquieted, agitated, as though in expectation of something unknown."[3]

The landscape opens onto the unknown. It is, properly speaking, place as the opening onto a taking place of the unknown. It is not so much the imitative representation of a given location as the presentation of a given absence of presence. If I may force the point a bit, I would say that, instead of depicting a "land" as a "location [*endroit*]," it depicts it as "dis-location [*envers*]": what presents itself there is the announcement of what is not there; more exactly, it is the announcement that, "there," there is no presence, and yet that there is no access to an "elsewhere" that is not itself "here," in the angle opened onto a land occupied only with opening in itself.

That is why the landscape is not a view that "opens onto" some perspective. It is, on the contrary, a perspective that comes to us, that rises from the picture and in the picture in order to form it, that is, in order to *con*form it in relation to an absolute distance and according to the spacing and distancing from which, rather, an unknown light "opens onto" us, placing us not before it but within it. After Chateaubriand, Baudelaire will say (in a poem entitled "Landscape"): "The great skies that make one dream of eternity."[4] Dream, presentiment, vague aspiration—these make up what one can call the "feeling" or the "sense of the landscape" in the various meanings of the genitive. This feeling is that of an absence: I would say that it is

the feeling of atheism, not as a positive affirmation of a world consisting of nothing but itself—precisely because here, in this "here" of the landscape, it does not consist of itself but of its opening—but rather as an affirmation that the divine, if it presents itself in some way, certainly does not present itself as a presence or as a representation, nor as an absence hidden behind or within the depths of nature (another form of presence), but as the withdrawal of the divine itself.

In this sense, the complete determination of the landscape is given—not surprisingly—in a poem by Hölderlin. After evoking the ruins of the "cities of the Euphrates" and the "streets of Palmyra," he writes:

> Jetzt aber siz' ich unter Wolken (deren
> Ein jedes eine Ruh' hat eigen) unter
> Wohleingerichteten Eichen, auf
> Der Heide des Rehs, und fremd
> Erscheinen und gestorben mir
> Der Seeligen Geister.
>
> But now I sit beneath clouds
> (Each one has a peace of its own), among
> The well-ordered oaks, on
> The deer's heath, and strange to me
> Seem, and dead,
> The blessed spirits.[5]

The landscape is the space of strangeness or estrangement and of the disappearance of the gods. It is, in truth, the opening of the space in which this absenting takes place. For this reason, it cannot give a presentiment of another, analogous presence that would simply be invisible where others were visible. It neither hides nor reveals nor evokes the invisible as a sur-visible that it would be necessary to divine by squinting into the light of the sun. For it opens onto itself: it opens onto the dividing up and sharing out [*partage*]—of the sky and the earth, of the clouds and the oaks—that it itself is, the separation of the elements in which a creation always consists.

It is in this precise sense that creation takes place *ex nihilo*: its materials and its operation are nothing other than separation and division. It is the separation or tearing apart of what is not yet anything, what is not distinguished from anything and is purely empty in itself. The division itself is nothing: it is the separation, the interval, the insubstantial line of the horizon that joins and disjoins earth and sky. All landscape painting paints a horizon: it paints the one-dimension-

ality of its line as at once a closure of space, a flight into infinity, and an arabesque laid out and multiplied in the lines of trees, clouds, hills and paths, branches and vaults, loops and angles, so many fractals of a single horizon, which never stops drawing back and renewing the partition of its elements.

These elements are given each for itself—the peace of the cloud and the order of the oak, the uncultivated earth on which the deer passes—and nothing else is presented or hidden, nothing but the withdrawal of the presences that, in another world, would have populated the landscape. This landscape is depopulated of its "blessed spirits." Depopulated, the landscape estranges, it renders uncanny [*le paysage dépaysé*]: there is no more community, no more civic life, but it is not simply "nature." It is the land of those who have no land, who are uncanny and estranged [*le pays des dépaysés*], who are not a people, who are at once those who have lost their way and those who contemplate the infinite—perhaps their infinite estrangement.

If the Blessed have departed from this land, it is not, for all that, stricken with sorrow: neither blessed nor sorrowful, it is held in suspense. Uncanny estrangement occurs in the suspension of presence: the imminence of a departure or an arrival, neither good nor evil, only a wide space [*largeur*] and a generosity [*largesse*] that allow this suspension to be thought and to pass.

For this suspension is always a question of a passage or a passing on. A landscape is always a landscape of time, and doubly so: it is a time of year (a season) and a time of day (morning, noon, or evening), as well as a kind of weather [*un temps*], rain or snow, sun or mist. In the presentation of this time, which unfolds with every image, the present of representation can do nothing other than render infinitely sensible the passing of time, the fleeting instability of what is shown. Every cloud has *its own* peace, but this peace is so properly its own that it has such a peace—everything shows this—only at the moment when *this* cloud has not yet become another, and with it the entire landscape, which incessantly estranges and unsettles.

A landscape is always the suspension of a passage, and this passage occurs as a separation, an emptying out of the scene or of being: not even a passage from one point to another or from one moment to another, but the step [*le pas*] of the opening itself. This *step* is the immobilization in which forward movement is grasped as a basis or a "footing," a span of the hand, the marking out of a measure accord-

ing to which a world can be laid out. The walker stops, and his step becomes that of a compass, the angle and amplitude of a disposition of space, on whose step—at whose threshold, at whose point of access—a gaze presents itself as a gaze.

This gaze does not discover presences within an already formed and given order, like that of religion, which populates the forests and the fields. It discovers the place without god, the place that is only a place of taking place and a taking place for which nothing is given, nothing is played out in advance: no country, then, is given, and every possible peasant has to invent everything in his occupation, as well as in the manner and the intention by which his culture is most suitably invented. Here uncanniness is originary.

What is contemplated is a *templum*: a temple, that is, for the Romans, a sacred space cut out of the sky by the wand of an augur. When it is sacred, the temple defines a place for presences: such as the birds that will pass through it, or clouds, or lightning flashes. When it is the temple of the landscape (Baudelaire, once again: "nature is a temple"), it cuts out a place for the withdrawal of presence, for the thought of presence as withdrawn from itself: estranged and unsettled presence, from which all the gods have departed and the humans are always still to come.

This contemplation is the contemplation of an access: the step, the threshold, the measure of the compass, as a way to accede to what remains inaccessible. It is inaccessible not because it would be concealed in the clouds, the greenery, or the flowing water but because it is, from the outset and forever, beyond and on this side of access: indeed, it is access itself, it is the opening step of the landscape, it is the measure of the picture—whether on canvas or on a screen, in verse or in prose, or even in music (in a certain way, is there not always landscape in music, and vice-versa?). This measure is the artistic and philosophical measure par excellence: it is the measure that defines the infinite in the finite.

5

Distinct Oscillation

> When I have painted a beautiful picture, I have not written down a thought. That's what they say. How simple-minded! They rob painting of all its advantages. The writer has to say almost everything to be understood. In painting, a kind of mysterious bridge is built between the soul of the figures *and that of the spectator* [. . .]. On the difference between literature and painting in terms of *the effect that a sketched out thought can produce*, in a word, on the impossibility of sketching anything in literature in such a way as to depict something for the mind.[1]

♦ The difference between text and image is flagrant. The text presents significations, the image presents forms.

♣ Each one shows something: the same thing and yet a different thing. By showing, each one shows itself, and therefore also shows the other one across from it and facing it. It therefore also shows itself to it: image shows itself to text, which shows itself to image.

♥ Thus an imaged image and the word *image* show—in showing each other and showing themselves (to be)—the same thing and yet a different thing. Furthermore: the word "image" shows itself as an image whereas an imaged image shows itself the way the word *image* does. At least each of them wants to believe this, or behaves as if it did.

♠ Can a text on a text (an interpretation, a commentary) and the image of a text (the painting of a book, of a letter) be interchanged? Does the text make an image of the text it interprets? Does the image become a text on the text that it, too, interprets?

● In any case, the two show what it means to show—to manifest, to reveal, to place in view, to shed light on, to indicate, to signal, to produce. They show, and in showing, they show that there are at least two kinds of showing, heterogeneous and yet stuck to one another, collated, pressed and compressed together (like the stones in an arch), attracting and repelling one another. Each is both pleasing and repulsive to the other. Each is *monstrative* and *monstrous* to the other. A monstrum is the sign of a wonder. Image and text are each a wonder for the other.

♠ This is because they are such strangers to each other and because, at the same time, each discerns itself in the other: each one distinguishes a tinge, a vague outline of itself in the ground of the other, deep in its eye or its throat. Each one draws the other toward itself or is drawn toward it. There is always a tension. There is a drawing out [*du tirage*], a traction: in a word, a line [*un trait*]. There is an invisible, untraced line that draws out and traces on both sides, that passes between the two without passing anywhere. It draws out and traces nothing, perhaps, but this impalpable line . . .

♣ But in this tension, in spite of it or because of it, both one and the other *present* something, which is placed before our eyes. But the text can be pronounced, and therefore drawn away from every image, perhaps also every presence. In any event, it is not a question of the same eyes in each case: there are the eyes of the mind and those of the body.

♠ I hear you, I understand. Moreover, I can close my eyes and repeat, out loud or silently, what you just said. Does it follow, then, that the text pronounced excludes all images? I'm not so sure. The speaking voice has its own form, its sonorous image. See for yourself: when I say "sonorous," do you not have an image? Do you not discern a round "o"-"o"-"o" . . . ?

● Oh, oh! I see what you're saying: I see the voices that I hear! I see them so well, in fact, that the spoken text calls up, as though from out of itself, the face of its voice, the movement of its lips, the

passing glimpse of the inside of the mouth, of the tongue and the teeth, and of the whole articulatory cinema, not to mention of the overall expression of the face. The voice draws the eye. It is always a drawing and pulling: a division of space, an incision, but also a shot taken [*un trait lancé*], a drawing back and letting fly toward the other. Image and text: arrow and target for each other.

♣ You spoke of "cinema": it is also theater, although the nature of the images or their mode of delivery is not the same.

● Certainly, they are different. At the very least in that, in their relation to the text, the theater proposes an entire body, a body that is physical and present, moving on a stage, whereas the cinema presents a body that is cut up and framed—even if it is shown in its entirety. This frame is linked to the text, even if it is not subordinated to it, or else it becomes a sort of text, an articulation.

♦ One could say, then, that the theater embodies the text above all, gives it flesh and blood, breath and posture, whereas the cinema textualizes the body, makes it signifying. And the theater demands a writing appropriate to it, a writing of gesture, posture, and breath.

♦ But it is also in this sense that cinema was initially "silent." One spoke by way of a text written on panels inserted between the images, after or before the filmed faces pronounced the words. Often one saw these words twice: once as text, in images of writing; once in the movement of the lips, the eyes, the hands, which the actors deliberately drew out in their poses and gestures.

♠ You said it yourself: the text on the panels was, nonetheless, an image too. It was not merely the text as the meaning of the words. It was, in the successive stream of images, a kind of image, which offered a passing insight into the element of sense: into consciousness, if you like. The black ground of the screen on which the letters appeared, or else the frame surrounding them (which was often embroidered with a few foliage designs, curlicues, or arabesques), delivered sense as an image, in a view opened onto that which makes this sense: onto the subject, into the subject. A view into that obscure subject of meaning, that black sun.

♥ You mean both into the thinking subject, therefore also the speaking subject, and into the subject treated, that is, the object of

the discourse and of the action, the intentions, feelings, and agitated representations of the characters.

♠ Yes, both of these together, and each one subject to the other: the subject of sense and the sense of the subject, the whole making up the subject of the film, which is inextricably what it treats and what directs it, what gives it a perspective or a proper vision, a style or an atmosphere, a manner.

● But the manner is that of an image. It is what makes an image, including in the text. Making an image means producing a relief, a protrusion, a trait, a presence. Above all, the image gives presence. It is a manner of presence. Manner and matter of presence. It has often been said: no discourse can compete with the power of an image. (Nevertheless, discourse is not the same as text.)

♥ But what is "giving presence"? Isn't it giving what cannot be given: what is or is not? You are present or you are not. Nothing will give you presence except your arrival, which is no one or is yourself. Come on, now, show yourself!

● Yes, yes, giving presence means giving to someone who is not there something that one cannot give him. It is the squaring of the circle, or of love, which gives something one does not have to someone who does not want it, as a psychoanalyst (which is to say, a specialist in image-texts) once said. The image gives a presence that it lacks—since it has no other presence than the unreal one of its thin, filmlike surface—and it gives it to something that, being absent, cannot receive it.

♣ The image thus gives presence to the text, if with this word *text* you understand the interlinking, the meshing and weaving together of a sense. Sense consists only in being woven or knit together. Text is textile; it is the material of sense. But sense as such has no material, no fibers or consistency, no grain or thickness. Sense "as such" consists precisely in nothing other than weaving together an "as such": for example, I say "a flower," and now the flower *as such*, that is, as nothing presentable, absent from every bouquet, from every garden or botanical book, begins to link "such" to "such," relating endlessly to itself as its own sense or idea, which never has done with linking itself to itself, all the better to let loose and unwind

its parcel of silky fibers while also spinning out its sense or its indefinite metaphor.[2]

♦ Its metaphor or its image, you see. This image is necessary for us, and this image of images—meta-phor, trans-port and movement aside, displacement—in order to give presence to this sense without material, incorporeal by definition, but which is only in the weave, not in the web or cloth. But how could there be a weave without a web? The image is the web of a threadless weave. Sense requires the image in order to emerge from its meager material, its inaudibility and its invisibility. Sense requires sound, line, and figure, without which it is as abstract and fugitive as the movement of a needle through the stitches of a piece of lace. The lace of sense fails at every moment to abolish itself in the doubt of its embroidery.

♠ Notice, however, that by drawing sense out of absence, by making *absense* a *presense*, the image does not do away with the impalpable nature of absence. On the contrary, it is occupied solely with this im-material, and that is what it *images*: allow me to use this verb in a sense that is neither "to illustrate" nor "to imagine." "To image" must be heard as a transitive verb whose action, however, cannot act on an object. I can illustrate a discourse by giving a concrete example, but this remains secondary in relation to the sense (at least that is how it is ordinarily understood). If, by contrast, I say that *I image* this discourse (for example, the discourse that says, "I say 'a flower'"), this is something completely different: I present its saying with its said; therefore I say "a flower" or rather, here, I say, "I say a flower," and the image is there, palpable as the impalpable in this saying of the saying, this movement of the needle in the stitch that already links saying to flower, but also "saying" to "speaking," "singing," "evoking," and "flower" to "scent," "petal," "wilting," "floret," "flora," or "flame"—and so many others that are *absent*. But there is doubtless no saying that is not in some way imaged. No denotation is without connotation, if you like. Connotation borders on denotation, and embroiders its borders. It is there that the image rises.

● The word *imago* designated the effigy of the absent, the dead, and, more precisely, the ancestors: the dead from whom we come, the links of the lineage in which each of us is a stitch. The *imago* hooks into the cloth. It does not repair the rip of their death: it does less and more than that. It weaves, it images absence. It does not

represent this absence, it does not evoke it, it does not symbolize it, even though all this is there too. But, essentially, it presents absence. The absent are not there, are not "in images." But they are imaged: their absence is woven into our presence. The empty place of the absent as a place that is not empty: that is the image. A place that is not empty does not mean a place that has been filled: it means the place of the image, that is, in the end, the image as place, and a singular place for what has no place here: the place of a displacement, a metaphor—and here we are again. The image calls out: "Make way! [*Place*!] Make way for displacement, make way for transport!"

♣ Thus the physical body of the theater and the framed body of the cinema are modes of occupying this place. They are ways of being placed there. And, by definition, there are various modes of this placement: since the place is empty, the number of modes is indefinite, perhaps infinite. Sense as what is absent, as its own incessant absenting, does not have any single mode of existing. Only full, complete presence has a single mode: it is identical to itself. But in this way, it does not exist, it is there. Sense exists, or rather it is the movement and flight of existing: of *ex-ire*, of going outside oneself, exceeding, exiling. Sense essentially disidentifies.

. . . . . .

Intermezzo

What Diderot admired in Richardson and in Greuze is, therefore, and quite precisely, what will later be sought in the cinema: "Outbursts of passion have often struck your ears; but you are very far from knowing all the secrets of their accents and their facial expressions. Each one has its own physiognomy; and all these physiognomies follow one another upon a given face without it ceasing to be the same face; and the art of the great poet and of the great painter is to show us a fleeting circumstance that had escaped our attention." *One could not better describe what we expect from the close-up. And what captivates Diderot in Joseph Vernet is the latter's "western" style* avant la lettre: "with infinite artfulness, to intermingle movement and rest, daylight and shadows, silence and noise."

The history of art sometimes plays the accordion, as it were. With his "necessary lengthiness," Richardson first stretched out the literary

time that Greuze's instantaneous cinema would compress in his paintings (which require long descriptions nonetheless; see the Salons*). In its turn, cinema, which like painting operates by means of images, will stretch them out by multiplying them in duration, as literature does with words.*[3]

. . . . . .

♥ Would you say that the body is the image, whereas the text is the soul?

● Certainly not, if you are suggesting that the image is on one side and the text on the other—which is what happens in what is normally called "illustration." This is an impoverished dualism, like every dualism. But, in truth, every image and every text is potentially, and respectively, text and image for itself. This potential is actualized in the gaze or in reading. I read a text and here is an image, or indeed, here is yet more text! In looking at the image, I always textualize it in some way, and in reading the text, I image it. These actualizations are innumerable: no text has its proper image, no image its proper text.

♥ But when an actualization occurs—which one could call, in either case, an *interpretation*—there is indeed soul and body, that is, form and intensity (for these are the true senses of the words *soul* and *body*). Form and intensity are intimately mingled together, however, just as the Cartesian soul is present everywhere in the body that it animates, or that animates it, as one might say. To *interpret* is precisely that: animation as embodiment, and embodiment as animation. It means configuring an intensity and intensifying a figure. *Body* and *soul* are in truth only one word, divided in two in order to show how they interpret each other in both senses at once.

♠ There is one thing that is outside interpretation, both as text and as image: namely, spirit—the self-equivalent breath, neither body nor soul, without form or intensity. Spirit becomes neither trait nor trace. It has no color, no figure, no letter, no style. Spirit has no body or soul.

♣ Image and text are therefore distinguished as soul and body: each is the limit of the other, its horizon of interpretation. The hori-

zon of the image is the text, with which it opens an indefinite power to imagine, before which the image is only a closure, a closed contour. But the horizon of the text is the image, with which it opens an indefinite power to imagine, before which the text is only an impotency, a permanent postponement of images.

♠ But in the end, or in the beginning, every horizon recedes indefinitely and is engulfed in the sea and the sun mixed together.

● But the image is not self-identical. Essentially, it is distinguished from itself. Thus we differentiate very clearly between an image and a thing that is not an image (at least so long as we do not treat the image as a thing or any thing as an image, which is always possible: the displacement is limitless). The image is, in every respect, distinction. It is distinguished from things or from living beings, it is distinguished from the imageless ground from which it is detached, and it distinguishes itself insofar as it designates itself as an image. It always says, simultaneously, "I am this, a flower," and "I am an imaged flower, or a flower-image." I am not, it says, the image *of* this or that, as if I were its substitute or copy, but I *image* this or that, I present its absence, that is, its sense. I image what is unimaginable in sense.

♦ Or rather, if I understand you, I present one of the possible modes of its sense, one of its possible distinctions, for example, as a physical body and a proffering of voice, as a framed body and an articulation of speech . . .

♠ And many other modes besides. It is not possible to enumerate them all. Theater and cinema are only modes in which the text is itself posited as such, giving rise, or giving place, to a delicate interval between textual presence (the sense understood, if you like) and an imaged absence (the sense concealed in the image's ground). Only the interval between the two, in the rhythm of the spectacle, properly makes the truth of the thing: the truth of sense. It is the cadence of moments in which sense is imaged, in which it stops the image in a "freeze frame," in an ungraspable grasping.

♥ There are other modalities in which the text is not given as such, in which it can no doubt appear, but also disappear. Then there is no text as text. The text, the weave, becomes something absent, which the image images. This happens even in the theater and in the

cinema, or at their limits, in pantomime or tableau vivant, sometimes in performance, or in the silent shot, especially if it is still or if it comprises an entire film. One is then in a situation of contagion with other modes.

♣ To tell the truth, where is there not contagion? Each mode is a mode of giving presence to an absence that threads its way in every direction, a point on the front, a point on the back, upside down or inside out, and this absence in incessant absenting puts all the modes into contact at their borders: the same unidentifiable texture circulates everywhere. The relation of image to sense is the eternal return of the same. The same sense always imaged otherwise.

♦ In the modes where no text is indicated as such—when sense does not say, "I say"—the text proceeds from the image itself. It comes out of it and returns to it, without setting down any words. This is the case with painting, photography, installation, sculpture and architecture, and, sometimes, video, performance, music, and dance. Always another step, always a step to the side: the image murmurs "*no text* [pas de texte]," and you hear "*the text step by step* [pas à pas le texte]."

● In fact, each of these modes may or may not display a text. In any case, there will be a title, a tag, even if only the negative "untitled." Somewhere there will be an indication that here is what one calls a "work." The minimum of discourse is the word *work*, or some other designation or deictic (a pointing finger, a pedestal) with the same function. *Work* then means not so much the product of a setting-into-work, not so much a particular piece of work, as the following indication: freeze frame here. A still image, meaning also: a still text, a fixed point and a cut of the weave in process, an immobilized needle, an eternalized movement.

♦ In that sense, look at the words found in paintings, when there are any, as in the medieval phylacteries, in inscriptions like "Et in Arcadia ego," in the snippets from diaries and the cubists' stenciled letters, not to mention the signatures (Caravaggio's in dripping blood, Bellini's on a parchment, among many others).[4] These words make sense, their ordinary sense—"pipe" or "I am the painter"—but they do so by absenting this sense in their image: they are their own graphism, their graphite and their graffiti, its matter, its paste, its

color; they are images in the image, insisting on their absent sense, giving rise to the unheard and the unintelligible, distinct from all received sense. In "Caravaggio" we hear "ravage," and the name resounds with blood and wounding, death and the death of sense, sense entering into death, knitting death with its needle, a withdrawn, secret sense, sacred and consecrating the image as image, that is, as an empty place, opening onto this indistinct ground in which the distinct, the absolutely distinct, detaches itself and disappears. Death to sense and sense in death: a skull images its empty thought. Upon it one writes: "Vanitas." In close proximity to this, Pascal declares: "What vanity painting is." But painting always paints a vanity of words.

♣ From Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* to Burroughs's cut-ups and the various forms of "concrete poetry," passing through the cubists or the suprematists, or from Schwitters to Hantaï, in countless places in contemporary art and in countless different ways, there has been a kind of proliferating obsession with words in painting, with the painting of words, with painted words and with writing as painting. The principle stimulus is a desire to embed words within painting, to bring out their form and material at the expense of their incorporeal value. Sense deposited right at the painting's skin. But this skin is already brushed against [*affleure*] in language: for a French or English speaker, meaning takes on another grain in German, another texture. From one language to another, there is always a diminution of signification and an increase in sensation. The text images itself. If I say "flower," *fleur*, *Blume*, *fior*, I do not say the same flower and yet I also do not say the flower itself (the flower "as flower").

♠ There would thus be none that is "absent from every bouquet," but rather each flower flourishes only in the climate of a language imaged in a way that is necessarily idiomatic and thus sonorous and visual. This paste of words, these petals stuck to the tongue, cannot be extricated—or transmitted.

♥ But the converse is equally true: there is also what might be called a stabbing desire to write in painting, to make some kind of signifier point, spurt, or spring forth in the image and outside the image. A desire for the image to speak of itself, in itself, and for itself. For it to become the body of the Word. There is an entire secret theology of transsubstantiation, a profane atheology of incarnation and communion: take and touch, devour with your eyes, this is my sense

spread before you, resuscitated as painting. Blood of sense that flows vermilion.

♠ Another atheology will say: image and text are the two holy species of a single withdrawn presence. The two aspects, the two sides or faces presented to the eye of the body and to the eye of the mind for an absence of surface, for an absent sense that has no facial value. The presentation of the absent always oscillates between the presence of a form and the presence of a sense; one always refers back to the other. Neither one, consequently, truly fixes a presence. Each one bears itself as an immobilization, in itself, of presence (here is the image, here is the text, everything is there)—and as an immediate reference in the direction of the other: here is the image, it *means* . . . ; here is the text, it *represents* . . . But who, then, is the one that is absent? Who is the one that is neither text nor image? Who is the one that would be located precisely at the intersection of this double reference, at the place where the meaning of the image encounters the meaning of the text without either one ever being the meaning of the other?

● We must avoid naming him, as you well know. I would like to use one of your words, however, and call him the "Oscillator." This word is the diminutive form of the Latin *os*, which signifies the mouth and, by metonymy, the face. *Oscillum* thus designated a small mouth (closely related to *osculum*, kiss), as well as a small mask of Bacchus hung in the vines as a scarecrow: the movement of this face swinging in the wind produced the sense of "oscillation." The Oscillator, then, swings between mouth and face, between speech and vision, between the emission of sense and the reception of form. But what appears to move toward an encounter does not do so at all: on the contrary, the mouth and the look are turned forward and are parallel, turned into the distance, toward an infinite perpetuation of their double and incommunicable position. Between mouth and eye, the entire face oscillates.

♦ And yet, the Oscillator does not cease to knock back and forth, to leap or to dance between the two, touching both of them. It wants to make the mask speak and it wants to give speech a mask. This happens for us now especially with video. With video, we no longer have to do with the textualized body of the cinema. Something else is involved, whose generic name is incrustation. Not only the incrustation of words in the image, but incrustation of the image itself: it is

embedded into the material of the screen, it is not placed upon it as in cinema, nor is it physically joined with a canvas as in painting. In a sense, we must not even speak any longer of a screen: video is not of the order of the screen, but of penetration. One is not a spectator but a voyeur. *Video* means "I see," whereas *theaō* means "I look" (and *kineō* is "I move"). "I look," "I move," and "I see" do not designate the postures of the presumed "spectator," nor of the presumed "artist." These verbs signify the work's *doing*, its manner of doing and making, what it does to sense or how it *makes sense*. Thus, in *video*, there is absorption in vision, with a tendency toward making absent what is seen. The seer and the viewer come before the visible. The support, in fact, is not an illuminated film but light converted into punctual signals. One enters into pulverulence and into the dance of points. The image becomes particular or particulate. The text, for its part, spoken or written on the image, becomes vibratory, decomposed and recomposed into suspended and rustling waves, slightly drawn back from any spoken language. The Oscillator is imprinted somehow in the flaky and granular matter of a vision turned into itself, onto itself (not necessarily in a narcissistic way), but everywhere rubbing against seeing and rubbing the text or making a text of this rubbing. In an oscilloscopic machine, the distinction between text and image is *virtually* effaced.

♣ But it is reborn from these snowy ashes. The Oscillator is indestructible in its oscillation. That is what separates it at every moment from any resolution into one side or the other, as well as into an improbable union of the two. For the interval between sense and sense is not masked only by the Oscillator. Consider painting once again: *pingo* means above all "to embroider with threads of color," or else "to tattoo." This mixes weaving, incision, and delineation with tinting and coloration. The woven thread and the puddle, or the line and the covered surface. Finally, drawing and painting, both of which run through the text: the first gives more lines to read, while the second gives warmth to words. If I write "red," why isn't it red? Should it be? Or should it be written in green? In purple? In black? I say "a flower," and here is the absent one arising red or white, or red and white and just as smooth and soft, flourishing or faded. But I write "a flower," and here is the word that is traced by marking the paper with a colorless smear.

♦ And yet, the flower is somewhere. It is behind the Oscillator itself. It follows its movement and remains behind the mask with

each oscillation. But behind it there is something else, or someone, who or which is neither text nor image, who or which is in the background, and forms the ground. Let us call this one the "Distinct." The Distinct is set apart: the distinct mark of sense, its *trait*. It is the stigma, that is, the incision that separates. It is the distinct mark of sense in two ways that are perfectly conjoined and contradictory: on the one hand, the mark by which sense is distinguished; on the other hand, the mark that is distinguished from every possible sense. On the one hand, the distinctive trait by which there is sense—this and not that, a flower or a caterpillar—but also one sense or another in the sense of sight and hearing: that which prevents one from confusing flower and caterpillar, written word and spoken word, embodied sense and incorporeal sense. On the other hand, a trait that is in retreat and drawn back from all sense. A nonsensory trait that is not embodied in any sense—neither a pencil stroke [*trait*] nor a stroke of the violin bow—but which is also not incorporeal like signification.

♣ The Distinct is in fact none of that, but it is not nothing. It is the thing itself: it is what is in the ground of things, at the heart of all things that are, and that withdraws their sense of being into the secret from which all the senses draw their sensibility. The Distinct and the Oscillator have a common cause. One supports the other, which in turn agitates the first. It is no more possible to distinguish them than to confuse them.

♣ But we must not believe that "text and image" can be replaced by "distinct and oscillator." These two couples are not homologous. They are also chiasmic in relation to one another. Either text is distinguished in the ground of the image and this image oscillates on the former's surface, or else the image is distinguished between the lines of the text and this text oscillates throughout. The image scintillates, and the text gives off a flat, muffled sound. The image is mute, and the text crackles with white noise. Or it is the inverse, at the same instant, in the same movement. Each one, in the end, is the distinct and the oscillator of the other. Each is the *ekphrasis* of the other while also being its illustration, its illumination. *Ekphrasis* draws a phrase from its other, just as, from its other, illumination draws a sight. A phrase image and a sight of sense.

● How does an image speak? In an image's language; that is, in a language with no verb or substantive, a language of infinitives and

conjunctions. How does sense make something seen? As a figure and an air of sense, that is, with no aspect or frontal surface, and in concealment.

♠ The infinitive of the image and the concealment of sense: each one courts the other and flees from it. That is Illumination: Image envelops Text, which conceals itself from it; Text devours Image, which emerges from it intact. The words appear to be there only in order to portray their own silence; the drawing seems to figure nothing other than a sense buried in its absence. Text calls Image: perhaps it says nothing other than this call. Image illustrates Text: it dazzles it and us with it, and perhaps does nothing else.

♥ Thus, on both sides there is a pressure and a precipitation toward the presence of the image, the blinding brilliance and the intimate conviction, immediate certainty. One believes the image with one's eyes closed. But there is also on both sides a disquietude and a melancholy in the text and its sense: eyes wide open, one sees it sink into the night, into which one would like to follow it.

♣ Each one calls to the other: illuminate me! *Mehr Licht!*[5] Without you I'll die! Or: you are my death but dying in you I illuminate myself. Illuminate me, illustrate me: surround me with glory, celebrate me, even delude me and de-limit me in your element!

● The relation between each one is a relation of sense: the text says the sense of the image, which says the sense of the text; it is the torturer's wheel. But at the same time, it is a relation of certainty: each one exposes to the other the assurance it lacks in not being identical to the other. Each exposed to the other and nothing between them. Image and text: this is the slit, perfect, definitive, and delicious, in which the naked truth is always recognized.

♥ *Image would therefore be to text what sense is to truth. But this equality of proportion would be perfectly reversible: image would also be to text what truth is to sense. Indeed, the image cannot lie: it is what it is and refers to nothing else. The text consists entirely in its reference to that of which it speaks. One might conclude from this that the image is a stranger to truth, is neither true nor false, or that it is nothing other than truth, the whole truth that shows itself in it each time. One might also conclude that the text is outside truth, since it always only takes us further and further into the infinity*

of sense, or that it alone is able to enunciate truth or lies concerning the subject of which it speaks. Everything depends on your notions of "truth" and "sense." If truth is what lends itself to verification, then the image is unverifiable unless it is compared with an original, which one assumes it must resemble. But this assumption is a discourse that you will have introduced, to which the image by itself gives no legitimacy. If truth is what is revealed or manifested from itself, it is not only the image that is always true, it is truth that is, of itself, always image (being in addition and simultaneously image of itself). As for "sense," if it consists in a reference moving from signifier to signified, it belongs only to text—where, in addition, it turns out to be indissociable from the reference of signifier to signifier and from the entire weave of a language. In this respect, an image has no sense: it is pure truth. But if sense is validity for a subject, then the image makes sense out of the fact that it shows itself: it is insofar as it has at least the sense of its arrival in coming up against and countering the gaze. In the end, as you can see, what is "image" and what is "text" depends on who is thus countered and what comes to be encountered. The encounter involves recognition and exchange, a commerce of signs and of mutual trust or mistrust. That which counters presents an obstacle and suspends the forward step. So it is at the beginning of Dante's path, when a panther "light-footed and very fleet, covered with a spotted hide" appears before him "and did not depart from before my face."[6] *Only a little later does Virgil appear. But countering and encountering are mixed together in everything that is ordinarily designated as "image" or as "text." There is almost nothing, only a minute separation, between the mark of drawing and that of the grapheme, between graphism and writing: this very narrow slit which is nothing other than the incision of the mark, paraph of truth in the midst of sense but also traced sideways from sense across the true, the slit between the lips, their very contour.*

♦ Through this slit, sight looks and speech writes, simultaneously, alternatively. In this way, sight looks into the mouth and speech writes into the eye. One sees the image in the other's ground, and the other traces a text in the ground facing it. But, through this operation, the ground in each becomes abyssal. Sight loses the Distinct in the ground of the eye, and speech loses the Oscillator at the tip of the tongue. In the ground of the abyss split open—blind spot, cloven tongue or pen—the Oscillator and the Distinct glow with a common and irreconcilable incandescence.

♠ What Image shows, Text de-monstrates. It withdraws it in justifying it. What Text exposes, Image posits and deposits. What Image

configures, Text disfigures. What the latter envisages, the former faces down [*dévisage*]. What one paints, the other depicts. But precisely that, their common cause and their common thing [*chose*], oscillates distinctly between the two in a paper-thin space: recto the text, verso the image, or vice (image)–versa (text).

● It has often been said that cathedrals were Bibles in stone for the illiterate. How mistaken! They are, quite obviously, both for the literate and for the illiterate, the frozen forms and the flipside of reading, the hidden face of writing. The *Qur'an*, for its part, is writing that is imaged from and as itself, and in reading it one is immersed in the illustrious letter. The icon, by contrast, makes the Word see: it does not make it visible, but makes vision plunge into it. The statue of Buddha is Buddha, says the disciple, but the master checks him: "You talk too much!"

. . . . . .

Coda

Of the secret Word of
tongue does not let us
ing us away. Our true words.
are here. The words that do not
in the air, are here. Read
ceptible to any pronun-
the eyes. Passing over the
stretch to infinity. Touch-
no body, the clarity
Only absorbing the light
The true words that connect
sounds; we see them dis-
clearly. The words that
umbra whose meaning sparkles
iant days, neither timbre nor
the words, these words here.
but impossible to recount
is entrusted to the voice; perhaps
them a little, although un-
Silence.[7]

Silence, even our mother
speak, except by turn-
The words never spoken
inhabit a voice resounding
as if they were not sus-
ciation, mutely transmitted. By
taut string of gazes, they can
ing no lip, passing over
allotted to words.
of the pupils. Through the eyes.
us, never reduced to these
tinct, their forms appear
shine in the pen-
through one of those rad-
melody, which remains always
Intention to divulge them;
them in a language that
with numbers, they resemble
pronounceable, Word of

. . . . . .

For the secret Image of . . .—there is no word for an absence of image. Perhaps the text-word? There is no word to say without an image. Which is not darkness. Nor blindness. But the unformed (rather than the formless, always somewhat deformed and therefore discernible), the inapparent, the unappearing. Without parency or patency or latency: but no image. The unimaginable that no word brings to image, not even this word unimaginable. *The privative* un- *here is the entire image, the darkness on stage, the end of the film, the film not printed. Not a thing behind the image waiting to appear, but the reversal and underside of the image, the back of the painting without a painting on the back. Rough surface of the real. Speaking of it turns us away from it, makes it an image after all, as when a painter paints the back of a painting. It is an image that must be unimagined, that is, thought, if thought is a commotion, a syncope, and a bedazzlement. Its flash is not the image of the obscure, but the brilliance that sparks out from having knocked against it: a flash of darkness sliced away. A blow and a shout, a stupefying pain, a breath cut short, the wordless unimagined, in a bark, a wail, a groan, a sonorous uprising.*

6

Masked Imagination

The Kantian Schema

Between the Renaissance and the nineteenth century, European thought (the world that was in the process of westernizing itself, of imagining itself as "world") shifted from the painting to the projection screen, from representation to presentation, and from the idea to the image, or, more precisely, from the fantasy or the fantasm to the imagination. We can also say it thus: from ontology to phenomenology, or, therefore, from being to appearing, from form to formation, or from matter to force, from idea to conception, and, to sum it all up in a word: from sight [*la vue*] to vision. Or, in terms that are even more incisive: from the image as lie to truth as image. Nothing less.

This important group of displacements no doubt constitutes, after the Greeks and Christianity, the third decisive moment in the West. For the Greeks, there was light, and a sight that looks into the light (following a nocturnal world populated by forces, not forms). For the Christians, there was an eclipse of the visible and an insistence on speech: call, exhortation, a saying whose force is not in the said, an auto-energetic enunciation.

With the modern age, a certain synthesis occurs: a sight that operates like a saying, a performative enunciation of a vision—"this is a thing." In fact, what occurs is *synthesis* plain and simple, one that we could call the synthesis-image, an expression whose current technical

sense can only be derived from Kant (since it is to him that these remarks refer, as you have no doubt guessed).

The Kantian imagination is indeed the first modern figure (if I dare to speak of a figure here . . . but this is deliberate, as you can well imagine) of a faculty of images that is not representative (at least not in the current sense of the word) but presentative, appresentative, or apperceptive (that is, perceiving for itself, perceiving *ad subjectum*), constitutive or productive of its object—or of itself as an object—and thus, in the end, a purveyor of knowledge. Regardless of whether this knowledge is determinant or reflective in the Kantian sense of these terms, and regardless of whether it is therefore cognition or thought (or, indeed, knowledge or belief—or faith—here too in Kant's sense), it is a knowledge through the image, for the imagination is what presents all things—the object and the subject, the triangle and the ultimate ends, the imaginable and the unimaginable.

Between these two extremes, as we know, there is a technics (or an art), which occupies the decisive place insofar as it is understood as the pure production of a form whose name, "beauty," signifies that it is valid absolutely for itself—or, indeed, as pure production of an excess of all form (called "sublime"), in which the imagination imagines itself as unimaginable or unimagining, and thus again as productive of itself even unto its failure, productive of its limit and of the surpassing of its limit. The Kantian subject—since that is what this *self-imagining* is—designates two pure modalities of such a surpassing, modalities that form the two extremes of its tension: its transcendental temporality and its unconditional freedom.

The imagination goes from one to the other, since time forms or gives the possibility of presentation as composition of unity in general: "Number is therefore simply the unity of the synthesis of the manifold of a homogeneous intuition [in general, a unity] due to my generating time itself in the apprehension of the intuition."[1] Number is the first of the schemata, or the "pure schema of magnitude (*quantitas*)." In other words, it is the schema of the *one* as successive to itself. It is the pure image (the schema is a non-sensible image) by which, in general, *an* image is possible, that is, by which the unity and unicity of a representation are possible.

The subject produces unity—that is, its own unity as subject-of-a-representation—as successive. That is its primary schematism, or its pure imagination, the condition of possibility of any image, of any (re)presentation: the condition for their being *an* image, and not a

chaotic flux (without this singular image being simply one and unified: what it does, simply, is present itself).

Insofar as it is or makes time, the schema gives the image as finite: in place of a uni-totalizing intuition that would be the divine vision of a One in-itself in its own infinite act (the Monad of monads in Leibniz), there is merely the one *that succeeds itself* by giving itself or by opening a possibility of images, of the vision of an object. This one is a sort of *ad hoc* formation of the image always renewed but never completed in the unique form of the real.

At the other extreme, freedom consists, for the subject—and in a symmetrical fashion—in *not* (re)presenting an image of the world as a rational or reasonable whole endowed with ends, except through a weak image called a "type" (as distinguished from a "schema") which serves as a symbol: the type of a nature ordered by laws, which helps us to think the duty of acting unconditionally in order to *produce* (that is, also in order to *imagine*) a moral, or free, nature.

Kant's famous Pietism is of some importance here. Without going back to Luther's principled reserve concerning images (which, it should be recalled, had to do with the adoration of the image and not its production or its presence as such), and also without doing history here, properly speaking, it must be pointed out that Kant inherits the critique of *Schwärmerei* from an entire tradition in which this *Schwärmerei* was accociated, as a delirium of the imagination, with magic, sorcery, and mysticism in general, as well as with Catholicism considered to be a form of idolatry.

As a movement with mystical tendencies (particularly in comparison to the dominant form of Lutheranism), Pietism had a complex relationship with the imagination. The latter was simultaneously rejected, on the grounds that a given image cannot claim to be an immediate presence of the divine or of spirit, and yet solicited once again—behind the scenes, so to speak—as a force capable of letting the divine manifest itself in an inner light (an expression associated with the Puritan traditions) by which one accedes, not to images properly speaking, but to the very condition of all vision and/or truth (if it is true, precisely, that truth must in the end be seen). On this point as on others, one always finds in Protestantism (of which I consider Kantianism to be one extreme) a tendency to discredit a false religion (and sometimes religion in general) for the purpose of establishing another that is more pure, more abyssal or more abysmal (more engulfed, more rapturous . . .), and thus a movement that

carries itself beyond images (idols) toward the very origin of illumination and, consequently, toward the obscure point of a divine imagination. If Leibniz's God calculates, Kant's God, to the extent that one can speak of him, imagines: he imagines the moral world and he imagines himself as the light of this world. For this God is nothing other (and in this sense he is an heir to Spinoza's God) than the *intuitus originarius*, which in turn is nothing other than the imagination that creates the world. This latter (whose objective reality cannot be posited) is what must regulate the thought of the *intuitus derivatus*, that is, the imagination that produces our representations. This movement toward the source, both unconditional and asymptotic with respect to an originary imagination, will have managed to pass through the very death of God, and perhaps it had to do so; we will come back to this.

But let us remain with Kant for a moment. In the perspective I am indicating, time, on the one hand, and freedom, on the other—the subject's two lines of flight—necessarily come *from before themselves*: in order to take place, they have already taken place. In order to open the possibility of a world and of experience, they have already opened this opening itself. In this sense, the correspondence between time and freedom is an intimate one, it is even *interior intimo ipso* . . .

Now, experience is first the image, *Bild*: the possibility of a presentation. Henceforth, presence cannot consist in a being-present without consisting identically in a presentation of being. In general, anything that is comes down, in the first or last instance, to an image that I give myself or that gives itself: this, here, comes down to the same, and there is no imagining "subjectivity" that is not also the "objectivity" of the image itself. Thus, the corollary of the "subject of representation," or, more exactly, its very condition, consists in what is not yet either a subject or a representation, but a making-image, a *mise-en-image* or putting-into-image: *Einbildung*.[2] That is what subjectivizes the subject and also what objectivizes the object, and it is there that the subject becomes abyssal, engulfed in its infinite antecedence to every possible object.

What I thus give myself or what thus gives itself *before all else*—in the precise sense of these words—cannot be already an image, but must be its possibility: not *Bild* but the *Einung* of *Bild* (*Einung* is an old, and rare, poetic form of *Einigung*, uni-fication). It is the making-one, the bringing-into-the-one of the *Bild*. It is a fore-seeing of the image, of

the opening to a view in general. The schema thus fore-sees and pre-opens the vision of the union (or as the union) of the concept (*a* thing, *some* thing, *several* or *all* things . . .) and sensible material (proliferating multitude, magma or plasma that is not anything). The schema is "the non-sensible image," as Kant says, which is to say that it has the unity of a manifold without any manifold being given, but also without the pure and empty unity of the one that is nothing but one. The schema fore-sees in that it forms a pure image *of* the image as a gathering together and a unifying of the manifold: a pure image of how something *presents itself* in general. The schema fore-sees and in sum pre-(s)-ents self-presenting: in German, *es bildet*, or *vor-bildet*, it preforms or models the *Bild*. One could also say: it imagines or it images the imagination itself, the ground and the force from which it arises. And, by that very fact, it gives us an understanding of the image that is completely different from the ordinary version of representation, figuration or fiction.

To say it in German: "ein Bild ist was sich einbildet und wie es sich einbildet." An image is what imagines itself and how it imagines itself. Or again: "ein Bild ist das dass und das wie, sich als und in eins zu bilden"; an image is (the fact) that and the way in which something forms itself in and as one. An image is the making-one, the making-itself-one of something. This "one" is not unity as opposed to multiplicity: it is the possibility that anything at all, including something multiple or fluid, may come to presence; which is to say that, as some thing or event, it may bring itself out of the confused and incessantly dissolved dispersion of sensible givens in order to give *itself* to be seen. In order to make something be seen.

To give itself—to be given—to be seen coming out of the non-visible and the non-seeing: for we understand that in the imagination thus envisaged, the object and the subject are given together and give themselves to one another, or even in one another, "ein ins andere hinein sich bildend."[3]

The Heideggerian Image

In his analysis of the schematism, Heidegger perfectly understands what is at stake here, and the necessity of thinking it in order to penetrate the secret of the schematism (reputed by Kant to be unassailable, as is well known)—which, however, does not exactly amount, it will be noticed, to "wrenching away" this secret (Kant uses this expression), to extract its "art" (also Kant's term). It means, rather,

entering into the logic of what can be called, for the sake of convenience and in order to provide an image, the *self-imagining* of the schematism.

I would like to examine the operation by which Heidegger attempts to do this, and, in particular, the way in which this operation *images self-imagining* for us, the way in which it exemplifies or provides a model for "making an image." I would like to do this by commenting on section 20 of the *Kantbuch*,[4] entitled "Image and Schema."

There Heidegger writes: "First of all, image [*Bild*] can mean: the look [*Anblick*] of a determinate being insofar as it is manifest [*offenbar*] as something at hand [*Vorhandenes*]. It offers the look."[5] The usual sense of *image* here, then, is "first of all" the *aspect offered* by something. (It should also be noted that the German *Bild* has an etymology very different from that of *imago*—which is the representation of the dead—implying rather form, aspect, or overall outward appearance.) It is the *Anblick*, the "glance" or the "look" presented, directed toward us by the thing. Heidegger continues by saying that this sense can be extended to *Abbild* or copy (the translator says "likeness," in the sense of a portrait or reflection; a photo is commonly referred to as an *Abbild*)—the copy of a present thing, then, or else to *Nachbild*, an imitation, reproduction, or "after-image" of a being no longer present, and to *Vorbild*, the model or "fore-image" of a being yet to be created.

We find ourselves, then, before the immediate image-aspect, as well as the mimetic triplicity of portrait-reconstruction-model; Heidegger adds to this the "very broad" sense of "look in general," in which it is not said whether what is rendered visible (*anschaubar*, "intuitable") is "a being or a non-being" (consequently, this is also true for the "look" of a projection, an ideal configuration). He says that Kant uses all three senses without formally distinguishing them, and he expresses a doubt that these distinctions alone will be able to clarify the schematism. But of course that is precisely what he sets out to do. In fact, he will attempt to show how the production of the possibility of "creating a look" in general refers back, prior to any kind of mimetic image, to the originary sense of the *Bild* as an aspect that makes itself seen. One could also formulate it in this way: he will attempt to show how every creating-a-look finds its condition in a primordial putting-into-the-look. And how this putting-into-the-

look—that of the schematism—must be envisaged (quite literally) with regard to its native constitution.

In fact, the elucidation proceeds from here first by discussing the three senses. First, it is said that the ordinary mode of the *Bild* is empirical intuition, which is always that of a "this-here [*Dies-da*]." Such a "this" can itself embrace a multiplicity, for example, "this particular totality of this landscape." Heidegger thus recalls intuition in general as a regime of grasping presence (which is the Kantian definition), a presence that is singular or plural but always in some way *one*, precisely because it is grasped-in-presence. He explains that by calling it "look," *species*, one speaks of the landscape "as if it were looking at us" ("als blicke sie uns an"; in Latin, *species* can have the active or the passive sense of "look," as can *visus* or *adspectus*). Let us keep this feature in mind; Heidegger does not recall it, but it will play a decisive role behind the scenes.

Heidegger then says that every derivative image—every *Abbild*—is only an *Abschreibung*, a copy or transcription "of what shows itself immediately as 'Bild.'" Thus is introduced what could be considered a motif of inverted mimetic values: every copy copies the thing and the thing's showing-itself. The *Abbild* (or the *Nach-* or *Vor-bild*) always shows the *Bild*, while also showing itself as something that shows itself: a photograph shows itself as a photograph, and it shows the showing-itself of the photographed thing. Thus the copy does not lose the originary monstration: it maintains it and restages it in the ground of its own secondary monstration. Heidegger's aim here is clear: the primary sense of the image, the giving-itself-to-be-seen and the offering-its-look, the *Aussehen*, the looking-like-while-showing-itself of every thing understood at the same time "as if it were looking at us" (*aussehen*, "to look," or "to seem (like)" breaks down literally into "seeing-outward"), forms the originary and proper value of the image, which is preserved in the ground of every reproduction.

Consequently, what is present at hand (*vorhanden*) can be represented in the sense of copied. But what *presents itself* does so always in its own showing-itself. In a sense, this implies that each thing, before being present at hand in a pure availability, has brought itself to presence, at bottom [*au fond*], like a person.[6] Much later, in the Zähringen seminar of 1973, Heidegger will say that Dasein is "face to face with what-is itself—and not with a representation." He continues, for example, "if I remember and think of René Char in Les Busclats, what is given to me there? René Char himself! Not some 'image' by which I would be immediately referred to him."[7] In 1929,

the "himself" (or "itself") is the same as the image insofar as it shows itself *at bottom*. Or else, at bottom, the image is an *ipse*: it is the ipseity of and in the act of a showing-itself. (We will see later which *ipse* lies at the foundation of the text of the *Kantbuch*.)

This is also true if one reproduces the reproduction, thus producing a *Nachbild* (picture or photograph) of an *Abbild* (portrait)—that "of a deathmask, for example," as Heidegger says. This photo shows us itself and the mask, and what the mask shows, namely, "the dead person, as he appears—*aussieht*—shows himself or showed himself [*bzw. aussah*[8]]." But "an individual corpse itself can also show this," that is, "wie das Gesicht eines toten Menschen aussieht," "how the face of a dead man seems/looks-outward"—to transcribe literally and according to the indication given above by Heidegger. This indication stated: "gleich als blicke sie uns an"—just as if it were looking at us. "As if," *gleich als*, implies that it is the same as, that it faithfully resembles: there is thus here, in the ground of the *Bild*, an *Abbild* of the *Bild* itself as a showing-itself that shows itself as a gaze directed at us. The primary image shows itself as a gaze turned toward us. The image makes an image by resembling a gaze. It is as if Heidegger had said: the primary image is always an image (resemblance) of an image (monstration). There is here, *at bottom*, a chiasmus or a generative enfolding: the image gives itself to be seen by resembling a seeing; the visible presents itself by seeing. The primary image is always also *like a gaze*; it is therefore image by being at the same time what op-poses itself to the gaze and what opens itself as gaze. (And perhaps, in addition, it is "sage comme un image"[9] in several senses: calm, immobile, impassive, and overcoming all pathos, possessed of an assurance, a knowledge, and a profound art, that of seeing by being seen, that of making activity out of passivity itself.)

The Image, the Idea, and Time

Heidegger does not explain this "like an image" *as* I am doing—but he does explain it by going back to what is shown by all these conjoined or dislocated im*ages*, images of images that always show a general *Aussehen*, a "seeming-and-outward-looking," which the text relates, in parentheses (and in Greek[10]), to "*eidos*, idea." The *idea* is the showing-itself, the carrying-itself-outwardly in general of every possible particular *aspect*.

It is impossible not to point out, at least in passing, something remarkable here. I am thinking of what Heidegger will later problema-

tize regarding the Platonic Idea as a "yoke" imposed on *aletheia* (that is, on unveiling) or as a "ground" of presence that stops the movement of advent and withdrawal, the veiling-unveiling of presence as *Anwesen* and not *Vorhanden*.[11] I do not want to depart here from our commentary on the *Kantbuch*. But it is important to note that, in 1929, the *idea* appeared, however briefly, in terms rather different from those of its later distinction from *aletheia*, which, moreover, is not mentioned in 1929. It literally does not appear. Under these conditions, the *idea* finds itself in the place of *aletheia*: it gives to veiling-unveiling the appearance of a seeing-showing. The seeing by which the thing as its own image is unveiled, and remains veiled. This episode is interesting in that it suggests that there was for Heidegger, at a certain moment, a possibility of truth for the image, which, by being brought back into play, might make it possible to avoid the excessively occulting/bedazzling turn later taken by *aletheia*,[12] a turn whose final consequences pose a certain danger to thinking: the danger of vertigo and of fusional blinding. The image or the *idea* as manifest aspect (contour, surface, *species*) of the non-manifest in a gaze (*species*, *adspectus*), engages—to say it with a touch of provocation—a thought of the clarity and distinction *of* and *in* the blinding evidence of truth itself. Moreover, we also know that in 1942 Heidegger will write that the *idea*, as he interprets it (limitative form, correlate of a direct gaze) nonetheless preserves something of *aletheia*.[13] That is, something of what we see showing itself in the 1929 text.

We will come back to this, but first let us return to the text.

Once it has been introduced as the Greek name or the proper name of *Aussehen*, the *idea* will be understood as the *how* of self-showing "in general," and therefore as the unity of a representation, that is, in the terms required by the problematic of the schema, as the modality or as the side (the aspect?) of the concept taken up in representation in general. This unity is not a unity given apart from the image or one that would be superimposed on it. On the contrary, the image is constituted by and as the conjunction of the concept's unity and the plasmatic chaos of sensation. The unity forms the rule according to which a plurality must be drawn out and inscribed (*auszeichnen*, *hineinzeichnen*—these words occur a little later in the text) in order to make (an) image. Such formulations make it clear that what is at stake here is not an abstract or numerical unity that would come to capture and make rational what is given as the sensible flux. On the contrary, what is at stake is a kind of design or drawing, a tracing, a sketch

delineating this flux, enabling it to present itself without, for all that, setting it down in a petrified form, in the sole mode of the geometrical object that the Kantian schema most readily evokes.

The *idea* or the look in the ground of every possible image constitutes the "*Bilden* not bound to a determinate something at hand"—which could be translated as "the forming not subordinated to a determinate form at hand"—that makes possible every *Bildbeschaffung*, every creation of an image, and with it every coming to presence of something as something. In the end, we have to do with a proposition that could be called profoundly graphic or pictorial: there is a thing only through the design of the thing, and this design gives the thing the contour of a look turned toward our vision.

This look that unifies the sensible and sensibilizing unity (the chiasmus of the two is what properly makes up the gesture, the site, and the art of the schema) forms the schematizing operation, which does not first give an image but is nonetheless related to "something like an image" (for which Heidegger introduces the expression "schema-image"). The schematism operates through a "like-an-image" that constitutes at once a quasi-image and an image of image, that is, in the first or final instance, an antecedence of the image to itself, its imaging arrival or occurrence: its imagination. This imagination is what sees before and outside itself the look that it will present to us and allow us to represent to ourselves.

That is why the schema will then be understood, coming back to Kant, as the fore-seeing rule of the *Vor-stellung*—which makes every look possible, in both the active and passive senses of "look." This priority of the look over the look, this anticipation of and in apprehension (to use the Kantian terms), will be said to form the mark of finitude (in section 21). Finitude means that the look, unlike an *intuitus originarius*, does not arise from nothingness and does not give itself to itself in totality as an *intuitus intellectualis*, rather, it precedes itself and therefore always succeeds itself. It precedes itself and succeeds itself just as the contour of a drawing anticipates itself and prolongs itself in the hand holding a pencil and moving toward the piece of paper then back away from it. In a sense, it itself sees itself and it itself illuminates itself. But it is not, for all that, a self-creating totality. It is also, in its fore-seeing, a not-seeing of its own form, which is always to come or else always already past.

Thus time is the "pure image" or the "schema-image" (section 22), which means that there is no given present (*Vorhanden*) that is not

preceded by the pre-givenness of its givability, identical to its receivability: *Vor-stellung* of its *Stellung*, pre-positing of a being-posited. The imagination is therefore time, since time is the non-present, the non-instantaneous, of a look that does not see its own unity (its concept) directly, but only in and as the *Bildung* (formation) of the unity of the manifold, a unity that, consequently, is itself manifold, many-folded (if you will) into itself and from out of itself in order to image itself. The self-imaging unity is the unity unifying itself as a sensible unity, while in this same chiasmus of the schema, the sensible images itself by sensibilizing itself as *a thing* that is sensed.

The Death Mask

But what about the example chosen by Heidegger, the death mask and the photograph of it? He says nothing more about them. Once the *eidos/idea* is mentioned, we pass to another example: the look of a house, the "distinguishing [*Auszeichnen*] of the whole" of the "how of the appearing of a house in general." But this example does not have the same status: it is turned toward the production of a look (that of a house), whereas the example of the mask proposes a look of the production of an image (the how-a-dead-man-shows-himself). In both cases it is, of course, a question of going back to what is before any empirical image. All the examples exemplify such a movement back toward the eidetic and non-sensible *Bild* of the *ein-bilden*. But one could say that the example of the look of a house is turned toward the *gebildet*—toward the imaged image, the presented image—whereas that of the mask, which is in a way turned around and looking back, indicates the *einbildend*—the imaging image, the image presenting itself.[14] It is indeed the mask, then, that properly gives the example.

Now, such an example cannot fail to surprise. Or, perhaps, what surprises us in this text is that its author does not seem to address the singular character of his example. A double surprise: to see the appearance of a death mask where one could just as easily have a more banal image, and to notice that this relative incongruity, or this somewhat *unheimlich* or uncanny intrusion, has no effect on the author. It is this double surprise that I would now like to analyze: which is to say that in analyzing the implications of the example, I will be led to analyze—not to say psychoanalyze—some hidden mechanism that imposes the example or slips it in as though unbeknownst to Heidegger (whether this lack of awareness is a mat-

ter of blindness or of negation—in the Freudian sense—makes little difference).

Let us look again, then. When this example appears, we sense that it is something more or other than just any example of an image. Heidegger could have spoken of a portrait or of a painted landscape and a photograph of it, or else of a photograph and its reproduction in a book: in one sense, such examples would have been even more rigorous with regard to the indifferent character of the reproduction as such, since the theoretical concern here is to reduce attention to the reproduction in order to center everything on the production of the image, or, better yet, on the image-producing-itself. But the example of the mask is odd for the simple reason that it exemplifies an originary showing-itself through the showing-itself and the outward-seeming of a dead man, which by definition does not show itself but essentially withdraws itself from all monstration. There must, then, be a particular reason for the emergence of this example.

Appropriately enough, there are in fact two: there is an empirical reason and a transcendental reason. What is strange—and it is a strangeness that I would not know how to dissipate—is that we have to find these two reasons ourselves, since the author gives us no indication concerning them.

The empirical reason is the following: in 1926, the year in which Heidegger first taught the material that would become the *Kantbuch*, a book by Ernst Benkard was published in Berlin under the title *Das ewige Antlitz* (*Undying Faces*). This book presents photographs of the death masks from the collection of the Schiller National Museum of Marbach (123 masks, many of well-known figures like Newton or Cromwell, Beethoven, Pascal, Hebbel, or the famous "Inconnue de la Seine"[15]). This book was an immediate success and was reprinted several times in subsequent years. It caught the attention of Gide and Canetti, Aragon and Céline, from whom we have statements showing some interest in it.[16] There is no great risk in the hypothesis that Heidegger was also struck by this work, whose renown would surely have made him aware of it, and that he would have seen it as a remarkable example of an image of an image. This is all the more likely in that photography, already for him an ordinary means of *Abbildung*, which he introduces into his text in the first place as an example of reproduction (before introducing the idea of a reproduction of a first reproduction), is associated in this book with an *Abbildung* that is

much less ordinary (it is very likely that Heidegger never saw a death mask before opening this book in 1926) and more archaic both from a historical point of view and from a logical point of view, since it implies the immediate contact of the cast and the face.

We can note—without going any further into their differences—that, in the text of Heidegger's course from which the *Kantbuch* was later drawn,[17] there are two moments when the implicit reference to Benkard's book comes into focus. In the course, an example of a specific mask is given: "for example, that of Pascal," which in fact does appear in Benkard's book. On the other hand, when introducing the death mask in general, the course remarks in a parenthesis: "(we are not concerned here with the presentative phenomenon [*Darstellungsphänomen*], which the death mask constitutes in general)." The death mask as such thereby finds itself even more clearly and explicitly disregarded (to say nothing of the fact of ignoring the question whether "the mask in general" consists always and above all in the reproduction of a given face!). But this disregard might well be masking something in turn, and perhaps also to Heidegger himself.

It is obvious that this example's archaeo-logical movement back toward a self-presenting is much more radical, or more abyssal, than what the photograph is able to illustrate. In the final instance, it is a question of what is manifested by "the face of a dead human being in general." It is this generality—presented by every "individual corpse"—that functions as a shifter in the passages on the "sensible transposition" of the concept and on the rule of the schematism as *Ein-bildung*. We are touching, then, on the transcendental, and perhaps involuntary, reason of the example.[18]

The fact that the dead person, as dead, does not give rise to any explicit considerations on the part of the thinker of "being-toward-death" is a surprise that only increases the strangeness of the example. But there is yet another surprise: after emphasizing the ambiguity of the *Aussehen*, the *aspect* by which something shows itself and at the same time appears to regard our gaze (such that the image appears to be born only by producing a reflection or resonance of the gaze, by coming face-to-face with the one who sees, who *imagines* or who *imagines himself*), Heidegger does not remark on the fact that the *Gesicht* or face of the dead man forms a face-to-face that is blind. He does write that the image of the dead man shows him to us according to the aspect that is his or that was his (*aussieht bzw. aussah*). The word *beziehungsweise* (abbreviated *bzw.*)—meaning literally "accord-

ing to the relation," or as one sometimes says, "respectively"—is very important, since it can imply the play on words that Heidegger does not recall: the dead man has a present aspect, insofar as he does not see, and he has another aspect insofar as he looked. However, everything happens as if his image superimposed the two aspects: the one respective to now and the one respective to before. As if the before (the look) remained in the now (the non-look), or as if the now (the non-look) retroactively affected the before (the look). There is prospection and retrospection of each of the aspects into the other: blinding of the eyes, gaze of the empty sockets. To say it in an awkward manner, respective to the present and dead aspect or respective to the past and looking aspect—respective to the aspected and to the aspecting, there occurs a strange conjunction of *aussehen*. The second is the past aspect that the present aspect shows as past: not a past present (the one who would give a portrait with his gaze), but a present past.

But everything changes from one present to another. The past-present, like the present-present of the corpse, tendentially forms something present at hand, *vorhanden*, something simply placed there, lying there, and thus not *coming* to presence.[19] But the present past in the aspect of the non-seeing or non-aspecting *Gesicht* presents the withdrawal of the look. And it is the look of the withdrawal of the look that in the end, in this text—that is, as an *eidos*-look of the dead man located in the ground and origin of the entire series of looks—becomes the element that makes it possible to bring out the fore-seeing rule that is constitutive of the schematizing *Ein-bildung*.

After-seeing also amounts to fore-seeing, the pro-vidence of vision, the possibility of a world; and the aspect of the dead man also amounts to the *adspectus*, the *species* or the *eidos* of that for which there can be no "intuition": the concept or the unity of the manifold in the image. The implications of the death mask could be drawn out most freely, but most rigorously, by saying this: the divine power of an intuition that would be creative of the unity of its sensibility is supplemented (and not replaced or substituted for) by a lack of vision that joins the sensible manifold in or to a unity by default, a blind, non-creative unity, but one that, with its empty gaze, gives rise to the possibility of the image.

In thinking of the analyses of being-toward-death (and in wondering whether it was possible for Heidegger not to think of it when he looked at the photographs of the death masks), one comes to discern

a strict parallel between the impossibility of an *intuitus originarius* and the impossibility of substituting myself for the dying man in his death. One is even tempted to say: the true beginning of the death of God is the removal of divine intuition from the world and from experience, which is then precisely the assignation of death to the place of the origin, there where a world springs from nothing, in an inverted repetition of the gesture of creation.

At the same time, however—or, indeed, as a consequence—there occurs, as though inadvertently or by subreption, a silent displacement of the double impossibility (of being in the place of the dying other / of being in the place of the absolute seer). For in following the logic of the *Kantbuch*, we must admit a certain access to an understanding of fore-seeing, therefore of *Ein-bildung*, therefore of the "hidden art" of the schema—and consequently, according to the parallel, we would have to admit, under the notion of *Sein zum Tode* (being-toward-death), something like an access to the other's dying . . .

From Death to Death

The gaze directed at the non-seer—our gaze directed at the mask—enters into the empty eye as well as the backside or the inside of the eye: my look slips all the way into the back of the look and places sight in view [*met la vue en vue*]—which, after all, is something that both painting and philosophy have sought to do.[20] To bring the invisible to the surface or to make sight seen, and to render the aspect of the perspect: these are the two lines of flight in all art called "visual" art and in all thought of the *intuitus*, of schematism and of phenomenality in general.

To be sure, we are speaking of an access without access, since it accedes to what has no aspect—or else to the aspect of the unaspectant. But this latter, the gaze without gaze or the withdrawal of the gaze—more precisely still, withdrawal as gaze—is also the forelook of the look, the *Ein-bildung* of the *Bild* and the fore- or forthcoming [*prévenance*] of presence. (In this context we could resuscitate the old terms for "gaze" in French that were eventually supplanted by *regard*: *engard*, *surgard*, *pourgard*, so many attempts on the part of language to designate taking-into-view as a taking-into-account, as attention and, if you will, as intention in the phenomenological sense, but falling short of both the act of intention and the phenomenon.)

Thus another parallelism emerges: just as dying is "thrown being toward the ownmost potentiality-of-being"[21] and is thus distin-

guished from "demise" (*Ableben*), so does the *Aussehen*, the actualized aspect of the dead face, form the possibility of the schema and distinguish itself from its merely present aspect at hand, which forms only the *Abbild* of the dead man's traits. But the ungraspable and ownmost *Sterben* (the *Sterben* of the proper) passes through *ableben*; likewise, *bilden* properly speaking passes through (and escapes) the *Abbild*, the mask, and the *Nachbild*, the photograph of the mask.[22] It passes through and it escapes as a *Gesicht* of the dead man, a face, a look, a blind seeing—this *Gesicht* that bears in itself the mark of being-past since it presents the aspect in relation to the look that it has and/or in relation to the look that it had, and which it therefore no longer has, such that the look that it has is the look of no longer looking as it did . . . *Sterben*, *bilden*: the singular proximity of an "I die (myself) [*je (me) meurs*]" and an "I image (myself) [*je (m')image*]."

There remains, then, as a point of contact with this unimaginable because unimagining *bilden*, the one concept that Heidegger does not discuss again after the beginning of section 20: the *Vorbild* (fore-image) or the model of a "being that is yet to be created or produced."

The gaze of the dead man is a model of the image or of the look in both senses of the word, in that it looks without seeing or sees without looking: a model of the fore-vision of the unity that anticipates itself in the precession of its own succession: time as a series of time, which forms the first of the schemata. This model has no look, since it fore-sees the look [*pré-voit la vue*]. But it is a model, since it images (*bildet*) and in-images or imagines (*ein-bildet*) an imaging (*Bildung*) in general. It imagines the image or—if we can put it this way—the general imagery of the image. This is to say that it fore-images or models (*vor-bildet*) the *one* of the image. It imagines the one. This has nothing to do with what would be implied by the apparently related formula "It fictions the One." For there is precisely no fiction (in the sense of construction, setting into form, erection) of the substance or structure of a being-One. There is rather this: the empty gaze imagines itself (as) one; that is, it bears itself ahead of itself as that which succeeds itself, a blind spot that also forms, at every moment, and as every moment, the focal point where an image lights up (a look, a representation, some thing, a spark of world). To imagine the one, and to imagine oneself (as) one—this is possible only beginning from death: from the point at which the one ceases, by which alone the "one" appears (to) itself as such, in disappearing. (Or else, in a sym-

metrical manner: it is possible only beginning from birth: the non-presence of the one in which the one pres-ents itself, precedes itself as the image of the self precedes the child's self in the imagination of those who make it, and these latter are in any case not only the child's parents.)

But this is also the moment to point out that the parenthetical remark from the course, in which Heidegger states that he will not be concerned with the mode of presentation proper to the mask in general, may well be the index of a malaise. What Heidegger thus sets aside is the concealing role of the mask (for the sake of a role that is rather ostensive, if not ostentatious). In the logic of the *Kantbuch*—its manifest logic, at least—everything comes down to a *self-showing*. But the exemplary example of this, if we may put it thus, is a *hiding* or a *self-hiding* (the death mask): a self-showing that withdraws itself. Monstration occurs in concealment and from out of concealment or disappearance. And it is precisely this delicate mechanism that Heidegger simultaneously shows and hides. He suggests the truth of the look of the dead man, but he glides over the fact that this look is a dead look, or the death of the look. *Aletheia*—as a play of veiling/unveiling—is already at work in the *eidos* as ostension of the aspect. But reciprocally, the *eidos* already occupies a place at the heart of *aletheia*: the logic of *aletheia*, with which Heidegger will later attempt to overcome the fixity of a given *eidetics* of the being, in order to move toward the inaugural event of a (re)velation of being—this very logic will perhaps never avoid the demand that becomes manifest in the *Kantbuch*. This demand states that there must also be a self-showing of the unshowable, a tracing out of the effacement, a modeling of the absented gaze. In other words, there must be an *eidos* of *aletheia*, and a face of death (not only an aspect of the dead man, but, through it, of that which made him die). Once again, it is no doubt precisely this demand that will be accounted for in a different way by the reflection on art, for which the analysis of the schematism (in fact never reactivated in any subsequent work) would have opened the way.

By this or some other means, what Heidegger gains, in a more or less visible manner, would take the following form: the image goes from death to death, as it would have gone from the *imago* of the ancestors to the disappearance of the Kantian imagination in the sublime—which is to say, its disappearance in the presentation of the subject without an objectivizing schema, or rather in what one could call a

symbolizing beyond-the-schema. In the ground of every image, there is an unimaginable imagining: there is dying as a movement of self-presenting (once again, given the dismissal of the purely-present-being, present to and in itself, the *intuitus originarius*, which would be without image because it would in advance absorb every image in its pure and simple primordial Unity).

At the far end of all imagination, there is access without access to what is never-yet-imaged of the one, and to an interminable in-figuration of every finite figure. The image always promises more than the image, and it always keeps its promise by opening its imagination onto its own unimaginable.

But if, consequently, the *one* of the image is never anywhere but in the sketch, the fore-tracing and the fore-seeing of itself (in the fore-seeing of its unforeseeability . . .), if it is, in sum, an imaging that is never imaged (what Kant would call a pure image), if this imaging originates in death as the unseeing gaze face-to-face with my own gaze as it sinks in turn into its withdrawn image, then this means that the "one" comes from the "other," and not from an auto-intuitive self, that it comes from the other, through the other and as other, in order to return to the other.

In the ground of the image there is the imagination, and in the ground of the imagination there is the other, the look of the other, that is, the look onto the other and the other as look—which also opens, consequently, as an other of the look, a fore-seeing non-look. The other approaches me face-to-face, and thus shows itself as other. The image is first of all other and from the other, altered and altering. It gives the other according to which the same can be shown.

Thus, the other essentially does not show itself as such: what it gives to be seen is the same. The same is altered in its image, and it is thus that it makes itself the same as itself—visible, imaginable, and presentable. But the operator of this imagination recedes and withdraws to the ground of the image, in which it is concealed from every look and conceals its own fore-seeing, sur-veying, and pro-viding vision. The final effect of the death mask is to mask the imagination *itself*, even as it uncovers it as dead beneath the mask. Dead and consequently, respectively, *having been*: it will always already have begun to image (itself). The secret of the schematism—a secret that one unveils only by veiling it anew—is that there is no imagination *as such*, identifiable and appropriable. The imagination remains unimagin-

able. Dead, free, and creative: this would be the same thing, this would be its same thing, its hidden art.

"Light, invisible to my eyes . . . "

Curiously—or rather, if you prefer, not surprisingly—I now find myself seeing the return of a completely different scene. A chorus announces, "You will see him appear," and at this point a tragic mask steps forth on its buskins [boots worn by tragic actors in ancient Greece], its empty sockets streaming with blood. Oedipus has gouged out his eyes—Oedipus who had "known nothing, seen nothing," who had "excluded himself from his own view when he ordered the sacrilege to be driven out," who had committed the unimaginable, whose "eye too many" sees into the night of the gaze, in which, however, he cannot reach death, "having been saved at the moment when I was dying" (dying always without ever meeting his demise).

But when he does disappear, near Colonus, in a disappearance that no one will be able to see (Theseus, the sole witness, will cover his eyes), inasmuch as a disappearance can be seen, at that moment he will say: "Oh light, invisible to my eyes, though long ago you were mine, and my body feels your contact for the last time today."[23]

Beneath the mask, and from the bottom of the dead gaze flowing back through the entire body, a vision of contact, a blind vision, touches not the visible but the light, that which makes visible and that which makes one see, the element of every image, the imagination not beneath its mask but as the living-dead body of the mask itself, entering the scene in order to withdraw from it.

Entering and exiting, that is what makes the image: appearing and disappearing. Not first representing, but first being or making "a time, *une fois*," a first and last time, the time [*temps*] of making or taking an image, the time of time itself, which opens the eyes. The time, *la fois* (from *vix*, *vice*: succession in turn, the moment as access or as success-succession), that is what exits the no-time, the *sans-fois*, to return to it immediately. Scansion, eclipse, spark of inimagination.

The image contains the index of its frozenness (its form, its present, its representation) and at the same time the index of movement (force, appearing/disappearing). That is also why it engages both the indefinite proliferation of images as well as each image's isolation and enframing, its being hung on the wall.

And, finally, to end: the photograph *itself*, as a death mask, the instantaneous and always rebegun image as the casting of presence in contact with light, the casting of a presence fleeing into absence, which one neither captures nor represents, but which, paradoxically, one thus contemplates (one comes into its *templum*, the time of its framing). Contemporary contemplation of the eclipse of the gaze in the ground of the imagination itself: schema of the same in its other.

7

Nous Autres

Someone who says "I," in saying it, distinguishes himself. Indeed, he does nothing other than that: he separates himself, he sets himself apart, he even cuts himself off. *I is an other*, as Rimbaud said, and this obvious fact precedes any possible feeling of self-estrangement or alienation. Before being an other to oneself (which perhaps the self always also is), *I* is an other to every other *I*. I *am* other than every other *I* who is (who can say "I am"). Through its enunciation, which adheres to the statement it makes and functions as a shifter for its meaning, *I* defines (define . . . ?) an other who is other than anyone thus set off as non-identical to the sameness that this word, *I*, establishes in it, that is, the sameness of its linguistic value and of the subject that poses itself in it by proferring it. This subject "pronouns" or "pro-names" itself in this word by pronouncing itself in it, and "to pro-name oneself" means: to pose that which comes before the name, that which, or the one who, will then be able to name him-/herself.

That is why *I* can say *you*, singular or plural, in all clarity and in all equality. "You" gives to the other the status of a symmetrical "I" whose own *I* has already silently resounded in the statement of the very first "I." A child says "I" when he or she comes to grasp this pronoun's ability to substitute for everyone, even as, in each case, it becomes strictly unsubstitutable. Everyone distinguishes himself, unfailingly and without hesitation, from the other with whom he shares the unshareable: the obscure recesses, the shadowy hiding

place or the vertiginous chasm from which this syllable *I* can emerge, like the *smack* of a clapperboard during a film shoot, or the *click* of a computer.

Or like the snap of a camera shutter: by pressing down, the finger says *I*; it suspends the hesitations between the multiple subjects intersecting and mixing in it (in the viewfinder, the seer, the visionary, the blind eye). It suspends them in a suspense that dramatically immobilizes a possibility caught in the process of becoming a necessity, or even a fatality. Just as this click and its result, the photograph or the *snapshot* [*l'instantanée*], as it is called, appropriate a brief difference, an imperceptible alteration that thus becomes perceptible, present, indubitable—a fold of skin, a pouting face, a plume of smoke—likewise do *I* appropriate myself, in the instant when I say "I," the wholly-other of a singular subject, totally invisible and as such, as non-visual, suddenly totally exposed. By taking the photograph, I fix an other in a suspended hesitation by which the image and its subject are both determined: *I*, the one who takes the photograph, completely other in each case, other than all the rest, other than everything that does not say "I" and other than everything that says it from the position of another *I*.

It is quite a different matter when it comes to saying "we." If *I*, like *you*, constitutes a *pronoun*, it is entirely apart: just as a proconsul takes the place and the role of the consul, likewise here the pronoun suffices to assume the presence and the authority of the name. It is also in this way that the biblical god combines the unnamable name with the affirmation "I am." And in the *I am*—whether spoken by this god or by Descartes—"being" weighs very little by itself: it is merely the redundancy of the "I." (That is why Descartes writes *ego sum*, adding this *ego*, in principle unnecessary, to the verbal form *sum*, in which *ego* is already grammatically enveloped. By developing it, Descartes transfers the being of the verb *to be* to the pronoun *I*.)

But *we* constitutes a less evident and less certain pronoun. When we hear "we" (for example, in this sentence that *I* am writing and that *you* are reading), *we* are caught up in an indeterminacy that is itself additionally polymorphous. We must ask ourselves immediately: Who, "we"? What subject has just been identified thus? On what grounds is it possible for me, or better, for *us* to admit that a "we" subsumes the multitude of subjects who would be the real or potential readers of the text that *you* have in your hands (*you* and no

other, at this moment, just as *I* write it alone, in this other present moment in which *we* most certainly cannot conjoin our two presences). You see, then, that you are indeed alone in reading, and this is true even if you are with someone else, "reading from the same book, your foreheads touching side by side," as Victor Hugo wrote somewhere.

I am writing, you are reading. But all of us, *nous autres*, "we others" who are readers and writers of texts relating to photography, or perhaps to art in general (if I try to imagine who might read this text), if we want to identify *ourselves*, we need to construct an identity that is not at all given with this simple "we." Every time, then, someone says "we"—and who could say "we" if not some*one*, a single person? who can say it if not *I* or *you*?—he formulates a request for identification. For this request, he proposes or suggests traits, indices, lineaments, whereas, however, he cannot confirm in their immediate and in some ways intangible positions, which the *I*, on the contrary, does confirm them.

I is distinguished without remainder, like every other. *We* lays the same claim, but with the explicit character of a solicitation, a demand, a desire, or a will to distinction. *We* must construct its alterity, which is wholly other only in a tendential manner. That is why we accompany "we" with the elements of its request: "we French," "we in this family," "we photographers." By the same token, the request thus formulated confesses its fragility or its difficulty. Indeed, *who* are the "French," *who* is "my family," *who* are the "photographers" . . . ? In each case, it is necessary either to construct a concept or to fall back on a formal and extrinsic identification (identity card, civil records, professional license).

That is why we say *nous autres*, "we others"—or rather, certain languages say it, others imply it. Perhaps Spanish is the language in which the usage is most common. A Spanish speaker can say, "Nosotros (españoles), decimos frequentamente 'nosotros'"—which is, very literally, "We-others (we Spanish), we frequently say 'we-others.'" The most ordinary context is enough to indicate implicitly the identity of the group thus distinguished (for example, those who have already seen the exhibition): an identity at once precise and weak, and insofar as it is weak, assumptive. In French, on the contrary, "nous autres visiteurs de l'exposition" ("we others, visitors of the exhibition") tends toward a stronger (pretentious, emphatic, etc.)

identification. In German or in English, languages in which "nous autres" is not a possible construction, the context can make it implicit: when Nietzsche writes, "Wir gute Europäer [We good Europeans]," the French translator gives, "Nous autres bons Européens," aware of the fact that the "good Europeans" are not an entity that is already given or taken for granted, but an appeal, a call, an assumption, or a distinctive claim.[1]

It is always a matter of assumption or presumption. Alterity—the distinct identity—is not given. Whereas *I* produces or creates its own identity, *we* project it or assume it. *Nous autres* lets it be heard that in the end, after further investigation, this *we* could one day become a completely different—an entirely other—subject.

In a related manner, "nous autres" contains a presumption, without any evidence, about its enunciation. Who says "nous autres"? This is anything but clear. The individual who says it assumes and demands that one assume with him the enunciative co-presence of every other individual among these "others" who are designated (every other "Spanish" person, every other "photographer"). Whereas *I* distinguishes itself as wholly other, *we* appeals to all those others whom it sees fit to include within its common, supposed, but never posited identity. All the questions of democratic representation and the possibility or impossibility of a "people" can be brought together on this basis. A people can say neither "I" nor "we." Rather, it speaks of itself in the third person: "The Spanish people declare . . ." one reads in the official, constitutional texts. But, in fact, this third person too visibly conceals the identity of the speaker (who? which subject of public law?) and endangers the performative power of the enunciation (the founding power of democracy . . .).

In a definitive way, *I* constitutes a performative in the sense that linguists give to the *speech act*:[2] the enunciation itself produces the truth of the statement. I am by saying "I am." *We*, on the contrary, constitutes an inchoate performative: in the process of being formed, but not yet *performed*. "We" is always *in statu nascendi*, and it is precisely this that *nous autres* designates: a distinctive alterity aimed at, desired, held at a distance.

There is perhaps only one case in which "we" would meet up with "I" asymptotically, at infinity. This is when, faced with misfortune, misery, or death, one says (*one*: a way to avoid both *I* and *we*, degree zero of enunciation): "pauvres de nous autres!" (This is an old

French expression for which I hope there is an equivalent in Spanish.)[3] *Nous autres* here designates the totality of humans in the fragility of their finitude. The only stable and evident alterity shared out to "us all" (to us as all, and other than all the rest of nature), is the alterity of the humanity in us, insofar as it has no stability and is sunk in the obscurity of an originary collapse.

It is *we* who are *other* than other beings, but this *nous autres* simultaneously distinguishes us and precipitates us—very far from gathering us together within an *I*—into the alterity or in the ontological alteration of a being that is lacking to itself. An essential non-coincidence makes *us* other than our*selves*. (In French, "nous-mêmes [ourselves]" can in certain cases be a substitute for "nous autres": "nous-mêmes" can take on the value of "for us," "as far as we are concerned.")

This non-coincidence passes through photography in an exemplary way. Of course, it can also be at work in painting. But painting has never envisaged the "snapshot," the coincidence of an *I* with a click that releases a *you*, an other *I*. Photography is elaborated around the common incidence, on the silver or digital support, of light and the eye, of a view of the outside and a view from the inside, of *this particular* look (active) and of *this* other one (passive).

This common incidence is instantaneously divided between the luminous (*photo*) and its trace (*graphy*). In its trace, it is altered. The luminous turns back toward the eye (into the eye) and what it presents to it is no longer a "view" or a "vision," neither objective nor subjective. It is, rather, the stigma of the surprise in which the thing that or the one who "takes" the photo and the thing that or the one who "is taken" in the photo are suspended together. At that point, in this stigma (photography itself), both are taken by each other and by surprising or coming upon each other. They are there, intimate and intrusive, strange and familiar to each other, at the same moment, as the same image. The sameness of this image is permeated with the alterity of its two concomitant subjects.

Photography is a monster with two subjects, with a double body (human) and a single, cavernous head whose one eye blinks on and off.

At this point, at this moment, in this place of the photograph in which time blinks and is distended as an immobile surface, the most exact and the most rigorous *nous autres* is produced. Each one affirms its alterity while both together make the request for an identity distinct from every other, in whose distinction they are absorbed into

one another, one by the other (as in a designation of this sort: *James Joyce by Gisèle Freund*, a view of one of them [Joyce] in the eyes of the other, and one of them looking [Freund] into the eyes of the other). It is the identity of the photograph itself, openly non-identical to itself and thus strangely identical to the superimposition of the two others in it, the viewfinder and the viewed surprising one another—over-seeing [*sur-veillant*] one another and suddenly "coming upon" or happening [*sur-venant*] to one another. Both of them together, as a "photograph," pronouncing a kind of silent *nous autres*.

In this sense, each of the *I*'s (model and photographer—or subject and subject . . .) deposits in the photo a performative self-certainty, by attesting *only in the other* to one's own distinction as wholly other. Each photograph forms a *nous autres* in which, for a moment, the eternal instant that trembles in the photo unites photographer and photographed who are now one—a single identity assumed, and presumed, for which the photograph is only the supposition and the support. Consequently, although every photograph articulates this "nous autres," it also ends up pronouncing and performing a tacit *I* that it itself immediately and improbably *is*.

Every photograph is an irrefutable and luminous *I am*, whose proper being is neither the photographed subject nor the photographing subject, but the silvery or digital evidence of a *grasping*: this thing, that thing, this man here, that woman there was grasped, there, at that time, by a click, and this *hic et nunc* eternalizes here and now, on this paper on which it was *developed* and *printed*, its sovereign hesitation immobilized and sublimated in the decision that took it, and grasped it, by surprise. This grasping presents itself and says to us, "I am." But at the same time this *I am* says "nous autres": we who were grasped in the grasping, we who were surprised and caught together by this *hic et nunc*, which makes us others together, others to one another, one through another and one in another, others who we never are outside of this surprise, we who are other (finally and above all) than you who regard us, we others who are now embedded in the strangeness of our illuminated capture.

Like the other *ego sum*, this one is made explicit as an *ego cogito*. Photography thinks, which is to say that it relates to itself as the photo-being that it is. It is experienced and constructed as an illumination, a dividing up and sharing out of shadow, frame, grain, and depth of field, and in doing so it determines a knot of signification

whose intimate entwining is played out in the grasping or gripping of hesitation. Because this knot cannot be undone—only somewhat loosened, through a few interpretive sketches—thought remains here fundamentally a thought of its own strangeness.

In a photograph there is always something hallucinatory, something that has lost its way or is out of place. Whereas painting—or cinema, though in a completely different way—works to present, to bring us into proximity with a modality of presence, photography, which at first seems bound to operate in the same direction, is given over to an irrepressible removal of its own presence.[4] It is lost; as soon as it is printed [*tirée*]—as though drawn [*tirée*] out of nothing—it is withdrawn [*retirée*] from our grasp, hidden, and secret. Even the least photograph openly holds out a secret, and it does so by metamorphosing everything into an alterity all the more altered in that it is close to us, in that it refers us to our familiar immediacy. Consequently, it always murmurs a *nous autres*: we (others) who are exposed, who are illuminated by the sun, the moon, and the projectors, we (others) who are the strange beings of this world of day and night, we (others) who surprise ourselves in viewing ourselves, in turning ourselves into visions, in photosynthesizing ourselves, we humans and shadows of humans, we are our most proper and therefore our strangest, most foreign others.

The secret of the photograph, the very clear mystery of its being lost and straying, is its flight into the strange in the very midst of the familiar. The photo *captures* the familiar, and immediately, instantaneously, it *strays* into strangeness. By capturing its own straying, it leads what it captures astray. The photograph *estranges*, it estranges *us*. Between the subject of the click and the subject grasped, there is a coexistence without coincidence, or there is a coincidence without contact, or a contact without union (which is the law of contact). The encounter is ineffective in its effectivity (which is the law of encounter).

Such is the straying and secret *I am* of the photo. Thus it does not say, "I is an other"; rather, it proffers the wholly other "I am" whose text consists in "we others." It remains to be asked whether there is ever any *I am* that is not laden in the depths of it-self with innumerable we-others: but that is perhaps exactly what the photograph charges itself with uncovering, with suggesting. Each "subject" in the photo refers tacitly, obstinately, to all the others, to this prodigious universe of photos in(to) which we all take ourselves and one another, at some time or another, this colossal and labyrinthine photo-

theque in whose depths there stalks—like a Minotaur—the monster, the monstration, and the prodigious image of our strangeness. The encounter is always monstrous, or monstrating, ostensive and threatening, invasive and evasive in the same moment, straying in its capture, released in being grasped. This is not a dialectic, or else it is the point—the seed or grain—of madness that vibrates at the heart of every dialectic, the labyrinth that disturbs its progress and throws it off course.

This grain, or this labyrinth, is called a body. A photograph is a rubbing or rubbing away of a body. We others, as others, are bodies. When we meet one another, we are bodies. We are in each case the brother or the sister of the Minotaur's human body, and it is this body's blood that flows through the beast's head. The bodiless, for its part, is the same, the self-same, hidden behind its body, the dimensionless point of spirit, the empty reference of a formal "I think." But what makes the photograph possible (and what once made people believe that it could capture spirits in its gelatin) is that in the photo it is a question of the body: it is the body that grasps, and it is the body that is grasped and released. It is the body, its thin surface, that is detached and removed by the film. This is the physics and the chemistry of the instant, the force of gravity of the click, this curvature of space and this impalpable lightness of a vision that precipitates and coagulates into a thickness of skin, a density of touch. The contact and the tact of the photographic click detaches a new body each time, an instantaneous body, unstable and fixed in its instability, as a loving or a suffering body, desiring or fearing, which is surprised and overtaken by pleasure or pain. We others, we difficult bodies, delicate bodies and exposed skins obscured by their own clarity, bodies gently pressed and released by another body, by its eye, its finger, its uncertain thought of being and appearing, which suddenly comes to take its place in us (others), as in the cavernous recesses in which it will carry on its rumination.

8

Visitation
Of Christian Painting

Art never commemorates. It is not made to preserve a memory, and whenever it is set to work in a monument, it does not belong to the memorializing aspect of the work. The proof of this, if any were needed, is that there are monuments without art, whereas there is no work of art that is as such a monument. If art in general has any relation to memory, it is to that strange memory that has never been deposited in a remembrance, which is therefore susceptible neither to forgetting nor to memory—for we have never lived it or known it—but which never leaves us: that which, under the name of the beautiful or the sublime, the terrible or the graceful, the radiant or the moving, is for us, since so long ago (since always?), the "splendor of the true" (Plato), that is, both its brilliance and its flash, its lightning bolt and its secret. No anamnesis rises up within it, but every gesture of art strives toward its irruption, approaches it to the point of brushing against it, and, if necessary, to the point of burning itself and tearing itself apart. Art is what always exceeds itself in the direction of that which precedes it or succeeds it, and, consequently, also in the direction of its own birth and its own death. It is always the art of sinking on this side of itself, or throwing itself beyond itself.

The immemorial is, par excellence, something that precedes birth: it is what is absent from all remembrance but toward which an infinite memory endlessly rises, a hypermemory, or rather, an *immemory*.[1] On this side of or beyond the memorial, that is, beyond or on

this side of the self and of what can be subjectivized: the hereafter or the other world (death, in that sense), not outside the world but present right here.

A figuration of pre-birth—before any birth, *avent*, as one says in the Roman Church, or indeed birth of birth, birth to birth itself—is presented in the Christian legend in the scene called the "Visitation" (a scene whose origin is itself most certainly immemorial). Painters have shown some interest in this scene, which is a scene of piety more than of theology, a scene of emotion and surprise, and a scene of strangeness in relation to the more canonical and dogmatic scenes that frame it and intersect with it, namely, the "Annunciation" and the "Nativity."

Let us look at a *Visitation* painted by Pontormo, the one in the church of Carmignano (not the earlier ones, which are in Florence).[2]

After receiving the angel of the Annunciation, Mary learns that her cousin Elizabeth has become pregnant, at an advanced age when such a thing could no longer be hoped for. She is already in the sixth month. Mary goes to visit her. (No reason is given. Everything happens as if the miracle had to be confirmed by its duplication.) The *visitatio*, in ecclesiastical Latin, is not merely a visit: it is a procedure for becoming aware of something, for examining and experiencing something. In certain contexts, the word also signifies that which is brought by a visit from God—ordeal or grace.

In fact, when Mary (on the left in the painting) arrives at Elizabeth's house and greets her, the latter "was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.'" To which Mary responds with what is called the *Magnificat*. The scene is in Luke,[3] the evangelist of childhood, who is also the patron of painters because according to his legend he painted Mary's portrait, and several painters have represented him as doing so (his book is therefore like a portrait, a faithful image). Elizabeth's son is John the Baptist, "the precursor": he is the one who in the darkness of the womb "leaped" or quivered [*tressaille*] for joy at the voice of the woman who was made pregnant by the Spirit.

The scene is therefore entirely spiritual or pneumatic par excellence: the essential is hidden from sight and passes by way of the voices, by a touch of voice that makes the intimate and the unborn leap in their invisibility. What happens is a flash of spirit between

2. Pontormo, *Visitation*, Parish Church of Carmignano, Tuscany.

two absent presences, two lives in a state of withdrawal from existence, as immemorial as they are unexpected and improbable, in the closed womb of a sterile woman and a virgin. In one sense, it is a pure challenge for painting, at least if painting is not in fact always destined to pose a challenge to the visible. We might say that with this subject, the invisible must leap out at us.

Painting goes straight to the heart of the matter, that is, of the mystery. It does not remove or resolve this mystery, nor does it make it an object of belief; rather it implants itself within it, so to speak. We are first met with, if not submerged in, a large pool or splash of vibrant and contrasting colors, all set off in the foreground in Pontormo's intense manner: acute or grave, these colors are acidified or diluted in waves of light coming from who knows where, but certainly not from the cold and dark surroundings, from which this whirl of tints and this agitation of pleated and draping cloth stands detached, carrying all else with it. One patch of light in particular stands out in such a way that one might think it came from a projector shining on Elizabeth's belly, where it gives the soft green a yellow tint: that is where the child "leaps." (Mary echoes this joyous leap. In her *Magnificat* she says, "my spirit rejoices." It is the resonance of her own voice that comes back to her thus.)

Everything is moving in this convolution and tumult of cloth rippling with folds, sinuosities, and billowing curves in which it lifts and rises more than it falls, as though by an immobilized wind, an air that lightens and enlarges the two gravid bellies between which and in which breathes the spirit. An entire gravity is suspended here.

These wombs touch without touching. The distinct curves of each one would remain slightly separated, between the two shades of green, if it were not for a small piece of the cloth covering Elizabeth's head that hangs down and touches them, at a point that seems truly calculated as a tangent, or as the infinitesimal calculus of a passage to the limit. From this point upward to Elizabeth's extended arm, a triangle is outlined in the dark orange of her outer garment, at the center of the picture. Farther up, this triangle widens into the layered and enfolded lines of the arms and the positions of the three heads.[4]

This ternary and trinitary system (which feminizes the Trinity) determines a rhythm between the two mobile bodies of the mothers, who are joined together while their feet seem to dance on or to be barely touching the ground, and, between them, the immobile head of Elizabeth's servant. At the same time, it is a crossing of gazes: the two women gaze intently into each other's eyes, each one looking into the heart of the other as though recognizing and moved by what can be neither seen nor said (more exactly: what is never to be seen or said, but toward which one does not cease to move—and that is the immemorial), while these two interpenetrating eyes (only one eye is visible on each profile), like the wombs touching each other, are somehow repeated in those of the servant, at the center, who

abruptly fixes us: who has always already fixed us as though from out of the very ground of the scene, from out of this background of dark sky that is outlined by the line of the wall, whose perspectival angle passes precisely through the top of her veiled head.

(One thing that is at stake in this painting is its attempt to disorganize perspectival space—and its oriented gaze—to turn it sideways, to make it circle back on itself, or to smear it around, so to speak . . . It is no longer a question of aiming the gaze, but rather of flattening and spreading out vision.)

At the same time, the rhythm is shifted again: the gaze turned to us is doubled in turn by that of Mary's servant. The two servants, each of whom is clearly homologous to her mistress in terms of age, headdress, and colors, transfer to us, in a frontal gaze that is manifestly that of the painting itself, the sort of intimate, infinite, and poignant gaze through which the two mothers visit one another. The fixity of the servants' gazes (all the more remarkable in that, in one sketch, they are looking off to the side) seek our own and await it, as often happens in portraits.[5] What is thus sought, what the painting is seeking, is the mutual visitation of a spectator and a painting, or a *subject* of painting. One who would know how to see the *subject*, at once the subject treated and the presence hidden in the womb, with its immemorial origin—so that we might know how to see the invisible and bring about the anamnesis that arises before birth (or at the far end of death).

But with the second servant, the scene pivots and shifts toward the left, which is also the case in Dürer's *Witches*. On the left there is a sort of repetition of the central motif: under the young servant's elbow, a patch of beige surrounded by pink, there is a red triangle that, because of its shape, size, and placement, can be seen as a repetition of the orange one in the middle. The divine triangle of the womb (trinitary and feminine) twice over. It is somewhat as if, through Mary's young replica, the central knot of revolving figures—a closed and intimate triangle—were unfolding or unwinding by repeating itself in the direction of an elsewhere, or toward nowhere.

Something beyond the ternary scheme is indicated, something that returns in the surroundings and that animates, however slightly, its linear architecture. Barely visible, deliberately placed at an exaggerated distance and in partial shadows, there are two barely visible silhouettes. (They are as small as the humunculi shown in certain

"Visitations.") In order to distinguish any of their details, one must approach to the point of touching, as it were, the womb of the painting, the recesses of its internal space, toward which the servant's twist of green turban unfurls, and in which one can see, at the deepest point in the background, the only small patch of light gray in the painting. It looks like a kind of opening, and in fact it is a street leading off to the left, like a discrete signal drawing the eye toward a little light in the background: light coming into the city—light from the interior. This patch of dawn or twilight is laid out like an empty square or like a receding vista, a vanishing point inversely symmetrical to the large doorway with its raised threshold opening into darkness behind Elizabeth's back.[6]

Here we find two silhouettes, placed slightly forward from this point, close to the painting's edge, before a door whose arch, similar to those of the windows above, indicates the Florentine setting. They are two men, with the look of common people, one of whom holds a knife and a round loaf of bread, the other a bottle.[7] One looks at the other, the other looks at us (perhaps with only one eye), in an abridged version of the large central scene of gazes. But, in a way that is obviously intentional, they themselves are barely visible, plunged into indistinction, as if it were necessary to neglect them (even while noticing that this is necessary), as if it were necessary to forget them even while recalling that this is necessary; they are embedded deep in the ground of the picture like the two children in the depth of the wombs—and, like them, immemorial. It is also possible that these men are suffering or wounded (perhaps one of them has had an eye gouged out), which could refer at once to war and to sacrifice (I will return to this).[8]

With the bread and the wine—and with these men who are holding them and who are distinct in every way (size, gender, light) from the dazzling group of women—the incarnation (in a first sense) is marked a second time, but this time in the vicinity of sacrifice and death. Something deathly comes from the ground of the picture, as it does (perhaps) from the gaze, gentle but grave, directed at us by the older servant. As for the younger servant, her intent stare rather invites us to look at how that which precedes and that which follows life—another accentuation of death—are intertwined in the immemorial. This intertwining is neither present nor absent, but is carried or thrown into a mêlée of veils and arms, of colors, lights, and gazes: it is an intertwining of the absolutely intimate, *interior intimo meo*, into which the gazes of the virgin and the sterile woman plunge and inter-

penetrate, thus plunging into the double presence—restaged in the background by the two men—of a present that comes from nowhere and from no time (not from any clearly located conception or fecundity), from no generation, but indeed from the hither side of time and space. This double presence turns back toward this hither side, just as the double penetration of gazes is also turned toward us in the double gaze that cuts the scene in two at the level of the picture plane, as if this plane passed between the two wombs, such that from them emerges the view across which the immemorial considers us and, so to speak, sees us coming or even offers us its own visitation, from out of the depth of a dark and stormy-looking sky traversed by the very thin flash of Mary's halo.

But this bread and wine—this obscure detail of the picture thus set off, since such a detail is necessarily burdened and overburdened with sense, and appears to conceal an intensity (dense and compact) that counterbalances the entire expanse of the foreground, or that might even be the true catalyst of this agitated ferment of colors (unless it is its precipitate, its residual concentration: one could go in either direction)—this bread and wine, then, have a secondary value connected to that of incarnation (the presence of the god in the woman's womb; I will return later to another detail of the detail). They are the body and the blood of Christ shared out among the disciples at the Last Supper, in a gesture that the man-god asks to be repeated "in memory" of him (we are still in the gospel of Luke). The sharing out of bread and wine is the commemoration of the incarnation, for all of Christianity, just as, through Christianity, it is also the memory of a much more ancient, indeed immemorial, sacrality (Dionysian, agrarian . . .) an echo of which will resound long after the age of Pontormo, and already at some distance from Christianity, in these verses by Hölderlin:

> Brod ist der Erde Frucht, doch ists vom Lichte geseegnet
> Und vom donnernden Gott kommet die Freude des Weins.
>
> Bread is the fruit of the earth, but it is blessed by the light
> And from the thundering god comes the joy of wine.[9]

We also know how the interpretation of the eucharistic memorial played a determining role in the history of Christianity. In a first, and fundamental, sense this commemoration goes beyond the order of memory: it brings back the real presence of the man-god, and the reality of his incorporation by those who consume the "holy species"

(that is to say, the holy appearances of the incarnated god). But the mode of this presence was divided by the Reform: the Churches of Rome and Byzantium confess the effective presence of the Eucharistic substance in the appearances of bread and wine, whereas Luther keeps the substance of these latter, in which a spiritual presence is sheltered.

Now it happens that this "Visitation" can be read as a politico-religious allegory in relation to the reform movements of the Church. It belongs to the period when Florence, having just restored its Republic, underwent assault by the Pope's ally, Charles V (after the sack of Rome). During this period, the Florentine artists generally show themselves to be very patriotic. Michelangelo returns to place himself in the service of the Republic, whose fortifications he worked to improve: it is thought that the right section of this painting, with its mighty wall, is a reference to his work.[10] Political stakes are mixed with religious ones: since Savonarola, Florence had been shaken by several attempts to reform the declining Roman church. The city even saw a few individuals rally around the faith of Luther. Certainly, Pontormo is not here making a "Reformed" declaration, but one might well think that he is making a statement that is at least slightly reformist.[11] It has even been suggested that we should see this "Visitation" in reverse: Elizabeth, entering Florence by the Porta Romana, would be visiting Mary, future mother of Jesus, *Rex florentini populi* (a motto taken up during the time of Savonarola).[12]

The "Visitation" is sometimes also interpreted as a symbol of the transition from the Old to the New Testament, or from the Synagogue to the Church: thus, in the painting, a new Church would be taking over from that of Rome, or would at least be coming to regenerate it. From that perspective, the bread and wine here would be as though suspended between a transsubstantiation and a distinction of substances. But either way (or even placing both together), Pontormo would be inviting us to think, beyond a religious or political debate, the theme of a real and hidden presence at the heart of his picture. It would then be the painting itself, its striking brilliance and its force, that would contain the truth of this presence, that would form its substance or conceal its mystery, just as the wombs of the two women conceal the fruits of two mysterious conceptions. Thus, as is already clear even from the most superficial viewing of this painting, everything here depends on a presence that bursts into the superabundant visibility of colors and forms, whereas the infinitely intimate gazes of the two mothers plunge and sink into this presence.

But if this gaze is indeed immediately turned toward us by their servants, the painting thus plunges into us and into our vision a look that makes us the substance or the subject of the painting, or that places in us, through the painted substance, the real presence of its subject (at once man and god, painter and spectator, representation and presence). In a gesture that would demonstrate a rare audacity toward the religion whose resources it is manipulating, Pontormo seems to be withdrawing bread and wine into the shadows, a bread and wine that would here become the cipher of a presence at once hidden and exposed—hidden in its exposure—whose only reality would be, in the end, nothing other than painting. This would constitute a remarkable gesture of turning away from the religious.[13]

This suspension or ambiguity between two of the painting's essential references—to religious truth, to pictorial truth—would occur in the very same way between two significations of the memorial of communion: on the Roman side, a commemoration that literally revives the event, that reproduces its full actuality, and on the Reformation side, a memory addressed to something that is not reactualized, since it is, rather, eternally actual. Either way, it is always a question of the immemorial—that is, of what is not in reference to a past, but is only in actuality, in an eternal return or in an unalterable presence. The immemorial is what is infinitely ancient and thus definitively present. But this logic applies above all to the act of painting: it does not commemorate a scene from Holy Scripture, it sets to work the engagement of a presence that is not anything to be recalled but is, on the contrary, the presence that calls "in" the painting, in its construction and in its light, selfsame with the intimacy of its bursting surface. It calls as Mary calls (on) Elizabeth, and the entire painting is the silent but vibrating echo of this voice: the "leaping" and quivering in which it enflames its colors and its curves.

(Is it possible also to think that this pictorial exaltation in the foreground withdraws religious reality, itself reduced to a mere consumption of food, into the shadows? And is it possible to think that the painting goes so far as to reverse the roles between itself and what it is supposed to represent and symbolize?)

Returning now to the foreground, but still on the left side, where the disturbance of rhythm is played out, along with the whole delicate relation of flesh to spirit (of man to the divine, of the flesh of painting to the spirit of presence), we encounter another surprising detail. A loose strand of the Virgin's hair appears lower down, along

the border separating her olive green dress from the pink one of her double.

Already, looking at the hair on the heads of these two Marys, we see that it escapes from their headscarves in unruly waves, particularly in a length of hair that falls onto the Virgin's shoulder; in contrast to the veiled heads of the other two, their hair thus points not only to youth but, within this youth, to a sensuality that may indeed defy religious convention. I find no other Virgin by Pontormo with hair so free and quivering (another form of "leaping"?), whereas I do find it on a woman's back in his *Deposition*—a woman who for that very reason must be Mary Magdalene—or else in the portrait of Francesca Capponi, also depicted as Mary Magdalene. But the latter, as we know, is a figure of sin . . .[14]

This hair hanging very low here, whose appearance (whose resurgence, one might say) is surprising, if not incongruous, stretches down to the loose tuft dangling against the Virgin's buttock, just at the level of her double's pubis. Here again, the detail is designed to pique a curiosity that cannot, as soon as it notices this, remain uncertain for long. It is clear that the division between flesh and spirit becomes blurred here, or that the painting repeats the singular operation of the mystical nuptials in which the virginal womb was impregnated. Precisely here, in the furtive play of a tuft of hair that clearly evokes another, the sex is indicated. The union of divine spirit with human flesh is here made material; it is the braiding and interlacing not only of this hair but of the entire grand mêlée, this whirling volume, mobile and suspended, of phosphorescently colored drapes. The Virgin's body is suggested by its visible outline, not as if one had to undress her with one's eyes, but much rather in truth: as if the entire iridescent volute in which the group is resolved were this womb itself, its opening and its depth, its caress and its light, the tangible flesh in the eyes of an immemorial *jouissance*.

(But if the sex of the Virgin is thus given for us to see, how can we not notice that one of the two men in the background shows, frontally—and this time without any possible doubt about the detail—a codpiece in the fashion of the day: a triangular piece, very visibly swollen with its contents, pointing toward the other triangle opened at the center of the picture . . .)

But it is impossible for the tuft of hair not to make one think also of the painter's brush, which applied its delicate blond touch. On the same spot and with the same silk or tuft, and in the same *manner* (to use the term that is often associated with Pontormo and a few oth-

ers), there would be a mixture—an interweaving that is as fleeting as it is insistent—of body, spirit, life, death, man (woman) and god, grace and sin, light and texture, color and curvature, representation and the unpresentable—as well as one sex with the other.

This mêlée begins and ends in the painting, and as a painting. As the truth of immemorial intimacy, it is, and is nothing other than, this projection out before us, it is this splash of color as a turbulent pool, this entire picture as a womb or an eye, opening onto an iridescent interior that, in the end, and in the beginning, is nothing but its own exposed surface.

This buoyant movement of lines, this bounding and bouncing of gazes, this passage of colors into a spectrum or a prism, all of this is indeed a "leaping" aroused by spirit: from nowhere and from no time, from no devotion, from the absolute outside folded into the bosom of the most interior of interiors and simultaneously unfolded as a large, flat segment of vision, overflowing space while also making time vacillate in the dancing *tempo* of the group.

The immemorial, that site and moment of provenance and presence to which one does not return but which is *always-already-there*—the mother's womb, the father's spirit, life/death, sense/truth—are confounded here in the suspended present of the picture, in the light immobilization of a dance, in the prismatic grasp of a dawning or crepuscular light, of a flash of sky and of the scene that is played out and enjoyed [*jouer et jouir*] in the "liquid splendor of the colors,"[15] in the rustling of the cloth, the quivering silence between two voices, and the infinite exchange of gazes taking us up into itself, making us see that what is to be seen is entirely in the ground and entirely at the surface [*tout au fond et tout à la surface*], is nothing other than this immense rising of depth into surface—the depth of the womb and of the sky, the depth of the city and of the eyes: always-already-there, therefore always to come again like the return of a past more ancient than any past, its *visitation* always reprised in a movement in which the surface itself rises up, billowing and leaping out. Here, painting finds itself enjoying [*jouir*] itself, and enjoying what it conceives self-same with its surface and its manner.

Coda

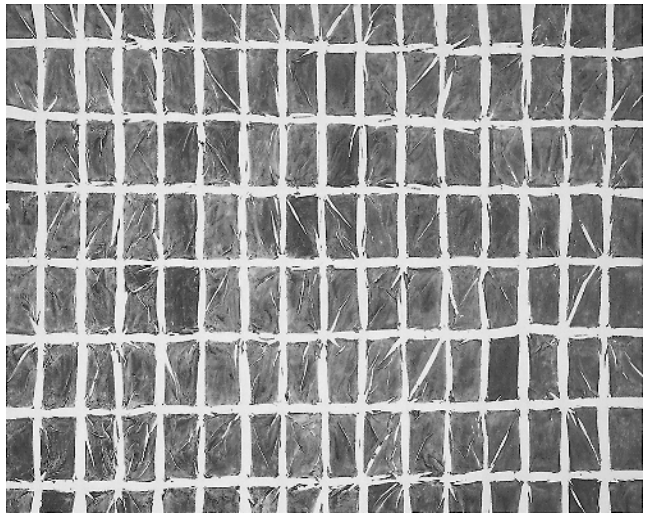
To conclude, I will take another step, elsewhere in painting and toward another womb, another site of conception.

Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto* (*Pregnant Virgin*) is a well-known work from about sixty years prior to Pontormo's (one which he therefore must have known). It does not treat the same subject: it is not a Visitation, but neither is it an Annunciation or a Birth (although it was given the title *Virgin of Childbirth*[16] and was thus venerated as a protection for women giving birth). It is a scene without any status in the religious legend (like a scene of pure painting . . .): the Virgin is standing, facing forward, beneath a round tent opened by two angels, who hold apart the heavy cloth curtains. Mary's left hand is propped on her hip, while her right hand rests on her large round belly, where her blue dress, unlaced at the midriff (no doubt for the mother's comfort), shows a white chemise through its opening. The hand placed on the edge of this long slit is held in an ambiguous pose: it might be holding the cloth together as it falls open, but it might also be spreading it apart, as though it is about to slip into the opening, toward which this hand obviously attracts the gaze and centers it.[17] Here too, then—but in a different way—we visibly accede to the invisible in the womb: the entire painting is nothing but opening (and thus, indeed, *del parto*), one opening after another all the way into the background—which is nothing other than the quilted *capitonné* cloth of the tent: the surface itself is thus opened and lifted, handled by the angels and by the Virgin. (On the left side of her belly, a similar slit—it, too, no doubt meant to accommodate the pregnancy—shows not the white of an undergarment but the same tint as the quilted background.)

I do not want to discuss this painting any further for the moment.[18] I would like to move directly to one, much closer to us, that is a sort of memorial to it: a canvas in Simon Hantaï's *Tabula* series from 1975 that bears the title . . . *del Parto*.

There is no longer any Holy Virgin here: her figure has disappeared, as well as her name (at least in the title; Hantaï's own brief commentary ends with: "To the *Madonna del Parto*"[19]). It is a painting dedicated to painting, but less to any memory of its history (as we can see) than to the repetition and the reengagement of an immemorial womb—or, if you like, of the womb of the immemorial, which thus turns out to be painting, its spread-out surface and its paste, presented not exactly for the sake of a birth (not for the coming of a figure) but for the access that is opened to nothing other than the very opening of pictorial space. In being related thus to its own tradition, this pictorial space is related not to any "content" (or signification), but only to its plane and its folds, manipulated in the

3. Piero della Francesca, *Madonna del Parto,* Monterchi, Arezzo. Scala/Art Resource, New York.



4. Simon Hantaï, *. . . del Parto,* Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris.

interminable lifting up of a presence always already present in the ground, a presence of the ground itself, opened onto itself down to the most profound depth: being, in truth, nothing other than this separating and spreading apart.

Hantaï has described how he produced this canvas by folding and knotting it before applying any paint; at the end of the process, "the knots are removed and unfolded, the capiton is split open in every direction." The canvas thus simultaneously takes the form—but on the same plane—of the doubly split dress and the quilted apse of the tent. In coming to the surface, everything has passed through the ground. As in Piero and in Pontormo—but perhaps in all painting—the enfolded intimacy of the painting's subject (the enigmatic presence, the enigma of a real presence) is unfolded and laid out in the picture plane. And the surface thus lifted and stretched, and very large (255 x 320 cm), is only the site for these slits and their brilliant dance, their crackling movement rendered in the color that Hantaï himself likes to designate as "this *caput mortuum*,"[20] which he mentions in a list of various kinds of earth. Earth, light—the light of the earth (and not of the sky)—death, life, the ground and the opening.

(After the fact, I add these notes that Hantaï made in a more recent publication: "What hides itself shows itself—folded into a reserve. . . . The canvas ceases to be a *projection screen*, becomes material, cutting through itself, etc.—the invaginated—the involuted—the flattened mountain—the painted and the hidden—folding and unfolding . . . void that separates and binds . . . there is nothing behind."[21])

Painting opens onto itself, which opens onto the immemorial: presence always-already-there and always-there-again, inexhaustibly withdrawn into itself, relentlessly exposed before us, womb traversed by a "leap": ourselves before being born, after dying, always once again, in a dazzling amnesiac/hypermnesiac anamnesis, the immemory of a dawn or a twilight of the world.

Thus, the legend of its own origin that painting made for itself—the Greek story of the girl who traces the outline of her fiancé's shadow on the wall as he leaves for war—should not be understood as a parable of representation. This girl is not seeking to reproduce an image of the one who will no longer be there, in order to recollect it later: rather, she fixes the shadow, the obscure presence that is there whenever light is there, the double of the thing—of every thing—and its invisible ground. Painting does not make this ground

visible; it makes it invisible in light, it bears it and bears it away, invisible, in the pigments and folds of its illumination. But it is thus that it bears the truth of representation: for the latter is a "reproduction" only inasmuch as it is first, both in its essential movement and in the primary sense of the word *representation*, placed into presence, the intensity of a presentation in the desire to bring into daylight the presence preceding the day.

If this *Visitation* by Pontormo brings together all its energies—signifying, symbolic, political, sexual, emotive, metaphysical, or aesthetic—in the whirlwind of the iridescent cloth that dances in the foreground of the scene and with which, in the end, it envelops the scene, identifying it and concealing it at the same time, this is because painting here folds and sinks into itself, falls and drapes over itself; it is a kind of clothing or curtain over its own womb, which carries the presence of an immemorial absence, to which we pay a visit in this shimmering that we touch with our eyes.

What is Christian painting? It is certainly not the representation of Christian legends. No doubt, in the history of painting it has also been a question of this: but it has been no more and no less a question of this (in terms of what is at bottom essential, if not in terms of the quantity of pictures) than of every other mythological or heroico-political legend. And to the extent that it is a question of this, any kind of illustration can do the job, in the manner of pious images that are less artistic, as a general rule, the more pious they are. Christian painting is not a representation of a Christian subject. Rather, and conversely, Christian painting is Christianity—or something of Christianity in painting or as painting—caught up in the process of making painting: pregnant with painting, giving birth to it while also announcing itself in it and as it—and, what's more, announcing itself as the entire stakes and the entire history, still today, of what we call "art."

It is not true that Christianity developed its images as an illustrated Bible for the illiterate; rather, the Christian image, joined with the no less Christian refusal of the image—an internal tearing apart and stitching back together of Christianity, and of all three of the monotheisms—bears all the intensity of the access to the inaccessible divine: to the god without a name, the most high without altitude, the present without presence, the image without resemblance, and the semblance or appearance without image, the appearance of what

does not appear, the non-appearing and the suspense of all phenomenology, painting as *proffering*: literally, bearing forth.

Nothing less is indicated here, in truth, than what is at stake in Christianity insofar as it deconstructs itself, that is, insofar as it comes undone from religion, from its legend and its belief, in order to be the agitation of an immemory of presence: the gods have withdrawn, withdrawing with them presence itself. The truth of monotheism is the atheism of this withdrawal. "Real presence" becomes the presence that is par excellence not present: the one that is not *there*. The one whose being-there is a being [*être*] (which here means: a doing, a manner, a touch, a flash, a line, or a trait) exposed to the elsewhere of this very place, in this place itself though without any visible or invisible elsewhere, selfsame with the canvas, here as in its swollen womb of painting. This painting proffers a *this is my body*: this is the exposure of the skin or the veil beneath which no presence is hidden and no god is waiting except the place itself, here, and the singular touch of our own exposure: *jouissance* and suffering of being in the world, precisely there and nowhere else.

In this sense, Christian painting must be thought—that is, looked at, appreciated, or judged—on the one hand, insofar as it engages the totality of Western painting on the basis of Christian motifs:[22] all "profane" painting and every mode of painting and visual or plastic art in general propagates and shares out, relaunches and problematizes this *hoc est corpus meum*. Each one of these words becomes pregnant with expectations, aporias, certainties and disappointments, joys and sorrows of a "real presence" that is anything but "real" or "present," as empirical self-assurance *and* religious belief might have imagined these in the world of the past. But painting—art—has always consisted in abandoning this past world, on the spot. (Was there ever any such "past world" of naïve and imaginary belief? Is this not rather our retrospective illusion, we who always want to have a past that has been surpassed, or perhaps lost . . . ?)

But also: Christian painting, and with it Christianity, must be thought as the dense and complex setting into play of the triple instantiation of monotheism, which is itself played out within Christianity as well, as the triple instantiation of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Namely: the Christian god "properly" (that is, religiously) speaking, present/hidden and presenting himself as hidden; the Jewish god, speaking, interpellating from out of the unpro-

nounceable and the invisible; the Muslim god, incommensurate with any presence. What is common is the alliance. It is therefore always an alliance with something that is essentially unequal and absolutely improper to all alliance in the sense of an association or any given union. That is why at the heart of painting—and it is indeed its heart[23]—an indefinite exchange is played out between representation and non-representation, between visible and non-visible, between art and refusal of art. Let us consider Pontormo's *Visitation* for a moment as a Jewish painting: indeed, it does not bring to completion the representation of what it treats (and that is the prescription given by the tradition: that the representation remain incomplete). Let us consider it now as an Islamic painting: indeed, it is composed of nothing but a mêlée of arabesques, it too interminable.

Thus painting *immemorizes* that of which the three monotheisms are precisely not the memory: that which, beginning from it, must be liberated from it, but long in advance of it and of us—our own real presence withdrawing from us.

How pregnant we are: how it swells and shows itself, within us and in front of us, this expectation that has its value not only, and perhaps not at all, in a coming to completion, but rather right here and now. An expecting that awaits nothing, that is beyond any submission to an arrival; a painting that paints nothing, that is beyond representation and beyond the gaze itself: a *being-there* of the *beyond* [*un* être-là *de l'*au-delà]—of what else could it be a question, here and now?

In a certain way, "a being-there of the beyond" provides a summation of Christianity,[24] and perhaps also the point of departure, within itself, for its own deconstruction, that is, its own stripping away of its religious character, opening at once, in a formidable ambivalence, that which structures the twofold possibility of the world insofar as it begins in the West: nihilism, on the one hand (when the near or the "by" absorbs the beyond[25]), and, on the other hand, eternity, if this can be understood as the beyond coming to open the there, giving it its being-there in this very opening. (Which is precisely what thought attempts to engage in Heidegger's *Dasein*, Derrida's *différance*, and Deleuze's *becoming-imperceptible*—or else, and without a proper name, in the contemporary world's efforts to think after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, after and across the disasters of all the identitarian, communitarian, sovereign, and capitalizing affirmations,

which have all consisted in imposing the "there" on the beyond instead of inscribing the beyond as the "there.")

This attempt and effort of thought, this common effort of a praxis of sense that renounces *theōria* as the imposition of an object, implies an essential recourse to the image: because the image, as it has been worked over by our Christian history, been set to work and unworked, visited and abandoned (and the image is not limited to painting, but occurs also in music, in dance, as well as in the cinema, photography, video, etc.)—because the image, then, is above all the *there* of a *beyond*. It is not at all its "representation": it is a thinking-there, thinking as the effectivity of a *place opening itself to presence*.

"Christian" painting, by ceasing to be properly religious and cultic (in the western part of Christianity) did not, for all that, become "representative" (or "realist" or determined by "resemblance"). It did not cease, through all the transformations and all the displacements effected by pictorial art and by all the arts of the image, to dig and hollow out this opening of the place that gives rise to what has no place: presence insofar as it is essentially excessive and exceeds itself. Presence, then, insofar as one does not present it or does not properly accede to it, but insofar as it is offered to a visitation that undergoes the ordeal of the invisible at its heart. And more precisely still: the ordeal of that which regards us from out of the heart of this heart, or from out of the heart of this operation that we call "art" and by which we designate nothing other than the divided and shared out access to our common presence. That through which, at times, it is possible for us to visit one another, that is, to approach and to perceive one another, we who are present, the immemorial ones.

It is perhaps surprising that a Jewish (perhaps Judeo-Christian?) thinker such as Emmanuel Levinas once wrote: "That presence [of the Other—*Autrui*] consists in coming to us, *making an entry*. Which can be stated thus: the *phenomenon* that is the apparition of the Other is also *face*; or again (to show this entry, at every instant new in the immanence and essential historicity of the phenomenon), the epiphany of the face is *visitation*."[26]

9

The Sovereign Woman in Painting

What we call Antiquity—that is, the first moment of the sunset pursuing its interminable and hazardous course far out in front of us—had a genius for figures. This period, in which the presence of the gods receded into the distance, becoming—it was said—only images or idols, was admirably adept at representing itself to itself, recounting itself and characterizing itself in exemplary paintings, scenes, and portraits. Among these are Homer, the blind poet, or Alexander cutting the knot, Xerxes and Cato, Athens and Carthage, as well as the *agora* or the Roman Legion. At the very least, it is with this gallery of images that a certain Antiquity has been transmitted to us, by which the tradition—in its transports as well as its losses, in the conjoined gifts of its memory and its forgetting—effects a slow crystallization and refinement of types and characters (in the strongest sense of these words), toward which we will never cease to turn our gazes—gazes that are more and more certain of being unable to discern in our own future any chance, any sketch or scheme, of new figures.

Indeed, the word and the very notion of "Antiquity" from the outset form the crucible or the mould for all these figures, or for the general figuration still suggested for us by the "ancient" or the "antique" (or, to use a French expression from the sixteenth century, *l'antiquaille*). In fact, the idea of an extreme ancientness, which the word *Antiquity* was meant to designate, emerged at the beginning of modernity and had the connotation of an *exemplary* ancientness,

sketched out in unalterable and eminently imitable forms; it was, thus, precisely contrary to the motifs of oldness and decrepitude. (In French, the language of these centuries allows us to follow the alternations, the debates, and sometimes the play between the two values of the *antif*: *antien* and then *antique*.)

The "Renaissance," in this respect, is nothing other than the constitution or reconstitution of a gallery of figures. Constitution or reconstitution: to decide between these two, it would be necessary to determine the extent to which Antiquity *itself* already thought itself and represented itself as figural, and the extent to which it was the "Moderns" who restored it in this way. This is an empty debate, undecidable on the plane of history proper. But it is decidable with regard to the following consideration: without a doubt, Antiquity does attest to the fact that it was already and originally preoccupied with its own antiquity. The golden age, the age of the Titans, Atlantis—these were already figured as its own lost and exemplary ancientness. As was that Egypt whose tremendous ancientness, displayed in its colossal forms, gave Plato such an impression of desirable authenticity, perhaps lost forever.

When Renaissance art discovers or rediscovers the figures of Antiquity, it thus discovers or rediscovers this movement by which an antiquity of figures is necessary for self-recognition. When divine majesty and compassion have disappeared, such that one can no longer entrust oneself to their icons, it becomes necessary (and timely) to find the images of an ancientness whose immemorial character is converted into an actuality and into a resource—that is, into an anxious concern—for identification.

It is no doubt even necessary to think that the *image*, as we understand it or perceive it, corresponds quite properly to a relation to ancientness. The absence out of which the image draws a singular presence, ostensibly distanced in its proximity, is first the absence of a past that rises into the present with all the weight and all the resonance of its abolition. What comes to the surface and into the light of the image is always an antiquity.

When Artemisia Gentileschi painted *Cleopatra*—just as when she painted *Suzanna* or *Danae*, or when Giampetrino, long before her, or Guido Reni, almost at the same time, each painted a Cleopatra (all of which, moreover, no doubt imitate one another, among themselves and in relation to a dozen others)—she painted not only a legendary figure and a model of identification (one could say, a self-portrait in advance), but also the movement of an art that is deliberately search-

ing for itself and that lacks models and figures already charged with meaning and presence.[1]

This triple motif—or motive, or subject, statement, or gesture—does not form a sedimented triplicity, however, but rather a trinity, the unity and identity of a triple figure: the figure of the last sovereign queen of Egypt, that of Artemisia, and that of the painting that will later be called "figurative."

This unity becomes unified in itself by way of the unity of Cleopatra, the eponymous subject of the canvas. The name *Cleopatra* identifies a scene in which, remarkably, we see none of the signs that usually identify the scene (Egyptian markers, indications of sovereignty, the queen's handmaidens, or else, in Giampetrino, a barred window evoking the enclosed space in which, according to history, Cleopatra enclosed herself, as into her own tomb, along with her maidservants and the body of Antony). But Cleopatra's unity, the figurativity of her figure, so to speak, is that of a violent, poignant, and heartrending confrontation between two worlds, two orders of representation, two ages of the world, two states of sovereignty, and also two women in one. It is in a way the *ancient* unity par excellence, as the unity of a vertiginous distance and the fascinating proximity of what is most ancient. In Cleopatra, an immemorial antiquity—that of the most illustrious sovereigns of a world more ancient than the Mediterranean world—both shines with, and is eclipsed by, a brilliance that fixes for all time the moment in which one world gives way to another, but in such a way that the departure of the first becomes firmly embedded in the one that follows.

On three separate occasions, and in three female figures, Antiquity represented to itself the destiny that carried it toward Rome and, through Rome, toward the gradual shift from a Mediterranean axis toward a European axis, the displacement from the South to the North and from the Ancient to the Modern (since, beginning even in antiquity, the "modern" characterizes itself as that which has lost its past and is obliged by this loss to invent itself or to lose itself in its own future). The abduction of Europe distributes its mythological motifs across a series of three legendary figures, in the sense that the legend recomposes and fictions a history that it both obscures and shapes. These three figures are Helen, Dido, and Cleopatra, through whom we might, and perhaps must, trace the movement in which

Antiquity recognizes itself, just as we recognize ourselves as its disinherited modern heirs.

These three women mark three moments in the displacement and, more than that, in the deep unsettling of the foundations of a world conceived, and perceiving itself, as having emerged from an archaic obscurity, as having been liberated from strange and foreign powers, and as gaining mastery over its own fate, where previously there had been submission to immemorial orders. At the same time, this is a world that has torn itself away from the sacred glories, certainties, and self-evidence of empires, which, however, do not collapse without transmitting an undying spark of their brilliance. The Trojan Aeneas carries this spark; it is what also makes him the son and protégé of Aphrodite. The same goddess permitted the abduction of Helen—which is what led to the first collapse of the Orient in favor of the Occident. (In certain versions of the legend, it is said that Helen remained hidden in Egypt during the Trojan War—and this indicates a supplementary link between her and Cleopatra.) But Aeneas does not depart for his destiny as the founder of Rome without taking with him some vestiges of ancestral piety. Even as he passes from East to West, *pius Aeneas* displaces the divine: he abandons it and saves it at the same time.

This dialectic does not have a resolution; it is infinitely problematic. The future foundations will be irreversibly marked by the double seal of abandonment, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the desire for *hierarchy*, in the strict sense of this term—that is, in the sense that is inscribed only in *hieroglyphs*, as the name *Cleopatra* was inscribed in her cartouche. The sacrality or holiness of power, the *hierophany* from which every true manifestation of all-powerful authority cannot be separated, is precisely what begins to be eclipsed at the dawn of the Western world: this is the antiquity of Antiquity itself, the venerated and hidden secret that will haunt and determine the path of a twofold quest: for a "politics" capable of ensuring itself and assuming itself as a "civic religion" (as it will later be called), which also means as "sovereignty," in the sense that the Moderns will give to this word, from Bodin to Rousseau and Schmitt; and for a "representation" capable of ensuring itself and assuming—beyond any cultic reference and apart from any hieratic icon—the character of a consecration belonging specifically to manifestation or to appearance, and therefore, in a singular way, to the manifestation or the appearance of sovereignty.

Helen, then, figures the first moment in this long rupture. She is sovereign only through her beauty (but this beauty is what shakes up the order of the East), even as she is withdrawn and concealed from representation, as is attested by the history of painting, which has only rarely attempted to confront her brilliant appearance. Indeed, Helen also inaugurates the interminable haunting of a reality that eludes the image, since in one widespread version of her legend—as though in order to efface the scandalous adultery of the Homeric version—it was not her but her image, her *eidōlon*, that Paris carried away to Troy (or, sometimes, to Egypt, whereas in other versions it is the real Helen who goes to the land of the pharaohs).

Dido, for her part, inaugurates the royal suicide at the same time as she stands for a second Eastern kingdom, exposed to abandonment and then domination by the West. Dido, who comes from farther in the East, from Phoenicia and from Libya, is herself the founder of a city. She establishes Carthage on the territory she has acquired—or conquered—through the ruse of the bull's hide cut into thin strips. Her immolation engages the destiny of sovereignty in two ways. On the one hand, she anticipates the violent refusal of kings, on which Rome will pride itself—and which will lead to Caesar's death, even as this death provides new resources for an *imperial* sovereignty, and thus for a new civic religion, that of the two kingdoms and the two types of omnipotence, each sovereign in its order. On the other hand, with dagger and pyre Dido seals a secret union of power and passion, or perhaps a split between a power that is in itself amorous—in which passion and sovereignty spill over into each other—and something that takes on the character of an exclusive passion for power.[2]

Cleopatra completes the sacrifice of the ancient world, of the antiquity of Antiquity and its hieratic and erotic sovereignty. The last of the pharaohs, the hierogamic wife of her brother, before bearing one of Caesar's sons and then Antony's children, she imprints on history, since Plutarch, the figure of a "queen of kings" who dies in a way befitting her majesty. She dies both in order not to be humiliated by Octavian, as he prepares his triumph in Rome, and in order not to leave Marc Antony, who has just killed himself after twice losing his honor—once by abandoning his fleet to return to his lover, and again after his troops are defeated by those of Octavian.

All the tragedies based on the Greek story take up and modulate the double and interwoven motif in which Cleopatra's suicide is affirmed as the sovereignty both of the lover and of the sovereign

woman. Artemisia had certainly read Plutarch, but she may also have read—or seen performed—Giambattista Giraldi Cintio's *Cleopatra*, written some fifty years before her paintings, and we could even imagine, however unlikely it may be, that she could have read Shakespeare's play, which was more recent (but not translated in Italy), or perhaps those of Français Jodelle, Jean Mairet, or Isaac de Benserade. Benserade's work (1635) is contemporary with Artemisia's maturity; in it, Cleopatra speaks to the asp, saying (with reference to Octavian):

> Cet aigle qui si haut s'élève dans la nue
> Et sur tout l'Univers tient son aile étendue
> Va succomber sous toi, tu restes le plus fort,
> Tu lui ravis sa gloire en me donnant la mort,
> Tu m'empêches de voir le rivage du Tibre,
> Sans toi j'ai vécu reine et par toi je meurs libre.
>
> This eagle rising so high in the clouds
> And spreading his wings over all the world
> Will succumb to you; you remain the most powerful.
> In giving me death, you ravish him of his glory;
> You keep me far from the banks of the Tiber.
> Without you I lived as a queen and with you I die free.[3]

In Mairet, however, again speaking of Octavian, she also evokes a failed seduction, which turns her back to her dead lover:

> Ses projets et les miens sont réduits en fumée,
> Il ne triomphe pas, je n'en suis point aimée.
> Mais déjà les Enfers s'ouvrent devant mes pas,
> Je voy l'ombre d'Antoine, elle me tend les bras,
> La mort me rend l'objet de mon amour extrême
> Et ne voyant plus rien je vois tout ce que j'aime.
>
> His projects and mine are now but smoke,
> He triumphs not, nor does he love me.
> But already the Underworld opens at my feet,
> I see the shade of Antony extending an arm to me,
> Death gives back the object of my love extreme,
> And now that I see nothing, I see all that I love.[4]

Artemisia's paintings of Cleopatra are attempts to make visible this vision drowning in the shadows. It is a vision withdrawing from the spectacle of Rome, or else withdrawing from the world, in order to open itself to the shades. But the one that most interests me here adds more than the others to this vision, in which a brilliant body

holds our gaze even as it is submerged in darkness (fig. 5). This luminous flesh, drawn by the gaze and the hand of the painter from the shadows that enclose it, exerts upon us the threefold power of a seduction in which the erotic is joined to the pathetic, and to a royalty whose majesty is all the greater in that its splendor consists in nothing but nudity. It is all the greater also in that painting here affirms its ability to make this double extremity of bedazzlement and separation shine before us, an extremity in which we can recognize what one

5. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Cleopatra*, Fondazione Cavallini-Sgarbi, Ferrara.

could call, in modern terms, "the essence of manifestation" and, in ancient terms, the epiphany of mystery and its sacred power.

Cleopatra thus becomes the name of a triple agency and a triple potency: desire, power, and the image together take hold of a sovereignty that reveals itself in the abandonment or the withdrawal of what henceforth will appear to be nothing more than its own lost Orient. Where previously what reigned was the sacrality of a lineage, its majesty and its idols, now there reigns only the striking brilliance of its eclipse—but it thus reigns in all its splendor, as the splendor of this eclipse itself.

This is the triple secret that the figure of Cleopatra was given to maintain—to conceal and to expose simultaneously in the infamous fate of the whore queen (the *regina meretrix* invented by Augustinian propaganda), in the extravagant renown of the new Aphrodite (a role she played with Antony-Dionysos in the festivities of what they baptized their "inimitable life"), and through the lesson of sublime honor by which she sanctioned the ultimate end of everything that, much later, would be placed under the label of an archaic "oriental despotism." This triple secret comes together and is drawn into itself—is withdrawn once again—in the secret of a painting whose primary concern is not to "figure" the perceived world, but, by means of the figure, to touch on the secret as such, and on that which in the secret must remain buried and will in fact continue to sink farther and farther into the antiquity of Antiquity as its very condition, the condition of its *departure*. In the first instance, with this departure—the departure of the gods—Cleopatra or her legend also restages or replays Isis (to Antony's Osiris), one of whose emblems was a snake.[5] By condemning herself, Cleopatra liberates herself. She condemns the *hierarchical* order, knowing very clearly that what displaces this order does not replace it but rather installs domination in place of potency. The *imperium* is not the divine power of the pharaoh—and that is why in the end it will have divided up not so much the world as, on the contrary, the duality of world and heaven, the separation and the rivalry between two kingdoms with different forms of omnipotence.

The sovereignty of the Christian God, a sovereignty that Artemisia's painting no longer even dreams of conveying in any icons, is sovereignty insofar as it has become absolutely devoid of any potency presented and represented on earth. It is in the end the All-Powerful

now become equivalent to the non-powerful, an abandonment of man to his own forces, for which divine grace cannot be a greater force but, on the contrary, only another desertion. (The notion that Artemisia paints as a Christian—whatever piety she may have had, and even if she had no other faith than that of art, as one may well believe—becomes a certainty if we consider the grace by which painting deposes, abandons, and saves Cleopatra on the canvas.)

That is why political sovereignty, particularly in the form the Christian world inherited from Rome, consists in nothing other than the recognition of an unassignable order of public potency—of a secret and disquieting or even terrible nature attributed to the state—and in an absolute withdrawal of power into the ground of power itself, by which it is forced to invent itself at every moment, to exclude itself at every point from the very order that it founds, and to expose itself to its own ungroundedness. To the *deus absconditus* there corresponds a *potestas abscondita* that is all the more enigmatic and problematic in that it cannot be identified as divine: this is also why it is always badly in need of "civic religion." But it is also why it becomes a "global" or "worldwide" power at the moment when the Roman Empire—in this sense an heir to Alexander, of whom Cleopatra herself, both Egyptian and Greek, is also an heir in her way—is no longer an empire based on the hierarchical and hierophantic order proper to a place, a dynasty, or a territory, but becomes the *imperium* spreading over the totality of the world, which now identifies itself as such (and which, precisely for this reason, is about to become Europe). Thus, in the tragedy by Giraldo Cintio (which we may well imagine that Artemisia read), Cleopatra says to Octavian, at the moment when she is still attempting a reconciliation with him:

> Di quel Cesar, di cui tenete il nome,
> Né il nome sol, mal la potenza tutta,
> Essendo, come ei fu, signor del mondo.
>
> From that Caesar, whose name you carry,
> And not only his name, but all his power,
> You are, as I was, lord of the world.[6]

This same Caesar, however, was the one whose heart she had first ruled, and who in Corneille says: "Over my will you are sovereign." The story of Cleopatra is simply a renewal of the chiasmus between the potency of love and that of political power, in which the two sides are by turns opposed and combined. But the truth of this chiasmus consists in bringing to light a simultaneous conjunction and dissen-

sion between passion and power, beginning at the moment when the latter is no longer founded on a sacred order. Omnipotence is divided in two.

Now the problem of this omnipotence is precisely the one that art comes, if not to resolve, at least to replay on another level—by substituting itself, in the end, for the impossible civic religion, whose place it would take but whose religious character it would reject (placing itself, at least in principle, far from the order of a cult). Art becomes the sovereign neither of the world nor of souls but of the very enigma of sovereignty—of the paradox and ambiguity that arise when sovereignty is no longer hierophantic: that is, of the possibility of founding without a foundation and of making laws without legislation.

In place of a cult of stelae and statues erected as divine presences, the celebration of art is a celebration of the groundless space opened by a canvas without depth: it continually brings out of this abyss all the possibilities of forms and colors, all the radiant appearances and all the illuminations of an arrival in the world, of a coming into body and flesh, of an incarnation and a birth by which the mystery of potency would have to be clarified—that is, not the mystery of force, but the very different mystery of birth itself, of being in the world and of being-a-world.

Cleopatra's flesh is sovereign flesh not only because it is the flesh of a sovereign but because the potency exposed in it exerts an imperious seduction befitting its abandonment and its fragility, befitting the delicacy of its illumination, its curves and folds. The infinite fragility of an existence that is more than mortal (perishing, exposed, abandoned) offers itself by taking up within itself or onto itself, as its skin—as the very painting of this skin, the dressing (or priming) of a royal body for a royal tomb—by taking on the glory that, in the antiquity of antiquities, was once supposed to derive from the gold, ivory, marble, and cedar of the statues and the stelae.

Painting (taken as a substantive) here is no longer the colored layer that covers effigies sculpted or drawn on walls. It itself becomes the ground, the substance—both an extended and a thinking substance—of a figuration entirely occupied with *painting* (taken as a verb) precisely that which escapes the effigy, "figure" in the sense of a hieratic mask, or else in the sense of naturalistic physiognomy: that is, a figuration entirely devoted to the act of painting in the sense in which this word began to signify a representation of the unrepresent-

able, of the infinite distancing and the no less interminable imminence of presence, rather than a covering and a coloring of what is already immutably present. In this delicate and potent flesh, glorious and wounded—a fading offering of Cleopatra—painting is made flesh: *pictura caro facta est*.

Painting made flesh is no longer an established marker or signpost that would point the way to an unseeing adoration of the god: painting must henceforth be not adored but admired, that is, looked at with a gaze that mingles in its light and that desires its skin. This is the direction that art began to take beginning with Giotto—but it happens also, already, in the Greeks and Romans: not the invention of resemblance, but the incarnation of mystery. All the sensuality this art manages to communicate corresponds to this incarnation, by which, inevitably, what becomes embodied is not a spiritual identity with its place in a dogma, but a mystery. Here "mystery" means: what is illuminated from itself, and not what envelops a secret. The secret (the sacred) here is painting itself, this light and this flesh that a brush draws out of the rough and fragile ground of a canvas.

And this is also why Artemisia's *Cleopatra*—like a number of other feminine figures by the same painter—also evokes her rebellious indignation at having been raped by her painting teacher. The purple cloth of a royal garment may well recall the blood that once flowed from this sex, whose intimate shadow is indicated in the dim angle of the light. In this sense, the death inflicted by the asp is a repetition of the rape—all the more so in that this snake reaches toward her breast or climbs down her side, as in a number of images, whereas in Plutarch, and in certain painters, it bites her arm when she reaches into the basket of figs where this trap has been set for her. But the reference to rape is not without a subtle ambivalence. If this death is a suicide, and if this suicide is a liberation, then it also brings an enigmatic joy. One of Shakespeare's characters says of Cleopatra: "I do think there is mettle in death which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying."[7] If the suicide of the sovereign woman completes, transmits, and replaces ancient sacrifice—which would give it another paradoxically Christian feature[8]—this is in part because this rape does not have any of the associations that one might want to impute to it as a kind of sacred deflowering. Rather, its violence is both reflected and turned against itself in this gesture by which the one who inflicts it on herself succeeds in combining sovereign dignity with the moral loftiness of Rome and with the *jouissance* that she gives herself, as she simultaneously joins her lover and

escapes from servitude. In Shakespeare, irony and empathy are woven together in these words spoken by the clown who brings in the basket: "I wish you all joy of the worm."[9]

Here the figure of Cleopatra brings together all her various aspects. The *regina meretrix* in the hovels of Rhaleotis or on the "love beach" at Marsa-Matrouh, the insatiable lover jumping from imperial bed to imperial bed, the revivification of Aphrodite—all of these features take on a less caricatural appearance. The conjunction of power and *jouissance* corresponds to the withdrawal of the sacred foundation of authority: in the pleasure of power and in the power of pleasure—the chiasmus of a double autotelos—is indicated an unfathomable double secret that no sacred certainty can resolve. It was not for nothing—though no doubt in spite of Augustus's wishes—that Antiquity created the oxymoron of the sovereign woman in love. The Moderns understood this perfectly: neither sovereignty nor love owes anything to anyone or to anything other than itself, and this unparalleled sufficiency is also their extraordinary fragility. They are, each of them, what they are only inasmuch as they renounce their own ground and therefore are capable, ultimately, of renouncing themselves.

But painting, too—and with it all that goes into inventing *art*, a category yet to be born—shows itself to be just as sovereign as it is in love when it assumes the privilege (in itself very far from the calculations of perspective and the mastery of figuration) of bringing the profusion of fragility itself to the surface, from a ground that is without depth: flesh, light, a gaze not directed by any ideality, an order not regulated by any hieroglyphy. So it is with the folds of skin above the belly and below the breasts, with the inward curve or slight sagging that gives the body's touch by showing it touching itself, bending under its own weight even as it reveals all the more openly its delicate glory.

In Benserade's version, when Octavian realizes that Cleopatra's death has robbed him of the hope of putting her on display as part of his triumph in Rome, he says:

> Ô la noble auenture!
> Que vainqueur en effet ie triomphe en peinture,
> j'eusse esté glorieux si la reine eut vécu,
> mais les Romains diront, il dit qu'il a vaincu.
>
> O noble adventure!
> Though a victor in effect, it is in painting that I triumph.

Glory would be mine if the queen had lived,
but now the Romans will say: He says he has vanquished.[10]

To triumph "in painting" and not "in effect"—thus the victor loses, not his domination of the world, but the striking and brilliant manifestation of his victory. In a paradoxical way, this "in painting," which points to appearances, not to say simulacra, also evokes a triumph that would be dull and flat and without true grandeur. He would be lacking not victory but its representation, and thus its true illustration, in the strongest and most luminous—dare we say *photogenic*?—sense of the word.

But through a play on words that is also a more profound play on the shifting trajectory in question here, we might oppose to this ordinary, pejorative sense of *painting*, this banal debasement of representation, the sovereign splendor that shines in painting when, with Artemisia and many others, it begins to elude the domination exerted over the world by kings and priests (by the powerful), and thus begins to remove from this domination the powerless but brilliant and shattering omnipotence of what we call "art." And, indeed, we call it "art" without ever knowing what this word names, if not precisely a sovereignty withdrawn from domination, together with a sense that eludes its own imposition.

Cleopatra, as we know—and as a few other painters painted her—was first presented to Caesar rolled up in a carpet, like a valuable gift. Artemisia unrolls this fabric for us once again, and this time it is not the vexed Caesar but the last of the women pharaohs who *triumphs in painting*.

Notes

1. The Image—the Distinct

1. [The French word that Nancy uses here, *lien*, shares its Latin root with "religion."—Trans.]

2. [Nancy often uses the word *trait* to describe the kind of marking off in question here. In French, *trait* can mean both a "mark" or "line" that is drawn and a "trait," as in a feature. I will lean toward the literal rendering in order to maintain its resonance with the other words that Nancy puts into play in what follows (words built around *-trait* or *-tract*); its relation to the many senses of "drawing" (withdrawing, etc.) should be kept in mind as well.—Trans.]

3. [The word used here, as in the title of the book in which this essay was published, is *le fond*. It means "depth" or "bottom" in a spatial sense, but is often used to refer to pictorial space, where "ground" or "background" is more appropriate in English. It occurs in a common expression, *au fond*, in the (logical) sense of "at bottom," "in the end," but is used by Nancy also in the more spatial sense of "in the (back)ground" or "in the depth."—Trans.]

4. The relation between the image and sacrifice—a relation of divergent proximity—would require a more precise analysis, particularly in the two directions indicated simultaneously: on the one hand, as a sacrifice of the image, necessary in an entire religious tradition (the image must be destroyed and/or rendered entirely permeable to the sacred), and, on the other, as a "sacrificial image," where sacrifice is itself understood as an image (not as "only an image," but as the aspect, the *species*—the Eucharistic "sacred species"—or the appearing of a real presence. See J.-L. Nancy, "L'Immémorial," in *Art, mémoire, commémoration*, (Nancy: Ecole nationale

des arts de Nancy/Editions Voix, 1999). But in the second direction, sacrifice deconstructs itself, along with all monotheism. The image—and with it, art in general—is at the heart of this deconstruction. In *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. Rico Franses (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), Marie-José Mondzain has provided a remarkable analysis of the Byzantine elaborations that, at the heart of our tradition, have harbored "a concept of the image that demands a void at the heart of its visibility." Her approaches and her intentions are different from my own, but they intersect, and this intersection no doubt reveals a certain exigency: the reign of "full" images encounters the resistance of a speech that wants to allow the ground of the image resonate as something that Mondzain refers to as a "void"—something that one could also give the name "distinct," as I am trying to do here.

5. This was (if anything was) the center of Bataille's thought.

6. [I have given one of the figurative meanings of this idiomatic expression, which can also mean "touchy." As Nancy remarks just below, *fleur* (literally, "flower") evokes the uppermost layer of a surface.—Trans.]

7. See J.-L. Nancy, *Le Regard du portrait* (Paris: Galilée, 2000).

8. Edith Wharton, "Summer," in *Novellas and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1990), p. 159.

9. [A term treated extensively in Nancy's writing, *partage* means "division" but also "sharing" in the sense of "sharing out." See especially *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).—Trans.]

10. Similarly, in Epicurus, the images of things—the *eidola*—are *simulacra* (in Lucretius' language) only inasmuch as they are also parts of the thing, themselves atoms transported to us, touching and filling our eyes. See Claude Gaudin, *Lucrèce: La lecture des choses* (Fougères: Encre Marine, 1999), p. 230.

11. [Word in English in the original; in French, *ciel* can mean "heaven" or "sky."—Trans.]

12. Sumerian and Akkadian creation story, in Jean Bottéro and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

13. It is thus a question of reviving the "instability" that the "onto-typology" analyzed by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe "was supposed to freeze." See "Typography," in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989; rpt. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 138. Art—if the image I am speaking of indeed belongs to art—has always been this reviving and awakening, and the reminder of a vigilance prior to every "onto-typology."

14. Beyond this first sight, there is the very subtle analysis by Michel Foucault, which has much in common with what follows here. See *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

15. What is simply there, "present at hand" or "available," according to Heidegger's terminology in *Being and Time*, not in the sense of the "being-there" of *Dasein*, which, as its name does not indicate, is precisely not there but always elsewhere, in the open: Would the image therefore have something of *Dasein* about it . . . ?

16. [Here *sage* ("wise") implies well-behaved, restrained, calm, or "good" (as in "be a good boy"). A rough English equivalent would be "good as gold."—Trans.]

17. Whether literal (Catholic, Orthodox) or symbolic (Protestant).

18. See Frederico Ferrari, "Tutto è quello che è," in *Wolfgang Laib* (Milan: West Zone Publishing, 1999). Frederico Ferrari says that art refers to nothing invisible, and that it gives what the thing is. I say this as well, but here this means that the "invisible" is not something hidden from the gaze: it is the thing itself, sensible or endowed with sense according to its "quello che è," its "what it is"—in short, it is its being.

19. A fragment from 1906, printed in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Chant éloigné*, trans. Jean-Yves Masson (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1990). [Also in Rilke, *Werke* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1987), vol. 2, p. 693.]

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, posthumous fragment, *Werke* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1956), vol. 3, p. 832. [Nietzsche uses the phrase *zugrunde gehen*, meaning "to perish, to be destroyed." I follow Nancy (who writes *coulés au fond*) in giving a more literal translation.—Trans.]

21. [Meaning literally "untied" or "unbound," this word refers to a thin "upstroke" in handwriting.—Trans.]

22. Verdi, *La Traviata*, act 3, "Prendi, quest'è l'immagine." Violetta, at the moment of her death, offers her portrait to Alfredo. The music is already funereal; it measures out the approach of death, which will be suspended by the tense rising of the strings, the *parlando*, then the shout that ends the song.

2. Image and Violence

1. It is remarkable that we find this in Pascal, who in so many and in such indefatigable ways is the first of the moderns (of our anxieties): "It is as a child, which a mother tears from the arms of robbers, in the pain it suffers, should love the loving and legitimate violence of her who procures his freedom, and must detest only the impetuous and tyrannical violence of those who detain it unjustly" (*Pensées* no. 498, Brunschvig ed., trans. Thomas M'Crie [New York: Modern Library, 1948], translation slightly modified). The two pairs of qualifiers that Pascal uses ("loving and legitimate . . . impetuous and tyrannical . . . ") contain an entire program on passionate and political violence, and on the links between the two. After Pascal, and beyond the Enlightenment (which represents the possibility of keeping violence separate from being), there is a long series of thinkers in whose work a double, contradictory, or undecidable violence is articulated.

It begins with Rousseau, and continues with Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Sorel, Benjamin, Bataille, Heidegger, Sartre, Derrida, and Girard, to name only these. It would be necessary here to reconsider Derrida's essay on a double violence in Benjamin, on its "troubling" character and in general on the "possible complicity" between various discourses on violence or between various violent discourses (see "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 230–98.

2. The nonexistence of pure nonviolence and the questions linked to "counter-violence" are remarkably analyzed by Etienne Balibar in numerous works, particularly in several chapters of *La Crainte des masses* (Paris: Galilée, 1997).

3. A question should be added here: to what extent is this world given over to itself not the world that emerged from Christianity, that is, from the message of universal peace and love that presents itself as the irruption of a violence into the world? Pascal's remarks cited above are made in the context of a commentary on Christ's claim that he comes "to bring the sword" . . .

4. Between image and discourse (philosophical or theoretical), there is a long history of violence against violence.

5. Pascal, *Provincial Letters*, 18, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), p. 288.

6. Certainly, truth as conformity or exactitude, as *adequatio rei et intellectus*, is without violence, but only so long as one does not ask how the "thing" and the "intellect" able to conform to one another are produced in this truth.

7. The etymology of *imago* refers to *imitor*, which it might be possible to link to *aemulus*, emulator or rival.

8. An object used in the Catholic service, a precious receptacle meant to display the consecrated host: ostension of what the faith calls "real presence," that is, presence withdrawn from sensible sight . . .

9. But this applies to all the arts, for each one produces a kind of image in this sense, including musical art and the art of dance.

10. The word *monstruation* comes from Mehdi Belhaj Kacem: "Communication is the attempt to restore, through the *repetition of some sign*, the intensity of an *affect* to which this sign is *connected*, but phenomenally this repetition *must fail*: there would be no affect without this perpetual failure, without the incessant *monstruation* of signs in the Heraclitean flux that is perceptuality." See his *Esthétique du chaos* (Auch: Tristram, 2000).

11. Immanuel Kant, "The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding," in *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, A 141, pp. 182–83. Much could be said in commenting on the repeated and polymorphous violence that dominates everywhere in Kant, because of the general necessity to impose unity (on the object, on experience, on nature, on the

law) where no unity is ever given. Everything always amounts to submitting to a transcendental unity, just as reason is "an appointed judge who compels the witnesses to answer" (ibid., B xiii, p. 20). The entire Kantian enterprise, in its infinitely pacifying appearance, proceeds from a fundamental violence that is "legitimated" by the critique, but this legitimation, like any other, must first allow that which claims its rights to violently come forth. That is why the Kantian thought of right and of the state also contains a secret that it is illegitimate, if not impossible, to repress: that of a violent establishment (see sections 44, 52, 62 of the *Rechtslehre*; English translation in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. J. Gregor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991]). Now, what is true in an exemplary manner in Kant is also true for the philosophical operation in general, as I have already suggested with reference to Plato: philosophy always has to do with an originary violence, in the origin, as origin, or carried out at the origin. Philosophy liberates this violence, or triggers it, in the very gesture by which it contains, represses, or conceals it. The world of myth is a world without violence in the sense that it is a world of power, in which the power of images, in particular, is given from the outset. The world of philosophy is a world in which neither image, nor presence, nor power is first given; on the contrary, they are first taken away.

12. "As soon as there is the One, there is murder, wounding, traumatism. *L'un se garde de l'autre*. The One guards against / keeps some of the other"—but since it is also "differing, deferring from itself," "it violates and assaults itself, but it also institutes itself as violence" (Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], p. 78).

13. Kant, "The Schematism," *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 142, p. 183.

14. [See "Masked Imagination," n. 5 in particular.—Trans.]

15. See section 20 of Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 5th ed., pp. 65–68.

16. Etienne Balibar envisages cruelty as something whose "ideality," heterogeneous to that of power or domination, is "essentially fetishistic and emblematic" (see *La Crainte des masses*, p. 47).

17. See, among others, David Nebreda, *Autoportraits* (Paris: Léo Scheer, 2000), and the numerous performances by Orlan, involving things such as surgical operations or the display of menstruation. Here I will not undertake any analysis of these actions, nor will I propose any aesthetic or anaesthetic evaluation. The question is obviously one of knowing whether we are dealing with extreme images or sacrificial mutilations—and the question is thus one of knowing just how thin the separation between the two registers can become . . .

18. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Wall and the Books," in *Other Inquisitions*, trans. Ruth L. C. Sims (1952; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 5 [translation slightly modified].

3. Forbidden Representation

NOTE: [The translation of "La représentation interdite" into English as "Forbidden Representation" entails a certain loss in the density of the expression. *Interdit* in French does not only signify that which is prohibited or forbidden by law; *être interdit* also means "to be taken aback," "surprised," "disconcerted," or "dumbfounded." As all of these meanings are relevant to Nancy's thinking, the translation of *interdit* as "forbidden" or "forbidding" should be read both as a prohibition or a forbidding in the usual English sense of the word and in terms of the confusion, disorientation, even fear that one still hears in the adjective *forbidding* (to describe that which startles, shocks, pushes back even as it draws toward, etc.). In other words, "forbidden" seeks to invoke both the legal and/or moral sense of "prohibited" as well as the affective result of a confrontation with that which is forbidding, or which takes one aback.

The translator wishes to extend thanks to Ian Balfour, Cory Stockwell, and Paul Tonin for their help in locating citations and references as well as to the staff at the *Centre d'Études et de Documentation Fondation Auschwitz* (Brussels) for their kind assistance.—Trans.]

1. Hans Sahl, *Wir sind die Letzten* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1976), p. 14 (reprinted in *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, ed. Petra Kiedaisch [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995], p. 144). I have deliberately left this poem in the original German. Here, though, is a rough equivalent: "A man whom many considered wise declared that after Auschwitz a poem was no longer possible. The wise man seems to have held no high opinion of poems—as if they were merely consolation for sentimental bookkeepers or colored lenses through which one sees the world. We actually believe that poems have only now become possible again, insofar as only the poem can say what otherwise mocks every description."

2. Nelly Sachs, "Dein Leib im Rauch Durch die Luft," *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1946. [English version mine—Trans.]

3. See *David Olère—A Painter in the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz* (New York: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1989).

4. For example, *Saving Private Ryan*, another Spielberg film.

5. D. M. Thomas, *The White Hotel* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1981).

6. Except, perhaps, in the sense that war came to an end with the camps, that is, that "war" could no longer sustain the same meaning that it had before (or could do so only in a difficult way).

7. To return to the first and most well-known text, that of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:4). Many other passages in the Bible are either similar or closely related.

8. Many of the often jarring texts of the prophets go in this direction, e.g., Jeremiah 10:1–16, Habakkuk 2:12–14, etc.

9. See e.g., Isaiah 90:20, 44:10–20.

10. In Exodus 20:4, the word is *pessel* and designates a sculpture, but there are other terms as well. I cannot pause to discuss them, not least because I am not a scholar of Hebrew, though also because it would first be necessary to do a special study of this question of terminology. I will, however, note this much (thanks to suggestions made by Daniel Lemler and Patrick Desbois, as well as to those contained in *Idoles—données et débats*, Proceedings of the 24th Colloquium of Francophone Jewish Intellectuals [Paris, Denoël, 1985]): the term most often invoked is one that designates idolatry, *avoda zara*, "foreign cult" (which is related to two others, *avodat kokhavim umazalot*, "cult of the stars and of the signs of the zodiac," and *avodat elilim*, "cult of the idols"); *elila* is one word for the idol ("small divinity, false god," again, "foreign god"), with *pessel* (above), *demut* ("image"), *zelem* ("a sketch that is also image," e.g., in the "image of God" that is the man of Genesis . . .); it seems noteworthy to me that translation by *eidolon* fixes the semantic register (by limiting the translations to the semantics of various forms of visibility) at the same time as it unifies a multiple vocabulary. In reality, one could say that monotheistic thought is preoccupied with idolatry (regarding "latry," see Thomas Aquinas on the *latria*, 2a2ae, 94, 1, etc.) and with the adoration of false gods or non-gods, even more than with the aspect of the idol and with a problematic of "representation" in the current sense of the word. Alternatively, within this same thought but in one of its more particularly Christian veins, there is a consideration of the "image" as "visibility of the invisible," e.g., in Paul of Tarsus, Origen, Pseudo-Dionysus . . . : the question of representation is formed at the intersection of all these roads. Having said that, it is worth pointing out that there is a marked absence—to my knowledge—of a basic study of the word *idol*, as well as a more general lack of any precaution whatsoever in the usage of the word in the dominant discourse. One finds, e.g., Hassidic scholarly investigations that give only the Greek word *eidolon*, or Catholic investigations that simply discuss the "image" without any other critical consideration: within this domain, just as within the domain of art, a *doxa* concerning representation covers over and deforms its origin. At its most general level, this problematic could be designated as one of *mimesis* and the divine, with all the complexity of the connections, interactions, and contradictions that are generated between these two terms.

11. See Deuteronomy 4:15, etc.

12. See, e.g., Isaiah 46:7 or Psalms 115:4–8.

13. Isaiah 44:18–20.

14. This is how Catherine Chalier summarizes it in her "L'interdit de la représentation," in *Le visage*, no. 148 of the journal *Autrement* (Paris, October, 1994) [also published as the appendix to Chalier's *La trace de l'infini: Levinas et la source hébraique* (Paris: Cerf, 2002)—Trans.].

15. Exodus 25:18–20.

16. I borrow these terms from Levinas, before having had the opportunity to evoke his thought concerning the subject of images.

17. Levinas's thoroughly biblical expression, which Sylvie Courtine-Denamy cites in "L'art pour sauver le Monde" (*Le souci du Monde* [Paris: Vrin, 1999]). Courtine-Denamy's work brings the thought of Levinas, Jonas, and Arendt into dialogue and thus shows something of the conflict between their standpoints on the image and art, standpoints that nonetheless all arise out of the same tradition and are all driven by the same preoccupation with the memory of Auschwitz. Levinas gives the striking example of a thinking that is mostly inspired by iconoclasm (though it is not without its own complexity), even if it is dominated by a motif of the *face,* whose ambivalence it would be necessary to analyze at length.

18. At the interstices of the *greek-jew* alliance (and perhaps as its complex operator), we must not forget the *Roman* figure: that of a confidence concerning images whose double polarity—let us say, baroque and/or romantic, or Catholic and/or fascist (even if, in saying all this, one is taking risky shortcuts . . .)—is also found all along the entire course of our history, which is essentially to say, over the entire course of the history of Western and modern art.

19. This word is Blanchot's creation; it takes on specific resonance in his *L'Attente l'Oubli*.

20. A lengthy digression into the philosophical history of the term and of the concept would be necessary here—this history for which Bergson wrote a special note when he edited Lalande's *Dictionnaire philosophique*. Much work has been devoted to this philosophical history over the last twenty years; one must not fail to mention that of Jacques Derrida and of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe concerning *mimesis*. Indeed, the word alone, with its whole tangle of values, raises the entire question of representation.

21. "The Duke of Beauvilliers forcefully represented the peoples' misery" (Voltaire; cf. Littré under the entries *représentation* and *représenter*).

22. I am appealing here to the opposition between *sacer* (an immediately "sacred" reality) and *sanctus* (that which arises out of a sanctifying action).

23. *The Symposium*, 210–11. (In Greek this opposition is expressed as the difference between *hieros* and *hagios*, albeit in an unclear manner. Hebrew, on the other hand, has only one term, *qodesh*.)

24. It is doubtless no coincidence that, with Medusa, we touch on one of the greatest myths organizing thought concerning the image; as for the "taken aback" [*l'interloqué*], it is enough to recall Jean-Luc Marion's use of the term to transcribe Heidegger's *der Angesprochene* (more literally, the "interpellated" or the "called"), that to which a call, which one could qualify as the call of *absense* or as *absense*, addresses itself. See J.-L. Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), as well as *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L.

Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), for the strong thinking of the "idol" and of the "icon" in which Marion's work has long been engaged.

25. This motif has very close connections to the motif of *national-aestheticism* as it has been named and analyzed by Lacoue-Labarthe in his groundbreaking work on the topic (especially in *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, trans. Chris Turner [Oxford: Blackwell, 1990], but in other texts as well). Of course, these connections also involve the thematic of myth within Nazism itself, a question that Lacoue-Labarthe and I have taken up together in "The Nazi Myth," trans. Brian Holmes, *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Winter 1990): 291–312.

26. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1936). See especially chaps. 10 and 11 of bk. 1.

27. In order to understand the turn taken by anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth century, we would, in effect, have to undertake a detailed reconsideration of a world that was experienced as a crisis of representation of the world (and of beyond-worlds), both within the order of thought and within the orders of religion, art, and finally even humanity and nature.

28. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, bk. 1, chap. 11, "People and Race."

29. Ibid., p. 318.

30. Of course, this is not without allusion to the "super-man," but it is impossible to develop that further here. Doubtless, the *sur* of *surhomme* ("super-man") also alludes to the more general expansion of its use within the period (*surrealism*, *supremacism* . . .). Of course, we must also recall Bataille's text on this prefix . . . (See "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* (Superman) and *Surrealist*," *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985], pp. 32–44).

31. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 254.

32. [The difficulty of translating *le partage* arises from the fact that, in English, it has two practically opposing meanings: it signifies both "sharing" and "division." The idea of translating *le partage* as "taking apart" / "taking part" so as to retain the complexity of the word is Gil Anidjar's in *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. p. 115).—Trans.]

33. It is in this sense that I understand Michel Tournier's characterization of Nazism as "the excess of symbols" (in his novel *The Erl-King*).

34. Hitler, *Mein Kampf,* p. 313.

35. Cited in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 648. (On the preceding page, one can read how Himmler boasted of the disinterest of these same leaders, along with Hilberg's commentary: "without exception, nothing will have been stolen from the Jews. We know how false this is right up to the highest rank of the Nazi order, but what is always important is the self-image that is in play.")

36. Ibid. p. 647.

37. See Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, trans. William Templer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 98–99. (Given so many possible books, I have chosen to limit my references.)

38. [Though the expression *soulever le coeur* literally means "to raise the heart," it should also be noted that the French expression *se soulever le coeur* is a colloquial expression meaning "to turn the stomach" in English.—Trans.]

39. It is highly significant that, in 1938, after having heard a speech by Heydrich addressed to members of the SS concerning the Jews as "subhumans" and the fact that displacing them from one country to another would not resolve the "Jewish problem," the very same Himmler had, in a journal entry, already gestured in this direction: "the alternative, although not expressed, was not entirely mysterious: 'inner martial spirit'" (in Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* [New York: Harper Collins, 1997], vol. 1, p. 313). This "spirit" already has enough strength to face the challenge of what was "necessary," to which it conforms its conscience and its image.

40. This term is used repeatedly by Sofsky, in *The Order of Terror*.

41. See ibid., pp. 278ff.

42. Ibid. "Entwurf einer vorläufigen Wachschrift für das Konzentrationslager Lublin 1943," p. 309.

43. Rudolf Vrba and Alan Bestic, *I cannot forgive* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 140.

44. In this respect, we must recall the face-to-face of the two sole "chosen peoples" to which Hitler once reduced the problem (in a remark reported by Hermann Rauschning in *Hitler Speaks: A Series of Political Conversations with Adolf Hitler* [London: T. Buttersworth, 1939], p. 238). See also René Major's comments on this remark (along with other revealing texts) in his *Au Commencement* (Paris: Galilee, 1999), pp. 150ff; his interpretation seems to me to refer at all points to the "power" that is a matter of "pure force": power represents itself otherwise than in acts; perhaps however, there is no power that would be exempt from the vector of this force.

45. Death, once again, whose truth belongs to the hollowing-out of presence, to the difference of presence from itself or to the distance of the subject within itself—to skim very quickly the philosophical motifs that are at the very root of all this: death as the non-appropriable property of existence that we call *finite*, both in the sense of the absolute in its unicity and in the sense of the unshakable or the non-sacrificeable in its being-in-the-world.

46. See, e.g., Louis Marin, "Le récit, réflexion sur un testament," in *L'écriture de soi* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

47. Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplation by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980). [What Nancy has set in

quotation marks is a citation of the latter part of the original German title.—Trans.]

48. Ibid., pp. 16–17.

49. Ibid., pp. 18–19.

50. Ibid., p. 20.

51. Ibid., pp. 35–36. These reflections make one think of Sade (who is referred to on the preceding page) and justify a reassessment both of the importance of the spectacle and of the mise-en-scène for Sade, as well as of his place within the history of representation.

52. Primo Levi says it this way in *If This Is a Man* (pub. with *The Truce*), trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 2001), p. 96. Marking the passage to the limit of representation, he also writes, "an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand."

53. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Random House, 1989). Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the impossible testimony of the "Muslim" in *Remnants of Auschwitz: Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), somewhat different from the one being pursued here, would warrant a separate discussion.

54. Hermann Langbein, *Menschen in Auschwitz* (Vienna: Europa, 1995), p. 288.

55. Cited in Mario Kramer, "Joseph Beuy's 'Auschwitz Demonstration,' 1956–1964," in *La mémoire d'Auschwitz dans l'art contemporain*, Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Brussels, December 11–13, 1997 (Brussels: Centre d'études et de documentation–La Fondation Auschwitz, 1998), p. 103. (This citation occurs in the context of a commentary on a performance piece by Beuys, upon which I will not offer comment here.)

56. Whatever else there might be to say regarding the abyss of foundation that the law itself hollows out.

57. I cannot ignore the extent to which I am invoking Nietzsche; within the context of this last formulation, however, the "case of Nietzsche" is extraordinarily complex, too complex to be treated here.

58. One could also say *représentation interceptée*, in the sense that Mehdi Belhaj Kacem wants *intercept* to be understood: neither concept nor percept, it is what grasps the movement of a force in order to let itself be carried (*L'ésthetique du chaos* [Auch: Tristram, 2000]).

59. See *La mémoire d'Auschwitz dans l'art contemporain*, pp. 203–7 and 225.

60. Such is, no doubt, the direction of Blanchot's reflections on narrative after Auschwitz in *Après Coup*.

61. Salvatore Quasimodo, "My Country Is Italy," *Complete Poems*, ed. and trans. Jack Bevar (London: Anvil Press, 1983).

4. Uncanny Landscape

NOTE: [*Paysage avec dépaysement*: this essay plays a great deal on the terms *pays* ("country, land, or home") and *paysage* ("countryside or landscape," also in the pictorial sense). *Dépaysement* evokes the anxiety and disorientation of being away from one's "country" and in an unfamiliar place. It has no English equivalent but corresponds closely to the German *Unheimlichkeit*, which means literally "unhomeliness" but is usually translated as "uncanniness," and which (particularly in its Heideggerian use) resonates in many ways with Nancy's discussion. In what follows, "uncanny" (or "uncanniness") will sometimes be used, together with "estranged" and "unsettled" (and variant forms), to render *dépaysé* (or *dépaysement*).—Trans.]

1. We would need to stop to discuss an important point here, namely, that the birth of landscape painting is marked by certain influences from China, where, as we know, this "genre" has considerable importance and displays significations or values incommensurable with those of European landscape painting. This claim is, no doubt, debatable, or indeed already debated, but it does exist; I am unable to address the question in any detail at this point.

2. Vicomte François-Auguste-René de Chateaubriand, *Génie du christianisme*, pt. 2, bk. 4, chap. 1, and pt. 3, bk. 1, chaps. 3 and 4. Chateaubriand develops his theme in reference to poetry, but there are many allusions to painting. (I will be citing the Flammarion edition [Paris, 1966]; the first two quotes are from vol. 1, p. 315.) We could add that it was first through Protestantism that the landscape in its most proper pictorial sense was introduced: the history of Flemish painting shows this, and it is also confirmed by the overabundance of landscapes in American painting, at least up to the first quarter of the twentieth century.

3. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 316.

4. Charles Baudelaire, "Landscape," in *The Flowers of Evil*, poem 86. [My translation—Trans.]

5. Friedrich Hölderlin, "The Ages of Life" [translation based on a version by Michael Hamburger, *Selected Verse* [Baltimore: Penguin, 1961], p. 171.—Trans.]

5. Distinct Oscillation

1. Eugène Delacroix, *Journal*, October 8, 1822, and April 4, 1854; cited by Hubert Damisch in *La Peinture en écharpe: Delacroix, la photographie* (Brussels: Yves Gevaert, 2001), p. 52.

2. [Nancy is evoking here, as he will do again below, a passage from Mallarmé's "Crisis in Poetry": "I say: a flower! and outside the oblivion to which my voice relegates any shape, insofar as it is something other than the calyx, there arises musically, as the very idea and delicate, the one absent from every bouquet" (Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Mary Ann Caws [New York: New Directions, 1982], p. 96)—Trans.]

3. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Regarder Ecouter Lire* (Paris: Plon, 1993), p. 76.

4. [The last two references are to Caravaggio's *Beheading of St. John* and Bellini's *Feast of the Gods*. "Et in Arcadia Ego" ("And I, too, am in Arcadia," a phrase written on a tombstone) refers to the painting of that name, also known as *The Arcadian Shepherds*, by Nicolas Poussin, and to a topos about death within the pastoral genre.—Trans.]

5. ["More light!" These are said to have been Goethe's last words.—Trans.]

6. Dante, *Inferno*, 1:32–34, trans. Charles Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), translation slightly modified.

7. Ryoko Sekiguchi, *Calque* (Paris: POL, 2001).

6. Masked Imagination

1. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, "The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding," A 143. [The translation cited will be that of Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1929); interpolations in brackets are Smith's.—Trans.]

2. [This German word, which is literally translated by the phrases preceding it, is the word for "imagination" found in Kant and elsewhere.—Trans.]

3. [Here is an attempt to render this phrase very literally into English (and to maintain its multiple and ambiguous reciprocities and reflexivities): "each one forming itself and each other in(to) each other."—Trans.]

4. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft, 5th ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 65–68.

5. Ibid., p. 66 [slightly modified; Nancy's interpolations. Note that here the term *the look*—used in the English translation of Heidegger—is expressed by Nancy as *la vue*, which is elsewhere translated as "sight" or "view." "The look" will be used in the context of this discussion of Heidegger, as it captures the simultaneously active and passive senses at work in Heidegger, on which Nancy will comment below.—Trans.].

6. [*Se présenter*, "to present itself," also means to present oneself, i.e., to introduce oneself.—Trans.]

7. Martin Heidegger, "Seminar in Zähringen, 1973," in *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

8. I will return to this moment in the text below.

9. [See Chapter 1, n. 16, above. Here, a very rough translation of this expression might be "picture perfect."—Trans.]

10. Which I transliterate here.

11. [See Martin Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," trans. Thomas Sheehan in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 155–82, esp. 182.—Trans.]

12. Here one would have to look again at the "Aletheia" lecture. [This 1943 lecture is found in English in Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 102–23.]

13. In Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth,"

14. The examples are in close proximity to art (we are between perception and painting, whether a portrait or a landscape), but without actually touching on it. (Although photography is designated, it is manifestly not as art.) Heidegger's reflection on art will not come until later. But it might be necessary, in another work, to ask whether the determination of the "setting-itself-to-work of truth," in "The Origin of the Work of Art," does not in some ways repeat the kind of operation carried out nine years earlier on the schematism—for example, in the passing mention of a formula like the one stating that the artist "makes the being come into presence, on the basis of its aspect" (Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002]). It would not be a matter of indifference if Kant's own aesthetic analysis maintains a hidden but definite relation with that of the schematism. That is, if in the end a reversal of priority between truth and art ought not to be effected—unless this is in fact always already effected.

15. ["L'Inconnue de la Seine" (the unknown girl of the Seine), also known as "La Noyée de la Seine" (the drowned girl of the Seine), was the name given to a death mask widely reproduced and sold in the first part of the twentieth century. Allegedly the face of a young woman who drowned in the Seine and whose beauty and mysterious smile inspired a medical assistant to make the mask, it inspired numerous literary works.—Trans.]

16. These details are found in the catalogue of the exhibition *Le Dernier Portrait*, shown at the Musée d'Orsay from March to May 2002 (Paris: RMN, 2002).

17. Volume 21 of Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, entitled *Logik, die Frage nach der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1995).

18. It is useful to recall the following (Heidegger may or may not have been aware of it): Roman *imagines* were generally formed from or on wax masks cast from the faces of the dead. The proximity of the motifs is remarked by Henri Maldiney; see "Image et art," in *L'Art, éclair de l'être* (Paris: Comp'Act, 1993), pp. 257 and 263. Referring to section 20 of the *Kantbuch*, Maldiney gives the example of Pascal, as Heidegger does in his course. From another perspective, it would be necessary to establish a relation with Blanchot's analysis of the image as deathly resemblance. But this would lead beyond the scope of the present discussion.

19. I say that this remains "tendential," keeping in mind a remark from *Being and Time* (section 47), in which Heidegger says that the corpse can be an object of anatomy, which is still oriented toward life by way of the inanimate. [Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 221.]

20. Descartes, in order to see what seeing is, looked through the eye of a dissected ox, and Flemish perspective was used to produce "views of vision." (See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983]. But much more broadly, in truth, to see seeing, to see oneself seeing and to un-imagine what precedes and opens every image, is a powerful motif extending from Plato to us, from Parrhasius to Malevich or Bill Viola and from blind Orion to *Being John Malkovich*.

21. *Being and Time*, section 50 [p. 233].

22. For the reader who does not know German, a further clarification might be helpful: in *ableben* and *Abbild* the prefix *ab* does not have the same value and therefore should not wrongly be used to overextend the parallelism that I am sketching. In *ableben*, the value is that of departure; in *Abbild*, it is that of secondariness. Nonetheless, it is, after all, the same *ab*, which is in fact both Latin and Germanic, and its sense is always at bottom that of "away from . . . ," "taking off from . . . ," "beginning from. . . ."

23. [*Oedipus at Colonus*, lines 1767–68. I have given a literal translation of Nancy's rendering of these lines.—Trans.]

7. *Nous Autres*

NOTE: [This essay was first published in Spanish translation in the catalogue of an exhibition of photographs entitled "NosOtros: Identidad y alteridad" (held in Madrid in 2003), for which it was written. *Nosotros*, the Spanish word for "we," breaks down literally into "we others." As Nancy points out below, *nous autres* has certain specific uses in French, whereas "we others" is not used in English.—Trans.]

1. [See, e.g., *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 241, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), p. 174).—Trans.]

2. [English in original.]

3. [The Spanish equivalent is "¡Pobre de nosotros!" Like the French expression, it means, very literally, "Poor us others!"—Trans.]

4. Of course, "photograph," "painting," and "cinema" here become concepts that are at least partially independent of determinate techniques and material supports. With these terms I designate valencies or tendencies that can be mixed together within the space and in the use of a single medium, so that in a "photograph" there may be more "painting" or "cinema" than "photograph," and reciprocally . . . "Video" would also have to enter into this play of concepts.

8. Visitation

1. See *Immemory*, the CD-ROM by Chris Marker (Centre Pompidou, 1998), in which it is a matter not of privation but rather of an overflowing of memory, a memory freeing itself from itself.

2. At the same time, it would also be necessary to look at *The Greeting*, a video installation by Bill Viola (created for the 1995 Venice Biennale), which transposes, restages, or re-presents the scene from Pontormo's painting.

3. Luke 1:39–56; it is absent from the three other gospels of the Christian canon but has a certain correspondence with elements in the Apocryphal books. [The biblical quotation is from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New Revised Standard Version), ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).—Trans.]

4. The wombs of the two women are often touching, no doubt with a symbolic intention, in the paintings of the "Visitation" that adopt the model of the embrace, rather than that of hands grasping at a distance or of Elizabeth kneeling (Pontormo had previously followed these other models). The model of the embrace might have come from a slippage of meaning in the Greek word *aspasmos*, which means a joyful, warm, and emphatic greeting. As for the overall scheme of the four figures, Pontormo takes it from Dürer's *Four Witches*, which itself takes up the motif of the three Graces, as Panofsky notes, relating them in turn to Dürer's *The Women's Bath*. It would be necessary to reconstruct the series linking the sexual, the mythological, and the miraculous in this filiation, which also creates a *ronde* of paintings. It is interesting, too, to note that in some Eastern traditions the children have been represented in transparency within the two wombs (see Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957], vol. 2, p. 195).

5. We should note that here these "servants" could also be—in another modality of the double—Mary's two half-sisters, who are present in some "Visitations."

6. This light shining into the background also covers much of the left side of the painting and forms the shadows cast by the feet and the robes in the foreground. It thus accentuates—as Paul Guérin has pointed out to me—the duality of a space starkly divided into background and foreground, left and right, along with the general disequilibrium of perspectival space.

7. This is at least the conjecture on which I have settled after a detailed examination, and which seems quite likely. I am thus proposing not only a personal interpretation, but above all a personal vision in a very physical sense of the term. This detail is difficult to distinguish with precision. I must admit that I discern something like a knife only in the reproduction contained in Costamagna's book (see below), in which this area of the painting appears much brighter. A direct viewing obfuscates it, if it exists (the canvas might be smudged at this spot). Likewise, the round loaf of bread could be a hat . . . Perhaps the wine is the least uncertain. The commentators I have consulted do not speak of the objects held by these figures (which, however, are discernible, even if it is a delicate task to identify them). They point out the disproportion of these figures in the picture and mention that they might

represent Joseph and Zacharias, the two husbands, who are sometimes associated with the scene (though the poses render this unlikely). See Salvatore Nigro, *Pontormo: Paintings and Frescoes*, trans. Karin H. Ford (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1994), and Anna Forlami Tempesti and Alessandra Giovanetti, *Pontormo* (Florence: Octavo, 1994). Philippe Costamagna, *Pontormo* (Milan: Electa, 1994), does not mention them. Very recently the following suggestion was made by Maria-Luisa Antonella (in response to a query by Antonella Moscati): the two men might be Pontormo himself (seated) and Bronzino, his student. Finally, Paul Guérin pointed out to me that in the same location in Dürer's *Four Witches* it is the Devil who appears. . . . Be that as it may, there will always remain, at least in this little scene—which is so noticeable precisely because of its effacement and its placement in the shadows—evidence of a concealment, and therefore an ostentation.

8. See Kurt W. Forster, *Pontormo* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1966). In Dürer's *Visitation*, a beggar occupies their place.

9. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Bread and Wine." [Nancy provides his own translation of these lines; I have rendered that translation literally.—Trans.]

10. Costamagna, *Pontormo*, pp. 54ff and no. 59 of the catalogue in that book. The war would also explain why at least one of the men appears to have been wounded.

11. One might also refer to the previously mentioned model for the painting (keeping all the relevant proportions in mind), in order to evoke certain pro-Reformist tendencies on the part of Dürer.

12. [The motto reads: "King of the Florentine People." Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) was a popular Domenican monk who made vehement calls for the removal of the Medici family from Florence. His wishes were granted after the French invasion led by Charles VIII. At that point, a new, quasi-theocratic yet republican constitution was established in which Christ was declared the king of Florence.—Trans.]

13. How many gestures of this kind are there in religious painting? One is tempted to say that there is, doubtless, nothing other than that, if only for the simple reason that it is precisely art, and not religion. I add here a remark after the fact: I see that in his brief commentary on Raphael's Sistine Madonna, Heidegger assimilates transsubstantiation to the pictorial figuration of divine incarnation (even though, in this case, the painting gives him no explicit ground for doing so, since it contains no allusion to communion). It would be necessary to analyze his precise aims: is he substituting painting for religious worship, or is he referring each one to the other in the name of a truth with a higher essence, or . . . ? I leave it to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, who is working on this text, to disentangle the questions it raises.

14. There would also be much to say about Pontormo's *Noli me tangere*, in which Christ, having emerged from the tomb and forbidding Mary Magdalene to touch him, touches (barely . . .) the woman's chest in the very gesture by which he pushes her away. We might also add that one of Dürer's witches wears a tress of hair down her naked back.

15. See Nigro, *Pontormo*.

16. [A more literal translation of the Italian title; the painting is referred to in these terms in French: *Vierge de l'enfantement*.—Trans.]

17. After visiting this Madonna, Chagall painted *Pregnant Woman* (1913, Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum), in which the figure points to her womb, where a small man is shown within an oval space (in conformity with the eastern tradition of the "Visitations" mentioned above). (See Ingeborg Walter, *Piero della Francesca: Madonna del parto* [Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1992]). It is intriguing also to notice a few features that it shares with Pontormo's *Visitation*: the disproportion between the principal figure and the setting, the small masculine figures, the distribution of light: after all, Carmignano is not far from Monterchi. . . . One can also refer to a more recent citation: *Self-Portrait/Enunciation* by Agnès Thurnauer (1999), in which a hand slides into the open slit of a dress, shown in a close-up.

18. There are many commentaries devoted to it, whether historical, pictorial, or psychoanalytic. Here I will point to Hubert Damisch's emphasis (in *Un souvenir d'enfance par Piero della Francesca* [Paris: Seuil, 1997], p. 104) on the fact that there is "no outside" in this scene, which is in fact a scene of the still closed womb, of a womb both virginal and gravid. He also points out (p. 102) that "Visitations" are by definition scenes "without a Father," after the fashion of this singular Madonna.

19. *Donation Simon Hantaï*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1998. The title *del Parto* is preceded by ellipses next to the reproduction of the work (p. 30), but not in the introduction by Suzanne Page (p. 3). We should also recall an important series by Hantaï called *Mariales*; one of the canvases in this series is called . . . *dell'Orto*, with a dedication "to Tintoretto." These titles reveal an emphasis on a relation to painting's past. Although it is very clearly implied in my argument, I will not comment here on the relation between this set of works and the signifier *entaille* ["cut or intaglio"], since Georges Didi-Huberman has dealt with this question in *L'Etoilement* (Paris: Minuit, 1998).

20. Thanks to Samia Benhaddou and François Martin, I am able to explain this in more detail: this term (like *tête morte* ["death's head"], *tête de momie* ["mummy's head"], *tête de Maure* ["Moor's head"]—when, in the nineteenth century, the color was prepared using the remains from mummies) refers to a dark reddish brown ("resulting from the final operations carried out with iron oxide, it is one of the red tones of this metal. It is quite close to English, Venetian, or Indian reds," as the painter Bruno Carbonnet wrote to me). The term has its origins in alchemy, where it referred to the final residue of a chemical operation, "that phase of the work when everything seems rotten yet when everything is regenerated" (Michel Leiris, *Zébrage* [Paris: Gallimard, 1992], p. 41, in reference to Hegel . . .).

21. *Simon Hantaï: Werke von 1960 bis 1995*, catalogue, Westfäliches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Münster, 1999. (*Involution*

and *invagination* are words found in the study by Damisch cited in n. 18, above).

22. It might even oblige us to approach every other painting, such as Chinese painting, on the basis of Christian painting; but that is a question for another work.

23. [The French expression used here does not refer specifically to the heart, but to the *sein*, the breast or "bosom."—Trans.]

24. In this sense, what I am sketching here intersects, at least in part, with the theses of a remarkable work by Marie-José Mondzain on the Christian provenance of a thinking of the image—and/or of the incarnation—according to "a concept of the image that requires an emptiness at the heart of visibility" (see *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. Rico Franses [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005], p. 222). Unfortunately, I cannot add anything more to this remark here, since I learned of this work only when these pages were near completion.

25. [*Beyond* is formed from roots meaning "by" and "yonder." This is analogous to Nancy's turn of phrase: "lorsque le 'à' résorbe l'au-delà."—Trans.]

26. Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 31.

9. The Sovereign Woman in Painting

1. Artemisia painted four different versions of Cleopatra in the act of killing herself. There is a version from around 1611, in the Morandotti collection, a work also attributed to her father, Orazio, or supposed to have been done in collaboration with him; there is one from the period between 1633 and 1635, in a private collection in Rome; there is a third version at the Fondazione Cavallini-Sgarbi in Ferrara, dated around 1620 [the one represented here]. A fourth version (oil on canvas, 187 cm × 134 cm, ca. 1630–35), listed in the catalogue of R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 244–45, no. 29, pl. XIX) cannot be located today. In the first two versions Cleopatra is lying down, in symmetrical poses (her head is on the left in the first, on the right in the second), and her entire body is visible; these compositions are relatively conventional (a woman reclining on a bed, which resembles Artemisia's *Danae*—itself a partial reply to her first *Cleopatra*—as well as the *Danae* by Orazio). The third painting represents Cleopatra seated (as in other painters, particularly Reni, in the same period), her body visible from the pelvis up (as in Giampetrino, among the predecessors). Incidentally, it will quickly become clear that, despite my love for Artemisia (or indeed because of this love, which frees me in relation to her), she serves here as a pretext for a free variation on the sovereignty of (on sovereignty and) painting, and that,

ultimately, it matters little to me whether this or that canvas is correctly attributed to her or not. For a well-informed and properly aesthetic commentary on Artemisia's four Cleopatras, one should consult the well-known work by Mary Garrard (*Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989]), as well as another study that is less well known, since it has not yet been published: Pierre Murat, "La Belle et le Serpent: Représentations de la mort de Cléopatre dans la peinture italienne et française du XVIIe siècle" (a master's thesis defended in 1995 at the University of Provence). Pierre Murat has also contributed to the present catalogue, *Cléopatre dans le miroir de l'art occidental*, in which this essay was originally published in French, and has written another study, included in *Cléopatre: La légende d'une reine morte*, the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Musée des beaux arts in Nîmes, 2003.

2. In Shakespeare, just before Antony dies he explicitly evokes the (presumably reconciled) shades of Dido and Aeneas (*Antony and Cleopatra*, act IV, scene 12, ll. 52–54).

3. Isaac de Benserade (1612–91), *La Cléopatre*, act V, scene 5.

4. Jean Mairet (1604–86), *Le Marc-Antoine ou la Cléopatre*, act V, scene 4.

5. See Plutarch's "On Isis and Osiris"; the notion that Cleopatra repeats the myth of the great goddess finds an echo as late as Thomas Mann (see "Freud and the Future," in *Essays of Three Decades*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter [New York: Random House, 1947]). It is the very purpose of myth to be repeated and replayed; indeed, myth is constituted as such entirely and essentially in its own representation, insofar as it functions as an instrument or a space of identification. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's references to Thomas Mann and Cleopatra, under the heading "Mythic Identification," in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, "The Nazi Myth," trans. Brian Holmes, *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 297–98. After the myth there is the event. In Artemisia's canvas, we find both: myth, image, immemorial antiquity—and the gesture, the event, the naked white body. Hierophantic sovereign order and sovereign abandon. The artist's hand proceeds from both or divides them up, as we see in the self-portrait in which she presents herself as an allegory of painting, a simultaneous grasping and releasing of the power to paint and the gift of painting.

6. Cintio, *Cleopatra*, act IV, scene 9.

7. Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, act I, scene 2, ll. 152–54.

8. Not to mention the fact that, for a seventeenth-century painter, the association of a woman and a snake would inevitably have religious connotations.

9. Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, act V, scene 2, l. 260.

10. Benserade, *La Cléopâtre*, act 5, scene 8.

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