
STATUES

THE SECOND BOOK
OF FOUNDATIONS

MICHEL SERRES

B L O O M S B U R Y

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For Christiane Frémont

STATUES

The Second Book of Foundations

Michel Serres

(translated by Randolph Burks)

B L O O M S B U R Y
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- *Undated*

STATIONS

- January 28, 1986 At 11:39 And 74 Seconds Later
- Recent Memories
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January 28, 1986
At 11:39
And 74 Seconds Later

THE SHELL, THE CANNON

Second Foundation

THE ROCKET

First Foundation

We remember having seen on television recently, at the same time as millions of viewers around the world, the rocket *Challenger* leave its take-off area at 11:39 on January 28, 1986, only to disintegrate 74 seconds later, incinerating the bodies of the seven crew members (including a 37-year-old teacher, a mother of two) who had settled in for the voyage into space. We were horrified. Europeans had, a few years earlier, witnessed in huge numbers the explosion of the Soviet supersonic plane at the Le Bourget air show, near Paris.¹ In the first case more than the second, the television rebroadcast the accident hundreds of times so that most of us would witness it, watch it again and again, and remember it.

Individually, we remember accidents of the same type happening to automobiles, buses or railway cars, and we remember charred bodies among the black and twisted

structures, but we view these accidents alone or only in the company of a few witnesses or rescuers. We also remember the captivating power that attracts those nearby around these mass graves: passers-by congregate. Businesses based on the spectacle exploit that attraction; the television transforms the event into a rite and reproduces it in front of gigantic audiences.

We have no difficulty remembering these catastrophes, since the media give us tragedy several times a day, covering the West with a veil of melancholy, without a crack. But who among us remembers Phalaris? During the sixth century before Christ, in Sicily, a tyrant from Agrigentum who bore that name had an enormous hollow bronze bull sculpted or assembled. It was erected in the center of the public square and brought to a cherry red by a fire after being filled with enemies. People came in droves to hear the bellowing of the beast.

On the other side of the sea, in Carthage, said enemies of the Agrigentines sometimes attended the worship of Baal, that multiple and fascinating god that the Jewish and Christian texts condemned under the names of Belphegor and Beelzebub, the god of the dung heap, the lord of the flies. The shoulders of his statue stood above the walls and fortifications; out in the countryside, it could be seen from very far away; to get it out of the temple, the walls had to be pulled down; it was hauled on runners and cylinders, a kind of rail was invented; the crowd was in a

great crush before it, held back by trellis-work that only the priests, scholars, or specialists, could get past so as to approach the colossus and look after it; seven tiered compartments opened in the god's body: provisions were placed in one and in the other an ape, etc., only the last one remained open and empty; the celestial spaces, the heavens, the stars, the moon and the constellations were invoked, brought into relation with the multitude by way of that metal shell; it was offered splendid jewels, gold and diamonds first, it was excessively expensive; then a blazing fire was lit under the foundations of the colossus with aloe, laurel, cedar, and an oil flame; and the crowd shouted "glory be to space!" while the fire roared, filling the place with eddies of smoke that almost made the giant statue disappear in a cloud. The god's arms, worked by chains from behind by means of subtle machinery, then swooped down on an enclosure where children had previously been left, children who were believed to be the first-born of the rich and noble families; one after the other, they were placed in the movable hand that by going back upright like an elevator threw them into the empty compartment prepared for them and by then close to the fusion, while the crowd cried: "They are not men but oxen. Oxen, oxen!" The victims disappeared like drops of water on a red-hot plate, multiplying the plumes of smoke that spread over the plain and the city in the direction of the stars.

This is pretty much how Flaubert describes the worship of Baal in Carthage under Hamilcar Barca during Hannibal's youth in the thirteenth chapter of *Salamambo*. Do we remember the novel and the sacrifices to Moloch, we contemporaries, scientists or ignoramuses of space?

Assume a dictionary that allows the scene that happened that year at Cape Canaveral and the abominable rite to be translated. A column on the left would be read in one language and on the right in another. Just as much of a crowd, on one side as on the other, forms a great crush at the tragic spectacle and gapes with horror; the Ancients and the Moderns designate the heavens as the aim and target of their aspirations or projects, space and the stars; the undertaking is expensive, for the Carthaginians as for us, the nation almost bankrupts itself over it; both of them divide their group and carefully separate the common man or those watching from the specialists, shut away, specially clothed, designated as priests or technicians of the thing or its representation; here the blast-off,² there the gigantic pyre; here clouds of smoke twisting into coils, there eddies that hide or veil what is happening; two ingenious pieces of machinery; here death, over there and in the past death; the loss of fathers and mothers, the death of children; repetitions of the event, formerly like a rite returned at a prescribed time or in the case of a pressing danger, now like on the stage or at the cinema.

The event, filmed, is shown and reshowed as though to assuage an unsatiated hunger in us. They would also start it again a hundred times in the past: then they sacrificed animals, apes, or oxen, substituted for human children, and the crowd would cry with reason: “No, they are not men but oxen.” The animals served as symbols or signs, consequently it could be repeated without end. Likewise we reshow images, which certainly resemble the thing more than symbols or substitutes. But the essential thing remains: this need to start again, rerun, repeat, re-present the rite, the tragedy in which the dead do not play at dying but truly die. This fascination endures from age to age. What stands, in the end, before the multitude or in the center of the gathering contains humans like a box, a Trojan Horse leaving at a gallop for the moon, a reddened bull charging into space, a vehicle pointed in a direction or a statue endowed with a meaning.³ Immobile at first, the statue moves and leaves. But the idol and the rocket are tombs. End of the dictionary in the black box.

The translation of one column of the lexicon into the other meets with many invariants, crowd for crowd, fire for fire, deaths and observers, and terrifies us into the bargain, uneasy about taking up the same gestures today as long ago. But here’s what eases our minds: the difference from the idol to the vehicle separates the enterprise from the rite and the accident from the crime.

We really go to the places that Antiquity only pretended to in dream; it designated the heavens, we traverse them. Conversely, it perpetrated murder, intentional and real, whereas we're undergoing a technical setback. The situations cut across and oppose each other instead of resembling one another. We can, they dreamed; we know, they didn't. The first lie on their part.

The second lie was the appalling lamentation that rose from the audience: no, they are not men, but oxen. The fathers and mothers, seeing the murder of their children, said that they didn't know what they were doing, as though it proved more difficult to say than to do. Listen to the litany, probe its depths. No, no, we don't know, we won't say. A lie or an admission?

No, it's not about human sacrifice, but merely an accident. We don't hear that litany today. And yet why rerun those deaths on television so obligingly for everyone to assuage themselves or to eat their fill at their leisure? We don't make any admissions. And what if we too did strange things without saying them?

I feel the shudder of anger experienced at the comparison of the two scenes, a comparison that makes a disturbing light come to us from so far away. This shudder would make us go astray, if it led us to dismiss certain questions. Our intellectual traditions insist that every clarity be made over our mistakes, failings, failures, lies, accidents, even at the risk of making ourselves

uncomfortable.

I'd prefer to bring intelligence into those two boxes full of men and ignition [*mises à feu*], blacker than those we place as black boxes in the vehicles whose reliability we want to assess. In other words, do our clear knowledge and effective technologies include dark patches of unexpected ignorance?

Will it be necessary to turn around the assertion made just now? Did the Ancients know things we don't?

When we compare our exact sciences to the vague knowledge dispensed by the dying humanities, we give the rational advantage without hesitation to the former over the latter, due to realism or effectiveness, certainly, but also because we have received this part of an old heritage. Enlightenment philosophy teaches that the irrational must be driven out: what do the hideous statue and its inhuman form of worship have to do with us?

But we have since learned to call anthropology what the Enlightenment cast out as madness or darkness, and we have also learned that exclusion brings us back to the sacred because the gesture of expulsion precisely characterizes sacrifice. By rejecting this form of worship and scene as barbarous, we risk behaving the way the Ancients did. Therefore let's accept our anthropological past as such; ignoring it would make it return without our suspecting it.

Like the earth that carries us and the sky that contains us, we have inherited millions of years of formation and therefore remain archaic for more than nine-tenths of our depth, plunged up to our eyeballs in the tremendously long past of the wait for science. This tremendous old age holds us. The roots of our effective and clear reason sink into the same depths as the body of a newborn into the time of evolution or the dawn of this day into the cooled-down furnace that baked our planet. We see the light, the child, the idea; we're blind to the roots, the foundation, the past: we don't recognize Carthage in Cape Canaveral nor the god Baal in *Challenger*, in front of the same deaths. Nor the statue in the rocket, both metallic and hot, black boxes full of humans.

Like Carthage long ago, Chicago, Boston, Montreal, or Paris today know the tutelary gods whose colossal statues sleep half-lying—bearing their respective names and pointed in their direction—at the bottom of launch ramps in the Urals or Siberia. Likewise for Kiev, Leningrad, or Moscow in the underground silos of Nebraska or North Dakota. We all attend to our daily affairs, threatened, some say protected, by the power of these statues, ready for blast-off.

There is a history of science or of these technologies, certainly, and even several, but more profoundly there is an anthropology of them. The humanities teach this anthropology, without knowing it: when they speak of

statues, they shed light on those of our museums or cemeteries, but also and above all on torpedoes and missiles.

What do we know? What don't we know? Of what were the Ancients ignorant? Of what weren't they ignorant? We know how to answer these questions; only a madman doesn't see all that we've gained since then. But this cruel rite—a theater and representation so similar to ours, whatever repugnance that comparison may inspire in us—bears witness to, yes, a technology. One opposes with reason the exact and the social sciences; one subordinates with reason technology to the former without ever suspecting that technologies exist that are to the social sciences what technology properly speaking is to the exact sciences. By means of the exact sciences, we, whether individual or collective, intervene in the world without suspecting that we intervene in the collective itself via the social sciences: unknowing actions no doubt, traditional technologies deprived of the social science that would found them.

We are only beginning to understand what cultures are useful for, what the stories told by the different literatures are useful for, what the dialects, the local accents, the ideas meditated on by philosophy, the wisdoms and moralities or the gestures prescribed by the liturgies are useful for: their finality is hidden from our eyes, which

are so lucid for the external world and its laws. Groups produce themselves by means of their culture and language, which develop and preserve them; groups recognize themselves as existing through the existence of their gods or heroes, draw remedies from this to their specific ills and defend themselves patiently against death and disappearance. A group dies if its language fades, and declines like its art. Religions above all teach us how to manage the quantity of constant violence that is inherent to the whole to which we belong so that we won't rush, impelled by that rage, to our self-destruction. The life of the culture indexes quite well the vitality of the group that cultivates it. I sometimes fear that modernity is allowing that whose usefulness we no longer understand to die or even destroying it, meanwhile the violence that besieges us isn't being controlled.

The preceding sentences make it clear that we do not understand the finality of cultures or social technologies because we do not know what "we" means. Who knows when we say: we know? Who decides when we decide? A single person? Everyone? A majority? An active and dynamic minority? The crowd, opinion? A few representatives? All of that, no doubt, at the same time or successively. The subject that acts and the object on which social technologies intervene remain outside our control. These questions remain as black as during the time of the Carthaginians, who believed—did they believe

it?—that the death of children without speech in the at first black and then brought to a luminous red belly of the god Baal would change their destiny or treat their ills. Who knows or doesn't know, who says and believes when we say: we don't know? Connections more than individuals no doubt, a network of links or interactions, a force field, an interlacing better than a partition of elements. Is our incomprehension connected to this shifting complex?

We have, in any case, inherited from a fabulous past social technologies, rites, myths, tales whose gestures and words pass from generation to generation via the symbol's memory while its function is forgotten. These legacies come to us from so far away that they've lost much of their effectiveness, which explains no doubt why we no longer feel them to be useful. A law of diminishing returns reduces them.

And we went around saying: of what use are the humanities, cultures, or religions? Answer: they're useful for not dying; they've been useful up to now for keeping us alive. "But our ancestors drank the water of this well, and they're dead." Certainly, but precisely we remember our ancestors, we who are living and still present. The humanities, cultures, or religions served to save us, not us individually, which remains a matter of hope and faith, but us collectively in the fact of history.⁴ Let's understand

here the word “immortality,” which has a well-known religious sense, but also a historical sense. From generation to generation, the continuum of human time has held over centuries of centuries without rupture or break. We readily believe that this succession is given, through nature or life; we discover that it must be built. Cultures and religions are useful for the construction of that sequence, for the pursuit of time, for the collective immortality of the groups that, through cultures and religions, create their time, for their continued creation, for the production of their history or for their own reproduction in that history. It’s not for nothing that we call our languages “maternal”: they engender us like mothers; they engendered our mothers. Religions and cultures can be defined as the technologies of this time of engendering centuries by means of the centuries.

If death threatens all of us individually today just as much as yesterday or tomorrow, it hangs now over our respective groups, but above all over us, in the global sense of all humanity. Death abruptly passes from the member to the set. Modernity is defined by the face to face, which seems new, with that major—maximal—risk that rose with the sun the morning of Hiroshima. This danger, which we ourselves made, in return makes us understand that we trail this collective immortality behind us like the tail of a comet from generation to generation, this continued creation, both so fragile. Certain religions

therefore claim with reason, at least in the above sense of the cement that makes history, that immortality is merited and prepared. For having forgotten this immortality, we put it in danger of being interrupted. This forgetting has resulted in the opposition of the effective technologies and those of society and culture. The former construct the world, the latter construct time. On their own, the latter without the former tend to abandon real things; isolated, the former without the latter push to use up or close duration. Yet neither our collective life nor our history nor the future constitutes simple givens any more than the world does. They must be worked, invented, continuously created, promoted, and maintained, with all our industry. Before the industrial revolutions, humanity only knew those industries that worked to perpetuate traditions or better, to secrete time, from whose compost the different traditions appeared.

The industrial technologies based on the exact sciences date on the contrary from an era so recent that their formidable efficiency in the inert or living world enchants us; we're coming out of such a series of victories that nothing will shake our confidence: where better could we truly place it? Yet we all experience at some time that a law such as the law of diminishing returns imposes more information and energy on us, more capital or sophisticated means, more hiring, for progressively

reduced results. Even if we change production channels, the same constraints await us. The benefit requires a growing debt; a certain balance has its price. We had thought that knowledge was free and our interventions innocent; we're learning to settle our bills and in which currency.

Furthermore, the rise in power of research and development in the advanced countries, the refined technifying of daily life give birth to new collectives, tied to rational work, that in turn experience the usual problems of every society. When the scientific city grows, it increasingly resembles the city itself. All of a sudden, the most modern is in short-circuit with the brute primitive. Rivalries, hierarchy, violence, kinglets, and servants are the same from the tribe to the academy, from the jungle to the laboratory. Formerly, we readily opposed science and society, the specialists or technicians thus being able to shift the heavy blame onto the ignorant politicians who were maneuvering the uneducated and stupid masses with irrational shoves. This true schema is changing these days in which the politics of science is going to replace politics itself. Our future depends more and more on research; tomorrow we will become only what our scientists make of us. The sciences and technologies are taking the place of the motor of history and the economy. Our destiny lies for the first time in our reason. Engineers and scientists still have a tendency to

consider themselves as part of a minority, whereas they've already conquered the third spot at least in a new world where they share power with the media and the administration, three powers without counter-powers. Administration holds the performative power of language, the media possess its seduction, science keeps its truth-value, and technology the monopoly on effectiveness.

Here we find again the primitive and anthropology, as though we had never calculated, proven or experimented. Our final social victory brings us back to Carthage; that's how we pay for it.

Let's get back to the accident and its meaning: the massive count that has been repeated regularly from year to year for several decades gives the idea of a law rather than of an accident, that is to say, of chance. In France, we admit to a little more than ten thousand deaths on the roads per year and several times that of injured people, gravely or lightly. We erase from our map one town every twelve months, or at least we tolerate it. Accidents or implacable law? And, in this case, what kind of law? Physical or human? Why, to whom or to what do we have to settle such a debt? What is signified by this so-called social tolerance to this amputation or sacrifice?

The calculation of probabilities, summing up a crowd of unforeseeable local cases, attains a relatively predictable global set. Statistical laws go from the

punctual accident to complete regularity: they let us know en bloc what we don't know in detail. So the victims fall under the blow of accidents and laws, of chance and necessity, of blindness and knowledge, of a strange relation of the local and the global, of the single case to the large number.⁵

Now the Carthaginians or others, contemporaries of this forgotten Antiquity that engaged in sacrifices, drew their victims most often by chance, choosing without choosing the first comer to the junction of several roads, which assumes a single draw from a large number of possible cases, or by making oxen turn around the altar until the circling stops and designates one of them, just as the wheel of a lottery would have done. The term “victim,” of the same origin as “vicar” or “vicarious,” which signifies “replacement,” or “substitute,” or “representative,” as one says vice-president, seems to admit that if it isn't this one, it'll be the other—it doesn't matter. Yet the same rite returned year after year. Athens, for example, would erase fifty boys and fifty girls from its free families every twelve months so as to deliver them up to the bull in Crete's famed labyrinth. I'm pulling up from oblivion the buried root of the calculation of probabilities, about which only its history is known. It's known that this calculation started during the Age of Reason with pensions and life insurance, which were made possible by

the publication of mortality lists. All of a sudden civil history is connected to the anthropology of religion. Death strikes randomly in these lists just as in those of Athens. The ancient sacrificial victims thus fell at the same time under the blow of the law, a law returning regularly every year, and the blow of crossroad accidents—since the children who were roasted in the belly of Baal came from the traffic circle where everyday life had brought them among the crowd, suddenly taken there as the first comers—fell, as I was saying, under the blow of blind social necessity and chance, of knowledge and blindness, of a strange relation of the local and the global or of one case to the large number.

Likewise, when Christ in the Gospel addressed sharply the group that was ready to stone the adulterous woman in these terms—“Let he who is without sin cast the first stone at her”—he made a clear allusion to that indispensable custom that no one was supposed to know who the first thrower was so that each might think that he had cast his stone after the victim’s death and that he might therefore take no responsibility for this crime. In the same way, in every firing squad, each person can think that he benefited from the blank round. Therefore no one sins; no one throws the first stone. Chance, one more time, mixes with law, ignorance with knowledge, and the local gets lost or is hidden in the global. Certain things happen without cause and without assassin. It’s raining

stones, and the subject of the intransitive verb is transformed into a law of physical nature.⁶

If such was not the case, one fine day would come when the group would turn against he who had cast the first stone, put suddenly in the place of the adulterous woman. And the same schema would be repeated right up until the last person. At the limit, the risk of the extinction of the group can be seen to dawn, an extinction slowed or prevented by this social technology. Such technology therefore prepares the way for what I have called collective immortality.

The parallel is striking: and what if Antiquity had truly known something that we've forgotten, something that concerns the relations of the local and the global? Of what I have called "we"?

I no longer belong to the generation of enthusiastic positivists who believed that the lights of science and the performances of technology were by themselves going to save the world from darkness, disease and poverty, accidents, war, and death, provided that everything outside of rational intervention be eradicated. Nor do I belong to the more recent generation who only sees misfortune and destruction in every scientific advancement. Those who cry victory and those who shout scandal speak with excessive voices. Like every battle or every division between two exclusive principles, this

conflict won't produce anything but its reproduction. For my generation, whose consciousness opened with Hiroshima, the same word means triumph and defeat, confidence and prudence, redoubled lucidity. The wisdom of long-ago-understood language to be the best and worst of things; thus spoke the fabulous Aesop.⁷ Today's languages are for better or for worse formed by science and technology.⁸ The term "pharmacy" in the ancient Greek language signified poison and remedy at the same time. Who doesn't know now that we kill and heal with the same drugs? The same word designated the victims excluded from the group or immolated in human sacrifices: the tragic scene of Baal would in those times have received the name "pharmaceutical." A same operator can at same time turn bad or good: we can improve collective life or abruptly do away with it by means of the same energies. The same unstable function becomes reversed, either unpredictably or beyond a certain threshold; the usefulness found here becomes harmful there, describing here a physical area, drawing there a social space. My generation inhabits the center of the beam where it's unsure if the balance arm is climbing or collapsing. That's the way it is.

Each of us keeps a calm soul because the benefits he can derive through his work are sometimes paid for, if they're paid for, by digging a deficit somewhere else, and

so far from his niche that he doesn't see it. For the same and converse reason, he'll be able to worry about the actions of another interacting unforeseeably on his own niche.

The oldest of our religious traditions considered knowledge to be guilty; we had thought it to be innocent; here it's simply but globally responsible. For scientists, progress costs nothing; for their adversaries, it's no longer profitable; we catch a glimpse, for our part, of delicate and metastable equilibria, an iron law that demands payment. But to understand it well, we must count debts and profits globally by broadening our horizons beyond our respective areas of specialization, a given technical advance possibly having a social or cultural cost. I dream that the point where equilibrium is decided or not is no different from the place where the exact sciences flow into the social sciences, where the technologies in the ordinary sense mix with the social technologies. Again the word "pharmacy": how many chemical poisons pass for social cures; how many social poisons come from chemical cures?

I've used the adjective "global" twice: therein lies the question. Never in the course of history have we experienced such an urgent need for a sort of sum: an assessment or holistic strategy, linking our local interventions, an economy in the etymological sense of unitary world, a general economy taking into account

needs, means, acts, risks and feedback;⁹ never has the urgency of an unprecedented theoretical and practical effort pressed upon us like this, less a science of sciences in the traditional sense by which we would theoretically grasp the totality of our theories, a project that flees from us like an asymptote, and more a polytechnic of practices integrating our interventions into a body so as to master their connections.¹⁰ We control our punctual enterprises, blind to their relations: we have neither a science nor a technology of interactions. We have conquered our efficiency through specialization, hence our inability with the sum. Another reason for the unforeseen equilibria that can transform a profit into a deficit.

This project of integration seems insane, yet the computer age makes it possible. Moreover the history and culture behind us had formerly and yesteryear given it several names. It is said that the word “religion,” for example, has its origin in this meaning of “connection” or “relation” which is our problem today. What did it link? We don’t know. How? Blindly, no doubt: the human and the divine, man and the world, individuals among themselves, parts and the whole; in short, the word’s root designates at the same time a theory and practice of links and communications, whose name can vary from Hermes to prayer and from works to love. Religion had community or communion as its object, that network of

interactions that runs into globality. It lacked local efficacy and aimed for totality. Symmetrically, we master narrowly specialized and local technologies, and we fail in holistic projects.¹¹ I would say the same for politics, so ill-defined that we don't know what we're doing nor what we're saying when we debate politics or engage in it. It tries to grasp the unnoticed connections between members and subsets and tie them together into a whole that we don't always understand. Everything happens as though the most anciently known and practiced social technologies tried with their means to resolve precisely the questions that we now consider to be the most urgent, as though these technologies gave themselves a holistic target, whereas the modern, precise, exact, narrowly specialized technologies have punctual or specific aims. The junction of the hard and social sciences brings back the problem of the local and the global.

There, at the difficult to conceptualize crossroads where the hard and social sciences meet, each one carrying its shadow or associated ignorance with it, we scientists or technicians discover again, in an unforeseeable manner, religious problems, no longer in the content of the concepts and their meaning—God, eternity, spirit, belief, or faith—but in the floating outlines of the connections between our acts. We know nothing about the links or bonds that gave their name to

religions;¹² we're ignorant of the relations between our positive interventions. We only know the concrete by small points; we manufacture a lacunary world.¹³ Yet our worries and the deontology to be sought pass through these absent connections. The blackest of our ignorances, set off by the brilliance of our knowledge, doesn't reside in the precisely delimited black boxes but runs through the networks that connect them, whose paths we haven't explored.

The evil runs. Do we remember that a few centuries ago the metaphysicians named a knot of arguments that were laid out in the same terms as the problem of evil? Of what use are suffering, death, disease, and most of all maliciousness or crime? The answer consisted in calculating the sum. With the whole thus evaluated, God, infinitely good, created the best of all possible worlds. Here the question of the mysterious links of the part to the whole has returned, but from the other shore: can a local good added to another local good produce an evil? Might a useful and effective intervention have harmful repercussions? How does a gift, as our language says, turn into injury?¹⁴ The two additions come to the same whether starting from evil or starting from good deeds. Does the torture of a single person buy back global good? Does the abominable death of a few children really save the menaced Carthage from extinction? By what

unfathomable mystery (I hesitate to translate here) do we tolerate so many deaths for the sake of progress or the happiness of the greatest number? Let's look, with open eyes, at the black box: the same reasoning and the same relationship to the global, well described by the theologians or philosophers during the Age of Reason, are used to justify our present inability to reduce or eradicate the number of our deaths as are used to found archaic societies on human sacrifice. Hasn't evil evolved at all? Do our scientific societies remain primitive in their most recognized achievements? Are they still founded on human sacrifice? Comparing the two scenes, in Carthage and Cape Canaveral, do they resemble each other rigorously?

An ineradicable radical evil: the Carthaginians thought that they couldn't avert their sacrifices and the murder of their children in the same way that we demonstrate, by the calculation of probabilities, our inevitable errors or accidents. They didn't want this and turned their backs to it while pretending to be unaware of the ignominy; acting and thinking like them, we name this pretense the threshold of tolerance of a society to its own setbacks. Everything happens as though neither they nor we could eradicate this radical evil, this root that's as deep as our origin, as though we were born with this violence that never leaves us. Collective death haunts us as much as individual death, and runs through the bonds that tie us to

one another, through the numerous and black links that cross and connect our interventions.

Should an observer from another world listen to or see for the first time what we call by antiphrasis the news or *informations*,¹⁵ he couldn't help but think that our universal culture, ravaged by wars and terror, was based on nothing other than human sacrifice. Three similar debts paid for three systems: the small ancient city of Carthage, the global communications network, or the connected set of our technical interventions; for three types of interconnections.

Classical philosophy described them under the optative term of "harmony," an ineffective, abstract, pious vow. The most modern religion spoke of them under the message of "love"; it didn't approach the problem poorly since the relation of love already concerns the local and the global, the near, the next man, the neighbor and the most infinite All;¹⁶ it attempted, by means of this vicinal and integral recommendation, to resolve that radical and primitive misfortune, that hatred that we've dragged with us since the dawn, a hatred that it quite rightly calls original sin, ceaselessly found in every group of any size and in action as soon as it acquires any breadth.

Can the sciences and technologies that we master locally, through an uncommon effort to integrate their punctual acts and for a wholly new progress, one that has

nonetheless been much sought after since the beginning of time and that would constitute the best of our culture since it would thwart the violence that we end up believing to be ineradicable, can they, as I was saying, now reformulate in their effective and precise language and manipulate through their own forces those links that our fathers had baptized with love so as to fight against the evil that was transmitting through their channel?

A strange reunion that no one would have believed to be so near at hand. Attentive to these interactions, the new culture will not only reconcile the exact and the social sciences but also the most advanced rational knowledge with ethics and religious anxiety. Our recent memories are tied to a long anamnesis.

THE SHELL, THE CANNON

Second Foundation

Shooting up from the entrails of the Columbiad, the name of a monstrous cannon dug into the very earth, impelled by thousands of tons of gun cotton set aflame, the artillery shell charges right toward the moon, carrying Michel Ardan and his two companions, plus two dogs, a male and a female. This is how Jules Verne staged the new discoverers of new worlds.

Just as Christopher Columbus's caravel, in crossing the Pillars of Hercules at Gibraltar, passed from the closed Mediterranean into the open sea and gave Bacon his symbol for the new science, so too the shell, torn away from gravity here, left the Earth for space and wanted to give the emblem of a renewed knowledge again to a disenchanted philosophy. What could be more clean than

the trajectory of a projectile, more rational than its path in an empty and obstacle-free milieu, black and studded with non-twinkling stars? What could be more thrilling than this ardent and extraordinary high-speed voyage toward the future? Praise be to Progress; goodbye to the Earth on which we had our feet not long ago.

One of the animals happens to die, from the shock of the blast-off. It is impossible to keep it for more than forty-eight hours in that cramped cubbyhole in which the adventurers are preoccupied with the renewal of oxygen. In defiance of several laws of physics, they decide to half-open, quickly, the bottom porthole forming a trapdoor to let the dog fall.

The first funeral in this ethereal microcosm: neither burial nor cremation has any value for this fragment or remnant of humanity who, after having abandoned the Earth, are beginning to learn the consequences of this, faced with the occasion of the first death. How and where to bury a body when the humus that the linguists say gave its name to humanity is lacking?

Ardan, Barbicane, and their comrade get rid of the undesirable thing—which would have quickly become unspeakable—by lifting the trapdoor as they would have opened and operated a garbage chute or a funerary slab. Expulsion: Satellite, the dead dog, thrown outside, was accompanied by some useless debris cluttering the

vehicle. What could be more purified than this place cleansed of its impurities? Neither technology nor science is to contain non-scientific elements: the rational only consists of the rational. And must exclude the rest. That is its definition and function: hence its kinship with the sacred.

The first funeral, the first social gesture for the little society that epitomizes humanity. A collective gesture, certainly, but Pasteurian, and what's more, a medical and hygienic one: the corruptible shouldn't be kept in a closed vessel, from danger of contagion. A religious gesture as well: you'd think a kind of animal sacrifice, concealed by everybody at the beginning of their life together. And ancient sacrifice also had a social and hygienic purpose. Doesn't the rational gesture of exclusion of the third—the excluded third or middle—summarize the set of all the previous ones by formalizing them? The staging of modern science in an object that's inhabited but designed by geometry, mechanics, and astronomy reviews all the antiquity that knowledge has left behind.

Ancient customs make things so that we quickly forget the dead, once past the mortuary rite and the impurities after washing. Their feet well supported by the capsule's cleaned floor, the little society now well founded, after an ordinary and necessary ceremony, already walks upon what it does not want to know.

The shock of the blast-off could also have killed one of

the members of the trinity.

Now, a little later, after a long discussion about algebra and ballistics—I remember very well having read there, a child, my first equations and that my incomprehension fired my enthusiasm—one of the occupants, observing space by the side port, exclaims that he sees a sort of flattened sack that appears to be immobile like the cannonball, and which is therefore following it, a meteor moving at the same speed. We see him in the illustration looking, from inside, through the window, mouth gaping in amazement beneath his white mustache, his eyes well defined in the haziness of his virtuoso hair. All of them one by one examine the phenomenon and comprehend that the apparition, the phantom, the object, *that*, the deflated bagpipes, goatskin, mummy, was nothing other than the body of the dog Satellite accompanying them at a constant distance in accordance with principles of mechanics. A thing was progressing behind progress.

Science shows then that death follows science's every step.

The drawing cuts out a rectangle on the page just as the port lets its shutter be pulled down in order to see outside. These apertures, which could be called observation holes, look out over the world and over the observer at the same time, the studded sky, the stubborn remains, in such a way

that the extraordinary voyager could catch us as well in the act of observing the dog, us ordinary people, across the pull down of the page that has the rectangle cut out by the drawing. We voyage in the book, another shell, at the same speed as the bolide that departed from Florida, identically participating in the rapid flight since the corpse remains immobile to port of us. Our artillery shell, too, climbs toward the moon, a hard cockpit whose walls, forged with written lines, break off to let sight pass through.¹

From the Earth to the Moon. Since Barbicane and his comrades have abandoned the first for the second, the first lethal event requiring burial made it clear, by its absence and as though in return, how one makes use of the Earth and what it is. At the death of a dog or man, whether burned, buried at sea or in the ground, the body disappears. Never to return. The air, in much too short supply in the shell, the sea and the humus it lacks keep and hide, erase the dead. The terraqueous globe, a pulverulent solid, a fluid robe, a gaseous veil, never opens so as to return the bodies, a tabernacle, a receptacle for every decomposition. We walk over the black box of fundamental death, trample on our dissolved ancestors in such a way that history and memory lie in the depths of dark excavation sites. The Earth is the ark for the dead at the same time as the set of objects.

Fire! The flying shell bursts forth from the giant cannon, carrying an exemplary subset of humanity double-locked beneath the projectile's ogive or in the project's velocity; thus three men are going to dance on a thin steel sheet under which lies, immobile, millions of cubic kilometers of emptiness, without archives.² They no longer set their feet on the same ground, above the same depths.

Thus we, who follow or observe them at the same speed behind a thin sheet of paper that we cut a rectangle out of to see the stars, have also left the Earth and levitate in space, in weightlessness. Of the thickness that yields to our soles only millimeters of bulkhead or floor, made of forged aluminum or printed flimsy, remain. And, behind, transparency. Of the real only the rational is kept.

The Earth is lacking for us. We no longer have our feet on it since we're gliding in the sky, the real sky that separates us from the Moon, but also the empyrean of mechanics and the imagination, between the lines of the narrative and those of equations. We are projected here into the rational, springing through fire from an abyssal cavern, the bottom of a cannon dug in Florida. Everything goes well on board in this new rational sky, where one drinks, eats, sleeps, talks without end and plays dominos as if nothing had happened. But the Earth is lacking for burial.

The inhabitants of the new planet don't change

customs at the first death in lifting the thin wrought metal trapdoor beneath their feet as one would ordinarily roll the stone of an earthly tomb to throw the body through the shadowy mouth and forget about it after having tossed a handful of earth over it. But here the oubliette, the hatch or the manhole, the round plate at the bottom of the cockpit, opens onto a transparent emptiness.³

The Earth absorbs the remains, and we didn't think about them. It gives and receives, does away with, or erases the balance sheets. A fundamental ark, that is to say, a major black box. Thanks to it, we used to act as if nothing had happened. Like a mother and even more, it's the complement of every parasitical operation; better, the universal donor who, in order to never insist on return or reciprocity, makes the parasite possible.

One day, I don't know why, the Earth was lacking for us. From that time on, we thought that nothing was created, nothing lost, that everything was transformed; from that time on, we calculated by balance sheets. The rational restores equilibria, balance, and proportions: that is its proper definition, by the origin of the word that designates it. That which brings itself back and brings back.⁴ And thus the rational will always return the thing that you throw into it, unlike the Earth, which keeps, hides, dissolves, and annihilates it. If you toss a dead man into the emptiness, he will come back; reason will bring

him back: but he never comes back from the deep terrestrial sum that he imperceptibly increases. Reason is recognized by its ghosts.⁵ Here then in the black and white space of the page or the stars, the corpse reappears. The object that's missing in the balance sheet is risen. The return of the real into the rational.

The “rational” says that death follows the rational's every step. Or again: science is followed, at a constant distance, by its own anthropology.

Something dead is hot on the heels of an artillery shell springing from one of those cannons that no one ever chartered with any other aim than that of giving death. Did the bullet hit the animal? Yes, but the beast was already lying in the bullet. Everything is happening as though the hunting picture was exposing the slaughter next to the weapon.

What is that man doing in an artillery shell? Hit by it, locked away in it? Seeing him suddenly appear from beneath the unsealed trapdoor you'd swear that he was coming out of his tomb.

Death occupies the entire scene.

The dog's head shines, in the drawing, like a scenery star. Radiating, it seems to run, immobile, toward the Dog Star.

In the real, on Earth, we blindly experience the

equivalence between the ark of the dead and that of objects. We don't really know how to decide. Set out for the rational, we see the same equation come back at the first serious accident; locked away in our small mobile artillery shells, we observe the calm twinkle-free brilliance of the stars and the corpse: the latter goes toward the former.

Stars, goatskin, or sack and projectile, objects occupy the entire scene.

Between Barbicane and his comrades, the dog, in excess, has to pass through the trapdoor so that the group can survive: we have witnessed the formation rite for the collective subject. But the animal, literally thrown beneath the floor, is now entitled to be designated as a "subject."

Between the mustachioed observer watching through the scuttle of the capsule and me, who sees through the window cut out of the page, between two individual subjects, the dead dog comes back. But it also comes back to the eyes of the traveling group.

The animal is dead for them, and it is an object for them and us.

Expelled by them, exposed in front of us.

And Satellite in the two cases, with or without capital. You are Satellite and on this Satellite something is founded.

Each person sees the satellite from his planet, a monad

equipped with a window; sees his Moon from his Earth; or an Earth from his Sun; knows the Object from the Subject.

We don't turn around it, which doesn't turn around any of us. It remains stable at a constant distance.

No deciding authority has yet taken on its function in this space: the dead dog is object or subject; the observer in his artillery shell of death remains enveloped in an object, as I am in the book and the lines.

Are the relations of the subject to the object stabilized by death? Are the relations of the subject to death stabilized, in turn, by the object? Are the relations of death and the object stabilized by the subject, whether individual or collective, to the point of its not knowing how to decide?

This triple stabilization defines the status of statues, hard like objects, bodies of dead subjects, preserved or returned.

When the shutter of the scuttle cut out of the page is pulled down, a black box opens, black as space or the night, a box in which a body lies, the dog's, plus a second black box artistically fashioned, opening through an observation hole across which I see an extraordinary man who sees.

I recognize this scene, which could be described in the Egyptian manner: as a descent into a tomb where a

mummy lies, a goatskin, plus a serdab, a dark room with a loophole from which a statue looks; painted stars shine on the walls.⁶ Or be told after the Greek style: the shepherd Gyges, with the name of the Earth, discovers a bronze statue in the gaping earth, one pierced with windows that let a body be seen. The extraordinary voyage toward a new world by means of a new knowledge passes through the already seen, the most ordinarily in the world. The most archaic anthropology, buried, forgotten, subterranean, invades the staging of technical and scientific progress.

I was thinking that the remains were old and the projectile brand new, and that death was ancient, unforgettable, and stubborn, following the latest invention of industrial reason without being left behind, but I now suspect that the smooth and cylindroconical box itself dates from a prodigious past: yes, assuredly, it flies out from an abyss dug into the entrails of the Earth. I was going to say from our origins. A conscientious archaeologist must take meticulous inventory of the things discovered under the trapdoor or the shutter when, suddenly, by chance, they're pulled down.

Here first of all are the things of the world, stars or planets, the objective background of the scene or the box. The entire narrative, the entire story aims at them. Via a delegated subset, humanity runs toward the objects or

seeks to get closer to them.

The body shines like a star, in the midst of stars and in front of them.

Death advances in front of the object.

Now the observing subject is hidden or locked up inside a bronze, steel, or aluminum wall, fashioned by him to be hard, a technological object that's protective but dangerous, that seems by means of its solidity to safeguard him from death but that can give it, that has given it, in fact, to the observed thing.

Death advances in front of the subject.

The approach, rapid and realist, of subjects and objects, knowledge or alliance is sung together by recounted narrative, calculated or deduced equations, therefore spoken or scientific languages, history as the global discourse of the human adventure. But if one cuts out a rectangle in the wall of paper that relates that gesture, one sees a strange and unexpected scene where the observing subject, far from observing the stars, things or objects of the world, doesn't take his eyes off the death he has given via the hard wall that protects him, that carries him along, the body that he sees come back.

The subject hidden behind death knows the death that hides the object.

The objects withdraw to the depths of the world just as the subjects do to the hollow of their box, at an astronomical distance the ones from the others, leaving

the body within constant close range to the walls of the cockpit.

Death makes the relation between subjects and objects stable.

While the principal story grandiloquently relates the high-speed voyage of speaking subjects toward objects as imposing as the Moon or planets, a different black genesis silently links the subjects, relentless death, with the fashioned objects.

In the silence of space death, frightening, never ceases to be there. Conversely, as soon as it is present or returns, an immense calm and volume happens around me, such that neither attention nor solitude has ever been less troubled: even language remains silent. Here is the first object, lying before, and the last, the constant and residual object, ineradicable, in relation to which every other object withdraws to the depths of the world, distant, extinguishing every light, while every language enters into the silence.

This object cuts up the collective wall, opens the confinement of the group upon itself, the prison of discourse and irrepressible debates, breaks the window of the stove-warmed room where one meditates on the soul, dissolves every protection. Only death has the power to abruptly pull the shutter of the cockpit down and to tear up the printed paper.

A fulgurating apparition, a phenomenon before language.

Ardan, Barbicane, and Captain Nicholl thought they were climbing toward the Moon whereas plunged in the *Columbiad's* underground tunnel, they were pursuing a descent into the underworld. Twelve years later, Jules Verne published *Hector Servadac*, the extraordinary voyage into the planetary system of a fragment torn from the Earth, and gave his hero the name “*cadavres*” written backwards.⁷

The history of the sciences and technologies advances toward its origins. The more it climbs, the better it descends. Its future illuminates the past. It progresses, obviously, and runs to the Moon or the stars, widening its and our horizon and, in doing so, digs at length and intelligently into its own conditions. We don't understand what progress is going toward because we've forgotten where it left from. Far from getting rid of myths and archaisms, the sciences and technologies continue and deepen them: they take off, certainly, from the depths of the Earth but take with them on their flight their initial constraints, as though the journey explicated, unfolded what was implicated underground at the launch.⁸ What is this projectile on which a human head is outlined if not a herma, that is to say, a fetish?⁹ What is this sack of skin if

not a mummy? What is the rocket *Challenger*, whose name has for its root the French word *calomnie*—no, they are not men but oxen!—if not the descendant of Baal’s statue? Of what, of whom are we afraid today if not the lightning-hurling statues that sleep, here and there, beneath the crypts or the caverns? Nothing could be more mythical or anthropological, nothing more religious in its primitive sense, yes, naïve and native, than the contemporary state of the sciences and technologies.

Let’s call “religion” what assembles or binds us by demanding of us a relentless collective attention such that the first negligence threatens us with extinction. This definition mixes the two probable origins for the word “religion,” the positive root of the act of binding with the negative, through the converse of negligence.

Thus the contemporary sciences or technologies bring us back to the conditions of their stunning advance.

But the myths that they deploy are a little different from those the social sciences inherited. These latter have no object but the set of subjects. The book of their foundations catches that set in turbulence around a dead man. Multiplicity, in a chaotic mob, attains by means of that dead man unity, city, for example, family, state, government, Rome. Every Egyptian brings his stone over the Pharaoh’s body, and that lapidation, well ordered, produces at a stroke the king, the pyramid and Egypt. At

the beginning of the voyage into space, the here exactly minimal multiplicity, that is to say, reduced to three members, therefore conducts its own foundation by dispatching the animal's body through the trapdoor. A reduced model of history, the rapid journey summarizes its essential gestures. That said and soon done, here's the ghost, materialized beyond the linguistic or forged collective envelope, an inaccessible stable object in the icy emptiness that excludes all life. The phenomenon or the object appears absolutely outside, as though the set of subjects had never had to deal with it.

How did the object come to mankind? In what form?

The first foundation, that of the collectivity, puts the subject in relation with death. The second foundation, about which we don't know whether it precedes or follows the first, ensues from it or deepens it, puts death in relation with the object. The one makes the visible and legible face be seen, since languages vie with one another to describe it, the other makes be seen the illegible and silent face, invisible, of a founding authority that has no name in any language and that assembles the authorities that we cut out under the three names of object, death, and subject.¹⁰ This fundamental layer unites what lies below, what "here lies" and what lies in front.¹¹ Objectivizing the subject, death gives the object to it on condition that the subject shapes it. What is this layer, this stable authority,

to be called if not a statue? An inert block set there, silent, tumular, funerary, crudely, or exquisitely worked, sometimes taking the form of a body, produced by us, exterior to us ... that stands without precession at the bottom of every origin, origins much sought-after in voyages or excavations. A first statue, silent, conditional, objective, subjective, mortuary, cast in the depths of oblivion and which bursts forth toward the Moon on the trajectory of science and technology.¹²

I imagine a double-napped cone on which death would occupy the apex; the subject, individual or collective, inhabits the opening of one of the two nappes, just like language and the social sciences.¹³ The subject's history, such as the subject says it, develops and widens in the immense opening out of this volume, while, silent because situated at the limit of language's hold, death lies at the bottom of the cone, so that going back up history such as we relate it comes down to descending into the underworld, less through turning around back up the course of time or for visiting the chatty shades than through doubt about the power of languages in the vicinity of the door of tombs, than through the hyperbolic effort of thinking while remaining quiet so as to enter into the black and icy void where objects don't even twinkle any more. If death engenders subjects toward this nappe, beneath that nappe death adheres to the things, those great

absent ones from history, from languages, from philosophy and the social sciences. We must risk ourselves as far as this silent place so that statues will rise, ancestors of our knowledge, mute stones, masses for our works.

Statues precede languages, these latter have buried them, just as the religions of the word destroy, with blows of stones and letters, the idolatries that engendered them: the second foundation digs beyond or on the nether side of the first, even before the logos would appear. The iconoclasts' fury against fetishes rings like a parricidal anger. Statues pass before languages and produce hominity first, before these languages refound it. Our ideas come to us from idols, language itself admits it; better, our ideas come back from them, like ghosts.

The corpse quickly becomes that which has no name in any language: the text does not describe, nor does the image show that state. The group excludes the dead dog before it becomes unspeakable, no longer sees it, no longer speaks about it, but sees it again come back like a goatskin or dry mummy, endlessly preservable in the cold void. This refrigerator must have stiffened it. So the group speaks about this statue again, as of an apparition.

Menhir, dolmen, cromlech, cairn, pyramid, tombstones, boxes for the dead imitating my mother the Earth, mute objects, raised statues, or standing ghosts,

resurrected from the black box when the shutter falls down that we thought we had closed for ever, cippi, effigies of marble, granite or plaster, bronze, steel, aluminum, composite materials, full, dense, heavy, immobile, masses marking places and indifferent to time, pierced, bored, hollow, become boxes again, empty, light, white, mobile, automobile engines indifferent to places wandering through time, carrying the living.

Along the slow and mute lineage of these things, of dead and suddenly let go objects, two short-circuits, at least, pass beneath language: how does the dead one become an object, beyond the unspeakable state? How does the funerary statue, equipped with its mummy, climb into the sky toward our satellite, as is shown in the image?

All of hominoid work tacitly answers these two questions.

Let's adopt its gestures by going back up that lineage, from stations to stations, from the rocket to the first stone, statues after statues posted there like boundary stones, turning back up time, descending into the underworld, right up to no longer being able to date or say. The voyage beneath the Earth or through history follows the same time as the rocket's path, in a similar silence, but in two complementary opposed directions.

How would the speaking subjects say objects as such, seeing that language, since the other foundation, breaks,

hides, and tramples them under foot, placing them under death so that they can frighten us like ghosts? One nappé of the habitable cone, light, soft, clear, rustles with language while the second one, heavy, black, dense, implicated, envelops the calm of things. Therefore we must have, at the birth of the experimental sciences, changed languages in order to faithfully describe or measure the objects of the world.

In order to grasp the hard directly without passing through the softness of languages, the descent into the underworld must be accepted: a mute genealogy.

The greatest tearing of our time comes from the formidable noise that language makes in order to claim that it produces the century even though we live, taciturn, dyslexic, drowned amongst the objects, in the midst of statues that have come back, in a hard flood repeating the most ancient of idolatrous times, a strange state that the dying languages inveigh against so as not to understand it.

The dog's body shines before the withdrawn stars: death arrives before the object. The projectile protects the observer: death arrives before the subject.

The stable remainder of the remains precedes the statue that precedes the mobile capsule. The idol, absent in the midst of two objects, was produced by the corpse before producing the finely worked thing.

Death does not leave that transformation. What fascinates us in front of the illustration, an open black box, makes clear-sighted idolaters of us.

The shell contains three male bachelors plus a female dog, a human and animal fetish without posterity.

How to impregnate progress now?

Recent Memories

DRIFTINGS IN THE CEMETERIES

Space

It seemed natural, quite natural, to my generation, during the years terrified by the last world conflict, to start or almost start learning the Latin language, the dead but active basis of our culture, by studying the questions of place. Four key words founded space: *Ubi? Quo? Unde? Qua?* All words soon echoed in the Greek language, then in mechanics and philosophy. We designated or described places immediately after having conjugated the verb “to love.” I don’t remember having learned any living language with such a connection of love and places.

Ubi? Where are we? How are residence or repose, the immobility of the surrounding horizon, sedentary life to be said? Answers to the question: in Vincennes, in the house, in the countryside, in front of the oven fire, at a

central or marginal point serving as a reference or that needs one; answers via locatives that make tenants of us, animals temporarily tethered to stakes.¹ *Quo?* Where are we going? The war prevented our rare travels or forced us to flee; we therefore asked ourselves the question about life, fate, salvation. Where are we? Here. Say more. Here in relation to what? And based on what? Where are we going? To death. And after? Here: and below? Yonder: and beyond?² *Unde?* Where do we come from? A literally naïve question posed to parents, and, behind them, to unimaginable forebears, toward the autochthonous point where the genetic tree takes root in chthonic oblivion or memory.

It seems to me that I have known familiarly and then suddenly left an age that summarized its experience by means of the first three questions of place, subterraneously connected to the passion of loving. We neither knew nor could answer the other question because we didn't know history for not having one, since, tethered again to places, we couldn't move about. In the evening litanies, we used to pray for travelers and the dying, for only the lost, astray in time and space, without reference, seek with anguish the tatters of an answer to the fourth question: *Qua?* Through where are we passing?³

Agricultural humanity, which began during the Neolithic era and is drawing to a close at this time,

composed of peasants, henceforth eliminated, living in a landscape, now gone, had molded culture and space by referring them to places, to knots that we undo as obstacles to our transportation since we're passing through space instead of living in sites or places and since we summarize our experience by ceaselessly answering the fourth question, ignoring the first three.

And since we're speaking Latin, in a time that has gotten out of the habit, we answer the first three questions by *pagus*, the landscape, *hortus*, the garden, and *locus*, the place.⁴ I have recently spoken at length about the first one, organized around the pagan gods; I leave the last one to its mystery, doubtlessly centered around the body, around the female genitalia and breast; I'll meditate on the funerary slab around which the garden is formed.

Stage right, stage left: these expressions, stemming from the house or the theater, oppose two places that language, however, puts into the same category.⁵ For a single Indo-European word—*ghorto*—engenders a family, Latin and Germanic, even Slavic: on the Latin side, the *hortus* of horticulture contributes to forming the cohort, that military group stationed in a division of the Roman camp, enclosed by ditches, towers, and stakes and divided into quarters. The word *cour* derives from there, just like the high and low courts, judicial or agricultural, and cortege,

courtesy, as well as the verbal phrase “to pay court.”⁶ The word “garden” comes to us from the Germanic or even the Slavic side, where place names ending in *grad* derive from the same enclosure. Stalingrad, Stalin’s Garden, is a bit surprising as a cousin of the courts of love. The English “yard” signifies, once again, the entire family: courtyard, enclosure, garden, soon cemetery. Spaces enclosed with bushes or walls divide town and country or associate in a composite tissue the fields of the landscape and the frameworks of the city. In this sense, the garden or the yard can pass for the element, urban and rural, of space such as our Indo-European culture perceives or produces it: its basic unit.

The origin of the words that cross the pseudo-barrier of the languages in Europe, from the south to the north, from Kierkegaard to hortensia, and from east to west, fortifies or confirms our memories of closing. The city fortifies itself, the military camp closes itself off, the farm is enclosed on itself, the ploughed field is surrounded with defenses: the interpretation of this cordon varies a lot, while repeating a common theme, sacred or religious, defensive, strategic, judicial, and sanitaire.⁷ It protects the interior that it outlines from aggressions of all types, flora from weeds, parasitical and rapacious fauna, corruption or diseases roving the foreign expanse, enemy armies, pillagers and pirates, external desecrations; it defines

cleanliness, the right to property, even more, it constructs definition itself in practice and in theory.⁸ No doubt the enclosure or fence opposed the sedentary farmers and the wandering nomads and imposed yard and garden on our languages as the basic unit of space when the Neolithic revolution invented agriculture.⁹ Old languages, old divisions of the landscape, archaic social groups, ancient ideas, one hesitates to say what goes furthest back in the forgetfulness and memory of our culture, the word “garden,” the thing or the agricultural practices that make the word and think it.

Where are we? *Quo?* Where are we going? Where do we come from? In the three cases, the “where” designates a locative that wouldn’t be understood without this enclosure or fence. Here does indeed stop somewhere, and if I go there it’s quite certain that at a certain moment it’ll be settled that I’ll be there. The local has no place that’s without limit or boundary. In the three questions, the locative designates closed yards or gardens.

Yet, in the contemporary age, the word “opening,” almost magic, carries a high value, whereas enclosure or closing becomes a vice to be avoided. Bergson recently established this distinction, now evident like a received idea or a prejudice: a closed society ignores its own geniuses or heroes that a society opened by them on the contrary produces and recognizes. Ever since, whether it’s

a question of things, systems, thoughts, or persons, the enclosure has been tantamount to sterility, all fecundity passing through a blossoming opening out.¹⁰ This reversal of values follows the transformation of space.

Bristling with walls or surrounded by hedges, for the swing-plow and the home, the units that were inhabited or outlined by our labors in yards and gardens are connected now in order to form a simple medium for passages. *Qua?* Through where are we passing? The localities open up to transit and transportation. Composed of places, by pieces gradually juxtaposed, the landscape comes undone through our connecting works and these clearings of the way. Local, formerly, globalizable, from now on, it no longer answers anything but the fourth question. The roads, rare, went from yard to yard—and traveling took an infinite amount of time—corteges were formed, slow, ceaselessly stumbling over the obstacles that were the octrois that we lifted so as to make a thousand kinds of freeways go better.

Take them, visit the world where you'll find three kinds of country: those where the places prevent paths, as in China, where the peasantry still digs and isolates the landscape, where the local blocks the global; those, conversely, where passage prohibits the genesis of any singular site, the North American type, where the global destroys the local before it can be born; those lastly where

the balance still lasts before pouring from one model into the other, the roads there not yet having quite untied the places but laboring intensely to do so. Visiting even contributes to this untying. For tourism is organizing a literally world war against what remains of places or sites. Globally speaking, hominity seems to evolve from the sedentary model, set up by the Neolithic agrarian revolution, toward the nomad model that appears to dominate today. From the closed to the open, from the habitat to passage, from refuge to wandering. Thus for the thinker, thus for thought.

A garden therefore projects in its figure the state of the world that it forms: an ordinary unit of space, nothing less nothing more than an enclosure or the *pagus*, an element of the landscape, it divides itself into juxtaposed pieces.¹¹ You went there; you came from there; you stayed there for the afternoon or the day, but today you pass through the Tuileries Garden, letting your tissue paper or your empty pack of cigarettes fall there while hurrying to the station that's connected to the airports. At the sign that the carnies, without permanent home, had set up their merry-go-rounds and ferris wheels without raising any protests everyone recognized that the old place was becoming a space of passage. The fourth question summarizes our new world: a transition among transits.

The element, unit, atom of space today becomes the

interchange. You stay in a place; you go there; you come from it, but you go through a crossroads. Pedestrians pass through the *guichets* of the Louvre, cluttered with traffic, or transit between the *rue de Rivoli* and the quays of the Seine through the underground passageway and intersect those who are hurrying from the Carrousel to the Concorde. Singularities populated a compact and dense expanse; interchanges smooth it out. If you want to draw a contemporary garden, think about a supple or undone knot with soft curves in a cloverleaf or about a complex computer chip. The ancient parks accumulated, dissimulating them a little, astonishing differences; don't forget that the interchange is a desert, a place of the fourth type where we no longer stop.

When Descartes, during the Age of Reason, anxiously wondered about how to traverse a forest, he was describing the places of his time in which the trees hid the whole.¹² When space abounds in sites, the traveler always has his nose over a singularity: a clearing, an ancient elm, a mossy trunk, a fork bearing mistletoe, a stag's antlers appearing amongst the branches. The precept of plotting a straight line in the middle of this jumble assumes that the fourth question has been resolved but couldn't resolve it except by a pious vow.

We ask ourselves the converse with the same anxiety: how to live in the desert? Descartes boldly asked the

fourth question in a world devoted to the first three, since the method imposes that one traverse; we ask the first ones in a world that's been smoothed out by the fourth and the set of technologies meant to answer it. If interchanges constitute the units of a space in which we now do nothing but pass, how do we live there? Answer: we no longer inhabit. Can you conceive, lay out a garden for wandering?

The desert is what the book of Exodus called the place of transit between Egypt—from which the Hebrew people were coming and leaving and which they called the abode of the dead—and the Promised Land, where they were going and which those who were passing through there would never know, generations of transition. We aren't coming from Paradise, a sublime garden where milk and honey flow, we're going there. We're passing through the desert interchange. Do we live there? Where do we come from? From the land of the dead.

Circumscribed places, defined—yard, garden—agrarian, stable, only exist as founded. We have to dig to establish said foundation. Dig beneath the wall that encloses them or the boundary stone that marks them. Above the trench rises the pedestal or the wall or even the harvest. The secret lies in the hole. A shepherd roaming behind his flock, Gyges, it is said, descended into the chasm opened by the earthquake and founded his kingdom, his fortune

and his power on the strange mystery that he discovered there. “Here lies,” invisible, the enigma, the arcanum. No place without landmark or boundary stone. The rain or thieves efface or change the signs that this latter shows; only the ensign-bearing thing remains stable.¹³ For a long time, philosophers were only interested in the flying marks and looked down on the thing that supported them. No softness without the hardness that holds it up; no gesture without the semaphore body, nor word without object. We come from things before being born of speech; we stem from the inert and tumulary stone, stele or cippus that stops the passer-by before the funereal obstacle.

The garden can be defined as the unit of space, if one analyzes space into its elements; it must now be understood as the mother cell, the originary place from which space is organized and spreads like a living tissue.¹⁴ The closed, marked out, designated garden is first defined by the presence beneath the boundary stone of sovereign death. Where are we going? There. Where do we come from? From there. We will therefore live here. Not far from the here made sacred by the repose of the ancestors. A given place above all remains the garden of our first parents. We will never know what historical truth was expressed in Fustel de Coulanges’s *The Ancient City*, but by establishing the emergence of the original city on the tomb, he translated being-there as “here lies.”¹⁵ How

is place to be defined, here or there? By the stone or boundary marker beneath which the dead person lies. Cemetery, the first garden; necropolis, the first city.

Where do I want to be buried? I don't care but propose the question. It concerns less my bones than love for this earth. Formerly I would have answered that the gentle curve of the Garonne and the soft *lise* that my forefathers turned with the plow, and my brother and father cut with the dredge could alone absorb my mineral sleep and return to nitrogen.¹⁶ Since, I've planed down the water and air, in which nothing remains, hung a capital letter on the native earth and transposed the patch of land into the globe. I accept resting at Lucca or Volterra, in the Kekova Bay, on the shores of the Yangtze or near Valparaíso, beneath the sand of a creek, facing the cold Pacific, waiting for an earthquake to sweep some lady swimmer near me.

No one can have himself buried in the Earth.

“Here,” the only word written by those who didn't know how to write: let them bury me here.¹⁷ And let them engrave my name or only my initials on the stone, or let them draw them in the dust.

There the generation rises that really wants to die everywhere, losing the place, winning the Earth, standing on the universal—fast languages and soft signs. Their

parents set their feet down on the earth and the hard; they had signs in their heads. Where do we have our heads, we who walk on software?¹⁸ Has the Bomb turned Hominity upside down?

What are those who, among our nephews, won't know how to write going to write on the non-place? They scoff at the stone and the medium for written signs. Their flying ashes will occupy space for an instant.

Is it a question of the definitive exit from the heavy or hard, of the second Resurrection?

Neither Paris nor Rome was built without catacombs: from there for centuries the flint stones of the facings, cornices, pedestals, and statues have come out; there the dead themselves descended to the underworld, the early Christians in Rome, the people in Paris. Having become stones, they rest in the cavities from which the stones for the walls above them were extracted. And the temporarily living sleep in the cavities formed by the walls of the stones pulled from there.

To the north of Paris, beneath the Basilica of Saint Denis, the crypt goes down to the foundations, below the ground and into past times toward decomposed bodies, through the labyrinth of royal history. They slept there, lying, one by one, prince after king or prince, corpse after corpse, statue after statue, their two feet leaning against an animal, before being disinterred and thrown into the

communal grave. To the south of Paris, beneath the Lion of Denfert, another descent into the underworld brings the indifferent amid the bones, skulls, tibia, piled there by the millions. A true archaic and primitive city, a true living city because primitive and archaic, Paris is rooted in crowds of the multiple, a multiple that's opposed to the royal individual and mixed with him; bones in the black valley and statues beneath the dazzling light of the stained-glass windows, the remains of the elect returned to the others' grave, Paris rests and is built on the foundation of skeletons become stones instead of the stones that built the city, the population and kings taking over from the rock. Come and visit the true city, walk along the streets, in the squares, through veritable boulevards where the walls, visibly assembled with a plumb-bob and water level gauge, squared off, are composed of heads, shoulder blades and pelvises, fibulas or clavicles, and think of the relationship between the necropolis below, stable, stock, and the metropolis above, a temporary décor. From what material are those walls made that come out of the ground, walls supported by the strength of such deep foundations? Flesh, calcareous bone or stone? You begin to understand the Scripture: "you are Peter and on this rock, I will build."¹⁹ Here's the transformation of the Peter-first name, of the stone-flesh into stone material or the transubstantiation of the inert

into life and of life into sign or again the substitution of institution for substance; we're approaching the word "statue." Put differently, from what flesh have the stone bodies been sculpted that suddenly shoot up here and there on the pedestals, at the crossroads and detours of our gardens? Dead men, stand up!²⁰ What superstition in the literal sense causes architectural cities to rise above necropolises, gardens above cemeteries, and sculptural works above bodies? From what transmutations of flesh substance into inert substance and from the former into a substantive can these vocal transformations around the statue and stability come? Substitutions, substances, institutions, everything comes out of death.

A rich plowman, sensing his impending death, had his children come and spoke to them without witnesses: "Beware of selling your inheritance," he tells them, "A treasure is hidden within it. But I don't know where: search for it."

From this fable, the unremarkable lesson is drawn that one must work: since the content or the mass isn't much lacking, take trouble with the form. Certainly. By turning mother-earth, the harvest will surpass the promise of the treasure. Very good.

They plow to search for the place. Where? Where does the treasure lie? In this "here." The family property refers to this precious "there." The father lied, just like the

grandfather and, going back up the genealogical tree or series, each tricked his successors who, their entire lives, turned the soil in order to find the treasure. Aesop lied to La Fontaine, who deceived his readers. We must rewrite and search. The inheritance follows the succession of this lie: the moral of work.

Where did the sons bury their ancestor? Where did the latter deposit the remains of his father and so on for as long as you please? The deceived children or successors, by turning the field—hither and thither, everywhere—must have stumbled at some point across the funerary remains and, with the passing generations, across the complete genealogy of their forefathers interred there.

He who was speaking of treasure was and was not lying, for he was or founded the treasure. For how are we to define the legacy or inheritance other than by the place and the mass of earth that rhythmically passes from hand to hand with time? The earth is in the hand, and the hand comes out of the earth. The fable that is speaking behind the plowman who speaks says the autochthonous succession of the peasants born of the dust and returning to the dust, only speaking up at the point of return. Where? Here. But who are you, moreover? A fragment of earth or mass from here. Where do you come from? From there, from those who are decomposing there and transforming into the there. Where are you going? To rejoin them. An inestimable treasure is the

transubstantiation of flesh into earth, of cultivated soil into body, of lineage into place. The first three questions cadence the eternal return of those who remain strangers to history but enter into the stone or mass and come out of there. History, for its part, goes, disperses, and squanders this treasure.

This is Being and that is Time.

These are the statues, mobile and immobile, hands full of earth in an earth that's full of hands, enveloped or implicated in the cycle of place; those are the signs that fly off and develop randomly. This is the hard, that the soft. No one lied: work lapidates, is related to stone and doesn't squander anything in vain and deceptive languages.²¹

A country or city sometimes allows several strata of history to be seen, the oldest of which are still living after a strange fashion. Unwinding its wide or narrow green band along the Nile, in the middle of the naked desert, Egypt shows the ancient pharaonic stratum, thick with forty centuries, the Coptic bed, the most archaic of the Christian era, the Muslim one that gives the dominant language and customs, and the contemporary one, cars, radios, noise, and machines. Thus you will see or have seen Cairo, a city of six thousand years or several months, fantastically living and dead.

But while arriving or before leaving, between the

airport and the center of the capital, stop at the cemetery; go and walk there for a few hours; all of Egypt is summarized there. I don't know when, or who was ruling, but a severe and sudden economic crisis, following years of relative prosperity, drove a poor and numerous population, without work or housing, into the large cities; the influx hasn't yet stopped. Now during those years, this starving, hungry, and unsheltered populace suddenly invaded the necropolis. Like everywhere in the world in these still inegalitarian places, there were rich tombs shaped like houses with doors and courtyards, roofs or domes, and little gardens, giving shade to putrefaction of consequence, next to humble stones marking remains of a more common sort, though of the same biochemical formula. The wave of the lumpenproletariat flooded the graves: the grandiose tombs were opened, and people began to camp in them; they got organized, life quickly asserts its rights; small wood fires for the billycan, clotheslines for the washing, pallets in the corners, basins, utensils, a pile of scattered garbage, a true city, strange and ordinary, was born in short order. Today it's called *The City of the Dead*, juxtaposed to the others, a city counting more than a million inhabitants, in which the shades mix with the bodies. The kids, like elsewhere, play soccer in little squares with broken ground, the goalie stopping the balls between the cippi; their parents cobbled together doors and built little walls; each took a recess,

and when a gate opens in front of you, a family is eating, seated on a slab, watching you. They scribbled the name and address of the living man over the engraving where the titles of the dead man were attempting to perpetuate themselves. Life is bustling about above the motionless stone just like when, long ago, one's ancestor used to be buried at home. I went through there as though in a place I'd known forever, elsewhere but at home, as though I had never ceased living in that truth.

A contemporary, social, common truth that hopes for, explains and foresees the coming revolts: economic injustice, here at its height, drives people to extremities of indignation. This very height serves as an example and tells a historical truth: the damned of the earth are founded on those who sleep below and are going to come back with them to wake the affluent individuals and peoples from their tranquil dreams. Here's the burning volcano. Truth in its rigorous form, implacable, more than perfect: the poor live like the dead and with them; they pushed open the gates of Hell when they entered there and will be risen tomorrow from the tomb, now already standing.

I opened them halfway; I went through and learned from the poor and their shadowy mouth history, the future and archaeology, an exact and living anthropology. A de facto state that's now accepted by means of its strength and numbers, the city of the dead even displays surfaced

avenues so that certain transports and the police can get through. Here and there, some façade can let it be mixed up with any ordinary city of the living, but in a good many deserted places, behind, where the walls narrow, where the stones remain on the ground, death, tangible, survives life. Who would venture there at night? But this accentuates again the resemblance between the necropolis and the metropolis. This place of hell, through these transitions, becomes one of our commonplace purgatories. Death keeps watch in our living cities.

An ancient truth dozes and worries there. Beyond the green band that was formerly watered and enriched at the drop in the level of the Nile, the desert extends its immovable law. To this desert went the ancestors who repose—pharaohs—under some pyramid, who sleep—notable—under mastabas, who decompose—ordinary—beneath the stones. The Egyptians of four thousand years ago called this passage the Journey to the West, and all their work, industry, economy, art, and all their culture was devoted to tombs as places, mummified dead bodies as objects, and finally the exit toward the light of day as objective. The poor survived by tens of thousands among the necropoles under construction in the desert valleys, their cities, the first cities. What am I saying? Rich and poor, powerful or enslaved—all lived there, frozen, yoked to the age-old task of wanting to tame death. That's not

only the ancient City but Antiquity in general.²² Did that interminable work, work so heavy that it occupied all their strength, result in delivering us from it?

He who no longer has anything lives in the place where death and life border each other, where being begins. The most destitute of today's Egyptians, driven by poverty to that border, have stepped across it the way their ancestors went through the desert long ago, in the abode of the dead; they rediscover an eternal law and recommence their history and our culture. Everything is erased and starts again from scratch.

The well-to-do or heedless tourist and the scholarly archeologist search for a beginning along the Nile's riverbank, the cradle of their civilization, a transition between prehistory without state or writing and our science that was born in Greece or our conception of time which doubtlessly came from Israel, and seek them in the excavations and stones, in the digs and through the museums, in the temple ruins, whereas the origin is produced there, before their eyes, in the filth, dust, and children's games of the City of the Dead where, on the marble and the corpses, the poor are reconstructing the Valley of the Kings.

I don't know any place in the world better than the central cemetery of Montreal, Quebec, not far from the Côte-des-

Neiges and the Saint Joseph's Oratory. For several years, during the long months of winter, I walked there every day for two hours between two white cliffs, slipping on the ice, wading through the powder snow or jumping from puddle to puddle. In large cities made infernal by the motors and the crowds, only cemeteries give peace, silence, and a space where one can prepare one's thoughts. I went there seeking calm and work. Generally, I arrived in Canada during the harshest time of the cold season, and the snow had transformed the vast necropolis into an immaculate park, tranquil and soft, the way in Paris, sometimes, severe winters transformed the gardens into solitary cemeteries, black and white. Gradually, very slowly, the year brought back that spring that's so brief in those latitudes that only three seasons are celebrated there: the wondrous autumn, the eternal winter, and the humid and detestable terror of summer. So the snow was continuously lowering in level, despite the gusts and drifting snow which suddenly brought the level back to its highest, and this ebb, irregular but irreversible, was slowly freeing the steles and statues: an end of an angel's wing was poking through the ice, a marble lock of hair, a weeping head was meditating all alone on the white plain, elsewhere bare shoulders, almost erotic on the smooth sheet, were arousing the austere landscape; when the Flood receded, the Ark's sailors must have had the same perception of the world—one of resurrection or

renaissance. Or conversely, I remember having pulled from the water the wreckage of a boat: it came back up dripping wet, detail after detail, from its drowsy submersion.

In short, the names came back above the mute expanse. The columns, steles, slabs of marble. At the end of March, sometimes, you could begin to read the lists of the departed, among the scattered statues, having finally emerged. I never arrive in a place I don't know without first going and consulting this dictionary, in the open air. You learn right away the two or three dominant names of the village, and in American cities you can estimate the waves of immigration by masses: German, Polish, Czech, Sicilian, Irish, or Turkish patronymics, come from afar to give their letters and ashes to an earth that wouldn't reject them. Casualties of wars over race, trade, religions, ideals, castaways who sought to drop anchor and grow roots elsewhere, thus changing elsewhere into here. This is truly the new world resurrecting beneath the melted snow of the flesh and signs of the old one. A temporary stop for the wandering. The great conquests never come from a large aggressive army but from the troops of those excluded by their brutal brothers.

After the month of February, terrifying, a mild March followed. The ceiling-floor of snow collapsed. I entered that morning like any other through the gate framed with two brick pilasters, and I went directly toward the hill,

alone. Not a single bird was to be heard, only the rubbing of velvet on wool, pants against coat, and the opaque breathing from the effort. Hat pulled down to the eyebrows, a violent wind, head buried in some thought, therefore head lowered I ran into the first vertical cippus freed from the snowdrift by the thaw: it bore my name! Which grandparent wandering over the water, come from the country of the *serres*, had transplanted there? Behind, in line with my body, petrified with amazement, and the stele bearing that signature of mine, another marble slab whose inscription announced the name of the little town of my birth, distant by a quarter of the equator, was emerging from the snow. On the white page my shield was appearing.

Where was I? A short-circuit between here and yonder. Where was I going? Where have I come from? I thought I was passing through the space of wandering, leaving no more trace than on a desert of sand during a storm, a flying Hermes observing the dead from outside my heritage, and here I was a ghost.²³ Here I was one of the phantoms gotten up from one of these tombs, and the snowflakes that now covered my coat were transforming it into a shroud: I in turn was disappearing into this place as though I had never left the land of my ancestors. My being was melting into the there. The four questions, intersecting like a crossroads, exchanging their places

between themselves, were trapping me here, with my feet thrust into the tumulary earth.

The skew-surfaced snow was slowly falling like an immense sheet of white drawing paper that would come to a landing, from above, hovering all the while, and on which at each level a new garden stemming from the cemetery would be marked. Lifting my eyes, I saw the sketch now signed by me, since my epitaph or signature had just made a hole in the page by marking my place of habitat on it.²⁴

The irregular interlacing of the hemmed-in paths tracing their stains of black mud on the naïve, impeccable isotropy surrounded the tall statues gradually resurrecting from the end of last autumn, when the squall had drowned them. Standing stones, menhirs, in a prehistoric landscape. Dead men, stand up! As they appeared, the snowdrop steles formed rooms, courtyards, enclosures, basins, passageways, an entire map being born on the white plain, with the steles indicating the scale or the low-water mark along their statuary skeletons which were emerging from the descending level: a thousand gardens changed by degrees.²⁵

When you're writing or drawing at a desk under the flat light of a lamp, make the page of snow fall over the domain of the dead, the founders or keepers of all the secrets of places; evoke them, help along their return to

the sun's blue brilliance. Neither the drawing nor the writing is worth anything if it doesn't reveal those who are veiled beneath this shroud. Their heads bore through the sheet. Without this resurrection, no sign nor language, which come from the sheet and the dead.

One garden marks one state of the cemetery, the first place or donor of places. That state depends on the level of the white sheet of paper, of the snow floor, of the earth in relation to the soaring of the dead. The statues, tall, fly over the columns or, over the low pedestals, hardly seem to tear themselves away from their tombs. Each garden marks an epoch in the dawn of history, when the unknown forefathers of our forgotten ancestors were sowing space with menhirs, betyls, cromlechs, or cairns, megaliths that defined its singularities which were occupied for the first time by an animal recognizing at once its world and its dead. The corpses turn into stones or boundary markers and these latter into statuary in which no one any longer recognizes the spirit of places, one's kin.

A garden is organized or born around its statues, the boundary stones and roots of its site.

Whether you draw or write, imagine that you're sailing on the Ark—a box that's full like the horse bound for Troy or the rocket pointed at the Moon—in the company of the old patriarch who was the inventor of wine and a collector

of species, and imagine that the declining Flood is resurrecting islands on the liquid surface: then you see coming towards you, through the gentle lowering of the water level, steeples, summits, treetops, roofs, towers, and heads whose tips are setting about piercing the paper. They are forming into groups of archipelagos, and the returned world is forming all alone its first variable gardens, which aren't lacking in ponds, basins, or in brooks.

The flood, inundation, or transgression no doubt signifies the greatest social violence, war that vitrifies the planet and covers it with a smooth and desert surface, a blank sheet before all drawing, a white unwritten page, whereas the drop in level brings back peace, leniency; write in serenity or kindness, the world is beginning. It begins again, as is the custom, with paradise, with the first garden. There's no garden without this dawn of the earth at the top of Mount Ararat, where it's reported that the Ark had moored.

We're holding neither quill nor drawing pen; the object itself attracts their points from behind or beneath the sheet. The statues puncture it while it descends toward them. The method is to come to a landing.

The more time and age advance, the more the work increases and the more the landing takes place. The things themselves—concrete, carnal, full, inert, complete,

beautiful, present—close neighbors, come there. Their dense, incalculable number pierces the paper so multiply that one has to write frantically, even though nothing more remains of it than tatters, as tiny as confetti. Abstract, youth loves to devote itself to a violent and rare geometry or theory; maturity, more earthly and calmed, rejoices at plurality, welcoming the droves of detail of the local.

While maturity is becoming enriched, the page itself is crumbling and becoming null; thus one thinks, at given moment, one is writing or drawing one's finger in the sand or on the soil as God must have done on the morning of the first day, a divine temptation, but one that's brief since the author, then, in turn enters into the earth in order to seek or increase the treasure and take over from the old lineage that's getting out of breath from propagating the spirit of places through the provining that runs from country to page.²⁶ And takes, at that moment, his authentic and proper place, that of the object, the true site of things, the locality of the world that, piercing the sheet of the piece of writing or the drawing, is their sole author.

One only dies from an excess of love for the place. One only writes from an excess of love.

The signature comes from beyond the grave.

Before the War

FETISHES

Time

FETISHES

Time

Born not far from Spain, before the last world war, in an old bargeman's house on the shore of the Garonne, my brother and I loved to watch, without anyone suspecting it, through a kind of transom or round dormer window that opened in the attic, our rope-maker neighbor, alone, twist the hemp into long thick ropes on his spool; indolent like those who repeat ancient gestures, his waist surrounded by yellow strands and tied like a spider to his bobbin, he slowly made progress in front of a low wall beyond which opened up, like a volcano, the oval-cratered arena in which bulls were put to death five to six times a year. Nothing could be older in my memory than the luminous matador before the black beast in the midst of the yells or in the lull of the great white silence beneath the sun; nothing could be more remote in my flesh, except perhaps the gigantic tumult of the floods. Cheek to cheek,

squeezed, pressed together by the narrowness of the window, panting, eyes bulging, we were waiting, drowned in the tide of fury, for the wild animal to collapse all of a sudden at the strike of the sword. Neither my brother nor I chose any other vocation for ourselves than that of torero, and we would train in the corridor, face to face, after class, instead of doing homework, one of us mimicking the horns, the other hanging the banderillas on the first's shoulders, quickly passing to the stomach cavity. Up until the moment when rugby overshadowed the bullfight and humdrum work the ancestral games.

The trumpet call resounds; it's time for the kill. Facing the beast, the flat and curved sword aiming for the small of the shoulder, the free horn in front of the groin, facing the man, both of them, muffle low, entrails offered, suffer the short eternity of narrow anxiety: they rush one toward the other; he who charges receives a charge.¹ A suspended moment, solemn and resolving, in which it's unknown whether the sword or the horn will penetrate deeply into the groin or the shoulder, a red and black wedding at its apex, statuary immobility. The half-human half-animal group has existed since Antiquity: faun, sphinx, centaur; we see it in this flash of a moment, an ox backside with a black tail, a torso and head of light, striking each other down. How are fetishes born?

No, the bullfight does not merely consist in killing the animal, but in the fact that the matador links the passes of the faena to perfection, as close to the bull as possible, in a long sequence of movements such that one can see at certain moments amid the cheers the whirlwind of two bodies melt into a single immediate statue.

To rediscover the secret of the centaur or the sphinx, I have to go back to the intuition that I had at that age during the very second of the kill. I have to remember—the nether side of the time whose roaring new culture, sports, motors, radios, forgetfulness of pain, killed the running of the bulls;² the nether side of at least ten wars; I was not quite eight; Manolete was making his entrance in glory and had to await the end of the world butchery to die in his own blood in Linares;³ at home, at the height of the Spanish Revolution, we nursed the Whites and the Reds, wounded, dying, each with their own ideas, both with the same death, just before receiving the enormous tide of refugees from the north; I have to remember, to feel once again the odor of the attic, the dust and dried prunes, the odor of slightly rotten hemp, to see again the colors, sky blue and sky white, yellow and black, to feel my cheek pressed against my brother's, my neck breaking against the hard frame of the dormer to the point of strangulation, to hear again Spanish swearwords coming from the bottom of the house for and against the two

parties, indistinctly, and the hurly-burly of the hideously impassioned crowd in the arena-crater, but why does the organ thunder of the Garonne's inundations predominate? —Here is the symmetrical instant where the two shadows fall toward each other, where the matador's sword is raised above the muleta and the beast abruptly lifts its head, an immemorial solemnity, a marriage, a mixture, an alloy of two races; no, I don't remember this moment from my childhood now, I remember that at that time I remembered what had been lying in my flesh in a nascent state since my most distant ancestors, that at that instant I remembered the birth of the divine.

Everyone around me, my brother, myself, the rope-maker tied by his waist to the turning post, the Reds and the Whites, the crowd with a thousand mouths, the brown eddies of the furious river, we all were commemorating, without knowing it, the moment when man was born from ceasing to kill man by killing an animal. A celebration of the pass. The being that's dying in the center of the turbulent cone no longer has a name close to ours, it bears horns: a Minotaur in the labyrinth of my memory.

We didn't know who was going to die, the bull or Manolete. We knew perfectly well who was going to die: the bull, six times in the afternoon. We played at exposing Manolete, who risked himself so much that, in fact, he was going to die in twenty years' time in Linares. Accidentally and after having killed hundreds of bulls.

The play-acted uncertainty, with odds unequal a thousand times over, celebrated the substitution, progressed with the possible death of the man toward the remembrance of the day when, for the first time, our fellow man did not die, but rather the animal, when our violence changed species. I remember that in those days I remembered that the rumblings of thunder brought the stream of time to the reminder of that day. We were commemorating by shouting the instant whose memory we had lost, the moment of passage, of lieutenancy or substitution or vicariance of the victims.⁴ Before that statutory moment, man would regularly die; after it, an animal was executed in his place; at the exact instant of the passage, the two, together, insert the horn and saber into the groin or the shoulder of the other and fuse together forever in the virtual of death. A thin fissure of time from which the ritual gushes, a symmetrical instant in space or a limit through logic, but above all primary, original and founding of our history and its time: mankind delivers itself from death, is born, by making the point or center of the cone of violence hang over a living being of another species. The terrifying cries drowning my child's body, the overflowing inundation, the Spanish civil war and the world war, the militants of every color, the spectators, my brother and the spider slowly climbing and descending endlessly around its bobbin all celebrated with a multiple

cry the birth of the first man who at that instant I recognized in me, a kid fabulously old in his flesh.

The statue with the human head and hindquarters of an animal—centaur or sphinx—immobilizes or represents the instantaneous passage from human to animal sacrifice, in which the beast represents man. Monstrous fetishes divinize this boundary stone, from three o'clock in the afternoon on. Statues of substitution.

The new culture established by ten wars, whose product, remainder, or survivor I feel I am, has for a long time forgotten how fetishes are born. I believe myself to be obliged to tell, today, for the sake of my grandchildren, how I lived, in those immemorial times, such daybreaks. We participated then in sacrifices before attending mass, pagans from before Christianity, Christians preceding the newness, scientists after.

Did I perhaps know all of history?

Around 1900

THE GATES OF HELL
THE EIFFEL TOWER

Mass
Work

THE GATES OF HELL

Mass

Experience

Wandering, resigning, despairing of ever finding peace, whoever passes through space invents places. The path unforeseeably comes up against observatories, humble or glorious, where he dreams for a moment of pitching his tent because, from there, another world can be seen. Is port finally in sight for him? A happy valley at the end of the earth, a calm or choppy bay, a cave, erect tree, island or divine shore, no, the expanse traveled is not homogenous; singularities interrupt it: our fathers called these apparition sites holy places.

At the bottom of the fault, when the ground shook and opened beneath the lightning strike, a shepherd once descended to discover a dead and naked giant lying in a bronze horse, a tomb from which he stole a ring that made

him invisible and king. Before the event, the plain extended, monotonous and gray. A shepherdess formerly entered a grotto in which she saw, dazzled, a woman in a blue and white dress who greeted her: she became a saint, although speaking patois. Poor and destitute, the wanderer, running behind his herd of ideas or animals, stops, filled with wonder: some thing, someone, God or Being, appears. Rarities are found in space.

There or here, the appearance, dense with meaning, almost reaches language. Everywhere else, we pass—strangers, at the dawn, to things, to the soil—through the world of silence. Here, I'd swear that the landscape is saying. The phenomenon finds its logos, all by itself. Expressed differently, in the language of simple folk: the apparition speaks: that translates the word “phenomenology,” taken from scholarly vocabulary.

Our world is collected in essential places, pockets, folds, summits, crater bottoms, gates to another world, an opening onto things.

Cast five times, grasping the planet like a hand, in Zurich, Tokyo, Philadelphia, Stanford, and Paris, rue de Varenne, *The Gates of Hell*, which Rodin called his Noah's Ark, resembles the bottom of a crater, where a crowd is burning and drowning.¹

A gate opens or closes a threshold that's taken for such

because in this place a law is reversed: on this side a given rule rules, on the other a different law begins, so that the gate rests its doors on the neutral line where the two legislations counterbalance one another and cancel each other out as on the flat beam of a balance. Thus a mountain pass brings the upward slope and fall to zero. The singular site participates neither in this world nor in the other, or it belongs to both.

Places of apparition open or close like gates, which have a connection with death. We console ourselves over it in only one way, by saying that we won't suffer at the point of death. For: either, living, death hasn't taken us yet, or, dead, it will have rendered us insensible. A null instant separates the time in which we're still living from the time in which we're already dead. The gate that our wide-open eyes never see except closed opens blindly. Rodin's gate remains closed. Life gets lost in an anesthesia from which death descends into the detail. We don't really know whether the null balance or scales will one day separate with its tilting fork the gentle from the implacable for reward or punishment, but we conceive or imagine the consoling thought of the analgesic moment making life without death tilt into death without life, although no one has come back to tell whether this sophism holds or is lacking.

A place in the world exists where I will die, my own gate. The singular sites that my wandering, haphazardly,

encounters form a sequence of stages that prepare me for the last station.

Thus space and time open up through some gate that yawns or gapes open onto what language calls by the same word: experience. An expert gate, the same term, that is to say, open onto an exterior. The gate is a kind of pass.² The world and life lead to a threshold that bars an elsewhere. The technical image of a black box does not signify anything different from what the word “empiricism” says: it’s a matter of drilling an aperture to reach the inside. Experience: a hole towards the outside; empiricism: a window into the interior. In sum, openings onto another place. But the naïve narratives describe the same method, which grants access to Bernadette’s grotto, to Gyges’s cavern, then to a tomb, and lastly into a horse whose bronze flanks are pierced with observation holes. Experience and empiricism correspond in language to the box model; the shepherd’s and shepherdess’s grotto and tomb send this phenomenology back home to the simple folk, ill at ease with refined languages. They describe statues: one contains a corpse, another greets and smiles. The gate opens, the mouth opens. This is the fundamental opening of experience. Preceding scholarly vocabularies and elaborate models, the narratives derived from anthropology describe their observations perfectly, without excluding or eliminating anything. Condillac

didn't do anything else: he opened a hole in the idol from which he drew his ideas.

An internal law rules up to a threshold, after which the law is changed. The shepherd became king and the shepherdess a saint; after the orchard where the apples fell, we learn the attraction that makes the Earth and the stars move just as much as the fruit. In the middle of the Mexican desert, the Gate of the Sun seems, to our ignorant and weak eyes, to be put just anywhere: it's an observatory.³ But the milestone on the road to Damascus where the wanderer fell from his horse, the Massabielle cave, the fault into which the future king of Lydia, a counterfeiter, slipped also merit this name. Being from there, someone encounters another world, Being perhaps.⁴ The observatories that we reserved for telescopes and books filled with figures have, despite the forgetfulness, replaced these places experienced by an ordinary life. Experience does not always and necessarily lead to the apparent or real road of the Sun and the setting of the stars, but most often to another world, perhaps more real than the real one, where phenomena, saved, do not remain the massif in which life suffers and passes. Stonehenge and Carnac still aim for this global world more than the pure space of figures and orbits. Heavy and dense observatories precede our old theodolites and movable domes. Yes, Bernadette is right: the discourses of the

appearance follow far behind the first dazzling moment in which the apparition speaks.

Let's erect a statue at that station, there where Being says that it is.⁵ A bronze horse in that cave, a mummy in that tomb, a plaster woman at the entrance to the grotto, or nothing but a naked rock at the summit of the mountain where God Himself thundered. A mark of meaning in the half-opened box. This statue is related to place and stability—hence its name—to experience, to opening, to the relation of the thing to its word, to the name as such, to the simply raw stone.⁶ It's related to death.

Sculpture bears ancient witness to the anthropological genesis of experience in general. It carves, drills, and fashions. Rodin is right: gate is the true name of the sculptor's ark.

An internal law rules up to a threshold, after which the law is changed. The body goes as far as certain gates; the world prevails past the apertures of the skin. The five senses stop at these thresholds which it is now a question of going beyond. The Gates of Hell or Paradise? The horror, rather, of those who detest experience, or the ecstasy of those who bathe in it. Let's go beyond these childish terrors: the skin, in tatters, pierced by expertise, mimics the world pierced with places. The mouths of bodies and things open. Shadowy mouths, golden mouths,

golden gates.⁷ Like scales being balanced, a suspension bridge launches a passage from one bank to the opposite one, from one country to the foreign, from one language to another, from one sex to its complement: a golden or temporal gate between the mother's or lover's legs, on the watch for first experiences.⁸

On the nether side lies matter or magma.

Homer, Virgil, Dante place the passage not far from Vesuvius or Mount Etna, singular sites where the earthquakes, opens and gapes between two plates and from which one can descend into the other space. *The Gates of Hell*, sculpted by Rodin, rises not far from the Golden Gate Bridge, on the edge of the San Andreas Fault, an unstable and trembling bedrock, always at risk of breaking so as to let us pass.

Inert Mass

Things are called thus because we take them individually to be such, whether natural or produced. That is an object or this is a thing: the indefinite article, nevertheless defining unicity, is the important part of this judgment. Leibniz went around saying that a *being* was first and foremost *a* being, by emphasizing in different ways the two identical utterances.⁹ He called this ontological unity

occupying a site a “monad.” What would become of ontology without location or unity, without monad or dasein?

Let’s understand by “physics” the science that works under this title as well as the relation to what we encounter in the world, the one in which we’re immersed, with all hands:¹⁰ the river and its gravel bed, the sand dunes, the mountain or the ocean, the earth, the wind, the animals, the crowd, the city, the calls, all kinds of networks ... nothing of all that do we call things since mines or quarries only contain rock or coal and the networks only murmur with information, non-individuated, announced by a partitive article.¹¹ The earth bears, the wind pushes, the river and the crowd overflow, the sky and the city envelop, the stone holds, the house covers, the water flows just like the sand, not to mention the fire and the history and the knowledge. When the earth opens, it closes on both sides of the wound: one must start again, and therefore cut again into its mass.

Why do we call ontological that which divides or splits up these indefinites into unities or subsets and puts them into a place? Language’s work begins; separation has already injured being. Or: if the thought of being escapes neither unicity nor location, there is behind being and them an anterior, indefinite, and fluctuating mass, without determination of site or place, which the Ancients divided

up, no doubt by antiphrasis, into elements that, mixed or transformed into each other, come and go in order to create time.

Mass is basic, as fundamental as space and time. Physics knows it, since it makes them its first three dimensions: traditional metaphysics only knows two out of three of them. One must begin with the beginning. Therefore with the senses, the gates of experience. Therefore with space and time.

One must begin with mass.

The Latins called “mass” heap or pile, from the Greek word that signifies the dough that one kneads before cooking the biscuit, bread or vase, individuated. A crusty chunk of bread or a fetish, placed there, comes from a mass of moist and dense dough, without shape or catastrophe.¹² The corresponding Greek verb says the action of kneading, that is to say, massaging. God massaged the first man in the clay and created the statue of the first Eve by massaging Adam’s rib, the hermaphrodite’s breast.

The Latin verb “to macerate” signifies “to soften” or “to soak.” Mass mixes some earth and some water or some solid and some fluid wetness, previously without unity or place, amorphous sets from which space will come, a topology that’s conditional for every metric and every distance, a source mixture for time.

That is the first object that the first subject works first. “And God said, ‘Let the waters of the heavens amass into a single mass and let the continent appear. And it was so. God called the continental mass ‘earth’ and the mass of waters ‘seas.’” The original work of separation or mixture done by the original subject on the original object. Creation, the name of this initial deed, accomplished by God, the name of this initiator, acts on the great massifs of chaos in the most ancient traditions, Egyptian, Hebraic, or Greek, which are divided into mute and loquacious.

The kneading of dough and the separation of masses seem to be acts that are so primordial or deeds that are so original that the English and German languages borrowed a common root from Old Saxon which means “shaping the earth” or “building in cob” to form their verbs *machen* or “to make,” in which mass becomes legible again. Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, which had had the happy idea of a genesis of objects or a genealogy of subjects by objects, is therefore lacking what its languages precisely contain: a philosophy of mass.

I would call the first *homo faber* “mason”.

“Matter” remains an empty metaphysical word, with neither value nor foundation in the physical sciences. If philosophy doesn’t have to dominate science or become its slave or handmaiden, it must at least maintain compatibility with it. Now under the word “matter” in the

subject catalog in the libraries, it can easily be verified that matter left positive knowledge around two centuries ago, and that consequently it won't be found there.¹³ Some political philosophies use it while laying claim to that scientificity that would give us divine knowledge if we could define it. Misleading advertising sometimes seduces: above all in philosophy because its practice requires an entire reflexive metalanguage in which one says what one is doing without always doing it. Physics ignores matter, for its part, studying atoms and particles and calculating their mass.

Language knows matter better and links it to the mother, its origin, if I dare say so. Latin calls matter “tree wood” because it produces offshoots like a womb.¹⁴ When we say *madrier* [beam] and *merrain* [shook], even “metropolis,” we most often forget the ancient alliance of “matter” and “mother.” Therefore the idea of engendering everything from the former could be called a linguistic tautology since it amounts to that other tautology, so banal, and, in the domain of inert things, so false, that everything has a mother and owes its birth to her womb. Materialism, never scientific, remains a philosophy at the breast.

Let's introduce mass into philosophy, in a way that's compatible with physics and the other sciences and placed by them among the fundamental units in dimensional

equations, at the same rank as space and time: all three units counted by them as pure quantities. They measure dimensions without inquiring into their nature. Yet philosophy, called metaphysical at least on this occasion, precisely inquires into their nature. What are space and time?

What is mass? It measures the constancy of the ratio between acceleration and force or velocity and energy. These latter can vary with space or time; the weight of a body can change; its mass stays constant. This conservation is necessary for a real world to exist and so that we can act upon it, reliably, in practice and in theory. Mass's permanence plays an analogous role to the constants that prohibit perpetual motion of every type. Nothing is free.

Work, experiments, theory, or knowledge therefore all presuppose it, two times over. First of all, as a condition for reality: without it, no world; the shipwrecked person, swimming in the middle of languid waters, cannot get a foothold; for such an acosmism, all knowledge would be reduced to logic or mathematics, all experimentation to language, sensation to statements, the tool to the observatory, the hard to the soft and language itself to the performative that produces what it says by the sole fact of saying: thus speak archangels, philosophers, judges, administrators, or the mouths of the media. Mass conditions the existence of the things of the world that

conditions us, and its permanence conditions the universe.

Next as a regulating or canonical condition: nothing can be removed from or added to it without inevitably finding again what has been subtracted from it or taking in it what has been added to it. Independent of time and space, it remains stable. It is the first statue: raw, testimony to a real that's independent of the mass of humanity, crowds and messages.

A primordial action, statuary repatriates mass—strange, inevitable, ceaselessly returning, equilibrium and content of the world, first object—by unifying it, like a thing; by individuating it, like a body; by localizing or marking a space by its means; by stabilizing mass like a dead thing or body; by therefore stopping time; by giving mass limits it cannot leave, by defining it or even by inventing the act of defining. By meditating on the two strangenesses that are the inert and death. Sculpture, acting in this way, replaces a primitive practice. When the first physicists, breaking things with hammer blows until they could break them no longer, invented the atom, did that act or idea proceed from different intentions or needs? Sculptors or statuaries, by breaking or unifying, act as proto-physicists.

They lay their hands on what is not a sign, on the stable mass—statue or atom—that guarantees that a thing exists that is lodged in space, that withstands time and doesn't care about signs and meaning—radically foreign

to our schemings.

The Work's Mass

Rodin draws the entire work from mass. He called *The Gates of Hell* his Ark, in Noah the Patriarch's sense no doubt, whose boat carried the bodies of the species, fluctuating over the amorphous flood, but also in the subtle sense in which the ark designates the box, the primary stock from which everything comes, Pandora's secret casket, the capital or basic set. It's equivalent for the sculptor to the painter's palette. May he who does not dispose of this black horn of plenty—industrious, happy, inexhaustible—not attempt the perilous adventure of the work. At the bottom of the Ark, of the box, of the horn lies mass. Here the layer takes on the sense of mineral treasure. Everything that the bottom contains surges, here, in front of the entrance.¹⁵

The same Rodin draws his *Balzac* from a kind of formless pedestal. The divine becomes human and the human inert in his work and in his body, which haunts an ample and floating coat into which his old writer's arms are thrust; in other roughcasts, he's drowning in his own chest or poorly supported by his colonnade-legs. The pedestal comes up to the model's head; mass invades the form; the body emerges from its sabots; Balzac is born

from his ugliness. Did Rodin know that Balzac knew that?

The old painter Frenhofer from “The Unknown Masterpiece” hides and shows under a veil his ark, *La Belle Noiseuse*, a painting that hides the beautiful woman and shows the noise, a hideous mixture of forms, colors and tones from which a living and delightful foot emerges and stands out, an imprint from which a Venus jumps out and is born, whose torso, head, and arms are not seen. One might think it the gates of hell reduced to two dimensions, where mass threatens the pedestal.

Raw, the non-fashioned and non-masoned mass, rough, mixed; raw, the mass before the sculpture and the palette’s mixed paints before the painting; raw, the world before words; raw, the slack waters on which the ark is floating; raw, the pedestal.¹⁶ In Italian, *zoccolo* or the sabot. Praise to the author in sabots, Frenhofer or Balzac or Rodin; glory to the artisans who don’t elaborate the made starting from the already made but who attack, face to face, with courage the face of the cut and work in mass and magma. Worthless, the cut-outs and copyings; worthless, the repeats and taking overs; worthless, commentary, even intelligent commentary; the only work of any value is the work that rises, direct, from the pedestal; long live the problems themselves, long live the sabots.

Frenhofer puts them on Venus for shoes, Rodin does

the same for Balzac, and his Ark is only an immense sabot floating on the first waters. The Hermes and Aphrodites rise from there, Aphrodite whose foot marks Balzac's canvas and only brushed my noisy genesis by a thread, a noisy genesis linked to the linearity of the written style; Rodin kneaded them full-size in mass.¹⁷ By means of the true three-dimensional volume. Real objects. What luck! How can hard mass be said in soft words?

One encounters women and things that are beautiful naturally, come from their mothers' wombs like this, or from divine wills or the hazardous hands of time, made or born in this way. One encounters ugly bodies and faces that can do nothing about this factual state.

Thought, an intuition, good intentions, work, or love suddenly illuminate gestures, eyes, skin—raw, ill-favored. The light beneath the appearance passes above. For this reason, language says the word “sublime.”

Beauty: thus shall it be. But the sublime results from a work and a mixture in which ugliness and indifference take part, which make the below pass above and transform the solid into vapor, as once again is indicated by the word, and the raw into breath or spirit. What flame changes this hard into soft, the thing into meaning, the dead into living, stone into sign?

Sculpture is of the sublime as tapestry is of subtlety.

The Living and Social Mass

Just as the seeds in the sunflower's massive and round flower grow over a kind of common pedestal and ceaselessly feed on it the way it does on the global mass of the sun, so we are born, live, and die dependent on the mass of matter, itself no doubt independent of us, born of the dust and returning to the dust, kneaded from carbon and nitrogen and returning, decomposed, to the nitrogen cycle, respiration and nourishment following this same cycle; we therefore never leave the common stock of birth and death, paradise, hell, moving ourselves over it at a small distance from it, corn seeds on an ear. The massive gates construct such a pedestal, from which humanity comes out, to which it returns, after some temporary apparitions on the surface, for a fractal and contingent Brownian movement. Humanity emerges from the mother-matter, from the womb-box, from the jambs of the gate or beams, beneath the lintel, an immense and teeming metropolis.¹⁸

Just as seeds hold on to a placenta, the way living bodies do to inert mass or mother-matter or isolated individuals do to a continuous, dense, and solid massif, so we are born, live, and die dependent on a connected mass of relations, a multiple network of rites, religions, languages, customs, signals, ways of dressing, a common

stock that's more and more independent of us, who control it as much or as little as we do the mass of matter. Rodin's crowd, naked, a multiplicity of bodies, emerges from the surf and cries, shouts, complains, touches each other, tears each other to pieces, sprawls body to body one over the other, male over female, old over young and woman to woman, fights each other, kills each other, roughs out with naked hands and skin the other mass by which it is also fed, from which it is even born and into which it will disappear in dying, forgetful, or memorable history.¹⁹ The original magma can be called mass, the chaotic dough of prime matter, or the mass, group, crowd, multitude, gathering of bodies making bodies.

Do we reduce to shades, each shade similar to the others, different by number only, wandering, risen, apparent, on the pedestal or the massif of communication that we thought we'd created, which escapes us, bears us and creates us, a pedestal or massif as consistent as the pile of carbon and nitrogen from which bodies come? We shades watch its spectacles or performances, listen to its murmuring, permanently plugged into this cake or connected placenta and sucking its blood. Do we amount to media parasites, to noises or network stations?²⁰ Doesn't *The Thinker's* pseudo-thought emerge, like a triple phantom, from the newspaper, his morning prayer, from customs and opinions, his daily practices, from

stereotypes that he cannot give up or without which no one can understand him? If the word “publicity” signifies the “essence of the public” or “of the community,” thought never leaves it: Rodin’s *The Thinker* parades before the crowd of the Gates like a theatrical hero adorned with the attributes of meditation. No matter how he concentrates on himself, back bent-over, chin on fist, unseeing face, he remains immersed in multiplicity, the clamoring mass; how can a person think in that noise?

Seated, standing, before these gates, sprawled before the television set, we see, we hear the thought that’s swallowed up in the chaos of the publicity. Parading above, before, the thinker publishes. Increases the mass from which he comes.

A mass of matter, a living mass or crowd, a mass lastly of information.

The museum whose entrance Rodin sculpted was never born. A museum always opens through a kind of threshold of Hell since it only encloses shades: mummies, corpses immortalized by some dead work that will be fought over by a few jackals. We’ve lost paradise and hell; we no longer build cathedrals nor invent smiles in the bristling horror of Reims nor fluid prophets in tears in the calm of Moissac; we no longer know, senile, how to build anything but museums. Our impotence for works reduces us to history, which reduces us to impotence. We

bequeath sterility to a few sporadic or artificial children. A detail, already abstract, of a construction never even begun, Rodin's gate doesn't open onto anything, not even onto one of our necropoles, a fake entrance, a caricature, a postiche. The word "fetish" means "artifice": manufactured, made by the hands of men, imitated, reproducible. A postiche gate, a crucible for multiplying fetishes.

At the summit of such a threshold, the Holy Trinity would have formerly reigned in majesty: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God in three persons. The black gate only guards the shades of men, themselves images of their creator. A shade of a gate having to open onto a conservatory of shades, overhung by three shades that have no hands. We've lost the creation.

At mid-height of the same threshold, Christ would have lived and suffered, from his birth up to the passion, the second person and the only one incarnated. We have only retained from him the "I think" of *The Thinker*: ideas or words, reasons, texts. Not flesh, nor the roving life, the lively adventure in cities or deserts, on mountains and lakes, among whores and freshwater fisherman, but sentences and writing. We've lost the incarnation.

Is the gate closing due to lack of works?²¹

The Tribunal²²

The Latin word from which we derive the scientific words “mole” and “molecule” designates mass: charge, weight, heavy volume. The same name applied to war machines or the enormous and complicated apparatuses that the armies used to siege cities and to try to capture them by force: the god Mars, it is said, had daughters, the Molae, who personified the exploits of war. The moles or dikes, barrage-masses that make for good ports, withstand storms and waves, whose overturning is said by the same word. A battle of mass against mass. Levying of troops, earthen or stone levee, the bad weather clears.²³

The figurative sense keeps on shifting into the regrettable sense in which the literal sense is involved: the “mole” or “mass” says trouble, danger, burden, effort, difficulty, problem, work, and overwhelming hatred. At the beginning of *The Aeneid*, before the founding of Rome, when Virgil evokes this great labor: *Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*, he hears the patience of history and the work of the negative, but—even more profoundly than his successors—without the form of the concept.²⁴ What a dense and hard mass to carve! Never completely abstract, the word, even less concrete, remains moral and rather pejorative. The adjective *molestus* does mean “painful,” “regrettable,” “disagreeable,”

“importunate,” “displeasing,” “dangerous.” The verb “to molest” comes from there.

Patience and courage are necessary to carve in the mass or to shape it, to work directly in what has not already been formed. In my country it is said: go to the coal, faced with the raw quarry, in the mine.²⁵ Dig in the layer. Honest or upright work comes from there.

The closed gate prohibits access to another space. In the Quattrocento, Ghiberti, in Florence, erected the *Gates of Paradise* and Rodin opened and closed our century by sculpting those of *Hell*. The philosophy of mixed bodies will build, I hope, those of a *Purgatory* or intermediate place for phase transitions, a half-breed by blood or language, for mixed and pacified notions. We are simplifying much by naming that other world behind the gates Paradise or Hell, that other world that’s anterior or posterior to birth and death, permanent and situated elsewhere, to which neither our concepts nor our customs would be known. They are named in this way because a Tribunal sits before the portal, and its rulings without appeal decide between good fortunes and evils, separating definitive despairs from eternal ecstasies. Not so fast. That, on the contrary, defines our world. For the Elysian Fields or the blessed gardens that are beyond hope to be torn up from the valley of tears, they would need to escape the grasp of every tribunal, and that would be

sufficient.

For, in human matters, the judiciary marks the final deciding authority, if the reader will observe and forgive the tautology. Our lives run alongside a thousand laws: lives that are good or bad, just or criminal, free or enslaved, guilty before ethics, morality, habit, and customs, in civil or criminal law, in relation to politics or the administrative, for jobs, mores, truth, language, files, papers or accounts, codes, figures, in the eyes of others, and by the noise that they transmit, receive, and spread ... The social sequence forces us to leave one wicket so as to present ourselves before the following ones. The collective is immersed in the time of judgment. Consequently, there is nothing beyond the Tribunal, understood as the supreme form, either in the social sciences or in the philosophies of knowledge. We've known that for a long time. The eighteenth century of the Enlightenment saw the formation of the critical disciplines and the nineteenth century of storms saw that of the philosophies of final authority. Metaphysics, instructed in global human experience, seeks the site from which rulings can be pronounced without itself in turn becoming the object of a ruling: always a critic and never open to critique. This final deciding authority goes by the name of the final judgment, if the reader will pardon the tautology and laugh at it.

Therefore the final judgment dominates our own world

and defines it, as the sum or integral of the wickets, courts, and orders, as the active form of philosophy. Its gate bars any place whatsoever, in Florence, Tokyo, Zurich, Stanford, or Paris, it doesn't matter, the current term of the series bearing the law of the series. The gate does not open onto another rule.

A gate opens, closes, one or the other; decide, with the middle excluded. By this logic of two incompatible values, a gate symbolizes, better than a balance, judgment. For the beam can hold itself flat when the pans counterbalance one another, while the double doors only know opening or closing, only know decision. Exclusion or inclusion, without any third place. Sentencing or dismissal.

Thus our valley of tears, staked out with gates or railroad crossings, bifurcates everywhere. To really change place, we must escape from the judicial grasp that defines and dominates it, from the deciding authority or the Tribunal as the concrete and abstract, local, and global form of the space in which we live and think, as the sum of our labors and words, and that would be sufficient. That signifies the most distinctly in the world that on the nether side or beyond, that outside of our world, lies indecision.

One doesn't separate or divide up mixture or mixed bodies—purgatory?—chaos, the background noise, or the unanalyzed. Or mass.

Carve, cut into the mass to penetrate it, to grasp its interior, and you will only discover two exterior walls; everything must be started again. Opened, yes, closed, still.

Twenty defined, nameable, individuated, famous bodies emerge from the Gates: Paolo and Francesca, Ugolino rise from the text of *The Divine Comedy* and from the Hell described by Dante, the pardoned Prodigal Son comes out of the Gospel and several metamorphoses from Ovid's poem, but more than 150 anonymous people emanate, without phrases, from the confused ark, a box tossed on the viscosities. All of them, known or unknown, resurrect from the dough or the earth, from waters one would say were first, from anguish or dream. From mass.

In the mass of matter, the human mass or crowd fluctuates: from the inert matrix is born the maternal womb from which we come, each and all together.²⁶ From there, a chaotic hubbub rises, visible, like a mute massif, a noise from which two or three books that designate a few bodies by name free themselves. Rare, the word in the clamor of raw, living, multiple, mixed things.

No one, ever, opened those Gates, closed. No one fastened its double doors to some breastsummer, or this lintel to a wall, or the wall to a museum.

Nonetheless these men and women, naked as on their

first and last day, spring out, as though it were wide open.

Manifest, it gapes open and brings the compact mass into the world: chaos, mouth, hole, well, port, box, arcanum, horn of plenty.

Open and closed at the same time, unique in the world, Rodin's gates, lifting the principles of contradiction and the excluded middle, elaborate a third place without an excluded, a new space outside the decisions of every Tribunal.

Sing Hope, all ye who cross this threshold.

The Thinker doesn't judge, infinitely merciful. Forgetting every critique, he innocently creates. To produce, for mass to emerge from forms, one must escape from the judiciary. That is sufficient. The Final Judgment disappears.

Our world remains a place of cases, the Hell of accusations, if the reader will again forgive the tautology. *The Thinker* and its author, with leniency, invent or discover, outside the tribunals that seize the world's space, a strange space in which things literally excuse themselves.

In every European language, in the north as well as in the south, the word *chose* [thing], whatever form it is given, has its origin or root in the word *cause* [case], derived from the judiciary, politics or critique in general. As though objects themselves only existed according to

the debates of an assembly or after the verdict delivered by a jury. Language claims that the world only comes from it. At least it says so.

We sometimes feel that if the cases died away—miracle—things as such would be born.

The world shows things outside of any case, exonerated.²⁷

Language is checked, sculpture, mute, shows it.

The closed gate opens onto mass.

Neither the bronze nor language describes it as tranquil, serene, peaceful; it's crushing, difficult, dangerous. Sculpture, through its mute art, as well as philology as articulate expertise, inquire about it. And physics writes that it has an energy that multiplies the speed of light by it. Mass menaces: it's going to explode. It has exploded.

We now know another hell into which we entered collectively when the gate opened nearly fifty years ago in order to settle a case.

Which of us will be resurrected from it?

THE EIFFEL TOWER

Work

Three hundred meters for the glory of no god, not celebrating the victory of anyone or of any productive invention, three levels without traditional, religious, military, or economic function, outside symbolic usage, without torch or sparkling head, stupid but scholarly for the time in which an engineer calculated it, as transparent as it is stripped of sense, showing its emptiness between its crossbars, useless, laughable, quadruped, the Eiffel Tower is nonetheless Paris's signature. No one imagines the ship without its mast. How did they poster the one before the other stood?

It's there so as to be there without making any other sense than that. Static, built to hold, posed, withstanding winds on fluid foundations, but supporting above all its own structure, uniquely referred to itself, no, there's nothing to be said about the Eiffel Tower but banal

numerical equations and this thesis. The word “thesis” only says position, or the affirmation that stands firm there: yes, the tower stands on its four legs, stupid and stubborn like a boundary stone. And what next? There is no next or elsewhere but only this place in the middle of the legs where the highest point of the head is projected, right at the bottom of the mast: the absent center of the hollow void.¹

A boundary stone is there so as to be there without making any more sense than that. Since it exactly occupies or fills the place, it cannot designate it; it is that place. The verb “to be” even means “to stand there,” upright like that boundary stone, which makes no sense, which gives out no sign; the rest on the contrary designates the boundary stone, for it is the there.

We couldn't live or think without reference; we needed places to go to, to come from, to pass through, to live, to set up the bed, to set the table, to make a fire, love, children, works, to be born and to die, points, centers, foci, navels, wells, springs, locales, sanctuaries. A deformed block or megalith, a cairn or menhir, Gallic, Gaelic, a crude stone that other ancestors called a herma, or a mass fallen from the sky, an aerolith called a meteor could all serve as markers, landmarks, poles, stakes, stocks, fixed points by which everyone recognized the place from which he drew his origin and to which

everything in the world was related: I come from a hearth a few leagues from there, from which the universe is organized. Turned toward that place, the world and we watched or adored it. Did we ever think without a landmark? What can we do without it?

No towers without guardrails: twenty railings or parapets prevent the suicidal from intentionally jumping to the bottom of the mast, the way others threw themselves under the wheels of the chariot that bore the statue of their god or more recently leapt by car into the road mortality statistics. If one knew how to preserve old corpses for a long time, the four pillars of the Eiffel Tower would plunge down into mass graves or piles of mummies, so much did each tier in times past serve those in despair. Why does death entice there rather than in this commonplace field or under that laughable tree? Why does popular imagery, likewise, tie a tortured prisoner to the central stake of the native village in a primeval forest or jungle? Time, rain, frost, September leaves and tears have erased Moloch and the blood of the victims of Baal, or of gods still to be born around the menhirs. Do the statues, standing, hide these victims beneath their pedestals or constrict them within their metal sheets, smothered, inside? In the reference's very place lies death, which makes space something other than a homogeneous void. Being-there is easily translated into

the French language: *ci-gît* [here lies]: the ancient funerary phrase. “Here lies” the woman I loved, whose tattered body is sometimes populated with worms. What else must we inevitably return to? The corpse makes the stone, and the stone makes the place. “Here lies”: that means here rests such and such, but at bottom means: by virtue of such and such a dead person, the layer for here appears.² Scholarly French defines the situation by the layer, felicitously translating the ancient and primitive practice. Death causes the here or the there to be born; I was born not far from the place where the forebear is dissolving. I situate myself by means of layer and distance, therefore by means of the interval from death.

I would have liked Eiffel to have put his tower up in the place of the lion, at Denfert-Rochereau, so as to sink the fluid foundations of the four pillars into the catacombs, the way the Abbot Suger founded the Basilica of Saint Denis over the crypt in which all our kings lie. Texts never have us descend into anything but distinguished underworlds, in the company of geniuses and queens, history’s paranoiacs, and therefore hoist us toward some member’s paradise: a club. There one frequents posh people, transformed into images or shades, like on television.³ Dead, they’re changed here into words. But still individuated.

Now when Paris expanded a bit, it was necessary to

build over the numerous old cemeteries and gather up into a single place what was lying there: in the hollow quarries, in the exact place of the stones raised into the form of monuments, substituting for statues and institutions, a good billion bones were piled up, skulls, hips of just anybody: tramps, salt-tax collectors, teachers, whores, carters, policemen, civil servants, parasites, wigmakers, administrators, pimps, greedy businessmen, tool grinders, students from the Sorbonne, professors from the Sorbonne, crooks of every stripe, innkeepers, notaries, garbage collectors, doctors, racketeers, rock-breakers, ministers, convicts, abbots, candle-makers, serial writers, drunkards, plus the rare ones who had expired in the odor of sanctity, alone. An immense and collective reduction began, the craft industry of gravediggers calling "reduction" the piling into a small box of the remains that were stretching out in several coffins when they took up too much space for the small amount of volume they attained after a short time. You think you die alone, whereas you come quickly back, as in the good old days, to the boarding school and the barracks, to the hospital or brothel, where even to go to sleep you're crushed. And the family laughs at seeing at the bottom of the same box, intimately mixed, those who mortally hated each other, for the sake of glory. So at that time two or three million skeletons were reduced, skeletons more or less damaged that a Cartesian genius

who was well-educated at our schools ordered into parallelepiped embankments, in the midst of which those who descend into the underworld for fifteen francs pay their visit.

Signs put up everywhere, sometimes in Latin, vainly announce the word before the silent jaws that lost so many teeth for so long after their tongues had rotted. The writing would go out with the electricity; the final sigh strangles every voice. At the bottom of the black and deaf cavern, what can be done with the word that, written, can only be born from the light or that, spoken, requires sound? The Word descends into the tomb: what does that sentence mean, what were we saying when we were singing *descendit ad inferos*?⁴ How do the mummies of the pharaohs, with glass eyes and closed mouths, read or recite the texts engraved on the walls of the Pyramids or the *Book of the Dead* in the darkness? Three thousand years of waiting summarized, suddenly, in three days. Hell, the noiseless and lightless tomb make something entirely different from the word reign: the thing as such, the stone, bone, death. A reduction that's parallel to the first one that leads us to what doesn't think, speak or produce any sound, doesn't say "I" or "me," but that we nevertheless are.

In these true indistinguishable hells, the rib and the metatarsus make the dominances, whether muscular or

social, intersect; the mix-up doesn't care about individuals, in a pile. No solitary cell in this cold home for the old and dying, nothing but disordered chaos behind the perfect cube faces. Does a word exist like sea, earth, water, or air to say this unitary and mixed element that quickly becomes an ossuary? Nitrogen and carbon? No, the best word remains: us. Us finally acting as a block, as the masons and politicians say. Us finally brought together, associated, forming a substance and aggregated subject. I think and speak; we are silent in the black box.

Ulysses, Aeneas, or Dante Alighieri, the geniuses of Homer and Virgil sang beautifully among the shades of the masters, escaped like them from true death, so as not to descend into the mixture; and therefore spoke, conversed, individuals named with individual names. No, hell can't be defined as a realm or space for shades, even pale ones, because in order to cast a shadow as well as for writing or reading, light is required, and there isn't any in those places, because in order to draw a shade, its outline must be followed, and in those places the edges get lost, in a heap: hell is distinguished by mixed bodies. The communal grave dissolves the individuation and arrogance or hope of the name. Go then and search for a soul there; a God at the least is necessary to recognize one. Us, mute. Us without limits or skin or flesh or border or edge or definition. Us mixed. This mixture has no

name in any language. Us, crowd, entangled stones. Us subjects, each above and below all. Us rocks, objects, things. A new mixture of the subject, in the plural, with the object. Us subject–object. A trismegistic category of metaphysics.

If I leave every thought, every word, every individuation, then the reduction takes on the meaning that the gravedigger gives to it. It discovers, mute, the thing, treasure, at the bottom of the tomb, the layer-mass in the layer-place.

He who passes between the two aligned masses or goes for a stroll in the Parisian ossuary, beneath the ground, as though between two walls of dry stones, in a hollowed-out street, and recognizes that hell resembles the city, avenue for avenue, wall for wall, places or roundabouts, bifurcations and crossroads, risks getting lost if he has neither map nor companion, the old bones replacing the stones extracted in order to construct the buildings that will make shadows in the light, above, the bones replacing the stones used to build the walls of the street, below ground; we are bones and by these bones the visible walls are supported above; we are stones and on these stones the highest towers are founded.

The cellars of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, rue Bonaparte, conceal pieces and masterpieces by the great and the not so great names, the Prix de Rome for sculpture since the foundation of that institution, groups

and statues of all sizes and forms, an ill-assorted pile of nudes, clothed subjects, limbs, pedestals and bodies, heads and torsos by the hundreds of tons, a relay in the subterranean shade between the Catacombs and the other foundations, remains of the fine arts between death and technology, right in the middle.

No city can call itself by the name of community if it doesn't thrust its feet into its own necropolis. There's no work without a descent into the underworld. No philosophy without the mute and long experience of this fundamental we subject object. Of this pile.

At the bottom of the south pillar, the elevator carries an innumerable crush of motley tourists to the levels: Russians, Japanese, Guineans, West Indians, Gascons, or Americans, a *mêlée* crowding bodies of twenty origins, classes, nations, colors or temperaments, religions and obediences, dressed, undressed in twenty fashions according to sex and season, ecumenical, a number hiding like a cipher the subject who just paid to throw himself from the stories. Where does this freight elevator start? From what depth? Where is it going to dredge the mixed *turba*?⁵ In the layer.

Founded there, the object rises, an abstract statue, ahead of that of Liberty, still representative, whose interior is by the same author, the last pyramid, the Tower of Babel come back and finished, in which languages

merge, the first rocket, still motionless, a white box that's empty, hollow, light as lace, with no mystery.⁶ Founded there, the Eiffel Tower rises, bony, a frame, a skeleton assembled with columns, dowels and ankles, spines, crests, ribs, patellas, gutters, clavicles, collars, knees, petrosal bones, jaws, trapeziuses, vertebrae, acetabula and condyles, flanges, gussets, washers, double ears, dovetails, diagonal braces and crossbars, metal sections, riveted posts and girders, both I and T. A large quadrupedal and microcephalic animal, full of humans like the Trojan Horse, Phalaris's bull, or any box whatsoever: a train car, a bus, a flying fuselage, a missile.

The mixed "we" climbs, without rite or religion, the intersecting rungs of this Jacob's Ladder and fills the motionless voids between the girders with its mobile flesh. From the collective, subjective and objective magma, rising from the layer, the three elements appear: the group temporarily plugs the holes and windows of the object that's constructed by and from it, minus a few subjects rejoining the layer by the shortest path.

A vertical interchange between its foundation and its frame, the Eiffel Tower lets a jet of men be seen as one can admire jets of water elsewhere. Just as certain concretions are formed from a turbulence that has been mobile or maintained for a long time when the spurting, fluid and stable spray falling back in streams leaves chalk

or limestone, solid and salts, likewise the steel colossus, like a termite hill above the agitation of the termites, seems to be born from the random and regular movement of the Brownian mass, rising and descending, motionless for an instant on the levels, coming from the dust and close to returning to it.

Fluid or dense, the crowd passes in this street, which certain people leave by stopping to climb up the floors of a given building, which others join by descending from the buildings and mixing into the passing, in which, mobile in the flow, I'm mourning a dead friend who loved the area around this place and often strolled in this busy street⁷ where I'm calling to mind, at the same time as him, those who will die tomorrow among today's passers-by and who will stop to descend lower than the sewers, and those who, new in relation to yesterday, are moving at this moment with us, road users, all passing through the variable, horizontal and vertical vortex, rocketing to the top twenty meters above the ground, and to the bottom, the basement, ten meters from the roadway, a flow that's sometimes so dense with trucks and cars that all movement is brought to a standstill like a hardened frost, one as stony as the walls of the houses, as porous as the concrete, a flow linked by signals as though by a metal lattice work, and caught there, myself a statue, I imagine these multiple and local turbulences, these exchanges

between roads and constructions, passages and stops, flowings and waits, exits and injections, lives, deaths, as being formed from the same viscosity, sometimes soft and flowing—the very men of flesh and bone, of cries and gestures—sometimes crystallized into rubble stone, bricks, girders, windows, just as a liquid whirlpool leaves with time, and depending on the heat, its thickness and speed, a chalky and limestone trace; thus the bodies and houses, the houses and bodies, living or dead, mix in the same manner at the same time, that's how we—crowd and collectivity—endowed, it seems, with what's called will or project, build the streets and cities, objects of institutions: because we pass.

We build. The dredger extracts from the face of the cut beneath the lacustrine or fluvial sheet the sands and gravels brought by the normal current or moved all at once by gigantic floods and that are stabilized by this place in the bed, living or abandoned for ten or a thousand years, a hardened, packed-down aggregation that mixes the southern mountains and the eastern valleys with the northwest, a temporary concretion of constant streamings; the bucket chain of the dredger or the pipes of the suction dredge throw the volume of aggregate into the sand transport that descends the current or goes through the canal before offering its open belly to the clamshell bucket cranes that toss the gravel into the shock hopper from which a steady stream of ballast flows onto the

conveyor belts, a stream that branches into effluents, some of which rise to twenty meters above ground and others of which descend into the subsoil, and depending on the place or crossroads of arrival, grinding machines or crushers or several storied vibrating screens break, wash, sort, separate gravel and sands henceforth ordered, then starting up again in a secondary circuit with other wide belts of conveyance that throw them into tall bins or low areas while a stream throws the silty wash-waters back into the river in a succession of sedimentation tanks and cascades, while dump trucks are receiving in their beds by the loaders' buckets the same outflow of measured alluvia that they transport in a chain or calculated circuit in the cement mixers from which, mixed with chalk and cement in an eddy that's uninterrupted for a certain length of time, a powerful pump draws it in order to throw it onto the patio that the masons are pouring. Flow does the Garonne,⁸ flow do the sands with the water and the gravel through the pipes or scraper chains, by the cranes and ships, the conveyor belts, buckets, hoppers, cement mixers, liquid turn by turn piled, cloven, broken, granular, abundant through expansion, sorted, ordered, regular, mixed, viscous, finally hardening around metal frameworks in the respective forms of pillars, walls or ceilings, deep piles or vertiginous towers. The water of the river freezes into sand; the mortar sets in order to

build the house. Mortar: the same word holds for the container, solid, and for the content, a diluted mixture ready to solidify; we don't know the distant root of this mixture word; we don't really know whether "mortar" rings like death, that event in the flow of time that stiffens us as well and then mixes us with things. In the meantime, we work: the dredger receives the river's flow and passes it to the bargeman who passes it to the crane operator who passes it on to the men at the building site who watch over the sorters and crushers who pass it on to the truckers who pass it to the form setters and masons. We build: water and viscous fluids pass; we pass. We pass things on; each of us stable at his station, a bit softer than the metal frames and fixtures or cement filling, skeleton and flesh, living or dead, but harder than flowing water.

We pass. No, the dredger doesn't really pass the flow, too hard, too heavy, to the bargeman who doesn't pass it on either to the crane operator or the mason and so on in the series of the mobile eddy that's going to freeze; no, each acts on a motor that he starts up, watches over, regulates, feeds, accelerates, positions, stops and maintains, soft orders over hard forces. The motor, at each station, makes the pass, and the driver of the motor makes it happen. A new turbulence leaving hard traces. Come from geological eras and forests that were slowly carbonized kilometers beneath the earth, brought from the Middle East, from Venezuela by oil tankers or from

harbor refineries by tanker trucks, a flow of fuel set off again temporarily stops in the tank and sets off again for another cycle, short; stemming from atmospheric phenomena, heat, pressure, dampness, descending the mountain torrentially or retained upstream by this dam, a flow of current become electric and later conducted by vast networks of towers and cables—rendering hideous a thousand formerly peaceful and quasi-divine landscapes—stops at the stator and sets off again for a new cycle, lightning-fast; the unstable and mobile air in the labile atmosphere reaches the rotor of the fan and sets off again from it into the turbofan engine. Every motor presents a complex topography, a labyrinth in which flows circulate: carburetor, cylinders, pistons, connecting rods and crankshaft, camshaft, valves, exhaust manifold, coil, rotor, fan, driveshaft, turbine, compressor, high pressure, low pressure, the outflow of gases. Liquids, fluids, currents of all kinds pass, bottleneck, transform, accumulate, get freed up, in the chambers, along the avenues, in all an intersecting, multiple, bifurcating design, a movement in an immobile shell relaunching mobility. It's sometimes naively asked whether the river, supple, digs its gorge or whether the valley—cliffs, shores, and sides—binds the watercourse by forcing it to flow where this watercourse itself makes its way, hard. The answer, I think, fluctuates like the river that descends by means of the feedback it maintains with the land. The

liquid sculpts a solid that shapes the liquidities; the stream sculpts the basin that shapes its thread. The fuel transits by a labyrinth made for this transit: for it, by it? The motor's topography shapes the energy river, but the set of operations or necessary passages sculpts the motor's topography. The space that's drawn makes the force that draws the space; force traces paths that conduct and produce force. The bed sculpts the valley, which in turn shapes the bed. We pass in the street and city that remain for the long term as the traces of our passages, of the same status therefore as necropolises. How are we to understand the hard without the soft and the soft without the hard?

What would become of speech without the narrow constriction of the throat, a constriction that was sculpted by the speech that was shaped by it? We wouldn't talk if we knew how to or were capable of drinking while breathing, inhaling or exhaling while eating, if anguish wasn't choking us. The soft word creates the hard body that creates the soft word.

The jet of men buzzing with words and confused languages makes the Eiffel Tower that maintains the jet for a long time. Here's the secret of sculpture, projected onto a giant model.

The Egyptians finished the Pyramids, and Eiffel as well put the finishing touches on his tower. But the confusion

or multiplicity of languages forbade that the Tower of Babel should ever be completed. They undertook it in order to climb the heavens and, as far as I know, such a ladder, well placed, would climb interminably. In other words, unfinished, the Tower of Babel resembled the infinite Tower of Babel.⁹ The Hebrews consequently succeeded with it; that's understood from the coherence of the language. It is always said that they preferred the written to the image and the word to the thing; therefore, in the Bible in the place just mentioned, it was first written that this will kill that, that the book will kill the edifice or will destroy it, that the lamentations will rise before the wall that has lost its top.¹⁰ However I prefer the joyous interpretation by which the ruin imitates the never-ending staircase, therefore divine. At least, the Babelian story includes or institutes this taking over that language must do after the construction.

Now whoever climbs on those elevations in Paris or Giza wonders why one should arbitrarily stop at a given level, where taking flight would begin. Where I rightly remark that Thales discovering geometry at the feet of the Pyramids gives them this taking over by language since an interminable torrent of coherent and true discourses gushes up from the edifice, like a perennial spring: we're climbing to the heaven of idealities here by means of infinite series. If you put the Greeks on top of the

Egyptians, you get a good image of the biblical Babel. But finally Eiffel justified building his arrogant, absurd mast by the capturing of a radio antenna, source of an interminable torrent of words, in every science, in every language. Who would have thought that the Eiffel Tower would be heard more than seen?

All these towers rise infinitely, software upon hardware, an invisible column upon a tall pedestal of stone or iron, time upon space, soft upon hard, volcanoes of terms.

From statues rise words, prayers.

From idols come ideas.

I pile mountain upon mountain, Pelion upon Ossa, the Tower of Babel upon the Pyramid, the latter upon the mastabas, the Eiffel Tower upon the former, a road interchange or an interplanetary rocket upon the Eiffel Tower; I don't have the words or the theory, I don't have the pen to continue the series.

Each tower, another floor of the preceding one, tears a piece out of it. You might think a sort of addition for which the bottom tower gives the sum. The Pyramid contains all the towers.

Adds them up, envelops them, implicates them, was hiding them.

For millennia we have been seeking the secret of the

Pyramids, which simply keeps in secrecy itself. In the habit, custom, act of hiding, enveloping, preserving, conserving. Let's not superficially oppose Semites and Indo-Europeans: one Indo-European civilization and one Semitic one loved the light, Greece and Israel, devoted to revelation by the Word; one Semitic civilization and one Indo-European one loved the darkness: Egypt and Rome bury in stone and bind tightly. I've already written that about Rome; the same intuition holds for the Nile valley even more profoundly, if possible. From Athens and Jerusalem, we have learned breath, spirit, voice, and logos, writing and the lifting of veils, the knowledge revealed by speech or texts; from Rome and Egypt, we still don't know the discreet act of burying, concealing, silence and blackness, the closed box, the object. Greek audacity, astuteness, and lying were necessary in order to dare name *Pyramid*, "fire" said differently, that heavy and compact block, that dense and cold black box that lapidates the dead Pharaoh's body by the millions of tons: never will anything merit its name so poorly; why not call them Darkneses? Only their white facing shone out in the sun. Several talkative and superficial Greeks had to pass there who took the veil for the depths, the appearance for the object, the epiphanic sparkling for the thing itself. Egypt, even more latent than Latinity, buried itself deeply to remain invisible, black like secrecy.

We take the idea to be evident that knowledge

inevitably unveils, exhibits, brings into the light, into the said and the written the hidden black things, even though our Western culture, born in the Mediterranean, en bloc originates in an intersecting fourfold root according to which two ancestors, Greek and Jewish, always present in our flesh, impel us toward light by speaking frantically to the point of the destruction of things, but according to which two other silent forefathers, from the Nile and the Tiber, bury in forgetfulness the sculpted stones, the objects, hide, close, protect, preserve to the point of losing speech. Our knowledge arises from the day and the night, from transparency and opacity, from manifestation and secrecy. We only recognize half our knowledge; we only assess a half-knowledge. What remains is the black, the enveloped, the object-related. The irrepressible voice that endlessly says in us that it says that it says and so on ad infinitum, the hand that everywhere covers surfaces with writing fold the other silence, the waiting, the flesh, the thing, the gift a hundred times over themselves. The secret of Rome or that of the Pyramids is kept well by knowledge itself. The more multiple treasures are pulled out of the tombs so as to make them shimmer beneath the sun, the less is known. For knowledge here is identically the practice of secrecy. This practice implies then that explication flees in the other direction; this practice works and does not judge, creates without critiquing, thrusts its hands into the dough and the earth: by giving everything

to language, do we lose the power of creating? I am searching for this power by tracing back into the secrets long kept.

Empty, translucent, quasi-theoretical, entirely explicit, without mystery or secret, wholly metric, more in formulas than in form, the Eiffel Tower, a statue, expounds, through the resistance of its materials, a few theorems of statics: it approaches the logos through these tautologies.

It waits, lightly mobile on its fluid foundations, to leave the zone of the there.

I thought I saw its soul wander, fly, pass, breathe, like the wind, in its transparency.

1883–1884

THREE TALES BY MAUPASSANT:¹

THE TIC

THE HAIR

BESIDE A DEAD MAN

The Senses

Object, Dead Body

Dentures, Movement

THE TIC

The Senses

After the volcanoes went out, even though they've been sleeping for a very long time, muds and boiling springs have been bearing witness to deep hearths, latent, lying beneath the plugged chimneys, smoldering beneath the pozzolanic ashes. In the Dômes region, where so many craters sleep, it is said with likelihood that less time has passed from the last eruption to now than between the last one and the penultimate one. Many inhabitants of Auvergne still live on alert before the puys and plombs.

Maupassant, mortally ill, took the waters in Châtel-Guyon, a place hidden in a gorge, toward the foot of the Dômes. In the days of the thermal water cures, it was still believed that what laid in the earth or came out of it could heal the body: where, after all, do humans go, what do they come out of, where do they come from, where does their name ceaselessly return if not the humus?

Maupassant therefore returned to the springs in a region where they gush up, boiling. Healing is resurrecting a little.

Idleness facilitates a thousand encounters in the spas, where short or long friendships are formed. Sadness and monotony produce such blossomings: this word indeed says that the closed opens.²

Here are a thousand tangled threads to be grasped, held out by chance, for leading to the origins.

A couple, a father and daughter, arrived, trying to decide which way to head. Let's go for a walk toward a deep valley, a narrow gorge, heading back up the river toward its source.

A glove on her left hand, the girl was hiding a lack, a cut-off finger, while her father suffered from a most unusual nervous tic: every time he wanted to reach for an object, his hand described a rapid swerve, a sort of terror-stricken zigzag, before managing to touch what it was seeking.

Let's go back to the root of these illnesses.

Having had a heart condition for a long time, one fine day, Juliette, the daughter, died. Her father buried her with her jewelry: necklaces, bracelets, rings, and ballroom gown, pompously adorned. Already a widower and from that point on alone, he had an abominable first night.

Suddenly, in the middle of the darkness, the doorbell rang; Juliette, ghostly, appeared. Don't be afraid: they had wanted to rob her of her rings and, in cutting a finger, brought her around from her non-lethal lethargy. There she was; nothing could have been more natural.

At receiving, in the dark, the ghost or resurrected girl, the father, terrified, fled backwards before the apparition and made, as though to drive it away, a gesture with his hand that, from then on, would never leave him. A primitive scene was replayed before every object.

The father buried Juliette. "Here lies" the daughter. The essential point of the drama is played in that place, where a third is going to dig up the one buried alive. We know the definition or mark of this site: HIC JACET. Juliette is there; there is Juliette, whose remains fix the place. This expression, Latin or French, literally consecrated, is similar in meaning to two other words or verbs of place that we can write: SUBJICERE or OBJICERE, whose prefixes, attached to the same verb, require a reference that's lacking for them: lying (having been put or thrown) before or under in relation to what, in relation to where? "Here lies" gives the spot, designating or stabilizing it. The tombstone acts as boundary stone or herma. In short, the HIC JACET references itself; death defines the here. But for the two previous verbs, from which we have derived the nouns "subject," thrown, lying below, and "object," thrown, lying before, we have to ask:

under what, before whom, under whom, before what? The object, the subject, non-referenced, seek, require, a founding site. But the question *who* appeals again to a subject just as the question *what* appeals to an object. We're in a vicious circle here.

The one as well as the other relates to death.

The daughter, dead and buried, lies at the same time here and below. Here, in her coffin, at the cemetery and beneath the jewelry, necklaces and bracelets that Prosper, the servant, was going to try to steal that very night, digging up, by this move, the body. The scene, in the darkness, repeats others hidden in the obscurity of myth. Gyges, the Lydian shepherd, descended long ago into a tomb in order to gain power and fortune by means of invisibility; the servant, become rich, returned to his master's home, sure of remaining above all suspicion. No one had seen him, not the night, blind, not the girl, dead, not the father, trusting. Tarpeia, the young Vestal, died beneath jewelry. But let's leave that; we already know that the source of value comes from the dead body. Let's likewise leave the cut-off finger or the absent penises of the classical fetishes.

Juliette lies here, below. She resurrects, rises, comes back, appears like a specter at her father's home. A ghost, she is now there, before: subject, object. She was lying, *hic* and *sub*; she lies, now, *ob*. Theorem: the subject

becomes object.

The object, the subject, lacking any reference, find one in and through death since the remains define the here, mark it, fix it, in space and for time. They are organized and placed, take on meaning, in relation to death; relative to that reference, they can substitute for one another. What is the object? It's the body come back [*revenu*], the resurrected subject, what we call a ghost [*revenant*]—a statue. Or the apparition. Phenomenal.

The game or drama requires three positions: the master, the daughter Juliette, and the servant. In other words: the subject, the object, the “here lies.” Prosper digs up the dead girl, robs, and cuts her. This third between father and daughter dies of shock when the master calls him, and he enters and sees her resurrected: he opens his mouth, doesn't say a word and drops dead onto his back. Here he is: a subject in turn. He's going to replace Juliette in the grave, sacrificed in her place, a substitute for the statue. From now on he lies here and below, invisible and expelled. Gyges traveled the circle of his ring and took the place of the corpse. Here is the name of the servant: the excluded third. The excluded third between the subject-father, the master who speaks and recounts, and the apparition, the daughter become first a precious object, an object robbed, finally an object period. If we do our accounts right, the excluded third takes the place of the grave, of the “here lies.” The philosophies of the

subject, indeed, those of the object, are silent about this third reference place, literally exclude it. As a result, the invention of rigorous discourse occurred as soon as it was located and one knew how to name it. However we didn't know yet that the excluded third was a moving corpse, that the subject exchanges with the object.

The father's hand will always tremble from it, in zigzag. This word describes a broken motion that runs elsewhere before reaching its term. Before touching an object or taking it, the hand rushes in reflex toward a point where there is nothing. At least nothing we can see. It goes toward a shade, a specter, an apparition. Toward what the object was before being what we name an object. A terror-stricken zigzag from appearance to reality, from the apparition to the thing, from the phenomenon to the in itself.

The hand drives away, excludes, expels. The specter, death, the third. The come back daughter, the unfaithful servant, the entire mortuary scene. It traces the bad passage: maupassant.³

That's called a tic: the body indulges in it without intending to, as though at random, as though the hand had lost the sense of space, direction, purpose, target, end. As though there weren't any object. "Tic" is onomatopoeia; "zigzag" draws a diamond: words without flesh, terms of noise or graph. A mimetic noise from which words are

made is called onomatopoeia.

The hand outlines the relation to the object that appears before the birth of language. Both expelling it and driving it off as though the act of speaking had put an end to the gesture of exclusion. The body that thenceforth recounts, discourses, argues, debates, remembers, preserves the pre-gesture of expulsion in its mass, like a reflex, before touching or handling the object. Here is the hand gesture that anthropologically precedes *homo faber's* gesture or hand. A gesture that's retained, boiling beneath the plugged chimney, a mouth apparently gone out that no longer does anything but speak, a cold body that now takes and understands.⁴

Before dying and for long years, André Leroi-Gourhan suffered from Parkinson's. We would help him hold a cup or glass, grab hold of a knife, eat, drink, or take. No one understood the experience, had made us understand it, better than him: hand, speech, mouth, tool, upright posture, and walking freely; this man who was skilled enough to whittle with artistry botched or overturned everything, traversed with tics and zigzags. The master of objects was no longer able to reach them.

Should we understand that his body was supplementing his work by indicating, without saying so, archaisms anterior to what his books and teaching had described through language? In the vicinity of death, was

he shaking his hands as though to drive away the specters, ancestors of the stones?

We recognize the gesture of blessing although it changes with place and time, likewise the gesture of cursing. But we don't know the primary gesticulations that precede cursing or blessing before those rites are said. What did the hand do before the reign of the mouth?

It doesn't directly go or head in the direction of what is, nonetheless, presented before it. The object doesn't lie before the hand, at hand, ready to hand. It merely appears, it arrives, absolutely new, strange, frightening, spectral, ghostly. It rises from there, from below, so as to appear before. Then the hand drives it away, through fear, or rather, describes the rapid, rare, disquieting movement of this resurrection. The hand runs below, above, here, before. It follows the transcendental route HIC-SUB-OB, a path which, tomorrow, will go directly, methodically, from the subject to the object, when the direction will be called the "meaning": then, the emotion of beyond the grave having gone out, the mouth and all its reign will have quickly forgotten where the object appeared or came from.⁵ But the body will remember before the meaning.

The way the earth, under the mouth of the cooled volcanoes, shudders sometimes. How can we heal tics, except by taking the waters?

The tic retains an immemorial memory of the silent

body, the way the slip of the tongue betrays the memory of the loquacious flesh, anesthetized by speech. By its zigzag, the tic describes the movement and moment of appearing.

Here is the phenomenon before phenomenology: the apparition.

In designating this senseless spasm of the body, the mouth remembers as well. It no longer speaks with articulated words, but mutters: nothing could be rawer than those onomatopoeias whose sound imitates a noise with a cry. “Tic” is part of an immense family that mimics a struck blow, one that also says the tool with which you strike or the thing that you strike, and even the mark of the blow.⁶ In this set or factory of words, every vowel combines with two or three consonants like t, p, r, or k. Examples: *une trique peut taper sur un taquet* [a cudgel can hit a peg].

Therefore the tic expels, certainly, but to do this gives a shock and makes it heard. The hand strikes what appears, before. The primary encounter with the object, which the ear hears and whose sonorous effect is imitated by the mouth. The arm hits the stiffened corpse or sets about sculpting the hard statue. Listen again: the peg or the post driven into the earth like a stock names the first boundary stone.⁷ The layer.

Philosophy begins with experience and, it is said, with sensation; a rational examination of the five senses opens

with touch because it envelops the entire body. So everything comes to us from the tic. Indeed, the word “touching” is part of the family. Derived from the Low Latin *toccare*, preserved as such in Italian, it vulgarly signifies “to knock” [*faire toc*]. You still hear, in the language at body level, the low music of the impact, of the rough encounter with the hard object. Touching neither caresses nor brushes against at first, rather tic and touch hit. Expel, break, bore, pierce. Through the reflex gesture, the organism preserves this abrupt spasm.

Without leaving the onomatopoeias, the series migrates and bifurcates toward more complex noble areas: “tracking down” [*traquer*], for example, still consists in beating, again, the woods or thickets, to drive the game out of it or make other zigzags before reaching the object; “bartering” [*troquer*] still supposes beginning an agreement or contract by slapping one’s hand into the hand of one’s partner.⁸ Metaphors, all of them, of research, commerce or relation. From stock to swap [*du stock au troc*], the same impact [*choc*] is heard at the outset, which language tries to reproduce: the body preserves the trace of this initial big bang. Past the senses, after touch, here are knowledge and exchange, following. Hear the blow struck home by the hand, by the tool, on death, the phantom, the apparition, the statue, by stone on stone, before leniency.

The gesture, complex, repels ghosts. And sculpts them.
Zigzag, first writing.

No, knowledge does not come from the senses but from the impact on the stone raised above the grave. With Condillac everything comes from the statue and from it alone.

Our ideas come from idols, that which was to be proven.

To understand from where and how reason and even language came to us, we must plunge into the crater in which everything mixes under heat. You don't get out of it by stating conditions of possibility the most logically in the world or by rejecting the senseless without any examination or by excluding knowledge en bloc. I don't have any experience of a transcendental cold. Beneath the ashes gone out, a certain heat is boiling.

Mass, space, the object come from magma, from wandering, from the spectral; reason doesn't derive itself from itself. We don't know of any perpetual motion; we have never found anything that's free: everything, universally, must be paid for. Why should this law change here? In other words, nothing comes from itself, by iteration or tautology. Neither language nor reason precedes or engenders reason or language.

Rational and expressible science drags a comet's tail behind it, one that in no way resembles its nucleus and

which anthropology tries to understand. When the rational sets up shop, it expels the irrational. True. Therefore it takes its place. Therefore it comes from it. Should explication happen it drives off the inexplicable. Therefore explication substitutes for it. Therefore explication maintains an intimate and genetic relation with it. Science, with its hand, excludes this third: untouchable, it suffers from a tic.

To examine the comet's tail, vague and hot, and its relation with the hard nucleus, we must change languages while keeping its language, leave reason while preserving it, accept the third position and run the risk of finding ourselves expelled. The instructed third falls into the excluded third.

The change of language launches us into the literary and the fabulous, or into those myths that are said to deceive us but that were formerly learned in the humanities. We throw ourselves into these non-falsifiable lakes the way Empedocles threw himself into Mount Etna or Maupassant into madness. Only philosophy demonstrates that literature goes farther and deeper than philosophy. "The Tic," a short story categorized under the fantastic by the critics so as not to risk thinking, in fact constitutes our history's first metaphysical meditation on the object, on its first apparition and the conditions for grasping it between our hands.

To write it, Maupassant showed more courage than the

philosophers of the tradition. He expatriated himself: left here, went there, came out of an interior toward an exterior, horla.⁹ He lost his soul and reason so as to save them, the only rule for research; he lost language so as to take it up again in its nascent state, the only method for truly writing.

He launched himself therefore into the underworld, into the body and death, silent domains and mute solitudes. Having become wise, tired of those who are always rational, philosophy seeks reason underneath reason, in places where it doesn't reign, and it writes by touching the silence underneath language, the source from which the first breaths came.¹⁰

Accepting the third place, at the risk of exclusion, the instructed third, speaking at once in the languages of the irrational and the rational and taking them toward their common silence, aspires simply to the weakness of expelling nothing.

THE HAIR

Object, Dead Body

A psychiatrist presents a necrophiliac patient and gives his diary to be read, which confesses obscenity. The madman was sleeping with a dazzling, beautiful, soft, blond braid of hair that he would ceaselessly caress everywhere he paraded around with it, after having taken it from an antique piece of furniture in which it had been lying, hidden. He didn't wear it as a postiche but used it as a fetish. We would now call him a fetishist rather than a necrophiliac although the diary delectably describes a kind of exhumation.

Madness, it is said, is explained by being arrested in the past: in fact, the patient dreams of women from old, snows of yesteryear, snows dispersed in their powder.¹ He seeks dead loves through fear of the present, which bears death in its future. Delirium?

What is to be said, then, about the long cultures who

devoted their time, their work, almost their entire fortune to the corpses of their dead? Herodotus, in his book on Egypt, recounted that a family in mourning wouldn't give the remains to the embalmers for a few days if a woman who was young, pretty, or famous all across the country was at issue. Customs on the Nile side of things, deliriums on the other?

Before a certain date, a certain Antiquity, literally necrophiliac, employed a thousand living beings to immortalize the dead, as though the future were knocking at the door of the tomb without being able to flow further. Collective or individual time was involuting into the mummies and statues lying, rising, shown, hidden across the necropoles. Antiquity comes to an end at a zero point, which we commemorate every morning by the date, where time was reversed in such a way that we now count it in the opposite direction, no longer finding any obstacle in front, as soon as the tomb, empty, was placed behind: a formidable revolution concerning the subject of the dead and consequently concerning the subject of objects. From that moment, certain everyday gestures became insane.

The necrophiliac madman, although contemporary, lives in the ancient style. A born archeologist, he maintains an archaic relation to ancient objects. The piece of furniture and the hair he discovers in it both date from an incalculable Antiquity.

He buys a piece of furniture and sets about adoring it. What does the adoration consist in? The word itself says it: in the opening, at every moment, of its doors and drawers.²

This manipulation provides him with the raptures and joys of possession. But who can be said to be possessed? One evening he extracts the hair from a slot. This slot, the knife that slowly explores and pierces, the night spent searching for the secret, the abundant blond and auburn fleece found there delight the soul of the doctor, who has since become an analyst, accustomed to searching for what he has already found, the sex right in the middle of the golden fleece, in a not very black box.

A frightful cry rises, a howling of impotent rage that requires that attention be paid. The doctor has this obscene madman doused with water five times a day without turning an ear to that appeal: he has his idea; that is sufficient.

Let's hear the cry; let's turn our eyes from the beautiful poster to the displayed sex; the madman howls too much not to disturb theory. Sex sells by shifting our gaze from the uninteresting object to the bared body. It makes you think you've understood, by means of this very shift toward interesting sex. But the madman always shouts so as to move us.

The doctor rises. Goes to the cabinet, opens it. Forget

the beauty. Look at the piece of furniture.

What piece of furniture? The one that contains the dead woman resembles a sarcophagus. One might say the chest was “marvelously beautiful, exquisitely fashioned and worked,” the chest in which Osiris was trapped by his brother and put to death to the great despair of his wife and sister Isis, a chest so well fitted to his size that one might say it was his mummy, his dead body wrought, transformed into a work of art.³ What piece of furniture? The one that’s opened and adored. The corpse of the adorable ghost? Turn your gazes away from the piece of furniture and the beauty shown by the doctor; this latter accuses his patient of necrophilia and has him doused with water when he shouts. Turn your gazes toward the doctor himself, toward *his* cabinet.

The manuscript given to Maupassant by the doctor says that the fleece was found in the piece of furniture. But the one who wrote it talks nonsense. Therefore the text—not the manuscript, not the diary, but the narrative—asks the good question: does the hair really exist? Yes. Where? In the cabinet, dash it all. Which cabinet? The doctor’s.

Who therefore rises and opens, him as well, the box in which the fleece is hidden. And he must open it quite often and over more than one week, since the box was jam-packed with phials and instruments.

The madman adores the piece of furniture: opens and closes it. The doctor opens and closes the cabinet: nobody says that he adores anything whatsoever. The fleece lies in the piece of furniture, no one knew it; it is placed in the cabinet, anyone can find it there. The hair is equivalent to the hair, invariant, identical to itself, content for content. As a result, the piece of furniture, ancient and beautiful, stands out behind the cabinet, common and banal, container for container. Body to body. The two boxes will be opened. The madman searches, patient, passionate, anxious, insomniac; the professional, expert, scholarly, specialist, normal and established in the institutional, relies on the tranquil certitude of finding what he is seeking every morning. A black box for the first, a banal and white one for the second. The hair, manifestly, lies within.

Having the mane's rocket of dazzling gold as a common focal point, the two images get closer and move away: the cabinet and the piece of furniture are alike and differ from each other, as well as the doctor and the madman, as well as the short story and the diary. As a result, the narrator is dissolved between the patient and the caregiver, half mad and enjoying caressing the soft hair, half reasoner and disgusted like the doctor by the obscene perversion, one foot to the left, one foot to the right, experiencing mixture and capacity. By "capacity," don't understand the concept, or the distinct idea, or

demarcation, but the possibility of containing everything at once, like a recipient, or of seeing everything at once, like the angle from which the entire segment is seen, but the possibility of understanding.

The doctor explains the illness by a theory that allows him to douse the one who shouts. Yet the madman has preceded the learned man by searching day and night in the box for what he didn't know he was bound to find there, something the doctor finds every instant, without having to search for it. The discoverer pays for opening the box with the loss of his reason or with his exclusion from the group formed by those who hold the monopoly on the definition of intelligence or who get paid for exploiting the discoveries of others. Hero and parasites, generous genius and annuitants, saint and political power-brokers. Sadi Carnot, Jr., at the beginning of the same century, died in an insane asylum after having opened Prometheus's firebox, after having drilled a spring in the side of what was going to become the piece of furniture par excellence, the mobile, or better, the motor, after having understood what golden flow ran from that opening, after having discovered the secret of energy power and enriched his times.⁴ Later Carnot would be translated into metaphors for understanding dreams, complexes and madness; energy would be translated into language. Who comprehends the other, the inventor or the

learned one? Capacity comprehends them both.

We have no trouble opening the expert's cabinet from which the hair comes out and flies toward us. Next to the phials and instruments, he has arranged a few books. Here's their banal inventory. All libraries of this type contain: *On the Cult of the Fetish Gods*, the first treatise on the question, published in 1760 in Dijon by the President Charles de Brosses; the great *Course of Positive Philosophy* by Auguste Comte, whose law of the three stages starts with the theological age, which is subdivided into three sub-stages, the first of which, fundamental and matrilineal, is named fetishistic,⁵ as though by going back in time a fetish in the President de Brosses's sense appeared at the beginning, containing the entire future or capable of containing the periods to come; *Capital*, by Karl Marx, in which exchange-value, ghostly, mysterious, and supernatural, with no relation to use-value, requires an additional explanation that so-called scientific economics requires of the operative concept of merchandise fetishism; values are exchanged like statuettes endowed with a strange power; the *Three Essays*, by Doctor Sigmund Freud, and a few others, which analyze, in the canonical sense, the overvalued object of sexual desire by means of the explanatory concept of fetishism, corresponding to the mother's absent penis. The doctor knows, has known or will know everything that allows a

doctor's chair to be won, everything that allows the clear boxes in which the hair sleeps to be opened without difficulty, everything that allows madness, religion, and history to be explained, while dousing the first comer.

The narrator asks the reader to adopt like him a third position. A friend of the doctor, a visitor of asylums, a reader of the moving diary, he is interested in theories, but trembles while caressing the golden bird who, flying from the cabinet through the office's space, lands in his trembling hands. Maupassant was really taking the waters, consulting psychiatrists, and would soon die insane. He accepted searching in the antique and empty piece of furniture.

In which he, like us, found—unexplained, ineradicable—death and the body.

Everyone knows what the cabinet contains, full, like the ancient Silenus statuettes, of phials and instruments. Its master key lies around everywhere; everyone has read the same books, become commonplace.⁶ Conversely, we don't know what the locks of the precious old piece of furniture, apparently empty, are hiding. If research consists in repeating the ordinary theories occupying the white cabinet, by pursuing it in this way, you will become a doctor, enjoying the power of dousing whomever you like; if you spend your days and nights, blades and points in hand, trying to bore a hole in a rare black box, the vast

amount of information issuing from it risks making you lose your reason and undergo the icy dousing. Let's search.

The narrator, a crossbreed of a mad and a sensible man, half-skilled in the sciences and seeing them as limited, eyes at the same time the piece of furniture or the cabinet and takes the hair in the latter as though it came out of the former. The first piece of furniture dates from a distant time, the second, no doubt, arrived from the factory: you have seen the same on every floor and in every department. Old and unique or recent and standard. The latter can't arouse the scientist's desire; the madman sleeps with the chest, dense with meaning. He loves dead beauties.

The hair is not a sexual fleece, nor is it a flow of fine gold; it remains hair, neither more nor less: for, decomposing little, the hairs stay preserved for a long time. Here is the transformation, the transmutation—what am I saying?—the transubstantiation of the dead body into a chest or of this latter into a tomb occupied by a dead body, whose hair is the trace, the mark, the remainder, a part.

Science and reason call necrophiliac madness the bizarre love of ghosts that, in the text and through solitary dreams, changes an adored piece of furniture into feminine corpulence, blond, tall, with lyre-shaped hips and cool breasts, but term culture or anthropology the

exact opposite change—practical, industrial, collective, approved, multi-millennial—of the dead body that's emptied, hollowed, washed, dried, hardened into a mummy equipped with its hair, an exquisitely worked box well-fitted into multiple boxes and put into secrecy, a black immovable chest in its tomb.⁷

The madman, a good archaeologist, traces back in time and follows the transformations, in the fitting order, by reversing them. He goes from the chest to the body the way mankind went from the dead man to the thing. But the patient's passion for the past doesn't merely lead him to times of old, to Thais, big-footed Bertha or the beautiful Roman woman, but toward that dateless year that preceded our time.⁸ Into the yesteryear of the constitution of things starting from death.

Maupassant or the narrator blindly seeks to answer the question: how did the dead body become an object? How did death, the mother of all things, engender them? How does the corpse become a preserved mummy, a hard and unrotted statue, like the hair, a full and hollow box, a tomb or chest, a fashioned or manufactured thing, a technical object? And to answer follows the traces back in the opposite direction and passes from the piece of furniture to the dead body.

Listen to the preliminary question, always the same: how does a heart, beating regularly, become a watch,

living its mechanical life? Conversely, can a clock become a heart again?

He adores objects: buys them, exchanges them, possesses them, collects, cleans them, maintains, improves, dusts, preserves them, observes them, feels them, handles them, passes from adoration to the laboratory, continuously. By dint therefore of looking at this latter night and day, of opening it and trying to bore through its secrecy, he discovers at last and sees that this form bears a golden fleece. How can we better express that the rest of the thing or form has to be inferred from the hair? We look too much at the blinding star and not enough at the piece of furniture from which it came, that is, the rest of the body, hips, thighs, and chest. The hair doesn't rot and therefore remains invariant across the transformations imposed by and in time, which is precisely why we find, perfectly recognizable, the dazzling braid. But over the same time, the dead body, the remains of the body, changes into a piece of furniture, the remains of the thing.⁹ When sister Isis collected the scattered limbs of her brother Osiris across Europe, Africa, and Asia to put them back in a chest, didn't she only find the indecomposable parts of the adored body, the hair, nails, and teeth?

The meticulous patient's scientific research, which was patient, passionate, and tremendously mythical since it

could be called the quest for the Golden Fleece, yet methodical and precise enough to devote itself to opening a closed black box, in a single stroke traces a prodigious past back to the genesis of objects. We don't have a word in philosophy to say this genesis, like pragmatogony for example, because we don't have a word old enough to express the root of the things themselves, not in Greek, not in Latin, not in Indo-European. However far back we may trace in and by our languages, we only find action words to say them, corporeal, collective or judiciary action. Things would only come from cases. From accusations. Likewise here: the madman can't excuse himself for loving and adoring things. Idolater, fetishist, his case having been heard, he undergoes the dousing. No language can comprehend him. Objects as we think we know them date from a quite recent past, but formerly remained tied to the corpse in the closet. He who loves them loses language and runs to death.

Let's seek, dig, I'm telling you, deeper into this chest; let's patiently open its doors, drawers, locks, or secrets; we'll find a body and its parts there: hair, certainly, the heart too, with its faithful beat, the jaw and mobility ... see them transform tomorrow into a wig, most certainly, and a watch, we've heard it, but also into dentures or some common device, and the piece of furniture—oh, surprise, surprise—into an automobile.¹⁰

BESIDE A DEAD MAN

Dentures, Movement

Two disciples are watching over the dead Schopenhauer. In the middle of the night, a silent minute that makes you think the sun won't come back, the cadaverous odor becomes so uncomfortable that they withdraw into the neighboring room, from which they can observe, by the open door, the destructive laugh that hasn't left the magisterial mouth and whose malicious rictus is illuminated by the candle for the dead.

Suddenly a very white form appears from that smile, runs across the immobile face and chest and with a faint sound jumps to the ground and goes under a piece of furniture. Sweating, crazed, panting, the two friends, ready to faint with terror, take a moment to get their breath back and approach, frightened: the smile has vanished.

The dentures of the cheered-up philosopher, released

by decomposition, made the loosened jawbones come apart so as to fall under the sideboard.

A tall, blond-bearded German, quiet, emaciated, tubercular, dying, with long legs so scrawny they seem to be two bones, a man quasi-mummified, recounts to Maupassant this old marvel, of which he was one of the two frightened witnesses, between the highest point of the sun over the burning Mediterranean and its loss beneath the sea in the midst of the sparkles. Whereupon the Frenchman evoked the statue by Houdon where Voltaire, seated, snickers, his grin preserved in the worked stone.

One follows the states of things with the eyes: a skeletal carcass at the end of its journey, endowed with a slow movement, an immobile corpse in putrefaction, a statue, a detachable prosthesis moving, of itself, under a piece of furniture.

Ancient Egypt, our first culture, devoted to the night of the sarcophagi, to its solar god, practiced a mysterious ceremony called, from the Pyramid Texts onwards, the “Opening of the Mouth.” Before the statue of a god left the workshop, the rite, performed at the sculptor’s, in the “golden house,” sought, it is said, to render the organs capable of fulfilling their functions. Did he give life to each statue? The same Egypt, having come directly out of the Neolithic and passed into written history, practiced the same rite on mummies. To give them back breath and

language?

Was our body reduced to stones and the dead before we opened our mouths? A statue, a corpse, the man who neither speaks nor cries, neither implores nor complains, shrouded in the silence of the brutes. Ancient Egypt celebrated the primitivity that preceded it with a ceremony in which it commemorated language's birth. It came out into the light of day through the mouth. Into the breath of spirit?

Two terrified students are attending, from an interval of thousands of years, by the half-open door's memoryless observation hole, in the pale candlelight, a similar ritual in which the mouth of the dead Schopenhauer opens.

What monster comes out of the shadowy mouth?

The mouth opens an aperture in the dead, stony mass through which something, sometimes different from a thing, enters and leaves: animation, vitality, language, expansive call; all cultures, every epoch, their philosophies have clumsily said, with one word or several—words equivalent and dark and again passing through the mouth—that very thing that renders living, speaking, active, conscious, sensible, thinking: subject. I breathe, I speak, I am.

Will the mass of stone become subject, or will the stiff corpse become subject again through the opening or

reopening of the well?

The localization of the for-itself or soul in the heart, liver, brain, solar plexus, depending on the decisions of the cultures and the times, escapes all evidence, always hidden in a deep center; while the mouth, yours or mine, even distant, makes the immediate presence of what makes us living and expressive be seen, felt, touched, heard, and sometimes tasted. Mouth object, certainly, verifiable by experience in the full sense, yet mouth subject, breathing, saying, unexpected, delicate, receptive, excitable, quick-tempered, emotional, biting, tender. Opening this orifice means going from high to low, from exterior to interior, but also folding or unfolding the edges or sides. The complex object–subject is situated on this warped border.

Here is a place where the stones, corpses, things of the world and the breathing, wind, language, spirit, for-itself, subject, all those non-things that we don't know and which perhaps know vibrate, mixed, in beatings and blendings.

In the volume or trunk of stone, wood, marble, granite, or chryselephantine mass, the sculptor opens wells. On the inert and already green flesh of the rigid remains, the paraschist carver incises edges.¹ The hammer hits the chisel head. The obsidian knife draws a surgical field. They make a hole. They pierce before smoothing. Make

large plates fly off. Make chimneys. Drillings that clear observation holes as though some gangue were covering over a secret obstructed by it, as though a form, a god, life, meaning, value, what have you, were hidden on one side or the other of a window that, unblocked, would let them pass. Rites for the opening of the mouth. But what have I been doing, for twenty-five years, tensed over a sharp stylus scarifying the white page, on the stone grain, wood fiber, sheep-skin, shining side of an obelisk, tearing the page up with stigmata so as to pierce meaning to daylight? Now speak, thing; so open your mouth, vellum. Those who don't write readily believe that it's a matter of placing previously conceived words or ideas on a medium the way a child would throw pebbles along a path that's already been opened up or sow seeds in the furrow plowed by his father, but those who spend their lives writing know that their bodies want to perforate the thickness of a partition in order to invent the chimney of meaning, the fold, the complex, the set of object-subject edges. Writing, like sculpture and mummification, carries on the ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth, or precedes it in the same sense. The written is the vocalicity of things.

It is thus that the stories of corpses lying in horse statues, like their soul or secret, their vanished motor, can be understood, stories of nested mummies of queens inside golden bulls, bodies, unique or multiple, of women,

of armies in the carcasses of animals, equipped or not with hatches by which they can be seen and touched, by which something, possibly, leaves or enters, and might make its voice heard. Did the horse, introduced into Troy, whinny or did the horde of Greek hoplites surge up from its mouth amidst the tumult and clamor? What complaint climbed to the sky from the mouth of Baal-hamon when, in the fire's roaring, it devoured three hundred and sixty first-born children howling in its red armor? The shepherd Gyges looked through the hatches in the side of the horse at the remains of the sacrificed king. Flaubert tore the paper with his quill so that we might see the horror of children burnt in the belly of Baal through the page's tattered remains.

The statue first takes the form of a black and unhewn box, unformed. That the sculptor drills to free its secret: perfumes arranged in the cabinet of ugly Socrates with the sculptor father. The work can begin again: in the inert matter, the horse; in the horse, the corpse; and so on as much as you please? What is to be discovered beneath the dead man's open lips? When the mouth is opened in the mass, you don't know just how far it goes. A chimney of explanation or knowledge, of the exit toward the daylight.

Leibniz described a set of monads or monks without any doors or windows, substances that maintain no relation between themselves or with the world except in God and

through God, guarantor of harmony.² These islands draw everything from their own depths: no one hears these music boxes, without apertures, that play, interiorly, for God and through Him.

Condillac constructed a marble statue and reserved for himself the liberty of acting on the entryways for the senses by opening and closing a defined window by which a specified piece of information would penetrate, a single and well-filtered one. It began with a scent of rose. The description focuses on pores: it develops the meaning of the word “empiricism,” or this latter sums up the essential.

In the scientific age, we speak of black boxes, of input and output, and we assess flows and their directions. We laugh at an out-dated philosophy that using a similar language nonetheless said nothing else. I suppose this philosophy would have laughed in turn at those strange superstitions that gathered priests and attendees around a statue or a mummified corpse for the ceremony at which a closed mouth was opened. Highly civilized, the Egyptians present there would surely have laughed at the prehistoric fertility statues, women with open vulvas, giving birth or not, of the Pre-Columbian gates, very often closed. In the age of science, we debate open and closed systems without always suspecting our heritages, metaphysical, religious, savage, without being conscious of our

immobilities. What have we invented since our prehistory?

Marble, armor, carcass, raw matter, dead flesh, skin, the chimney passes through strata that hide those strata one wants to free, the inert ones enveloping the living ones, the objective ones engaging the subject encumbered by them, lying under them which lie before it. If the strata were juxtaposed like sheets, work—easy—would only consist in detaching them. One would deleaf the variety the way one leafs through a book. But they mix in such a way that the chimney descends exactly into the varied. We don't always know how to decide whether, in writing or sculpting, we're cutting into the dead or the living, into the objective or subjective, nor when we reach the deciding authority that explains, free of gangue. Doesn't the pure reason lying behind the sensing statue's marble amount, once again, to a myth that it would still be necessary to drill? The mouth opens in a mixed body.

How to name this mixture—today still without name, but so frequent and widespread—of an inert and dead object in itself on the one hand and a living, animate, luminous, transparent subject? Flesh?

In this place in the world—the mouth, Schopenhauer's for example, but also the Knight of Hadoque's, who was statufied on the island—the world as such is annulled so as to give way to Will or Representation.³ Language,

voice, speech dictate and erase things so as to envelop or fill them with subject. The mouth creates a desert around itself in order to cry in the desert. The chimney, in plumes of vapor and waves, belches out some me and us. In these places in the world—the mouths—the world is summarized and concentrated: it is born from them, mouths which give the world; no more objects.

How do the mouths work? As usual. Whoever wants to appropriate things makes them into bodies mixed with himself, inundates them then with his own productions, sweat, breath, odor, urine, feces or signature, emissions of waves or ink, filth, orders and cries. Pure idealism properly expresses the stercoraceous origin of property, whether personal or collective, whether voluntary despotism or represented exchange. It vomits on a root so as to appropriate it, reeks as a means to chase away whoever is approaching, spits out its denture, splutters saliva or writes.

A first manner of writing signs a pure and clean surface with an “I,” a surface that this manner appropriates by dirtying it, the way a voice, deafening a space, drives the occupants away. Likewise certain products are sold signed so that even their buyers don’t possess them, robbed as though in a dark alley; the seller most certainly keeps them since possessing consists in depositing one’s brand or signature on an object. Likewise again, interpretation steals. It substitutes the

signature of a parasite for that of the producer, eaten.

In any case, a body mixed with subject appears.

Here is an object, supposing it exists. Before it, the writer kneels. Holds the breath of his mouth and his excrement, washes his hands three times and purifies his entire body. *Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas et circumdabo altare tuum.*⁴ I will approach your altar trembling. I know, I learn that there is no pure “I”; the “I” is the source of every impurity. We should write without signing. We should never talk about the thing, but make it, let it speak. May phenomenology not discourse on the phenomena, rather may the appearance, the apparition itself speak. May the angel come and may it announce. May the day shine without me. And the death that ravishes the light from my eyes returns all its purity to the day it was soiling. See with the day’s eyes, open the thing’s mouth. Drill furrows, wells, trap doors into the paper so that meaning emerges from there, so that the voice of things passes through the holes made in this white garment. Writing bores through walls or the ground so that geysers or streaming cascades can gush forth, sweeping along with their powerful flow the arm that pierced the dam and rolling it afar.

The object inundates the subject; a short while ago, this latter overflowed onto the former. In any case, these two major authorities in no way resemble two solids,

confronting each other face to face, crockery dogs glaring at one another, but rather two sources and some flows, that sometimes diverge, separated, but often flow together.⁵ The mixed body of subjective and objective abounds, stake, merchandise, fetish, the lived body, historical monument, the world and self. We can only grasp or understand this mixture under the condition, physical, of forgetting the solid state, the supposed crystal compactness of the metaphysical authorities, and of granting them a fluid state. It's a question here of a good solution.

We are seeking to describe the emergence of the object, not only of the tool or the beautiful statue, but of the thing in general, ontologically speaking. How did the object come to hominity? Before this coming, the body that has received no name in philosophy reigned, the originary knot, the confluence or confusion, the mixture of subject with object, the flesh or mixed body.

Yet our mixed body, everywhere a subject in a mobile way, an object through and through, suddenly solidifies without recourse, stiffened by death.

The corpse was the first object for men. Posed before them like a problem and an obstacle, lying. Any other thing, tree, stone, animal could or can enter into property, individual, collective, private, public and in this last case merchandise, stake or fetish. Before the dead body, every

subject draws back: the dead body lies there, cutting out its space, larger lying down than standing, more terrifying dead than alive.

Also the first solid: stiff, hard, rigorous, coherent, consistent, absolutely stable, the first stone statue.

But through decomposition or corruption the dead man continues to emit flows of liquid or air that invade and can dirty the environment: the lying subject pursues and uncontrolledly increases the subjection of the surrounding space. No violence would be able to stop it.

Working on the dead body therefore objectivizes it and solidifies it as well. All our knowledge and all our practices are there in embryo. Like the creator at the first minute of the world or the philosopher preparing analytical minutiae as conditions of thought, the mummifier separates the solids from the fluids, the consistent from the vague, the stable from the unstable, the form from the chaos, the distinct from the confused, the bones from the entrails. Emergence and constitution, by this last word I understand the stabilization of bodies and the birth of statues.

This very first work on the primordial object by the subject beginning at the dawn of culture puts the flowing and quickly corruptible organs into appropriate vases, the organs removed, separated, and then hardens all the rest even if it means constructing a hundred nested armor-

plates of linen, cartonnage, varnished wood, marble, and granite around the skeleton dressed in dry salted leather.

Mummy: the second statue after the corpse; the first object fashioned or produced, analyzed, the second solid.

The hieroglyph shaped like an ax or a flag—a brush?—translated by the Greeks as “god” and pronounced *neter* (ntr), also signifies natron, the bath salt in which the corpses were purified while being mummified: primordial and final waters in which the dead body solidified for seventy days.

Can it be translated into French as the *onction* [unction] during which the remains of a man are smeared with balm here and there? In return, the sign, supremely sacred, would designate the anointed one or the Christ in the Greek and then universal language. Dead, the Messiah did not undergo embalming but received unction with precious nard over his living body before his passion.

We are born or resurrected from these liquids.

The shadowy mouth gapes from the empty tomb.

In the rite of Extreme Unction, the priest anoints the nearly cadaverous body of the dying person with holy chrism on the closed eyes, the ears, nostrils, mouth, hands, and feet, saying: by this unction and His very lenient mercy, may the Lord pardon you the sins committed through the sense of sight, hearing, smell,

taste, and touch. Zola described this white erasing in *The Dream*. The ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth returns and becomes generalized to all the orifices or to all the doors of experience; it purifies the five senses, washes away their stains, the holy oil replacing the flows emitted or received by the apertures.

In *The Five Senses*, during the banquet of life, a local cogito causes sensitive and already subjective regions to be born on the body, regions that melt or eliminate the plates of necrosis and anesthesia, the impotent stiffness and inert frigidity by bathing them with a fervent and gentle streaming; these softened pieces assemble themselves, stitch and knit together little by little and vaguely in order to clothe or construct a specific body, multi-colored, personal, approximate and singular, different from the one that says "I" by speech, but quite ready to listen to it.

These local pieces come undone at the same time that they're being constructed; the body dies and not only at the article of the agony. The rite of Extreme Unction itemizes the articles. We fall into tatters and endlessly search for an idea, a love, a woman, an Other, or a melody to bring the scattered parts into harmony and sow a subject again. As soon as the limbs fall, they become objects. The corpse, the statue shatter, giving birth to things.

Formerly they would throw the Cycladic statues that

were broken into pieces into tombs: with flowers spread, limbs scattered in the sarcophagi, stiff, dead, cold originary objects, pieces closely related to the corpse, produced by it.

An act symmetrical to the local cogito, for which we do not yet have any name in philosophy, causes the object to emerge. Or finds it.

To the unification of the living regions corresponds the rupture of the entire dead body. A mixed flow, oriented, goes on one side toward a subject pole, its complete language, passing through the sensorial body's multi-coloredness, while on the other goes toward an objective pole and its complete laws, passing through the decomposedness of the dead body, a mummy or statue.

The Five Senses describes the mixed or multi-colored body in its light movement toward subjective, happy and soon to be unitary intensity; I'm describing it today at the same place and in the same state but making an opposite or complementary swerve toward the objects' multiple compactness. We don't know the status of this intermediary mixed body.

The mouth opens a chimney through which the mixed flow transits.

It forgets that it has teeth. It—slack, a flexible tongue, quite moist, a mobile veil, viscous mucus, labile tissue, ceaselessly lubricated, a source mouth, spring, funnel,

delta, transmitting, receiving waves in its conch or horn, aerial and fluid therefore—thinks it's smooth and wholly for itself—a canal or flagstone without obstacle or baffle, going to malacia—whereas it's hidden behind the hard barrier of the jaws and teeth, which construct the laugh and the word, without which, loose and flaccid, the cheeks would collapse over a hideous and wrinkled hole, hard teeth, solid, crystalline, aggressive, sensitive and insensitive, easily broken, extractable, replaceable by stones and bridges, objects. Can you imagine extracting the tongue in order to screw a wooden organ in its place? Whereas for the teeth or palate, a plate or sculpted stump of gold can be substituted.

An object–subject border that's so close to us it dissolves. We incorporate more or less make-up or masks, wigs, appearances. But false teeth abandon the mask for the face, become set in it, fitted to the living flesh of the subject, similar to it, alike, identical to a part of it.⁶ The body integrates them, forgets gold, ivory, steel or bone immediately in order to make its own flesh of them, by inundating the thing, by filling it with subjectivity the way a sponge swells with wine. The flows of the mouth bathe the teeth that also produce the flows of the mouth.

The dying old man tells of the dead Schopenhauer; the double short story traces back in time. What comes out of the living mouth covers everything with representation

and will; but what suddenly appears from the dead lips enters into the world like a thing. What issues from the living inundates the environment and appropriates it, what escapes from the dead body becomes a thing of the world. We discover this during a night of old, in anxiety. Will the dentures still bite, inert, solid, cold, immobile, artificial, false, and fabricated, but as such invested with the clever genius that made them, foreign to him who speaks?

Only the dentures will be left of the decomposing body, entirely taken over by the process that will bring it back to elementary flows; it will only leave this skeleton of the skeleton, harder than bone, more resistant because stony and fabricated. From Schopenhauer, the disciples only inherit his books and his dentures, the soft and the hard of their master's voice, two artificial things, two fetishes, stone and inscriptions. Everything Lucretius called simulacra.

The postiche is distinguished from the prosthesis the way a tenant is from the owner, by the sealing. The former is put on, wig or make-up, chignon, breast, eyelash, braid, or mask and is easily taken off, the second is incorporated: the one artificial like the other. The dentures, well-imitated, similar to the true, well-prepared or readied, are sealed or put in, in any case can be detached more or less easily.

We feel with our entire body that our organs can be detached. We make ourselves incomplete, we set sail piece by piece and in totality.⁷ A tragic experience but a drama without which there would neither be knowledge nor experience. We leave ourselves; the verb “to experience” says so of itself.

We are surprised with good right at the term “artificial:” why does it signify the false at the same time as the fabricated?⁸ Certainly owing to imitation, image, and fakery, from the similar to the same. But also from a contempt toward art. Industry first signifies the trickery of crooked industrialists. Inundated for two centuries with produced objects, we have been forgetting that our languages still shout into our ears that we are living in the falsehood and forgery of fabricated places. I have no doubt that Mérimée’s⁹ or Maupassant’s narratives, ceaselessly tracing back in time, were equivalent to powerful anamneses at a time when objects were growing vertiginously around them. From what upstream does this deluge flow? Have you on occasion counted how few objects our ancestors, theirs, used? That their rarity came rather from art? And suddenly industry multiplies the things that then become part of our needs, that satisfy and produce them, via a spiral that creates a new world and unexpected bodies. How can we not pose the question of

origin? Yet philosophers don't ask it, still under the spell of the subject or the collective. A few writers recount it therefore, in their common language, blindly, in a climate of dream, anxiety and fantastical madness. Yet when philosophy isn't said in a canonical and received language, no one recognizes it any longer.

The mad growth of the artificial therefore leads to the question of primitive fetishism. How are fetishes, the postiche, the prosthesis born?

“Since you say you know everything, oh Dionysodorus, do you know how many teeth Euthydemus has? And does Euthydemus know how many you have?” Socrates, asking this question, cruelly bites two vain, toothless old men in front of an audience of young men with dazzled laughs. Plato drew the advertising poster for the aggressive Silenus, his master, and stuck it up on the walls of Athens: look in passing at the carnivorous smiles, triumphant, showing, as in our time, incisors and canines. Knowledge is measured, like strength, by the number of teeth. How many are falling out of your mouth, oh Dionysodorus? Euthydemus doesn't know how to count them. You, the toothless ones, will lose the battles (Plato, *Euthydemus*, 294c).

The combat of ideas descends to hand-to-hand: the lowest arguments, ignoble, are over the face of the adversary, his strength or beauty.¹⁰ A dog, Socrates

gnaws absolute knowledge in the face, across his hideous smile. The mouth, that absolute knower, no longer knows that blurry border of the object with the subject where the one mixes with the other, the barrier of the teeth: the first arms, knives, incisive daggers, neighbors of speech, in the eye-for-an-eye combat.

Demosthenes, they say, used to fill his mouth with pebbles in order to test his eloquence on the beach facing the clamoring surf: did he want to bombard the assembled people the next day with vociferations, arguments, flying extended sentences and spat-out rocks, to stone them with discourse?

Teeth cut and pierce—precise—practice analysis and dichotomy, tear; and suddenly leave the palate in order to bite from a distance. Animals tear to pieces or gnaw right on the face, but Socrates, but Voltaire, Demosthenes, and Schopenhauer destroy at the range of writing, from the distance of time and history. Dead, they still bite the living and the dead. Voltaire's hideous smile still flits around his bones: Maupassant comments on Musset's distich with his German short story, but both recount how the teeth, migrating from the jaws via the written or spoken, at the same time as the tongue, kill, overturn, cut down, ravage, gut, slay, and destroy.¹¹

Count how many teeth a text has.

Say, distinctly: critique. In front of a mirror, count the

incisors or canines you have left, your big ferocious dog molars for speculative battles.

Did the aging Schopenhauer retain all his mordancy after having lost his teeth, replaced by dentures?¹² Yes, since he could then destroy from a distance like Samson with his jawbone of an ass. Even dead, he carried the battle as far as his putrefaction.

Orthopedics develops by continuous and *stricto sensu* insensible degrees: from the false tooth felt to be real to the phantom limb replaced by a hook, always false, from the glass eye that will never see, although sometimes seen as living by those around, to the vagina made of plastic where it's said that rejoicing can be born.¹³ The object becomes integrated into the subject as best it can; the subject, more or less, appropriates the object, like a transplant with or without rejection. But an insensible, frigid, anesthetized part can play the role of an object: how many people carry arms and legs, back or feet, their muscles, their genitals like toupees?

The mixed body remains to be thought as an intensity in which the for-itself inundates, bathes, occupies a certain volume with vague outlines and from which it withdraws. We feel our living body in this way; we experience what leaves the dead body. Meditation on death and life precedes the philosophy of the object or the subject, the philosophy of knowledge. We, inheritors of

the second philosophy, have a lot of trouble thinking the living body, even inhabiting it or knowing it; we, plunged in a deluge of objects, have all the trouble in the world locating the place from which they emerge, death being hidden from us by their production.

I don't think there is a human history with a longer reach than the one at the end of which the object emerges: a clear and simple history that rises from a corpus that's scorned or too revered under the various names of short stories, rites, myths, tales, narratives, fantasies, hallucinated experiences, medical and psychiatric files, false knowledge and true science, the history of objects setting sail [*appareillant*] from the dead body.

Schopenhauer, therefore, wore the apparatus dentures [*un appareil*].

Formerly this word was employed to express pomp and ceremony [*l'apparat*]: décor or royal, religious and funereal splendor. One woman wakes up naked as the day she was born [*dans le plus simple appareil*]; another is shown in a dream pompously adorned as on the day of her death:¹⁴ nudity of the warm and living body, desirable; overload of ornaments that weigh so much at the article of the agony. Preparations [*apprêts*] to appear before the supreme judge.

An *apparatus* [*appareil*], on the other hand, is equivalent to a system: a set of elements and relations

forming a whole for a function. The organism thus includes a digestive or urogenital apparatus: modern science, speaking Ancient Greek, prefers the word “system” in the anatomical disciplines. Surgeons, for their part, no longer put a broken limb in a splint [*appareil*]. But orthopedics, an old practice that developed slowly up until today, now becoming lightning-fast, has retained the word, for dentures for example. Let’s therefore remember that the same term designates a set of living organs or some artificial substitute.

Veils, coats, bracelets, crowns, or masks can be talked about in a similar way [*pareillement*] as real or false teeth, as wooden legs. An effort has to be made to conceive of a gown or a hat as postiche. Or as makeup that might have taken on the aspect of dress.

A building can display stones of large, medium or small bond [*appareil*], depending on the dimensions and thickness of the materials used in the masonry, depending on the layout of the construction. The elements of the system harden. Mechanism, machine, instrument, the *appareil* henceforth assembles pieces or organs destined for a work or a production, sometimes for an experiment. The mechanical, chemical, electric industries today manufacture appliances [*appareils*] by means of robotic apparatuses [*appareils*], the human body being excluded more and more from their assembly lines.

Finally, popular language absolutely uses the word two

or three ways: for the joined metallic rods in the palate that straighten the teeth; for the box that takes photographic pictures; for an airplane. The *appareil* puts the mouth straight, immobilizes appearance, takes off. Like a rocket.

It sets sail [*appareille*].

Everything strange in this matter comes from this word.¹⁵

The body is composed of apparatuses: respiratory, digestive, locomotor, etc. The technical world proliferates with apparatuses, technologies, and machines. Right in the middle of the two systems, the living and the fabricated, orthopedics substitutes via prostheses the second ones for the first ones. An old man, having had an accident, bears a femur head made of special metal or dentures. The orthopedic prosthesis must, for the effectiveness or reliability of the thing, perfectly resemble the living organ being replaced. They must therefore be the same [*pareils*]. It's well said that two friends or lovers are or seem to be perfectly matched [*appareillés*]. You might say the real and its image, its negative. Popular language is never mistaken.

And thus is said the movement of departure. Assume first the series of three *appareils*, living, orthopedic, and objective. Immobile, they're perfectly matched [*appareillés*], well imitated by each other. In the

photograph, you'd swear that he laughs with his real and white teeth. But suddenly, the object sets sail.

It leaves the body. No, it doesn't extend the body the way telescopes lengthen the sense of sight or the stick is added to the arm. No. It sets off. Independent. Like a rocket.

Did you see his soul take off across the bay trees? No, we saw, saw with our own two eyes, the dentures set sail [*l'appareil appareiller*].

Underneath a piece of furniture? Certainly. In 1890, in the short story "Who Knows?," one of the last before the writer's death amid the howls that came out of his mouth, the furniture itself, mobile of course, but suddenly automobile, set sail out of the house.¹⁶

Wandering like Maupassant, faithful like him to the naming, and definitively outside the there. Outside the "here lies" or the layer.

During the Grand Siècle

THE BEAM
COSTUMES

Object, God
Solid

THE BEAM

Object, God

The frogs croak in the sound and the fury amid the swamp, the reeds, and the rushes, a frightful mixture of mud and stagnant water: chaos.

Thus rings the primitive social state, always clamoring, although sometimes inaudible, beneath every order and terror: Hobbes called it the war of every man against every man, Plato and La Fontaine called it democratic, while Aesop said: anarchy.¹ No force prevails over any other.

The chaos comes from the group as such: every frog, to make itself heard, croaks as loudly as it possibly can.

A meteor falls from the skies. Try to hear the roar of the aerolith forcing its way through the flames, departing the stars for the lower strata of the air and hitting the beach, making it shake: thunder itself would pass for a tree frog's

“brekekex” next to that. The earthquake’s regular waves harmonize those, wild and small, of the chaos. In order to impose silence on the noise produced by each frog, a much greater noise than that made in sum by the collective swamp is necessary. Thus rings the falling beam.

Thunderbolts and volcanoes silence crowds, and the tumult of floods or deluges swallows them up. The external world is announcing that it exists to the social world, which only hears itself.

The swamp keeps silent while listening to he who holds the microphone and shouts, or ignites the roaring motor, the cannon, the atomic bomb. While this latter is sleeping, immobile on its launch ramp, the frogs, little by little climb onto its shoulders, emboldened and reassured.

Here’s the first statue, thus named because it stabilizes after a frightening excursion; silent too after having produced a terrible noise. Careful it doesn’t awaken. Here’s the meteor, a shapeless rock come from out of the sky and made out of an unknown metal, an obelisk, a black stone, a piece of wood, a mass.

The collectivity knows only itself and gives itself only itself as object, its noise, its relations, its streets and its swamp, its glory, its power, its politics, its hatreds. The collectivity is fed by and makes its clamors its delights, deaf to the noises of the world, blind to its light, insensible to its calls. And suddenly a terrible din

dominates the croaking; the aerolith, via gravity, is falling from the skies. Then the collectivity recognizes, for a moment, the existence of another world. The world as such can be heard through this, the world of stars, of heavy bodies, of lightning, volcanoes, and flooding rivers. The water is rising in the swamp, independently of the croaking, and the meteor falls here or there. The collective places itself in the presence, for the first time, of an object. Of the law of falling bodies.

Here's the first object: a beam whose mass has nothing to do with the crowd nor with the rushes, a rock bearing no relation to the mud of the marsh. Come from elsewhere since simply issuing from the world. The object lies before the frogs, foreign. Extraordinary because perfectly natural.

The social sciences precede the physical sciences.

Whether they stay in their holes, beneath the waters, or venture to jump onto the shoulders of the beam, the frogs croak, that's all. The chaos of the croaking signifies nothing as far as I know, and I find La Fontaine's Jupiter to be divinely intelligent in understanding that this noise asks first of all for a king, then a king who moves, and lastly a third one who's good-natured and gentle enough not to kill or devour them.

The beam falls; the group finds the object.

A crane advances, devouring the frogs; the group finds

a predatory living creature.

Jupiter listens and sends, it is said, the wood or the bird of prey.

The frogs croak, not doing anything, for their cries can't do anything for anything. The group makes noise and discovers before it, outside it, independent of it, either the inert material object of the external world or an animal of another species who feeds on tree frogs like a Frenchman with foreign customs, or the divinity, Jupiter himself.

Does society, the collectivity, drunk with noise, understand the object, subject or god, transcendent in relation to them, but that they—noisy—endlessly say they produced themselves?

The small joist, immobile, suffers an anthill of frogs to swarm over it. The crane, mobile, passing over them, makes them suffer and kills them. A thousand subjects weigh on the king; the king weighs on a thousand subjects, multiplicity covering unity or the one dominating the multiple. Just as the crane kills the batrachians, must it be understood as well that the beam remains immobile like a corpse that's been put to death by the crowd of frogs?

The turnaround happens instantaneously, the way the Tarpeian Rock borders on Capitoline Hill and the role of the condemned does that of the tyrant. Three verses, in the

middle of the fable, suffice to pass from the stiffened beam victim below the cries to the predatory bird that abuses and kills. In the middle of the reversal—the point of the cone downward, the apex of the nappe upward—La Fontaine says that Jupiter had had enough. As though he were in the beam's place, as though the crowd had jumped from the shoulder of the king onto the head of the god.

Here therefore is, in fact, a trinity, a god in three persons, King Jupiter and his two envoys or metamorphoses, the beam and the crane: object, subject; inert, living; below, above; good-natured and gentle, cruel; passive, active; lying down, standing; immobile, moving. Can the law for the transformation be discovered? Does a god find itself between the living subject and the inert object?

Before a lecture, recital or a play, it sometimes happens that the person who is going to appear in public experiences what's called stage fright. But what happens to a team before a decisive game? Each person, separately, may be afraid, but the anxiety of everyone sometimes drives the group to surpass itself. Does the collectivity feel something? I don't know, but I see quite well that it dissolves, that from the first minutes nothing was going right any longer, that the team wasn't coming together as though stage fright was paralyzing it, the team

as team even more than each of the individuals. It collapses or improves for the same reason.

We don't understand what that means and master this collective panic poorly. It lives in the midst of us, outside each of us, in the group, in such a way that you can place it, depending on the meaning given the first person plural pronoun, outside us and inside us, outside the individuals and in the team itself. This curious position of something, here anxiety, defines the us, the collective in general.

The instinctive work of the leader consists in taking that place; blindly, great politicians know and frequent it and, being from there, lead the group, use or abuse power. They remain individuals but something in them leaves in order to occupy the place that's exterior to individuals but interior to the collective. So the leader carries the anxiety and the team flies to victory. He does indeed possess a double body, personal and social: let no one give orders who doesn't know how to disincorporate.

A man can inhabit that place but an object can as well —when the king of the frogs is transformed into a beam —what I have in the past called a quasi-object. The ball flies amongst us, outside of each person who receives it but abandons it to the others, between everyone. It plays the role of leader and no doubt reminds us of the head of the king, of the body cut in two, double, characteristic of those we call our leaders and put at our head. A hundred quasi-objects circulate in collectivities, like the slipper of

pass-the-slipper, giving birth to exchange: ball, money, pledges, slaves, women; here we're back to subjects, winners or victims.

The object changes into the subject and conversely.

When you gather in my name and pray, I will be there in the midst of you.² The empty, absent, blind, unfindable place, the black hole of the group, which wouldn't exist without that gap, God himself doesn't consider it beneath himself to descend amongst us to occupy that spot, invisible, hidden, nonetheless present, deeply moving. He sends us his only son, spirit made flesh, assassinated flesh, messiah–victim, anointed king, transubstantiated on the eve of his death into that bread object we pass from one to the other to share it, eat it and offer it to our neighbor who consumes it in turn and gives it. Man, leader, present and absent, doubly incorporated, chief and wretched condemned man, become quasi-object, lastly object, discovering the law of transformation for all things occupying said place, God integrates the set of solutions to that inexhaustible mystery which is the meaning given to “us.”

We come into a temple, a church, or cathedral, a public place whose parvis is swarming with a crowd. We turn to the east where the colossal statue is glistening, tranquil, far away, in the shadows, like a monstrosity, surrounded by two contemplative cherubim. No one enters the holy of

holies where it reposes, absent or present; only the priests penetrate the sanctuary or choir and climb to the altar; only the elite chosen for their worth and dressed in the colors of the flag have the right to tread upon the cut-out rectangle, a paradoxical place for a thing that manifests another world that would possess the laws, the authority, the rules of transformation.

What thing? The statue of the king or leader, the object rock or the subject Peter, the marble that's nonetheless easy to break so that everyone can take a precious piece of stone, bread, money, gold, or ball, the subject but non-subject since object, sovereign but immobile like a little joist, all-powerful and wretched, the object or quasi-object, circulating, vibrating, living, the quasi-subject, lastly the god shining with the light of a black body that's exterior and interior to a strange place, the statue again, the immanent and transcendent answer to that infinite, unbroken conversation that obliges us to ask ourselves who we are when we live together and which none of us knows how to answer except the open and mute mouth of that statue, in the shadows, amid our secret prayers and the chaos of our cheering.

Can one do without god so as to reach the object beyond the political?

COSTUMES

Solid

How these vain ornaments, these veils weigh on me!
Phaedra, Act I, Scene iii

Pompously adorned as on the day of her death
Athalie, Act II, Scene v

Who puts on a uniform? The priest wears the cassock or chasuble, amice, stole, depending, the rabbi wears a beard and a hat, and that's for the sacred; the admiral adorns himself with stars and stripes, which he displays the way a soldier does his twill gaiters, gold buttons, and fourragère; the doctor has removed his biretta but puts on the aseptic white coat; the magistrate, standing and seated, hides under a black robe; professors, orators sometimes unfurl a broad sleeve supplementing the rhetoric; the tragedian appears in a toga on the stage. Religion, the army, science, and law converge on the theater.

We make fun of these rites, liberated, we say, from these slow heavinesses, but we rarely laugh at elegant women in violets and furs, each stiffened after her manner by the uniform of fashion or cosmetics and even less at the athletes in the numbered jerseys, governed by implacable rules, in the space of the field and the time of the matches, subjected to the violences of certain contests and to the judgment of the clock, of rankings and referees, ambassadors of cities and nations, therefore combining the political, the religious, the military, the judiciary and a clever skillfulness that's joined to the spectacle. The ritual varies in changing its ceremonial place but it remains invariant for a given group.

I perceive myself to be naked, weighed down by clothes I always find to be heavy. Certain men and women seem comfortable in their shirts and shorts, pushing their skin toward these coverings; others like me burden themselves with garments that hamper them. A coat sometimes induces claustrophobia like a box with cramped walls; you can feel completely bound by a jacket, suffocating in an undershirt. You only act quickly, supplely and in a sharp manner when almost naked: love, at the height of freedom. The dress slows the gymnastic gesture or the agile, rapid, inventive thought that loves to have a free hand and plenty of elbow room.¹ I find myself covered. And then contemplative, very slowly.

Not far from the polar circle, on the open bridge when the winter winds came, we would formerly put on four, five, six wool sweaters one over the other under our pea jackets without for all that warming ourselves up and were suddenly transformed—with our arms spread away from our trunk and our chests stiff and starchy—into immobile, fat deep-sea divers, round rag dolls with rigid armor: a few clumsy robots, poorly adapted to the blows of the sea, stumbling over the duckboards. The ship took on a phantom look, steered, in the middle of the ice floes, by statues.

Life, they say, evolved in the past from bodies with hard boxes containing flabby flesh to bodies with soft outsides attached to stiffer internal skeletons: life began with crustaceans so as to pass over to mammals, external or internal framework.² Thus the hard can hide the flabby, grasp it by the periphery, assure its upkeep. We protect ourselves by means of armor; we sculpt ourselves, less by solidifying the center or axis than by covering our skin. As though, become statues via the draped and the buckled, we were attaining an age-old archaism. The armor or the corslet, formerly, the robot or the diving suit, modern, bring us back to the lobster's crust or the insect's chitin; we become very old animals again; I was going to say fossils. The metamorphosis of the body into a cockroach doesn't come from a rare cooling of innermost

life since it's a question of changing tunics, rather this metamorphosis is produced most often by the everyday relation to the exterior: make-up and clothes don't hide so much as they harden and make blasé; we're moved less by togas, already, than by skin; by rouge less than by mucous membrane, and ceruse than by the tip of the breast. The painted and pompously adorned queen, weighed down by vain ornaments and veils, bothered by the hand that knotted the hair gathered on her brow, loses the subtle suppleness of expression and her gestural vivacity: slower than slow, she stops, fixed, an idol petrified by cosmetics; then life, afflicted, vibrates beneath the stiffness of the tragic mask and protests a final time before death, in front of the sun, at the memory of a dream. As though cosmetics were preparing the death pangs. The toga and the tragic mask slow, solidify, articles of death, sculpt the character; here's the statue—adorned on the stage or the throne, prepared for the sacrifice, like a bull with a spotless or meticulously varied coat.

Here's the body—embalmed, anointed, bandaged. Mummification subjected the head to the body—a head poorly held by a too-weak internal skeleton—by means of a scholarly folding of narrow linens. Make-up, natron, clothing, wrappings, by superficial layers, stiffen well. They enclose the flabby in the hard of the surface. Every day the Egyptian priests of old made up and dressed the

statues of the gods for which they were responsible before feeding and praying to them. They looked after them religiously, without neglecting a single detail, continuously created them or finished sculpting their form.

Sculpture, the most archaic of the arts, brings us back to the tragic, to death, to mummies and gods, but again to antediluvian animals via the surface veils. The layer of chreme, the veil of linen form the final stratum of the granular rock, foliated, out of which the colossus comes or the first wall of the black box, of the anthropomorphous sarcophagus in which said colossus rests. The series progresses from the hard varieties to the soft ones, finishing at signs and writing, passing through tissue, a middle variety, half hard and half soft.

Crusts of color then of wool, cardboard, varnished wood, marble, and granite superficially retain the flabby inside that flows, flees, rots in every conceivable direction. The painting holds the plaster, the plaster holds the parging, the parging holds the joints, these latter hold the stones, say what holds the wall. Does your solidity put its trust in your vertebral column or your decorations? In your tan?

And how I love that the French language, by means of two roots or origins foreign to each other, has formed two homonymous verbs about which one might dream that the one opened the meaning of the other, since *farder* [to

make up] also means “to weigh,” “to sag under its own weight” like a wall, or “to hold up” under a weight or burden [*fardeau*]: how these vain ornaments, how these veils *fardent* me!³

Have you ever seen, passing through Tokyo, on some stage, the traditional Japanese model receiving, standing, with crossed arms, an appalling number of kimonos on her? Around her bustle about slowly and for a very long time, as though for a rite, bearers and dressmakers, while a narrator recounts that a very ancient custom is being reproduced there; and the uneasiness takes hold: ornament or suffocation? The woman is disappearing beneath the layers; we’re at a massacre, without understanding. This is the tragic scene, without words. How those vain ornaments, how those veils crush her! Who could withstand those bonds, those knots and their weight? Veils kill by tightening as much as stones do by impacts. I have therefore seen a living mummy getting bandaged, a statue sculpted from life. My memory was strangling me, breathless beneath the sweaters and pea jacket, on the winter sea, on board a war ship, armored, armed, sailing toward death, for exercise.

The priest prepares to climb up to the altar of the God who delighted his youth. Over his black soutane, he slips on the alb or the surplice, both white; next he slips on the amice that he knots around his chest like a good sailor

does his detachable collar, then the long stole takes its place around his neck; he doesn't forget to put on, after the chasuble that changes colors depending on the liturgical days, the short maniple, which ends in a dove tail, over his left forearm. Is my memory failing? Has he left anything out? The deacon Saint Stephen is presented in a dalmatic before Saint Peter, at the entrance to the city, for the consecration, pompously adorned as on the day of his death, dressed in this way for the debate before the learned, standing for his thesis clothed thus to give his course before the listening crowd, and still beneath the same heavy draperies before the tribunal and the assassins that lynch and stone him. Do these ornaments and veils hamper or protect the condemned man? Do they mark him for sacrifice, like the spots, in the past, on the coats of the bulls? Carpaccio painted the first deacon beneath the burden of the sacerdotal cloths that were worn by deacons a millennium and a half after him in memory of him. Before Saint Peter and beneath the stones, beneath the weight of the garments.

What is a statue if not a dressed body?

The ancient Egyptians, who went almost naked except for a loincloth, and above all the women with their transparent dresses, so adorable when they put a narrow band along their mane, loved to abominably overload those who occupied a sovereign or sacerdotal position with infinite details, as though they were counting their

limbs or numbering their bones.

What is there in the garment that we have lost the memory of?

Certain priests of ancient Egypt carried the skin of a wildcat on their shoulders, a panther or leopard: did they just come from sacrificing it? Did those remains protect them from death? Heracles likewise suffocated his face at the bottom of the open mouth of the Nemean Lion that he had suffocated. The poets sing of our ancestors dressed in animal skins. I don't think however that they were only protecting themselves from the cold. They were becoming hardened from fear.

What courage will soon be necessary for others to strip the gods and men?

Those who are going to stone the holy deacon lay their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. There he is on the last canvas, on the left: above, the stone city surrounded with walls overlooks the witness, seated, watching over the tunics and robes, below.

They undress to assassinate; they watch or give death, almost naked. The victim is dressed in the dalmatic: pompously adorned on the day of his death. The devouring hounds, for their part, are running, their coat of fur outside.⁴ These vain ornaments, these veils weigh on him or her who is going to die and hamper for throwing stones those who are going to make them die. Clothed

victim, practically naked lynchers, like wild beasts. Adorned victim, no longer adorned murderers. The victim with all the trappings, in grand pomp and ceremony, the others no longer with the trappings.⁵ The unique victim marked, painted, made-up, anointed, the criminals no longer marked. If one of them were wearing clothes, dress, make-up, unction, the mark of a seal or finery he would in turn run the risk of taking the place and role of the dead man. Nothing changes things like a badge. So there they are almost naked, without robe or tunic, no longer in pomp or marked so as to remain in anonymity. Naked: neither seen nor recognized. The group of killers enters into fusion, burning with anger and hatred, a unanimous social crucible in which everyone abandons identity. The assembly killed while exonerating each of its members, naked. Clothing designates, separates, names, distinguishes, and therefore accuses; nudity confuses and erases the name: a double innocence.

He who is watching over the clothes is rightly going to change his name: Saul will call himself Paul before dying a martyr. There he is, on the left, at the bottom, separated from the group of killers, already marked like Stephen. He is soon going to slip on the clothes he's watching over: charging himself with all the garments in the world. Witness of and substitute for the statue.

The real must be imagined as veiled.

The veil must be conceived as a mixture of hard and soft: object, still, sign, already; sign, still, object, already.

Quattrocento

THE HAMMER

Homo Faber

With a hammer in the hand, Phidias, Michelangelo, Houdon, Rodin sculpted; Polyeuctus along with Nearchus and every other iconoclast broke the statues of the idols into tiny pieces, hammer in hand. Nietzsche wanted to philosophize by hammer blows.¹

Nothing is more difficult to succeed in than the hypocritical enterprise of destroying. Mosander, according to Symeon Metaphrastes, before Corneille, recounted that Polyeuctus had taken the edict of the emperor Decius condemning the Christians and tore it into bits in order to throw them to the winds; on the same day of wrath, the Armenian prince snatched the idols away from the people who were carrying them to adore them, smashed them against the ground and trampled their pieces, stunning the crowd just as in the tragedy.²

His father-in-law Felix had him beaten in the face by his torturers and ordered that his head be cut off. The limbs of the martyr were then going to rejoin the fragments of the statues and the pieces of the page. For the impiety concerned things and texts. Without any other baptism than that of blood, Saint Polyeuctus then entered into the glory that God had promised the victims: a crowd of pious Christians, during the era that was beginning, will kneel before his effigy. The statue has returned. The iconoclast works in the same direction as the iconolater and much better than this latter, hypocritically. This word means: below critique or upstream from decision, before debate.

The gods acquired their divinity from the violence that opposes the gods against each other. What statues did Polyeuctus and Nearchus break or overturn? That of Dionysus dismembered? That of Orpheus losing his head? Or of Hephaestus chased from Olympus, broken from his fall from the sky, limping badly? Or of Athena Parthenos, a piece of her father's thigh? An image of Osiris scattered to the four corners of the horizon? What god of paganism, of the polytheistic page, is not already reduced, on its pedestal, to a fragment? In other words, by destroying the idols, the holy martyr entered backwards into the process of their construction and by advancing into the history of saintliness did likewise. The pieces of the gods, broken, become deified.

Scattered over four different places in Europe—Stuttgart, Milan, Paris, Lugarno—the holy story of Stephen, the first deacon, painted by Carpaccio, represents him speaking to the learned, commenting on texts, entering into the diaconate under the benediction of Saint Peter, perched on the pedestal of a statue he just destroyed and haranguing the people with stiff necks in the center of a square, in Jerusalem lastly lying under the flurry of stones held in the hand or flung by the executioners. You can reverse the order of the series at your leisure, as though the lives of the saints were composed of pieces that are combinable and readable in any direction. Likewise, the statue of Saint Polyeuctus substitutes for that of Athena or Dionysus, and the process will begin again when new iconoclasts, hating saintliness, arise. The petrification of the martyred body can, for example, be recognized in the execution by stoning: you are rock and on this rock the Church will be built; or the scattered limbs of the deacon himself split up under the stoners' cruel volley can be recognized in the fragments of the idol below the new statue of Stephen. You get the impression of a reversible time or of an intense fabrication of gods: the executioners, the catechumens, the saints, the pompously dressed popes, all in the end ceaselessly carve statues, as though each of them was making the abrupt gesture of the sculptor.

Polyeuctus, Nearchus, Stephen wielded hammers, and their executioners hurled stones. In a pinch, you can break

idols by stone blows or even pick up pieces of a broken statue in order to break statues into pieces; you can stone or fabricate by hammer blows.

Phidias, Houdon, Rodin wielded hammers. Phidias sculpted Athena Parthenos and Houdon the beautiful Diana; Rodin decapitated bodies: he started the fragmentation. A headless statue remains a statue: Venus is more beautiful without arms. A foot cut off at the malleolus still remains a sculpture. The same goes for the mere head of Orpheus or of *The Thinker*. Successors will work away furiously, in the literal sense of the verb: the limbs will fly. Any fragment can substitute for the statue. Even formless mass. But this mass does not differ from the first—raw—stones that our ancestors left us from Karnak to Stonehenge. We don't know whether this absence of cutting up marks the end of a process of dismemberment or the beginning of a long approach toward form, but we suspect that these two moments exactly overlap in the history of aesthetics, about which one can think that it recommences, imitates, follows or equals the history of religion. A circle is drawn there and recommences.

Nothing is more stable than statuary, language itself wants it that way. Something exists that ceaselessly comes back. As in the myth of Sisyphus, the dead philosopher pushes back again, forces back, moves the

same rock away that rolls again along the same thalweg, right at his feet. Does a stronger presumption for the existence of things exist? Ancient menhirs, cairns repeated on the roads, meteors fallen from the sky, contemporary sculptures, the same things come back, that is, the thing itself, whose return testifies to reality.

I'm speaking here in three languages: Sisyphus's rock that's always there, the statues that are reborn from the pedestal after their destruction and fragmentation, and the stability of the sculpture express in three discourses, mythic, religious and aesthetic, or, rather, in a single anthropological language, the inevitable reality of the things that the physical sciences express, in turn, via equilibria or constants: vis viva, energy or mass, from which they draw different perpetual motions, other circles or returns. This book speaks of statues, aesthetically; of gods, idols and God, religiously; it above all seeks to say the things, metaphysically. The inevitable, constant, balanced reality of the things themselves. Every anthropology that it brings up, through myths, arts and religions, precedes and conditions science and philosophy. Sisyphus, Phidias, Rodin, Polyeuctus, or Stephen contribute to an anthropology of the sciences, here of physics and, since the gate sculpted by Rodin, of mass, the fundamental reality of science, neglected by philosophy.

The philosophy by hammer blows therefore cannot do

without the Eternal Return. Destroying makes the methodical detail of the construction explicit, from the left to the right along a circle in which the process can equally pour from the right to the left. The philosophy in fragments spreads even better in space and therefore preserves the theology it analyzes in order to obliterate it. Suppress anthropology, and it always comes back. Destroy philosophy by blows of anthropology, and it always comes back. The real comes back.

These logics by reversal, invariant across spectacular variations, like that of the parasite as well, are often presented as new through ignorance of ancient processes but are only thought to be so by everyone's unawareness with regard to what he holds in his hand.

Phidias, Rodin, Polyeuctus, Stephen, his stoners, lastly Nietzsche and his chorists wield the same hammer. But what is this hammer? Some hard and fashioned mass. Hard, no doubt. Less solid or dense, and it would fly into pieces. Into limbs, pieces and fragments. Heavier, it sculpts and destroys a mass, fashions or builds it. In the violent contact with the thing it hammers, this hammer must be thought, calculated, fashioned, built for the relation to the thing itself. What then is a hammer if not a fragment of a thing? A piece of the statue, a limb of the idol, and therefore the idol or the statue or the thing itself. A mass, it is sometimes said, quite aptly.³ Only a diamond

can shape a diamond. The stone thrown at the idol becomes the idol itself, and this latter in turn becomes a thrown stone. During the Stone Age, stone shaped stone and during the Iron or Bronze Ages, iron and bronze worked bronze and iron. The hammer hits the hammer; the thing destroys or constructs the thing. In the Eternal Return of the thing to the thing and of the hammer to the hammer, critique becomes magic, religion, fetishism; analysis changes into unanalyzed dogma.

The hammer is equivalent to the thing hammered.

Together, a few myths or narratives, the disrupted religious festivity, the judiciary rite and the masterpiece of art describe, as though in parallel and each after its own manner, the emergence of the thing as such, of the thing in itself, here of mass. Realism, the philosophic option or global attitude of the modern scholarly physicist, plunges long anthropological roots into antecedents that are rightly repugnant to metaphysics and the exact sciences: ungrateful, the evolved children don't always like being reminded of their father and mother who remained poor and uneducated. What's bred, however, in the bone will often come out in the flesh. Atomic mass, at Hiroshima, brutally returned to magma. One sees that languages, sometimes, the old texts and the silent works also restore the deep lineage cut off by precision, rigor and the abstract. Genealogy fills these gaps little by little.

By the same word *masse* [mass], the French language names the artisan who works it: it calls him *maçon* [mason]. The word renews ties with the German *machen* and the English “to make,” both stemming from the same *masse*. The anthropological genesis of the thing accompanies or rediscovers that of *homo faber*, who has just received various proper names: Phidias, Rodin, Polyeuctus, Nearchus, Stephen’s lapidaters, Peter himself, lastly Nietzsche, geniuses, saints or philosophers by the hammer. Wielding projectiles or masses for breaking masses, they come from afar, and remain our contemporaries. They make us understand how fabrication came to man. For the activity of *homo faber* isn’t derived from the definition of *homo sapiens*, as in a transcendental deduction, an easy school exercise, a facility by means of those theory classes that dispense with acquiring knowledge and experience over a long period of time. No definition of this *sapiens sapiens* is known there: without nature, essence or destiny, he learns and becomes. He becomes what he learns. Man when he speaks, man when he fabricates, or when he thinks and loves, rarely. He is not born *homo faber*; he becomes a mason. How? We don’t know, but these rites and religions, these fables and myths, these works said to be beautiful, these rolled, broken, adored, wielded, carved, polished stones still preserve the silent memory of that genesis. Nothing is stable like this set of masses, nothing

more ancient therefore than their stock of memories.

We will perhaps never know how to order these fragments into a single narrative, fragments scattered like the stones themselves, which bear witness to beginning hominity and whose scattering is multiplied by our social sciences, but we think we hear with the same ear the holy fury of Polyeuctus and Nietzsche, of the Jerusalemites rushing upon Stephen and of Michelangelo hurling his chisel at a finished work, shouting himself hoarse: “Now speak!”

The *Pieta* answers Michelangelo.

The virgin rests on a rock that perhaps represents a wooden support; that’s of no import. The word “mass” comes from a verb that describes the act of kneading, as masons do with earth, clay, brick paste or cob, cement, concrete, and plaster. Molding the first Adam, God, in our languages, ought to have to called himself mason. The word “matter,” it has been said, refers to the mother: the beam [*madrier*] comes from the tree that produces offshoots, as though stemming from the genealogic tree.⁴ *Madrier*, *matrice* [womb], matter. The Virgin Mother seated on the scarcely molded mass supports the dead body of the only son in her lap.

The Word comes from the womb [*matrice*], which for its part, comes from mass. Dead and mute, the word returns to the flesh, which returns to the mother, which

returns to matter, which returns to mass or the earth. The stone is a bone of my mother, the earth. Striking, staggering, immobile, silent, our hominid genealogy is summarized in the *Pieta*. The perfect work of art always says the essence of its art, of its matter and its form. The sculpture expresses this genesis without saying it.

Life and death: involution of the Word toward flesh and toward death, toward matter and mass; evolution, resurrection of these latter toward the Former.

Creating the family of the gods and men in stone, was it possible for the sculptor not to succumb to the temptation of believing himself God? Only the dead Word answers to Michelangelo's command.

Do the holes in the dead Christ's hands and feet, the gaping wound in his side, traces of the lance or nails driven in by hammer, differ from the injuries inflicted by hammer on the face of the marble mother by a dangerous madman on Pentecost Sunday, 1972 or from the blow dealt to Moses by the sculptor himself, flinging hammer and chisel at him and enjoining him to speak?⁵ Or from the impacts that carved it?

About the Year 33 of our Era

MAGDALENE AND LAZARUS

Knowledge

We exist as men through speech. In that beginning where the Word was, we were born from our voice, and the histories were launched into their writing. The sciences, philosophies, all the prevailing rites repeat this truth which creates our being and our knowing in such a way that that we only know this gnoseology and this onto-theo-logy in which the logos, become god and supreme knowledge, devours being and knows it.

Yet the vivifying breath of speech often brings hot air, lies, useless information, clichés, ukases, noises, and the quasi-totality of the human race would trade all the world's books for a morsel of bread: if the poor knew a little, they would strongly suspect that the second was lacking through the power of the first, a power just now

become an empire, holding the entire world gripped beneath rigorous networks of codes, accounts, images and sounds, laws stealing souls and our voices. The call for freedom in times past put freedom in balance with death; this call returns there today by passing through silence.

A new man is born without anyone hearing him come.

We have existed as men since the dawn by means of something other than speech, precisely by the thing, irreducible to language. The subject is born of the object. The hominid appears in front of what lies there. An animal no more has an object than a death, even though it sometimes uses a language; this latter comes out of the throat and extends it, whereas the thing, foreign, stands independently of bodies, outside their property. Animals and men, similarly, we build relations, distant and near, by exchanging signals that maintain networks of relations inhabited by our familiar contentment. But hominity appears in front of the object that's abstracted or extracted from these links, a free object, come from elsewhere like a rock fallen from the sky. Whether we invented this rock or received it doesn't matter; we weren't there yet to decide; we were born, in the beginning, from its epiphany. Man comes from things; he still knows it.

Not from the stakes for which he fights, nor from the fetishes adored by the sects, still less from the merchandise to be traded, all quasi-objects or signs

transiting through networks of relations that are still animal, nor from the detailed impressions or affects bombarding animals just as much as us, but from the object as such, placed facing the one who emerges through this very fact.

Before the self-important increase of mankind through the acquisition of speech, in arrogance and pomposity, a humble and silent arrival had taken place, in the shadow, in front of the object as such: the local lying one preceded the globalizing chatter.¹

I imagine, at the origin, a rapid vortex in which the transcendental constitution of the object by the subject would be fueled, as though feeding back, by the symmetrical constitution of the subject by the object, in lightning-fast semi-cycles and ceaselessly repeated, coming back to the origin. The oldest Greek word known that translates our verb “to be” designates, it will be remembered, this very circle, unstable and stable, vibrating around the immediate.

There is an objective transcendental, the constitutive condition for the subject through the apparition of the object as object in general. We have testimony of the converse or symmetrical condition on the eddying cycle, traces or narratives, written in the labile languages, mythical texts relating a hundred descents into consciousness or the understanding, to which only a few

philosophers reputed to be great have claimed to hold the key or stolen it from the gods themselves in order to enter there—like Ulysses or Aeneas did the underworld where one dialogs with the shades—and to describe mechanisms and functions that we poor humans do not even perceive. Who then lights up internal consciousness for them? By means of what torch does what superhuman Ariadne take them for a walk through the labyrinth of a reason that's cut off from the understanding? How do they know that? Under what condition does the exploration of conditions in the subject open to their lucidity?

But we have tangible, visible, concrete, fearsome, silent witnesses of the direct constitutive condition starting from the object. However far back we may go into the talkative history or the silent pre-history, they are always there.

However far we may push the regression into human time, however deeply we may dig in a thousand places of the earth in search of our own vestiges, we find these stony witnesses. We are now in practice descending toward positive conditions, for our sciences are opening the roads of a true hell, whereas transcendental philosophy was continuing those of limbo or the Elysian Fields of yesteryear. Under all the built things foundations are discovered that we just about know how to date if not always recognize. We don't hear the narratives whispered

by the phantoms or pale shades of our dreams, but we do extricate silent bones and fragments, stones and the dead, or those rocks that the ancients from a lost flood called, repeating the order of the gods, the bones of our mother.² True transcendental philosophy now descends into that true hell. Among the remains and skeletons, it finds statues, sometimes broken, mixed with the bones. Farther down, lower than the statues, it finds plates or slabs; more deeply than the sculptures or engraved tables, lower, farther down than the polished or carved stones, more obscurely than the legible or illegible meaning, it finds stones. Raw. As such. We have nothing to say about them and lose our knowledge there because it depends on our language. They lie at the bottom of our foundations, in the black and the silence.

We evolved scholars would tend to say that the unimaginable ancestor who might consider that stone as such, if he at least existed, was savage, primitive, without resources, still incapable of acting on some material by means of some tool. Immodest, we take our uncontrollable pruritis to be natural, the one that provokes us to appropriate all things by covering them with our productions, secretions, refuse, the way a dog pisses on a fire hydrant, a nightingale sings in a tree, or a philosopher confides his nausea at the foot of a tree.³ He who speaks loudly to be heard by the company at large, who writes on

every available space, who transforms the environment to his image occupies the volume, time, and channels, masters nature by reducing the world to his representation, doesn't leave any chance of survival for anything except under his control, all-powerful mankind, maker of messes, similar to the animals that mark their niche with their excrement, hasn't it vanquished and condemned them because it knew better than them how to steal territory? We secrete theory and languages so as to arrogate men and things for ourselves.

But he who lies below what lies before him holds back: attentive, concentrating, humble, silent.

Subject.

This word retains the trace of an act of humility. The subject is subjected to the grasp of what fashions and ruins it. Yes, kills it. The object alone exists, and I am nothing: it lies before, and I disappear below. It alone marks the place for which I am no longer the reference. I think, therefore the object invades the existence I accept being excluded from. How then would I mark the place? Knowledge, thought, attention obey the precept of losing the soul in order to save it. The subject will appear if and only if it disappears, annihilated by the object even before appearing. Agony, a brief struggle: I consent to the crushing. The subject lies below place's reference, a tumulary stone. Object: stele, cippus, gravestone. Subject:

buried corpse.

Dies. Descends to the underworld, doesn't even exist in the form of a shade. No one has ever known, thought or paid any attention without this death, without this descent. The entire object has taken his entire place, without remainder. So dies. Is not born, is reborn. Resurrects. A kind of evanescent phantom rises from the mortuary stone, arrives from beneath the earth as though it were leaving death behind, supernaturally rejuvenated. I think, therefore I consent to die from the object, to lie beneath the stone, buried. I think, therefore I disappear. I think, therefore I resurrect. Leave the earth, am born or reborn from the humus. The subject is constituted in this humility. Thus and only thus do I attain the designation of human, reserved in our language for those, humble, inhumed, whose bodies are sculpted from earth.

The statue succeeds the stone as such, the latter ancient, the former recent, because the object begins a history that the subject, constituted by it, will continue: by spreading all the more readily because it's weak and ghostly, scarcely existing, and all the more aggressively because it's afraid to die just like any animal.

No doubt illiterate, Gyges the shepherd therefore descends into the underworld and finds in the tomb first a statue of a horse, hollow, and in the statue a corpse, on whose hand is a ring, slipped on a finger and on the ring a

stone: have you carefully counted the stages on the road leading to the thing itself? Conversely, starting from the thing or its position, for it turns around the subject that's first dead and then alive, this subject changes or remains invariant, visible or invisible, phantom, and doesn't become king, spread throughout all its states, except on condition of returning from among the dead, as though resurrected, on condition of no longer being seen, of resembling he who lies in the hollow of the metallic statue, beneath the earth. The experience of the object approaches the experience of death. Same earth for the thing and the body. Just as the name "human" says "humility," Gyges's name redoubles the sound and meaning of the earth, as though he were called "geode," made of earth, full of it, similar to it, human in the end. The object makes a software shadow of this black-earthed body.

The people of Israel chant before the dismantled Wailing Wall: the temple no longer remains stone upon stone. What did the sage Thales see, do, think before the Egyptian Pyramids, during a time that's as ancient for us as the name Cheops sounded archaic to him; why did he invent geometry before this pile of stones? All of Islam dreams of traveling to Mecca where, in the Ka'bah, black, the stone is kept. Modern science was born, during the Renaissance, from the fall of bodies: the stones fall. Why

did Jesus found the Christian Church on a man who goes by the name of Peter?

I'm intentionally mixing religions and knowledge in these examples of institution.

When we go back in our past in search of everything that conditions or founds us, agreement seems to occur on an equivalence between the ordinary and the religious. The lowest and the best-buried plate, in the geological sense, the plate that moves little but over multi-century rhythms, bears the magic, the sacred, both fundamental, primitive. Transcendental philosophy builds haunted castles or manufactures automatic statues when it dispenses with this abyssal plate.

This plate does not let us go. We remain archaic in three-quarters of our actions and the quasi-totality of our thought; the most religious of men aren't, and by far, ranked among the practicing followers of a confession: as though practice, active, removed the religious from the rest of our acts, as though its absence rediffused it. So the usual, the ordinary, even the everyday remain primitive—and ritual. The geologist sounds deep in order to know the low strata; the philosopher of knowledge has no difficulty discovering a little-hidden ordinary. Contrary to widespread opinion, only the new, only the contemporary, rare, progressive, conceals itself, contracts itself, latent, little known, very unconscious.

Yet if agreement was quickly concluded on the identity of the primitive and the religious, it has never taken place on the definition of the latter term. What is religion? We would make immense progress in philosophy if we could construct its limits. Are philosophy itself and science inside or outside? We don't know. It's even probable that we will never know: as though one limit of our knowledge consisted in our incapacity to mark out the limits of what precedes our knowledge.

What I know of the religions that I think I'm acquainted with because they have formed our acts, customs, and thought or still weigh on us now, even if I can't define their status or hold, is divided or organized into two zones, the principal one of which made the Mediterranean the cradle of Western civilization and of universal and true knowledge by establishing itself as a set of religions of writing and speech, in sum of language: Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Do we say that mankind was born from its own speech—and history from the written—because it has been said that the former received life from the breath of God? The only rigorous or exact sciences or knowledge we know are really or virtually followed by the suffixes “-logy” or “-graphy” so as to truly show that language, oral or written, remains the first or final authority under which all reliable knowledge is possible and without which it disappears. Can one meditate on

being or God without theology or ontology, that is to say, without saying? The religions of writing and speech have won so completely, have invaded space and our cultures so universally that we no longer see their victory as the end of the crushing of the other zone, the one that's forgotten, humiliated, left in the silence and shadow, the one I'm exploring in these pages with astonishment: the religions of the things that propose to men being born before dead stones.

From the height of the logos, the Greek metaphysicians scorned as popular superstitions the statuary religions that they hadn't understood for a long time, just as the writer prophets of Israel fulminated against the golden calf, still standing, and as the first Christians exposed themselves to death by smashing idols: language detests things.

I can't find anything in books that tells of the primitive experience in the course of which the object as such constituted the hominid subject since books are written to cover over that empirical realm with forgetfulness or to brick up its door and since discourses drive away what happened in that silence with their noise. Yes, the subject of knowledge no longer thinks without language or has forgotten that the word *penser* [to think] derives from the verb *peser* [to weigh]. What is there in the soft that can be assessed by that weight?

Thus the archives always lie: even if one measures the

recent ages or the historical eras by the written, nothing archaic remains in it. The authentic archives sleep in the earth and not in libraries. In the truly weighty hard. Therefore either the philosopher becomes a historian, and he no longer leaves the bookstore, a commentator and copyist, a critic, logician, or philologist, enclosed in the soft in the sense of the little energies, devoted to the said, or he leaves the books and digs in the earth with his own two hands. Two ways to philosophize.

Two ways to descend into the underworld, to travel there and meet the dead. In the soft strategy, in which fire burns as little as does the word “flame” and in which the dog, a barking animal, bites as little as does the celestial constellation of the same name, Cerberus is less terrifying, and the academic meeting develops by questions and answers. Ulysses, Aeneas, Dante, or Theseus put themselves at risk as much but as little as journalists and only go there to question the shades: the big stories on war or work on the whole cause fewer deaths than work and war, and past battles don't kill their historians. The golden bough, wielded like a press card, protects, and no one bumps hard into phantoms that don't cause injury. But in the hard method, the price must be paid. If the verb or act of thinking refers to weighing, the thinker, who must be called honest here, throws his body and life onto one of the pans of the scales while his language hangs from the other side. From ancient Egypt

up to more recent traditions, such a balance awaits us after our agony. Thinking truly brings these scales into the immediate vicinity of the living body. The object I'm speaking about is in relation with my death. Since between now and my obliteration, time, counted, hardly counts at all, of what use is it to lie?

A transcendental lie conditions everything that the soft strategy, which does not weigh, writes or says.⁴

To add seriousness and even a grave solemnity to their word, the ancient Greeks sometimes threw pieces of wax into a fire while pronouncing a death formula: may I burn if I am lying. Better to die than not to keep one's sworn word. They called these molded things "colossuses," supposed to represent the double or a part of their bodies. This magic ritual cites the first known usage of a word that will later designate a kind of statue. He who promises throws himself into the fire; his word is worth his life and weighs with a colossal weight.

Nobility, in Rome, conferred the right to keep the funeral masks of illustrious ancestors in the atrium of the patrician house. Made of the same material as the colossuses, they were enclosed in boxes hung on the wall, like little tombs, funerary masks thus shown but hidden, like the dead, about which where they are is known but about which what they're becoming is concealed. During the funerals of their successors, the dead forebears would

follow the procession, their faces behind these wax masks and their bodies veiled with togas corresponding to their higher office. The entire genealogy, seated on curule chairs, would hear its own eulogy and that of the recently deceased pronounced from the height of the rostra, in the forum. By an inversion of the theater, the tragic actors listen to their text, in the position of mute spectators, in the orchestra. Those who play in front of the scenery are pretending, granted, and everyone knows it, but who could put the truth of those who make up the audience in doubt? So, a real presence happens. All of Rome would contemplate these ghosts, come out of the tomb, immobile, majestic beneath the yellow-brown of the old waxy material: it would see the prosopopeia of its history. The figure becomes embodied. As though history had really taken place in the public square, in place of or instead of its events. Rome only knows how to theorize via bodies and in silence, by contemplating these motionless faces hidden behind wax, these colossuses or statues, these dead, these objects that are heavier than discourses.

Later, after the death of Antoninus Pius, imperial Rome would witness the obsequies of its double-bodied master: the funeral of the corpse preceded the rite in which its wax effigy would be thrown on the pyre. From the flames in which the soft statue or impression of Septimus Severus or Pertinax was melting, an eagle flew

away toward the sky. The nobles remain, the emperors leave. The custom of double funerals was perpetuated for a long time by the kings of England and France.

Before E. H. Kantorowicz, in the fifties, rendered their two bodies to the kings, R. Hertz, as early as the beginning of this century, had extended this property from history to anthropology and from ruling individuals to the universality of the human race. In every culture, in every latitude, the double body is always apparent for every deceased: the perishable flesh and the hard skeleton. The practice of double funerals is observed everywhere, even over a single and same body. How to reconcile these two thoughts?⁵ No doubt he who holds power preserves the traces of ancient traditions more easily. He who has history holds power. Thus sometimes rare persons singularly recover what makes the human condition universal. And on occasion that returns to the latter.

The light wax, translucent, takes imprints, molds to forms, the wax being opaque, a little transparent, supple and creaky at the same time, stiff like cartilage, remaining and not rotting. The seal of the escutcheon or of the signature, the impression of the finger, the mask for the face or the coating surrounding the body, wax retains them as much as it represents them. One could easily reopen, by means of this matter that's very related to form, the quarrel over real presence. In a certain manner,

the colossus or effigy retains all or part of the body as much as it symbolizes it. And only dies in the fire. The second body, statue, skeleton, piece of wax hard inside and out, varies less than the first one, quickly corrupted and putrefied.

In his stove-warmed room so famous in the classrooms, René Descartes evoked the Devil, exorcised him, mastered him, and then took up the age-old rite of the colossus again, which speaks of the body and the soul in death and the incantation and gives assurance of the word of truth. The passage on the piece of wax derives its colossal fame from this type of abracadabra.

Descartes reduces the object to this piece of wax that he just brought closer to the fire. Colossus: a piece of the body, a double of the dead man, a statue or ghost, what is preserved of a deceased subject. In the Age of Reason, the object, again, as in the archaic eras, is only a remainder of the dead body.

On certain of the Ponant Islands, pieces of wax are displayed and revered, the bodies of sailors lost at sea whose corpses haven't been returned by the tides after shipwreck.⁶ White and translucent crosses are still seen in the middle of the cemeteries. Is the old nobility, Roman or universal, taking refuge there?

Something becomes detached from the dead body, setting sail like a simulacrum, independently, solid, fragile, preserving an imprint, a form or a volume, indecomposable and invariant, half soft like a perceptible sign, but half like a statue or a hard stone. Still a bit subject, yet objective. You might think that the soul of stone preceded the soul of wind.

To get the subject balancing between life and death, it suffices to take this object. A blind commemoration of that birth that I want to demonstrate.

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Now about the time when, on the stage of solitude, Descartes was fascinating his world by means of the rite of the colossus or the sacramental and chatty formula of the I that exists and thinks through this disquieting and weighty proximity, true sages truly withdrawn from the world, Trappists, Carthusians, were truly meditating in silence, in the middle of enclosures without fires, in imitation of those who, at the beginning of the era, became intoxicated with God.⁷

La Tour shows Magdalene, the repentant harlot of this time, facing a waxy skeleton head. A silent art, painting doesn't say anything, any more than the solitary and holy sinner.

How many, Mary Magdalene, had kissed your lips, when still young you would play at practicing the world's oldest profession and when you loved the only sage in Antiquity who ever frequented women? Your hard breasts then overhung a moist pelvis; your skin, your smile, your gestures would shine; you transfigured yourself in love and became superhuman. Rare teeth hang, now, from the jawbone that sniggers, apparent, beneath the empty sockets and the little lines that fuse the skull, a dry bone, light tan, dirty white, waxy, cold, clattering disarticulated. Hard as rock, Mary Magdalene, you have therefore become that.

I remember a small chapel in the mountains of Chios, solitary and buried, behind the monastery, before the view opens out of the valley that goes toward the sea, whose wall rises entirely built out of heads, all different from each other like living faces, long or massive temples, long or short and pointy noses, wide, square chins, immense and obtuse foreheads, where tibias serve as lintels; the skeletal pile reaches the chapel's roof structure or supports it, bas-relief in the architecture, always silent arts. Caryatids don't speak, nor statues or columns, nor friezes or metopes, nor stones, nor the dead. Here, a public notice in three languages claims that those who are serving as stones fell victims of the Turks. What does that matter? Has anything ever been built on anything other

than that? Here the catacombs rise up to the roof timbers: one of the founders appears in Mary Magdalene's cell, a remnant of herself or someone else?

The luminous flesh, that soft robe that clothed the ladder of your skeleton, Mary Magdalene, vanished first under the vast swarming of the decomposition that, over weeks, transfigured your beauty into what has no name in any language. Unnamable is the distance that separates the woman and the skull, the object from the subject, that unstable state that the painter did not paint but which he suggested in the transparent gap that opens between the body and death, poorly lit by an obscure glimmer.

The silence that descends into space in that experience doesn't come from pain, although one may not feel a more vehement one than at the moment of losing she with whom we so often formed one body, nor from fear before the rotting that awaits us all and that suddenly, at that sight, catches up to us since this is my body, no, the silence here is imposed by the languages or language that have never had the audacity to name decomposing flesh. The hole in the canvas opens like discourse's black box.

The anchorite shuts herself away, solitary, before the dry remnant of a head. But who would withstand the long presence of what the still living shred of what hangs on the skeleton becomes after death? Who wouldn't recoil from what we trample under foot?

I remember a spring day during which I was walking for something of a long while beneath the Aquitainian clouds along the variable and gentle hills where the glory of the world was descending, stopping every hour to catch my breath. Lying on the side of the path, my head supported by the foot of a cedar, I must have been dozing off when a sort of rumbling woke me, an immense rumbling like that of a distant city, the noise an anthill makes when listened to up close: the noise of numbers. On the other side of the dense and thick bush that had hidden it, downwind from me, the decaying carcass of a lamb was clamoring beneath the buzzing crush of the multiple. The noontide peace shook. A gray parasitic legion was pullulating, small, oscillating, streaming on the motionless thing, swarming, active, minuscule, and boring, by large groups, into the enormous black and passive thing. The moving multiplicity underscored the heavy fixity of the block, a silent statue placed there, definitively. Thus the innumerable covers unity by uncovering its legal bones, thus being-there is placed, thus substance lies below its attributes and modifications.

I had to wait for that for what remains stable beneath a hundred casual substitutions to come to life. Never had I so well perceived, loved, known the invariant and the silence, the piece of virgin earth that the spring or fountain irrigates and waters in the middle, never did substance and its presence reveal itself so evidently as

though it fell from the sky or came out of the earth, never had I been thrown so strongly before the object.

Suddenly, I thought I saw a page of writing. The little malicious letters were eating the skin, the vellum, scarifying, piercing and boring the parchment to reach the beast of a different color, immobile and defenseless, lying below in silence. Read my carrion-eating page; see the thing it's writing through the trembling lines. When it appears, the writing will withdraw.

La Tour painted four Mary Magdalenes—woman, skull, flame, table, book, sometimes mirror—of which three are read from left to right in the direction of writing, as though painting, imitating language, gave a direction to be read at the same time as it gives an image to be seen. Only *The Penitent Magdalene* reverses the direction, less wordy, and therefore sinks better into silence: every object facing the woman lies to the left of the visitor, invited to break a wall of the cell. The palm of her hand gags her mouth; the closed book hides the pages; the reversed image turns the ordinary arrow of meaning back; we enter into the taciturn night. With the stretched-out fingers, marvelously beautiful, of her left hand, Magdalene meditating closes the sockets of the skull, as one does to the eyes of the dead, as she is sealing her own lips with the palm of her right hand. I don't see, don't say, don't read or speak.

The distance that separates the woman and the skull enters into her arms since each hand touches a head, dead and alive, the gap measured by the bent arm span being canceled in the lightning-fast immediacy of touch. Are you touching two heads or a single one, alive or dead Magdalene?

The same distance depends on the angle of the mirror or of the cheval glass that La Tour put up in front of the two faces. The living person should see herself but only sees the dried bones; we should perceive her but only see the death's head. Should we see our own face, or the face of the holy sinner?

The circle or the triangle of death, life or reflection opens or narrows the distance that separates the living body from the dry head.⁸ That gap is the only object of reflection or the only subject of meditation. We must discover the secret of the distance, a distance plunged in silence.

The silence opens a heavy plenitude split with small cracks by the lightness of words.

Language is exchanged between us like an illusory prop for our disequilibrium; it seems to us that we'd fall to the ground or one on top of the other without this labile and floating orthopedics. The most often speech does not signify anything, nor does it serve to communicate, but quickly fills voids that would require more effort and time

to be filled with what opens them, but drowns maladies like the water that streams by cascades through the disjointed staves of the Barrel of the Danaides about which we've never heard it said that the water ever mended the cracks in the wood. It would increase them rather. Language only seals language that's pierced with a hole; the word nurses the word poorly. But the streaming hides the pain with its turbulence, and the flow of language effaces the cries and tears with its noise. Therefore irresistible, inexhaustible, inextinguishable, a little viscous and sticky, language, like a thirst, draws its own deadly continuation downstream: it is well said that a river flows toward its mouths or mouth.⁹ What good is it? The liquid accumulation you pile up flows and never gets high enough for you to be able to support yourself on. And the disjointed group, like every soul, gathered around the wooden bucket, spews words inside where the level is always dropping; we resemble fountain tritons.

Silence nurses, repairs, appeases, reposes, fills, shows the source of meaning and the place of the thing.

Outside. The wind suspends the entire range of its numerous breezes. Low clouds. No rain nor quivering of the foliage, no chirping of insects. A bird supports its fleecy wingspan in the felted air. The empty sunken lane, the deserted vineyard, the line of motionless poplars enter together into the silence as though they were pouring into

an inside.

To say this collection, I'm only using negative forms, verbs, and adjectives. Of silence as of God, no one can speak except apophantically, that is to say, by only saying what they are not.

However greatly space stretches out on an autumn's evening in the middle of the sea when the background panting goes out, on a plain where the horizon hardly rises to your thighs, under a gigantic sky, the muteness makes this space—as enormous as the Pacific or Canadian volume—enter into a discrete privacy the way one enters into religion.¹⁰ Distances are abolished and the world meditates. Dense and collected, it takes the veil.

Inside. The candle glimmers and the night shines. Darkness cloisters the scene. Magdalene, seated, motionless, is closing lips and books, is reading the skull in the mirror, from left to right, again: language, irrepressibly, returns. Blow out the flame, Magdalene; leave the so bitter light to those who have received the gift of tears; enter further into the darkness about which it is written that it hasn't received speech. Enter into the black of meaning and into the present time; listen intensely to the immense cone of silence that's screwed like a weighty conch to the pinna of the ears and extends far, far, a wider and wider horn of plenty running colossal distances beyond your monk's cell across an innumerable space and

a wonderful landscape that never tires and about which no one ever speaks. This silence opens up the path to God. Of the two, language only knows what they are not. Yes, yes, the silence receives God, both of them in affirmative presence, the latter taken in by the former.

If you light your candle again, Magdalene, you'll see that this scene is nothing but vanity: even the light that shines in the darkness, even the word.

Everything happens as though silence transformed the exterior into the interior or the world into presence and self-consciousness and as though it changed the cloistered privacy of a narrow chamber into an infinitely large outside or what is called the self into the objective totality. The silence mutates the in-itself into for-itself and conversely, at leisure. It doesn't know any border.

The silence dilates and language diminishes. The former liberates me and brings me to the world; the latter imprisons me and makes an I of me.

Speech imposes limit and definition; logic first invents the outside and the inside, the boundary stone that separates the interior from the exterior, inclusion, exclusion, expulsion, membership. The logos glimmers in the darkness and says that the darkness has not received it: whereas the darkness, mute, knows neither the external nor the internal.

Speech expels; silence makes peace by lifting every

limit.

The candle's flame, behind, goes a little above the top of the skull, like a tuft or a feather, at the place where, on the living, leather and hair spread out and from which it is said that lucid thoughts, invisible, evaporate. The candle bathes with light the occiput and the neck, the place for the jowls, holes and pillars of a face whose features in times past were able to glimmer with beauty or happiness, hatred or generosity, calm ecstasy. Just as inventive meditation transfigures the head and body to the point that one recognizes thought without possible error by the fact that the face shines like the sun, and the clothing becomes white as snow. The skull retains the halo that life, as well as an idea or holiness, gives. The source of the light hidden by the cold and black bone places this latter in the center of the canvas, a dark emitter of light. A reduced model of the dark chamber, it irradiates.

The distance that separates life from death, the skull from the woman, the skeleton from the body, that transitory state that occupies this space and this time isn't called corpse for long but becomes that I don't know what that has no name in any language. A little after La Tour and quoting Tertullian, Bossuet refers to this thing ten times. The eloquence answers the silence of the meditating canvas by evoking the muteness of every language. No known culture has wanted to name that

which decomposes and reeks. That which Mary Magdalene puts her arms around and sees without seeing in the mirror's image. That which the painting silently demands that you make out. *That*, that common being, universal, unnamed, plunged since the dawn of language into an ontological silence. Not only into the taciturnity of the holy night or holy darkness, not only into the mystic muteness of the repentant sinner, not only into the non-language of the painted image, not only into the cultural or anthropological forgetfulness of the collectivities all throughout history, but into the radical, originary, and primitive silence that precedes or accompanies that logos which is said to announce Being. That logos or verb that shines in the darkness and that the darkness has not received.

Mary Magdalene found herself there, in the area of Bethany, the day of the encounter. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother Lazarus wouldn't be dead," she wept. "Where have you put him?" he said. Then they answered: "Lord, come and see." The trembling Word went to the tomb. "Remove the stone," he said, for it was a cave with a stone placed over it. Martha, Lazarus's other sister, declared: "Lord, he already stinks; it's the fourth day." Lazarus has left the brief state of being a corpse. Everyone had said: come and see. The stone was removed. Then he who John (who is relating the miracle)

called at the beginning of the same text the Speech or the Word, the logos of the beginning, then the Word lifted his eyes upward and said a prayer to the Father.¹¹ Encounter: Lord, come and see. See. Yet when the stone was removed, the Lord lifted up his eyes and said. The Word did not see *that*, that which no longer has a name in any language: He spoke. And that said, the Word in a loud voice cried out: “Lazarus, come forth.” Outside the tomb: the voice, the said, the cry, the meaning, the command, life; outside death, the Speech. In the hole and below the stone lies the thing with no relation to the Speech. And which this latter didn’t see or name. The Speech called Lazarus, the name of the living person. So the dead man rose and came out, hands and feet hampered by bandages and his face enveloped by a shroud. The hard and loud speech had regained sufficient weight to lift the mummy.

Did Mary Magdalene see that the Word didn’t see *that*, that which the visitor, immersed in language, must not see in the painting, that which we no longer see ever since we began speaking, that is, ever since we’ve been men and our ancestors refused to see by mummifying and embalming the corpses and binding them with long bandages and covering them with linens sponging off the sweat, that which no one ever names, that which the Word, invited to see at the time of the fundamental, primitive, radical encounter, refused to see by lifting his

eyes upward, that which forms a hole in the world redeemed by the logos, *that*, this thing lying in the residual silence of ontology? The encounter did not take place.

What took place is the return of *that*, deaf and mute, into the universe of language, into the world redeemed by speech, its raising at the call, loud, of its living person's name, its resurrection into the sound uttered by the Word. This latter finally saw and received it when *that* became he who was called Lazarus again, the Logos's friend and Mary's brother. This encounter took place: from name to name, from living person to living person. The other did not take place: from logos to *that*, from the word to the thing. Come and see. See. He lifted his eyes upward and said. Upward: for the cave was plunging below, with a stone placed over it. Of tombs, we only want to see the stones. Nameable like the proper names written on them.

No relation exists between language and that thing. *That* is the thing itself, underneath the stone.

There is nothing else I know of that bears no name.

Martha, Lazarus's sister, declared: "Lord, he already stinks; it's the fourth day." And the Logos itself was risen on the third day. No relation exists between language and that thing. That which waits a day too long to have a name in language.

The unnamed distance between the woman and the skull, language and thing, which separates subject and object, that gap abandoned by language is, to the best of my knowledge, the space in which knowledge happens.

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The light does not go from the living face to the inert thing: on the contrary, the meditating face receives it from the object. The I does not begin, rather the *that* does.

Now between the dry head, more than dead, almost abstract, empty and dessicated, suitably objectivized, wholly exterior, pierced, visible, nameable, articulated, analyzable, between the skull and the rest of the world, a circumstantial halo of light, like the ones worn by the great saints, replaces, at bone level, the lining of flesh, fat, muscle, organs, skin, hair, radiance, charm, beauty, glory. The source of the light is hidden behind that object.

It is necessary to, I want to think the identity of the lacking flesh and the present light, of that softly incandescent halo and rotting. I solemnly affirm the luminous living body and the carcass that supplies new thoughts; I assume and know the equation of sinful flesh and radiant saintliness—Mary Magdalene knows it—of fruitful inventiveness and swarming scraps, of transfiguration and decomposition, all things that occur in the closest proximity to the humiliated bones; what the

skeleton is wearing retains a look of family: a carnal, spiritual, beautiful, putrid, and corrupted light that shines in the darkness around the skull and rejoins Magdalene's charm, her serene meditation, her odor of sanctity, her tranquil beauty. In this precise place, exactly circumstantial or standing around the body in a halo, the flesh becomes word. Thus the body thinks.

The body thinks therefore shines. Its face is radiant like the sun.¹² This thing shines in the darkness without one being able to see the source of light hidden by death. The body produces and thinks. At bone level, consumption, saintliness, radiance, or thought take place, all of them kinds of halos.

It thinks and is consumed. Burns in order to move, muscularly; burns with desire and radiates with appeal or charm; drunk with God, burns; burns with thought to the point of coming apart and no longer existing like a handful of ashes. Thinks if and only if it accepts death in these flames.

What comes out of that thing can be called flame or soul, charm, consumption, in any case a halo. And this portrait, double, or the painting, simulacrum, came out of the painter La Tour's body like his halo, and the statue of Saint Teresa in ecstasy came out of Bernini's body like a marble ring around a star; may this page emanate from my skin like the same golden leaf.¹³ I am flesh and halo,

therefore I think. To produce thought, it is necessary to make this soul be born, by appropriate training, from the body. And the necessary exercise passes through flame and death, the desire of the body and saintliness, annihilation before the thing. The black thing that sheds light without one being able to see the source of light, hidden by death, and whose radiance the face receives full in the face.

I think to live and I live from thinking; I think to the point of dying from it, for only death causes thinking; I think and live and die and become this thing. This thing thinks. Burns and thinks. The I has no existence. The thing begins.

The enhaloed saints formerly symbolized wonderfully the production of knowledge, thought, or beauty. They were depicted in the process of producing that circumstance shining around their skull, of making their soul, their charm, their flame, their transfiguration appear, and the painter or the statuary who represented them like this knew what he was doing in making them produce like this since he himself was producing the painting or the group like a halo, and if one had known how to read the saint's halo directly one would have known the condition or secret of production. However this is nothing but an open secret: every producer becomes so for having approached death more than any other, moved away from the I more

than any other, approached the object more than any other. This ascesis requires the silence and solitude in which the border between the thing and the subject disappears. Between Magdalene and the skull remains the halo of light, the secret of every production.

The subject comes out of or resurrects from the object.

Easter Day, early in the morning, the holy women, Mary Magdalene in the lead, hastened to the tomb bearing vases of herbs but found the stone rolled away, the sepulcher empty, and a young man in white waiting for them. What were they going to do there? Embalm the corpse. Why? In order to respect the ancient rites: Joseph himself had the remains of his father Jacob mummified before bringing him back to the land of his ancestors. Pompous finery, a borrowed radiance find a place on the body after death. Thus embalming—long labor and precise techniques—prepares immortality, resurrection, the exit into the day. Lazarus emerged hampered by linens.

For millennia, mummifiers first removed the brain by means of needles and the entrails through an incision made in the side; then they bathed or washed the corpse with herbs, sometimes for forty days, in pools of natron or by means of every other unction; lastly they enveloped it with wrappings. Four techniques, surgical, chemical and textile, suitable for separating the hard from the soft, the preservable from the perishable, suitable for purifying, for

covering with cosmetics, lastly for boxing up, burying, or winding tight. When we have to safeguard some body, we quickly rediscover the ancient quadruple gesture.

In abolishing them, the holy text indicates each of these archaic rites: Jesus received the crown of thorns on the skull and the wound in the side from which blood and water flowed while alive; likewise, Mary Magdalene, in Bethany, poured a vase of nard on him: embalmed and anointed before his death, he received his baptismal name, Christ, from the hands of a prostitute, a name which means anointed or embalmed, which she wrote on his body by spreading the herb as for an Extreme Unction. Lastly, up early, the holy women of the family, including our harlot, rushing to the tomb, saw the linens folded in a withdrawn corner, wrappings useless without their content. The four canonical techniques disappeared four times.

The passion, the death, and the resurrection of Christ nullify all mummification work on a body whose name has the same meaning as: mummy. The Word that became flesh, only the word “flesh,” is henceforth embalmed death.

On that Easter morning, during which the women didn't know what to do with their vases of herbs, the great, the colossal eastern Mediterranean and perhaps universal Antiquity drew to a close: a unique moment in which the exit into the light of day or the entry into glory

after death took place without preparations, without practice or perfume, veils or bandages, hammer or coat, apparatus, work or knowledge. No more hard object in the black box. All human activity found itself, at once, freed toward other objects than the dead body. Time and history changed dramatically; they were going to be counted in the other direction. The end lay behind: let's let the dead bury the dead.

Naked, unveiled, a single statue was from then on substituted for millions of mummies, stiffened by and under their veils: a tremendous savings of labor. A single name, written or said, a sign even, were substituted for a thousand rites, gestures, unction texts, done or to be done, like a concept for examples that are countlessly exhausted establishing it: the Word had redeemed the ancient objects.

The work of the negative, manual, corporeal, historic or societal, died in principle that morning. Modern work began.

Everyone was risen, in fact, from then on, since this one had died and was risen for us, that is, in our place, a universal substitute.

Victory, victory, the Fathers and the Christian hymns sing the day when they commemorate the Resurrection of the Christ. What does that mean?

For the very first time in history, the victim didn't in his turn vanquish the victor by vengeance, but by an unprecedented and new reversal drew his victory from death, that object that the two rival subjects are always moved by. No one has ever said or read that the Risen One triumphed over Pilate or over some traitor or tribunal, so that no one in his turn would be able to get revenge, as well, on those who sentenced Jesus. The trick of the victor animal, vanquished, the revenge and the deciding match before the very last one stopped because the true master of all combats, death itself, withdrew, leaving all rivalry or adversity. The ultimate victory over history.

The vendetta or dialectic, the dismal and repetitive motor of the eternal return, only advances in appearance, by changing the blacks into whites, the reds into greens, victories into defeats and conversely. Only prescription blocks this stagnation. If we placed prescription at the ultimate foundation of all our rights, death itself would stop the work we, blind, are collaborating with—and we would be risen.

That's what will happen at the end of the world, on the morning of the last day. Time will gush forth in an unexpected direction.

The Resurrection reverses the subjects' works and attention toward the object.

*

It doesn't sound an end. Nor a crushing catastrophe. Don't cry, don't scream, don't collapse before it, however terrifying in each of us.

It formed us. Without it, we would have remained exact animals, riveted to instinct, to the repetitive program, to societal croakings or noises. It has given us, like a spring, without ever running dry, our emotions and knowledge, has jabbed us with its spur to get us standing, to loosen our tongues, to carve stone, smelt alloys, demonstrate truths, to go toward the work.

It, death.

It doesn't sound my end. Don't cry, my body, don't collapse, erect posture and haughty bearing, before the terror it used to inspire.

It shapes my emotions. Without it, I wouldn't have wanted to travel the world, to know geometry or navigation, to become a mason, musician, to understand ten languages; never would I have built or written, composed or calculated, goaded by haste and the thorn of its presence.

It, my death. Of such little importance. Preceded by the end of a few others I loved.

It won't sound our specific end. Don't cry or huddle up in

a ball, broad thought of history; don't collapse, humanity threatened by the atomic terror.

It invents another time. We have to think a new peace, an unimaginable knowledge, a bold philosophy with unprecedented ideas.

On its basis, the total, global death without recourse of the human species.

An emotion without equivalent, never felt in the past.

It doesn't sound the end; it always sits enthroned at the beginning.

Outside the empty tomb.

It, the Resurrection.

I believe in the Resurrection and the Life.

Zero

RAPTURE

Weight

RAPTURE

Weight

Among the statuettes scattered in crèches during Christmas in the direction of Provence, frozen more than the other characters, figures the Enraptured One. An outside observer, naïve, he scarcely enters into the scene, and, like each of us, was passing through there: suddenly nailed to the ground, no matter where, dumbfounded, staggered, petrified by what he sees, motionless, stopped because sent into transports; here he is climbing to the third heaven and so a part of the holy scene. He has, like everyone, his feet on the ground and his head in the divine.

An evidently motionless statue seems to move, so much does its gesture vibrate: life stabilizes by finding its seat, while stone, in deviation from equilibrium, finds a dynamic.¹ A double paradox of a living motion that stops and an inert repose that rushes forward, of an organism

that's sleeping or dying and a raw material that's waking or resurrecting: it's not enough to say or describe linguistic figures to understand this present. It's not even enough to read static statuary and the act that frees itself from it in the word "ecstasy." Yes, rapture immobilizes and transports. In mysticism lies one of sculpture's secrets, as a religious source and sometimes as a reason for its captivating beauty. Ecstasy makes either the body or the soul fly, but adds tons to the body it enraptures. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi with a single light step went to the cymae but grew so heavy sometimes that ten strong persons couldn't move her. It's not enough to say or recount. Bernini had to sculpt Saint Teresa in ecstasy, compact, ethereal.

However deeply my thoughts or the ideas of others I've been able to share may have plunged, as much intoxication as certain discoveries or great inventions I've been able to understand may have lavished on me, however musical my sentences or the created beauties I've been able to contemplate may have sounded, however perfectly happinesses may have been able to present themselves, I've always known, with a sovereign intuition, that these events happened like islands for he who sails and that, beneath this rarity that could be lacking, a table, a pedestal, a continuous support existed, like a peaceful and gentle security where ever-present

beauty is the other name of intelligent light and joy.

Wiser people than me have named the superabundant continent I see and where I sometimes live: God, being, heaven, truth, or philosophy, but have always affirmed that this other world merges with this one, the simple and profound reality of things.

Angels, envoys, messengers, carried them there without their feet touching the ground—proof that there is no route or method leading there; archangels or cherubim accompanied them there to have them look over its layout and towers, and they were so happy there that they thenceforth deemed themselves émigrés or nomads wandering in the ordinary terrestrial valley when they returned, forced one day to go back home: they wondered what they were doing there.

So, however deeply their thoughts may have penetrated, as much intoxication as they may have received from a work, however beautiful several rare pages may seem, they know that these remain pieces, wreckage, from a certain shipwreck on that voyage.

All movement here below, mobility or immobility, only makes them train beforehand for a new angel-winged departure toward their hoped-for space.

Naïve, having lost their heads. Enraptured. Ecstatic before what happens in the world.

Fifth Century before Christ

EMPEDOCLES'S RETURN

Fire

EMPEDOCLES'S RETURN

Fire

How he traversed the distance from Selinunte to the foot of Mount Etna, beneath the turbulent sky, the anxious nights, the dry wind, he would not have been able to say, blind to the hills on which the wheat was ripening, to the black olive trees tied to the slopes and to the cruel towns resting on the summits. However, he had passed through the center of the island, in the place called the navel, where Persephone, the priests said, was abducted and then dragged into the underworld. He had gone through the door of the world without realizing it.

One evening, he found himself in the talus scree. Walking became impossible. A recent eruption had spilled a large lava flow across the flows he recognized. It formed a field of ruins, of debris, black and

discontinuous, marked with red and yellow traces. Cones, with their points downward, were collapsing; caverns were opening like hard and smooth arches crowned with ashy powder and led shafts be made out. Among the ejecta, rocks high as towers and other simple stones plagued the walker with obstacles and made him slip. Climbing straight up, he would immediately roll. The night added its shadow to the black sheet. To his right, already, a minor crater was burning. He received its acid smoke in waves; his eyes were tearing up. Sometimes, often, he fell to his knees under the too heavy weight and bled from his hands and feet.

He thought he heard clamors, the tumult of the wind and the furnace; was the ash slipping with a noise like falling water? The mountain at work was murmuring with its metamorphoses, cracking, rumbling, crackling, popping. He heard, all melted together, explosions and deflagrations of fire, muffled or loud, cave-ins, crashes and detonations of earth, heavy and deep, the lapping and bubbling, vibrant and rustling, of liquids, the hissing and stridulations of the air, at the upper limits of the audible, like the tearing of a curtain. Under the turbulent black sky, amid the dark and moving lavas, the troubled murmur of things was raising its commotion. Hurricanes on the open sea, sandstorms in the desert, forest fires, waterspouts and lightning, he remembered all that, then, as almost simple components of this great random

howling: here, the sum and product of all the world's noises, the great vortex. This high disordered, truncated cone solidified the turbulent form while leaving it changing and viscous. An interior turmoil that's come outside as an almost perfect excrescence, a hard fluid where multiple parts were born to unity, where unity was multiplied into its elements. The forces at work of union and dissociation in this thick magma seemed to be searching for a word across the scattered din.

For the first time the immense clamor of Love and Hate reached him. For Hate and Love rumble and wail, whereas, deaf to this racket, the vibrating strings of old Pythagoras sent out the world's first message, its first ordered signal. He passionately listened to the things panting beneath the acoustics, the disorder fidgeting before any type of sign; heard the primordial music, the buzzing of the burning chaos, the world's background noise. He knew then, personally and by hearsay, that his physics had touched the forces of origin, the shrill tearing of dissociation and the full and warm, harmonic and beating tonality of communion. Things speak, for a hurried listening, but rustle and babble for the profound ear. The craters, then, the flows, those collapsed sheets, those cliffs, those coombs appeared to him, in the black of meaning and under the teeming of the constellations, to be the great world organ, with lop-sided, twisted and divided up pipes, with disjointed stops, with scattered keyboards,

roaring, under the vault of the sky, an aleatoric proto-music.

Pythagoras had only known how to listen to the blacksmith at work, whereas he was hearing Hephaestus himself who, through fire, was filling space with mad tones. *Through his tenderness, he heard the primary Tenderness of things; through the hate that, in him, was twisting with bitterness, he heard the elementary and dark Hate.* The way, in the past, he had known the wind through the heady air that raised his chest, the devouring fire through the double furnace of the brain and the genitals, the waters through his secretions, the earth through the weight of his fatigue in the evening. The swirling noises of the world were reaching that internal ear that perceives the body's tumult. He too was a volcano; Hephaestus was forging in his own burning loins; Enceladus, beaten, crushed by the gods, was lying chained up in his belly, his liver, his thighs, from which he made plaintive and angry mutterings be heard, which came out of his own mouth in words of ash, cinder and smoke.¹ The interminable war of the giants had always taken place in his flesh and on the mountain. Of course, the old Cyclopes of the caves, blind, were wandering in the blackness and throwing rocks just anywhere ever since a certain envoy from Athena, the virgin and warrior, had passed through, ever since the ruses and wickedness

of Ulysses, the man of intelligence.

Zeus's thunderbolt from the clouds nevertheless didn't triumph forever. Mastery wasn't definitively sheltered from an eruptive bomb. He recognized that in his body's noises, in the abundant energies that made an immense clamor in him, they too searching for a word across this scattered din. Was reason passing over to the side of Hate since it had reduced this tumult to silence and these works to disordered chaos? Did the divine understanding of proportions and ratios detest a random desire? Did the Cyclopes only seek to look after woolly flocks? Did Hephaestus, expelled from the Banquet, only desire to forge animate statues to free the slaves from work? The fire from the sky was only a deadly thunderbolt; Aphrodite had left the anvil and hammer to enjoy Ares, the god of war. Yes, Hate was changing sides. Victorious, it was siding firmly with Olympic intelligence. Love was clamoring beneath the mountain. Empedocles, a scholar, physicist, a prince of reason, felt his head to be filled with Hate, but heard Love crying out in his entrails and genitals. An entire world, learned, constructed, built level like a temple, was toppling over in front of him, a long lie finally seen through. He listened passionately to the messages deprived of meaning issuing from those two dark mouths, the blind craters and his own black body whose forgotten commotion bore the secrets of the world. At that moment, the word "Etna," the sound "Etna," that

burst of the voice and teeth, without any other meaning than to designate a pile of ashes and fire, happened to reverse itself like a glove before his eyes to deliver an unexpected meaning: *ante*, what faces, the thing against, the object. To hide or efface the adversary, to make people believe that it had disappeared, the victorious word had contraposed its name. Antaeus [*Antée*] too was a giant put to death by a god. Some other god of speech had put to death the name of the place where he was buried. The volcano was expelled from language, effaced, reduced to a noise, that background clamor that Empedocles was hearing in the course of his nocturnal passion.

He was slowly wandering over that pathless, chaotic slope. Fell, climbed, rolled, descended, resumed walking and ascending; and understood with difficulty, in bits and pieces, without any key for translating this ashy hubbub clearly, this expanse of noise. He was transforming the sulfur dust that came into his mouth and cracked under his teeth into scattered words, transforming into sound the pulverulent cinders with which his ears were filling. A crowd of cold scoriae that could no longer speak and to which his heat was given. They stuck to his face, arms, and hands, to his sweat and blood. The fire of his desire was rekindling these stones. He was melting into the chaos, drowned in the rumblings and coal dust. Soon, he would have vanished into the black of meaning, into the unformed mass that forever precedes signals.

But no, it wasn't a question of a sepulture; he didn't want to bury himself yet. Burning like the plasma of stars, he was drawing a directional arrow on the black sand and dead rocks. A comet's tail was heading towards the crater. No doubt his own fire would exhaust itself by giving itself without conceivable pardon to the icy pumice. The scattering of the passive flow was regaining an earthly hope, in passing. At the end of his route, through stops, regressions, advances, his flame would perhaps have flagged, but he was going, compelled, to the source of the fire, to the source of life, meaning, creation. His heat was running—panting—toward the inferno, his desire toward rebirth, his gentle tenderness toward the sun below.

At the furthest edge of the clouds, the moon, in bursts, was spreading its silky glow. He then perceived contours, leaning rocks, scattered volumes losing equilibrium, precarious balance everywhere, like constructions in danger of toppling over once the storm or fire or earthquake had passed, and whose bare beams were hanging and leaning in overhangs but still supporting the roof timbers. On the great black cone, lit up and then veiled by occultations and which occupied almost the entire sky, each thing was taking on an angle, askew it seemed, but only held, moving, by reproducing, more or less, the volcano's jagged angle. The chaos was, suddenly, losing its disorder; the deviation from equilibrium was becoming a law, sown haphazardly in the

lava field. On the main slope, everything was leaning according to circumstance; rocks, piles, talus, funnels were giving their declination, like ships of all sizes on the mobile sea.

It was enough to imagine an infinitely slow rolling or heavily viscous waters to see that expanse dotted with masts of every breadth. Empedocles was seeing a strange raging ocean whose global level didn't keep smooth but was inclined, sloping, and which compensated for that fleeing by a thick density, an almost stable flow, an indefinitely not very mobile time. The duration of the fire was being frozen, on the descent, by the doughy weight of the declivity. Amid this crystallized hurricane, every vessel tilted its spars according its height and type. If he didn't move from this place for millennia and if his heart only beat once per lunar month, he would have seen them doing a lengthy dance before shipwreck. But his slender and hurried body was threading its way through a derisory time; his impatient and rapid heart only opened a rift in the hard massif of duration, despite the long serenity of acquired wisdom and the breadth of his shoulders. However he could imitate these movements of endless scope in the short alcove of his hours, him the accelerator that ramps up slow eternity. He climbed, lost his balance, fell, started again, the deviation always resumed in the thighs and loins. Standing and progressing by the very possibility of falling. He assumed, in a lightning-fast

manner, like an arch, the angle and overhang formed by the things in a poised calm. His tiny crank craft was dancing madly in the bad weather amid the ships of high tonnage that were almost motionless in the cyclone. A lighter, he was unloading the enormous time of things, he was hopping, subtle, amid the gravities.

The deviation, the two asymmetrical legs of Mount Etna's cone, the dangerously overhanging rocks, the arch of his back and the tired hesitation of his gait, this shifting sown on the sheet of ash were drafting the law of becoming, a law adherent to chaos. The key to the things themselves, their hobbling keystone, he was finding it everywhere for carrying it within himself. Everything is born from there, everything dies likewise. It was natural to find this general inequation of existence here on the roof of Hephaestus the lame's very house, Hephaestus who limped after his expulsion from the other world, his birth. To see day and night entering unequally into time is to contemplate the play of this excess, of this lack, an excess and lack that topple onto each other. The blacksmith casts and hammers beings and things in his image—askew, off-center, outside itself. And the volcano's furnace knows that if everything remains plumb nothing exists, that strict equilibrium amounts to the waterfall, chaos, ash in vertical rain, disorder from which nothing comes. In the beginning, fire: I see it shoot up from the crater; I saw it yesterday evening descend from

the sun; I see it snow from the stars. In the beginning, the rain of fire. Lightning. Yes, I understand why the smith fell from the sky. Then right after, nothing, eternally. Everything is falling and that's all, in a sheet, in a cloud, in a curtain. And slowly cools in the void like a kind of fog and goes toward its stability. Only nothingness can happen from this imbecilic equilibrium. Banal chaos, like the banal furnace, which rests infinitely and cools.

So to draw things from chaos, the smith invented the volcano, made Etna his home, threw fire onto the slope the way he was cast out from the sky. *That* gets colder along the incline, taking on postures and forms, cams and asymmetries. The truncated or the oblique begins to list. There is always an angle in the straight line or a gap in the circle. Etna itself has a jagged crater, longer toward the south and more abrupt toward the north. The cones rest on other cones, like Pelion on Ossa, solidified viscous vortices. The circles don't catch hold of themselves but open into spirals. Yes, I've always been mistaken with my circle. The grand form of the things of the world is turbulence. Spiral patches in the sky, like the waterspouts that raise the passive sea or lay the ears in a corn field down in an open ring with the passing of certain thunderstorms; the branches of trees climb a spiral staircase around the main trunk; the shell of soft animals winds around an umbilicus to the right or left. The universality of the spiral form is bound to be repeated in

the very small: if particles exist they're bound to bustle about in a plume; if grouped atoms of life exchanged by men and women in reproduction exist they're bound to be screwed in a helix. In the beginning, fire, in the beginning, deviation. The world is not ambidextrous, it must, to exist, warp a little.² An economy circuiting into itself would collapse into death or nothingness, the furnace gone cold. A little spending, a hole for waste, a window for acquisition are needed. On Etna's waterspouted gradient, the heat flows from upslope; the cold aspirates from downslope. My route rises winding; here is the descent of things, their birth, their death, that is to say, their form. Everything goes according to the cyclone, the circumference remaining what being has already lost. Fire twists in woven flames; the earth, crystals show dissymmetries; the air whirls; the water eddies. Every path deviates by an angle from its straight line, and the circle does not rejoin itself. I am, left-handed, a discord of the chaos. The disquietude that never leaves me rejoins the order of atmospheric phenomena. We must fall, lose our balance, to be and to come into being, and endlessly catch ourselves until the terminal fall to the bottom of the coomb. Love hesitates toward Hate; Hate has misfires in which it makes way for Love. In the shifted force field, everything flies out in a plume from that oblique rift. The volcano, the foot of the world, swirls

with rock and smoke toward the black sky.

Then, beings were born whose feet were screwed in helices and whose hands couldn't be counted. The previous evening, he had been seated at the foot of an agave that was leaning its slender main shoot over the open plume of its enormous leaves. The lava field was becoming populated. A place of the end of things and the beginning of times. The sowing of deviation over the sheet of ashes was bearing fruit. *On the new earth, in indecipherable numbers, grew heads without necks; everywhere naked arms without shoulders slid, and eyes wandered about vaguely, without foreheads, and one by one.* The background rustling in search of a word that he had heard in the wind and talus scree was coming now from mouths, throats, beaks, muzzles—scattered to the wind and downwind—which were emitting it, irrepressible. The former tumult was translated into the wails of infants. And all that, as numerous as the sand, was gently swarming in the coppery night, buzzing, humming with its proliferation. A massif of worms, a flight of locusts, an anthill or swarm, but in which each moving organ was differentiating itself from every other. The scattered's Hate was moaning, horrible, in search of Love.

An atrocious anxiety screwed his belly at the memory that once, on the coast of a lost sea, toward the Semitic Orient, still to the east of the Nile and southern enough to

see strange stars, at sundown he had seen a desert beach covered with myriads of crabs, a dense population of slow carapaced animals. Alone on a low dune, he watched, appalled, the viscous and broken magma. Never had he felt as solitary as on that day. On the reddish and shifting sand, in the wide band where the desert ended, crackling heterochelous pincers were sharpening amongst themselves, gray and translucent plates were sliding one over the other, clumsy rings were half-embracing, a purée of appendages were mixing without merging, scattered segments were trembling, a violent and sickly sweet agony in a rattling of hail. At the ends of the known world, the horrifying multiplicity, spread as far as the horizon, was sounding the end, the death of things. Is Hate's work here at its ultimate deciding authority? In that enormous sticky pile of scissors, knives, sections and fragments of armor, in that gluey continuum of breaches, ridges and fissures, in that ground-up cracking, that clattering of crushing, his hearing and sight reached the edge of history. Exactly after, the insane murmur of the sea. The ultimate dissociation on the wet sand, the final battle. His body was disintegrating little by little from remaining there, right near that sewage field. He was losing its hands and feet; he was counting its bones. He felt himself rolling on the dune, limb by limb, from part to part, like last chance dice, in order to rejoin in a cataract, passive and fascinated, necessarily taken by the sliding of

the sheet, violence, hate and dissociation. The crowd and he ran toward the atoms on the declivity of the shore, refusing the sun from above, the breeze everywhere, the water to the left and the land to the right, captivated by the serious and deadly work of difference. The sunset was hanging its green needle at the end of the solidified sky. In spite of the merciless heat, easily chilled, he wrapped himself in his tunic, turned his back abruptly to that slaughter and left running toward the desert until he was out of breath. That evening he understood that men, if they all so desired, could be immortal for very little.

Today, once again, the same desert, but black and in the small hours of the night, short of breath and the slope in the same seamless mantle. A similar place if not the same time, the same noise and a similar anxiety. No longer the emerald flame vanishing at the horizon, but this yellow and coppery fire coming out of the shaft at two thousand paces. He was no longer separated from the heavy proliferation by the elevation of a dune but plunged living inside. Legs and arms were coming up to his thighs; he felt himself brushed by ears and eyes. Scattered limbs were sticking to his skin and seemed to want to hold fast to his skeleton. He was becoming a monster and no longer knew what belonged to him. His lived body was bursting, for lack of coenesthesia. He no longer had any assurance of where his individual ended. The warm and secret patency one possesses of one's edges, of the space

filled with blood and muscles, of the volume occupied by the skin and its interior, that certitude was flowing, scattered, through his pores. He was leaving his home, as though by the stairs of a mill: becoming all, everywhere, he was being annihilated, was living nowhere.³ The exceedingly swollen goatskin exploded. Torrent and volute, ash, talus scree, ejecta and now these ten thousand pieces, this burst anthill, of him and outside him, with paradoxical borders. Him, that ancient sub-thing: agave and cavern, stone and bull, scorpion, volcano, bear or star. Lost, distraught, he was entering into the world that was invading him, burying himself in the ground whose earth was penetrating him, scattering himself on the thorny beds of the winds that were forming the rose in his torso, flowing along waters that were streaming from his liver to his nails, flaming like a fire across the sparks of the plain.⁴ Melted among the others, he was curling up in their intimacy, become woman, child, old man, slave and master, black as a Nigritian and mad enough to tell oracles. He was elsewhere, and elsewhere was formed here, as though the volcano had liquefied and then flung him in a thousand pieces into every corner of the world and across the thickness of what exists. *There were many that had two chests, two faces, oxen with human faces and men with bovine heads; there were male females with delicate members.* Swimming in that confusion of pieces

and appendages, he was turning into the universal monster of Love, the hermaphrodite.

My body appears such as the others have always perceived it in that it appears separated, divided, finished like an island because Hate has lopped its bridges, its long connections and bumps, and because it has blocked its holes, its apertures and passages; because it has sealed the doors and windows, has mutilated all the roads. Dumb, blind, deaf, intact and intangible, Hate is always virgin. The works of Love on the chaos of lava were attempting mutations in the metamorphic rocks. The background clamor was losing a bit of its insanity; breezes of ecstasy were passing. Disjoint appendages were knotting together, combining, intertwining in a helix; union was imitating Hermes's caduceus everywhere. Strange reptiles were transforming, certain ones of a colossal size, chimera were exchanging their parts, echidnae were becoming covered with quills and hair, woman-headed birds were landing on big-breasted harbor seals, camel lions and horse fish were trying to survive their birth and were searching for their rare female amid the leopards. Invention's generosity, in reality, was surpassing mythology. It was squandering where delirium remained miserly and reason stingy, and combining, tranquilly and limitlessly. You might have thought that several continents were nearing each other, distancing away from each other or putting their fortune in common. The noise

that was filling space was riddled with interferences.

He took some time to go past the molten tide and untie himself from this tentacular bushing out. He could have remained there always and would even have desired to do so. Not a stage or a stop on his journey but the impassable place after which nothing new could appear. As though a womb cloud existed and then the tedium of repetition. As though a network existed, one where the connections never stop, and then the imbecility of invariances. After the crossbreeding, due to the foolishly straight route, life doesn't vary much. After the paradise of tigrans and ligers, animality in ecstasy does nothing but endlessly repeat the gestures of the beginning. The mongoose no longer looks for the cobra except to put it to death; the hedgehog no longer attempts a now unthinkable crossbreed with the adder, nor the eagle with the lamb. The burning invention explodes into an archipelago whose islands are invaded by parasites to defend their approaches where dogs, frothing with rabies, mount guard. Hate, old, passes there. It unties the caducei, forbids encounters and cuts off coituses, defines niches, divides, puts in order by fossilizing things and constructing keeps. Does the misfortune of time come from the fact that the week of Love is short, of a dense and compact duration, whereas the era of Hate covers millennia, repeating itself? The dividing up of time only leaves Love the margin. Since when have we entered the

era of Hate? Since the memory of genera. Since when are monsters or gods no longer manufactured? He would have given everything for a new living creature.

He was standing on a bare projecting shelf, ventilated, after three successive falls. The slope resumed further on after this brief rest. As though awakened from a dream, he beat his sandals and shook his coat. Here's the start of the final gradient, the cone's last incline. The night, suddenly, was becoming very dark; before the clouds had occulted the moon, he had thought he'd seen several masses of gray snow piled below the scoria. The frost, deep, imprisoned Etna's fabulous discourse in crystals and ice. What winter season, what cold altitude is preventing me from speaking? He was going to the furnace through the cold. The wind was freshening with the height. The gusts, violent, were cracking with a roar in the couloirs of the high rocks, whirling at the bottom of the cul-de-sacs, broken by hesitations and silences. And once again, he thought he was out on the open sea, in one of those savage storms like he saw and lived through between Palermo and Naples or off the mouths of the Nile toward the coast of Crete. Complicated paths worked their way through the middle of the crumbling rocks, cliffs eaten away at their feet, vertical and inclined, like the troughs between waves. And in these narrow labyrinths, the wind's tumult was modulating, sweeping away the audible, from stridency to droning. The noise was

increasing to the point of silence, and the pauses in the panting were saturated with clamoring. He, once again, received the insane message. No, he wasn't alone, had never been so. How had he been able to imagine he was, yesterday evening, when the sunset was disproportionately lengthening his shadow? He hadn't seen anyone around the olive trees; nothing was stirring in the last fields or the first clusters of trees. A solitary field of rocks in the first hours of vigil. Nothing but rocks and his visions. And yet, he would have sworn that a crowd was accompanying him. He grasped its outlines and movements, behind the rocks, in front of them, yes, in them. Its immense mass, in myriads and thousands, was besieging the volcano. The cone was trembling because of it. Groups, families, clans, cities, nations were walking in procession along the slopes; torches flickered here and there, firebrands and lamps. An entire black crowd was hiding and then appearing, silent and howling its complaint in wordless music. The population of all those who have vanished. Not those that death had erased from the earth, but those who had not chosen to live there like shades and that hate had buried under the law. The vanished Empedocles all of a sudden found himself with those damned by Hate. He had naively thought himself the only one to choose the night; nothing could be more common, banal, or ordinary. The hero lives in the street and the public square, whereas the hero of the stage

amounts to a mask.

Immersed in the *turba*, the skin of his face was falling off. He was hearing a new language that the full light of day had abducted. Voices of imploring women, cries and murmurs being drowned by the confusion, brawls, altercations, pitched battles, a fearsome army whose breastplates and sabers were clashing against each other, breakings of lances, crashings of shields, whistlings of javelins, stomplings of horses whose hooves were breaking bones, vociferations of anger, disparate terms of abuse, warriors mortally wounded and who were bellowing out their agony, above all, the moans, groans, and lamentations of the wounded. The mountain was giving birth to the sobs of men, was streaming with venom, harshness, loathing, horror, rancor, and resentment; but the background tonality remained suffering. And victor and vanquished were nothing but victims; the women's voices were crying it out. Hate cuts up and reproduces itself, total and identical, on each side of the division, like a worm. Despite the putting to death of one piece by another piece, Hate multiplies itself faster than it kills; the contagion increases by its own ravages. The crowd was amassing the plague victims of history. The global flood of that plague we call history.

Empedocles understood that he was going to die. In his tears were vibrating the reflections of those who were killing each other. He was seeing double. He was going to

die from them, by them, and for them. Be totally consumed by Love and Hate. He had known how to beat the plague, the one that turns the throat black and spit the color of saffron, the one whose principles were hiding away in the river mouths and backwaters; he had been able to make the waters flow, to dredge the silty bottoms, to burn the sanies and rot on pyres, to scatter the fetid and putrid miasmas in the light wind to the south, to the sea, to drain the upstream swamps and cure the Selinuntans, but he didn't know how to fight against this insane plague that dictates fighting. Inadequate medicine, impotent physics.

Worst of all, his knowledge, tied to that state of things, had seen and predicted it. Love, Hate—global forces—regulate the parts and the elements, the chain of things and their unleashing; bodily energies lead to murder, lynching, tortures, to caresses, warm coitus, and ecstatic fusion; Love and Hate are also of science. At a hundred paces from the smoky hearth, the world is reversed. What I had thought up to this dawn to be my knowledge, the luminous space of faithful intuition, is placing me, manifestly, in front of things as they are. I see the elements and the contrary energies that shape them. But I only see and understand them for having been formed from these same parts and shaped by the same forces. The world, in me, is doubled and perceives itself across me. It's transformed by passing into my body. My science,

inevitably, is formed, composed, built from Love and Hate. It grasps the state of things but is subjected to it. Why should it be an exception to the law it decrees? Thus it understands things by obeying them. It says Love, Hate, draws and evaluates forces, but it says reasons, forms and beings with Love and with Hate. We have been living for a long time already, ever since a black morning we have all forgotten, in the exclusive grip of Hate. It alone causes rocks to crumble, reduces mountains to dust, brings the sands to the delta, scatters the sandstorms, wears down the ocean swell, cools down the pyres; it alone impels to chaos; the atomic pulverulence in glacial disorder achieves its reign and its end. It dictates its law to the rocks, to the dead. It divides cities, takes the ax to the tree roots, puts the swords in the hands of the warriors and implacably seeks the holocaust. Its regime and target is the battlefield in the evening, in the steaming scraps and wounded limbs. We're living in pestilential history. So my science as well, its history and cold light have forgotten Love. The crowd here is given over, body and soul, to Hate. And me, scientist, I am of it and in it, saturated to the teeth with pestilent miasmas. I carry the disease of Selinunte in my words. My physics carries Hate and my science destruction. Knowing is suspecting, and then cutting into pieces. His head tilted, his eyes like lakes of tears, he interrogated the hazardous wind to know who was holding the ax and the raison for the dichotomy.

So Love took him who took the volume of the world and suddenly enveloped the cut up crowd, his scattered body, the mountain of shadow and his new knowledge. An insane Love, fulgurant, broad. In a white silence in which the clamors vanished, an interminable piece of history came to an end. The new science was gently dawning on the eastern horizon, behind Greece and behind Iran, behind the entire known world, still blind, not very visible, unimaginably hot. The furnace sparkled there and not at the crater. He understood his former errors. Going down quickly, as fast as possible, running to the new place, taking everything up again and abandoning the final fold of this mountain, leaving the crest and the summit where the bad fire was awaiting him. Immobile, stopped, suspended in his new hesitation, he was going to go back down.

The crowd was climbing up the slope. It resounded with battles to the death to finally decide who, in the singular or plural, would be the very first to reach the height. It made use of elbows, terms of abuse and sabers. Everyone was trampling underfoot the most bodies possible, in the suffocation, amid the crushing, to arrive at the top as fast as they could. An incomprehensible power was driving the mass to suffer the steepness of the slope and the cruelty of the fighting in order to run precipitately towards the abyss. Everyone appeared terrorized at the idea of going down, toward the meadows of the bottom

and the olive trees of the shore. Visibly death was attracting them. They were killing in order to run to it. They would have loathed living happily. By the invisible seashore, yonder, in the early dawn, the peasants were already driving their oxen; their daughters were washing themselves over the stones of the fountains. The mountain, its folds and walls, its slopes and obstacles, prevented them from seeing what was calmly being done in the plains. They were climbing, reversing the gradient of the volcano; their cataracting river was collapsing towards the heights. Overtaking others and taking summits, destruction that's necessary for the life of intoxication.

The smoke, all of a sudden, invaded space. The ground, burning, was trembling. A few paces away, a yellow wall was glowing, studded with orange. Downwind from the crowd, Empedocles now heard the imprecations and cries of the mixed clusters that fell from the top of a short cliff into the purple and viscous swamp. Their predecessors, upwind, couldn't perceive anything. Fascinated by the discord and slaughter, blinded by the volutes of sulfur, deafened by the direction of the wind, the direction of history established within Hate's banks, supported by, clinging to the final gradient, drawn, impelled, shoved, they no longer knew anything about what they were doing. They were feeding the cataract of clusters into the violet lake without stop. Which closed

heavily over the despicable agitation.

Among the scattered rocks, enormous around the summit, the flow of the crowd's course was being divided, the way a river's waters are divided into several beds when long islands are met with. The standing obstacles were multiplying the forks, from which a labyrinth of bifurcations like one sees in a delta was being woven. The adversaries lost one another, their disputes settled by the walls, and found again, at the end of a defile, haggard enemies whose faces had changed. Just as it was about to be over, at the end of the combat, they had forgotten just who they hated and the reason for the battle. Their eyes were becoming all white from it. The fire had destroyed the firebrands that had given birth to it. The short overlapping of intersecting valleys was making the teeming mass and confusion more compact. The tumult sounded a fearsome echo along the black choked-off couloirs in which the wind was twisting. Ten paces from the sides of the burnt lake, on the charred scree, between the walls of flame, a lethal cold was striking the mass down. Furious and contorted living beings were falling into the molten sheet, mixed with corpses all stiffened by the freeze, with faces turned blue and a statue's limbs. The dead, frozen, were flaming like torches. The fire was decomposing this pile of rocks, suddenly struck, immobilized by the cold. Empedocles hadn't seen that the fall of the men was distributed around

the crater. He had thought he was seeing the cataract straight on whereas the smoke hid the entire circumference from him. The complicated network of the flow had surrounded the cone's crest. At the very moment he finally decided to descend, turned around, with his back to the fire and tightening his tunic over his chest to stifle the icy wind, he found himself facing the torrent.

A thick front of bodies, of corpses tied up with shapeless things, of blood, dust, and crushed objects was rolling toward him with the speed of a thunderstorm. No one, nothing could stop that. He immediately sought to free himself. He turned around, ran toward the crater and skirted a leaning rock. The crowd passed with a thunderous noise. He went back down, ran once again into a path along which the torrent was advancing. Made a U-turn, passed on the left, climbed up some boulders, descended, was seized again by panic, climbed again, used cunning with the volcano, approached the edge, moved away from it, rolled downhill, still the crowd. The mass with ten million heads was covering the mountain with its numerous tissue, besieging the corners and paths, swarming over the folds. Empedocles was looking for the rift, the opening in this network. He ran, calm and serene, knew that he had lost, and dreamed of a love that would open a path for him.

The sun rose. He saw full-on the fearsome

proliferation. Moved forward once again. Empedocles was seized by the cataract. A woman was smiling at him, solemn, quite close to his face, while he was falling, for a long time.

The next day, covered with ashes, a large part of Catania was wiped out by the eruption in the early hours of the day. In the silence of the streets, a few sobs, rare moans.

A few decades later, somewhere on the massif of Etna, erudite archeologists discovered strange objects in the ashes, strange objects that their science assured them the volcano had spewed forth on the dawn following Empedocles's disappearance. All trace of him had been lost on the evening of the feast given by the inhabitants of Selinunte thanking him for his civil engineering works, works whose plans and execution had rid the island of the plague epidemic. Where was he hiding, living or dead?

Those objects strongly resembled a pair of sandals, and certain witnesses deserving of belief as well as twenty Agrigentines who claimed to be on familiar terms with the scientist affirmed that Empedocles used to wear them. That's a formal proof, they said, that he threw himself into the crater. The story or legend began there.

Others denied that it was a question of shoes: here are two feet broken at the malleoli; here are relics of the body of that man whose legs were broken by accident at the

time of his fall into the furnace.

A third school, whose realism excluded all religion and respect, openly mocked the two others by recognizing those objects as two little volcanic bombs, ordinary things that the combined chance of fire, pressure, throwing, sudden cooling and impacts had sculpted into the shape of a foot, left or right, or of sandals or sabots. Why not a sort of pedestal? In short, completely natural simple stones.

Fragments of a body, scattered limbs, artificial, manufactured objects, or inert masses—no one ever knew how to decide.

That hesitation engenders a series: what comes out of the shadowy mouth or the furnace, out of the earth after a life throws or buries itself there, what resurrects from the tomb resembles a piece of the body, an artifact, a thing.

What is a statue? An inert object, a mass of marble or pozzolana, clay, bronze, common or rare earth. A shaped, carved, hammered, sanded, polished, modeled thing. A body resembling, so you can't tell them apart, a living being, mobile, aerial, soft, caressing, in love, moving. The series of our hesitations.

At the origin of physics, one the first physicists disappeared. His legend hurls him living into the volcano, which lastly returned that thing.

Nearly twenty-five centuries after Empedocles, on the

same island of Sicily where Archimedes, the prince of ancient mathematicians, died at the hands of a Roman legionary during the capture of the city of Syracuse, a city he had defended by means of fearsome war machines that came from his knowledge, on the same island, as I was saying, where Hate and Love transmuted into abstract theories and technologies, our contemporary Majorana, a scientist of genius of scarcely thirty years of age, admired by Heisenberg and Fermi, the author of profound works on particles, also chose to disappear when his physics or ours suddenly learned how to unleash by itself lethal eruptions. All trace of the young man vanished around Palermo, a little before the last world war: he had foreseen the atomic bomb. In him as in his elders, life and knowledge mixed fairly.

Agrigentum, Selinunte, Catania, Syracuse, Palermo, we've toured around the island or the world; Empedocles, Archimedes, Majorana, the cycle of time, of history, of the sciences is completed here; from now on we inhabit a kind of isolated Sicily closed under the black light of numerous Etnas, which depend and don't depend on us.

At the edge of a map, a legend shows us how to read it. That is this book's legend which tries, first, to answer the question that was posed just now: what is a statue? But the legend, besides and above all, requires that you accompany a living being in its ordinary and tragic

voyage to the vicinity of death. Empedocles approached it, lost his way and burned there. There's no true philosophy without descending into the underworld. Then, from the abruptly opened rift, things come out. Physics, one might say, begins: the subject has disappeared, the object comes to pass, raw, and then worked. The scientist's deadly passion reveals the birth of the objects of knowledge.

An anthropology of the sciences exists. It accompanies them, silent, unheard of. It constitutes their legend: how they must be read. An anthropology lived by Empedocles, at the origin; hinted at by the life and works of Archimedes; and Majorana, our neighbor—invisible and vanished—lastly, meditated on it.

Four Millennia Ago

THE SECRET OF THE SPHINX

Substitution

The Egyptian sphinx, a crouched wildcat's body with a royal face, sometimes holds between its hands—hence human hands—as though in offering, a sort of table or box on which a ram's head rests: an animal back and a human face doubled with a muffle with a packaged body. You can see elsewhere and in great numbers criocephalic sphinxes, devouring lion and devoured ovine incorporated. Have the wolf and lamb or the man and the bull ever been seen sewn together in the same fabulous flesh? Here the statue is broken down and rhythmized as though it were unfolding: the animal muffle with the box body precedes a monster with a leonine rump and a human head; this latter seems to be sacrificing an animal head. If the wildcat killed the ram, what is the man doing

in the middle of them? What is in the black box? One might think that Pharaoh is concealed behind the bestial face. The man and the box intertwine mysteriously between two animal parts from different species. What is a fetish? How do you make one?

Herodotus says that Heracles-Shu wanted at all costs to gaze on Zeus-Ammon and that this latter refused to let himself be seen. As the former was very insistent, the latter took it into his head to skin a ram and then cut off its head. He held it in front of himself, wrapped in the fleece, and showed himself thus. Do we see, one hidden by the other, a god, an animal or a man? The face of God or the muffle and coat of fur?

Moses said to Him, “Let me, I pray thee, see thy glory.” He said, “I will make all my beauty pass before you, and I will pronounce the name ‘Yahweh’ before you, but you shall not see my face: for no man shall see me and live.” And Yahweh continued, “Behold, there is a place by me; you shall stand upon a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I’ll cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take my hand away, and you will see my back. But my face shall not be seen by anyone” (Exod. 33.18–23).

Descending beneath the ground, after a thunderstorm or an earthquake had opened and cracked it, the Lydian shepherd Gyges found a tomb there and a naked corpse

that was larger than human size in a bronze horse, as though the man were hiding in the animal, skin protected by leather and hair, as though the animal had gone to ground in the sepulcher. The sphinx who holds the box with the ram's head in his hands shows the king in the middle of two animals, guarded from the front and guarded from the rear. From what pressing danger? The pharaoh Mykerinos, having lost his daughter, whom he loved dearly, put the mummy of the dead girl in a cow of gilded wood; incense was burned in front of them and lit lamps watched over them during the night. Elsewhere a Nubian head emerges between a bull's horns whose tips end in worshipping hands: a bicephalic animal in which the god mixes with he who prays to the god.¹ The animal, in all these examples, is mixed with the human, with the corpse, with the royal person. How many gods after all are there with an ibis or jackal head, and human limbs?

Can these mixed bodies be separated or a logic to these chimeras be found?

It would be necessary to introduce into philosophy the elementary operator of substitution, an operator so well known and marked out in logic or mathematics.

Isaac lies under his father Abraham's knife, and suddenly the ram replaces him. As he, the sacrificer, obedient to God, is raising his arm, his son is lying on the altar or stone. "Here lies" the victim. When the fist is

holding the blade in the palpitating flesh of the dying, it's cutting the throat of an animal. Let's observe Abraham's arm continuously as it violently falls upon the neck of this lying being and this latter at the same time: on the offertory table, the son withdraws while the animal enters. In the middle of this process, when the hand holding the dagger reaches the midpoint of its trajectory, who is lying on the stone when the motion stops if not this half-animal half-human monster depicted by ancient Egypt? The Biblical narrative effaces it. Substitution, elementary and discontinuous, puts an animal in place of the son; we see the ram, we see Isaac, exclusive of one another, like two tokens that can't fit together into the same place in accordance with the principle of the excluded middle: it's impossible, we say, for the man and the animal to be in the same place at the same time. Either one or the other. Granted. However we notice a middle moment, precisely the one during which the replacement is in the process of happening: the duration of the operation causes the mixed body to appear. Time effaces all contradiction.

Now the word "victim" signifies substitution, precisely. Of the same origin as "vice versa," "vice-admiral," "vicar," or "vicarious" as we have seen, it indicates lieutenancy: who or what is the place-holder; he who or what represents. The ram represents Isaac; it lies there in his place. But, once again, in a moment of indecision that no one sees because the motion goes fast

and which, mysterious, therefore remains in the black box, on the stone of the altar man is mixed with animal. During the process, the victim, by definition, links the representative to the represented. Here is the origin of tragedy, of all theater in general, of all representation: the Greek word *tragos* signifies the “goat” or the animal that’s sacrificed in a substitutional way. Who is going to die as a replacement for whom on the altar’s marble or the boards of the stage? Nothing has ever been seen at the theater except characters mixed with actors, in other words substitutes.

Now the word “substitution,” just like the word “substance,” literally says what stands below the statue, what is hiding in its hollow void or beneath its accidental appearances. The sphinx in the museum of Cairo therefore holds between its hands, below the ram’s head, a box that expounds the problem to which it contains the solution.

Every statue is in effect such a black box whose secret walls envelop someone or something that they hide and protect. The way a tent or a tabernacle does.

Like a priest, the sculptor shows this raw concrete chest or on the contrary, opens it and exhibits the mystery that that ark contained, or lastly, lets be seen, at the same time, the box and its secret at the moment of its opening.

Likewise: the corpse and the mummy lie in the tomb or

their statue rises, outside. Or lastly, the spectator, stunned, arrives at the middle moment of the resurrection.

In other words, the travelers get into rows, quietly seated in the car or plane, the rocket *Challenger*, and they come out of it, or not, on arrival. You can put anyone whatsoever in any seat whatsoever, by substitution. We've made the moment when the doors gape open commonplace.

The sphinx itself, the jackal- or ibis-headed god, the king's corpse located in the horse's body or his daughter's corpse in the golden heifer, these chimeras or metamorphoses open the black boxes halfway, the way Abraham's hand was stopped in mid-path just now, just as God let himself be seen a little. The priest and the sculptor show the raw or animal box and the human head that comes out of it in the middle moment, as though midday were ringing.² At that instant, a person plunges mid-body into another species.

These mixed fetishes anciently commemorate the inaugural moment of history in which animal sacrifice was substituted for human sacrifice. The man hides in the lion, the first foundation: the animal, then, protects the leader; God save the king. Then the ram itself hides in the box, the second foundation. The living subject and death are enveloped in the object. Our entire history is collected there: black beast, king, box or animal, man, thing; and

the sphinx silently unfolds it.

Time lifts the contradictions: we were living young yesterday, and tomorrow we die hoary; if childhood and white old age contradict each other like the colors, black or silvery, of the hair this in no way matters to the time that gathers, connects, and units them. If conversely a monster defies nature or logic by mixing the lion and the lamb light is often shed on this mystery by duration. And if man is placed here between the animal and the thing this makes a rhythm of history completely explicit. Might Egypt have invented these dialectical fetishes, statues or stations, about which it may be said that they seemingly cause the march of time?

Petrified duration in the motionless group.

For more than thirty years they carried billions of stones over the absent or dead body of their father or king. Herodotus tells us that they hated him. Cheops behaved like an appalling tyrant, to the point of putting his daughter Hantsen in some brothel so that every client would bring him a stone in payment for her affections.

The Pyramids are lapidations; it's a tautology to say so: piles of stones that rose from the most distant times over the tombs of the leaders. The pharaohs of the Old Kingdom lie under such heaps: lapidations spread out over the duration of their reigns, deferred, rationalized, administrated. Objectivized. Instead of dying suddenly

from a volley of stones like Tarpeia, Saint Stephen, Turnus, and so many others from every culture, they forced those very people who were to put them to death to prepare their death by working to death and, as a result, invented the state and organized it on the very pattern of the pyramid (or of the labyrinth if several command together). The lynching moment swelled over thirty years. The victim, always hated by his victims, becomes king. Herodotus recounts that the pharaoh Cheops, closing the sanctuaries, prevented other sacrifices; let's not be in too much of a hurry to doubt what he says because the measure directed the sacrificial and collective fury thereby transformed into work onto a single point, his own body or the place he was to occupy, and intensified the one-multiple schema along which violence and desire channel their effects. Hatred over the king's corpse or cenotaph, love over the king's daughter's body, a crushing tax of sweat, money or stone, an immense pile of assembled men, the body social is built here on an invariant diagram, assassins, masons, lovers, a multiplicity weighing over a single point, victim or whore, king or woman, father and daughter, abhorrence, desire, payment, labor, a crowd in clusters around a center, a star or pyramid schema. The first great human termite hills over an individual's belly. Here's the father under the stones, and the point raised toward the sky behind the mute Sphinx who, offering his wildcat body to

animal sacrifice, protected the king during all the time that he wasn't being stoned while being stoned. During the time the primitive object, the black box in which the king lay, was being erected.

Egypt's immense scene, at Giza, the Sphinx's enigmatic smile signify this lightning-fast moment, at the same time brief and long by several millennia, in which hominization came to be because a group stopped killing its king so as to kill beasts of prey. A statue of substitution, a wonder of the world, and the beginning of history: stones before us, a hard, colossal, and invariant thing.

The Egyptians said that the gods, being only in small number long ago and fearing finding themselves overwhelmed by the multitude of impious and wicked men, concealed themselves beneath the form of diverse animals to elude their pursuit and fury. But these same gods, having finally made themselves masters of the world, had felt grateful to the animals whose resemblance had saved them: they consecrated them so that men had to feed and bury them with honors. Plutarch was indignant before Diodorus's narrative, which is also cited by de Brosse,³ who was even more indignant that anyone should dare say that the frightened gods concealed themselves in the bodies of dogs or storks, a monstrous lie. But how did these gods or kings conquer the world if

not by diverting the sound and fury of the multiple toward another body than their own? And by hardening all of it into worked objects?

*

The sphinx—What animal stands on four feet at dawn, Oedipus, man who is passing by and who will die if he doesn't reply or find the answer to the riddle? *Oedipus*—Doubtless man, who before walking or standing crawls, a small child, on four legs like an animal. A childish answer. But before man, the animal itself, quadruped like you. Although you lie down in the avenues or before the temples, showing your king's face or your young woman's chest or even spreading your bird's wings, your four legs are obvious to see, oh wildcat. Man and brute mixed can remain quadruped. *The sphinx*—What animal stands on two feet at noon, beneath the shadowless sun? *Oedipus*—Man, of course, a biped like me, adult, standing, a walker, wandering, with a mobile niche, or like you, with a king's face and queen's breasts, or the animal whose feathered creature's wingspan you display, man therefore and animal too, but this latter flies away, leaving behind he who finally dominates the animals, the intelligent talker, expressing himself because standing straight. *The sphinx*—What animal stands on three feet when night falls? *Oedipus*—The man, again and always,

who leans on a staff of old age when fatigue and age arise. Every animal that walks, to the best of my knowledge, does so on an even number of legs, therefore no beast, no monster, oh sphinx, could live on three feet. The non-living, the dead, the inert are necessary for that. Only the object, the thing in equilibrium can stand in front of or after the animal and the man, static tripods, pyramids or tetrahedrons with triangular sides, the results of human labor. They can be called statues since they stay up all by themselves: your shadowless questions only bear on statues or equilibria. On the tripod, between us, the incense for the next sacrifice is smoking, and Pythia sometimes comes and sits on it. Three or four feet provide a good seat, not two:⁴ man wanders, at Giza, from the Sphinx to the Pyramids; these latter will remain, the former will be effaced. But not the staff. The support manufactured by the indefatigable talker, now standing and old, the tool, appeared during the final hours of the formation of this animal who remains a riddle. Oh, Sphinx, did you know that work has three feet?⁵

The sphinx—Oh, Oedipus, do you know why you're risking death? *Oedipus*—Yes, I've known for a little while now; the decipherers of riddles, my fathers, believed themselves to have gotten out of the difficulty for having heard me answer "man" to your questions. They didn't even consider the fact that we were risking

our lives, the both of us. If I don't answer or am mistaken you'll kill me; if I say the truth you'll die. We're having a dialog on pain of death. What are we gambling, as though at the dawn of history? Our lives. If I die you'll sacrifice a man; if you die I'll sacrifice a mixed body of man and animal: here's the first progress. *The sphinx*—New and unexpected Oedipus among the diviners of riddles of ordinary mothers and fathers, why don't we take up the question again?⁶ *Oedipus*—It consists precisely in mixing animal and man. Your riddle resembles your body. It's always necessary to guess the man concealed behind the animal. *The sphinx*—Give me some time, Oedipus, before my death. *Oedipus*—Forget that man that crawls as a quadruped during his childhood, soon to be standing, senile so quickly. Why not say he's still on four feet when the embalmers lay him out on the alabaster table shaped like a stretched-out lion to empty him of his entrails and organs? What can he be compared to in his mummy wraps? What dull foolishness! *The sphinx*—Recount again and take your time; save me. *Oedipus*—Here's the time: this day in which the sun rises, like a godsend, running to its zenith and falling to the western horizon, which everyone takes to be a short life, mysteriously measures our entire history and gives the laws of hominization.

The sphinx—Say the first law. *Oedipus*—The death we

risk face to face both of us and which makes us talk or write so long makes us think, drives us to decipher its riddle. Death in general and intraspecific murder: animals know little of them. We find ourselves at risk of death, facing the world and the other, in front of the crowd and before speech. We must give death an answer. *The sphinx*—Give me an answer. *Oedipus*—Give you an answer. *The sphinx*—Give you an answer. *Oedipus*—Give me an answer. Here we are before the altar and the mystery, a riddle completely different from the children's guessing game of a moment ago. At this risk and to save its life, humanity at the dawn of time fell upon animals. The great hunts drawn at Lascaux conceal the hunt for man. The latter slowly becomes human by first becoming animal. It transforms into a kind of sphinx.

The sphinx—So who am I? *Oedipus*—Crouched all along your wildcat body, you're the first moment of history, when human sacrifice was hesitating before the first law—thou shalt not kill—and when animal sacrifice began to be practiced as a substitute for intraspecific murder. If the sphinxes aren't killed they'll ravage the land right up to the extinction of men and their group. When Semitic Noah wanted to save himself and his family from the great destruction that would be caused by the waters of the Flood, he built the animal ark so as to hide in their midst, and as a result kept them. Animals must therefore be killed, must therefore be raised or

domesticated; wild animals must be eliminated; Hercules labored, a wooden club over his shoulder, and traversed the world, slaughtering birds, lion, hydra, hinds, boar; see him also change into an animal, the lion's fleece on his body and his face hidden at the bottom of its throat, protecting himself under this beginning of clothing.⁷ The Egyptians went around nude, above all the women, except for the priests dressed in skins. I recognize you as being a woman beneath that bestial mane, sphinx tightly bound or hidden beneath your riddles and appearances. *The sphinx*—My body, my name. *Oedipus*—Your name, Greek, says at the same time embrace and strangulation, oh monster who brings death but also covering and implication, the condensed, hidden, tightly bound secret. You're named like your paws: talons.⁸ *The sphinx*—And you're named like your feet. *Oedipus*—Our two names anticipate the riddle. *The sphinx*—I designate talons, but you know feet; by your knowledge and the words of language, you become man but I remain beast. *Oedipus*—Your body reads like a living hieroglyphic, just as jackal-headed Anubis or ibis-beaked Thoth do, like Heracles beneath his lion skin or Noah hidden in his menagerie. Remember Osiris whose dismembered corpse was scattered, piece by piece, on the Egyptian plain where, at each sacred place, an animal guarded it. And metempsychosis! It's told that the soul migrates into an

animal's body according to its merits. Everything became clear from then on, yet everything became reversed, for all at once, men were going to stop sacrificing animals through fear of killing the man bound in them. *The sphinx*—They had discovered the secret; they had uncovered the hiding-place! *Oedipus*—Yes. From that moment on, the delivered man could emerge from his golden animal skins so as to stand upright and naked in the Greek light, in the temples and the public squares, statues on two legs, simply human.⁹ The lawful noon rang, the Hellenic zenith of the great abstract discoveries.

The gods were no longer hiding themselves—nor men.

The Greek legend of Thebes reports that the sphinx or the sphinx of undecided gender, nature, and sex—human, animal, male and female mixed—was punishing the city for a homosexual crime committed by Laius, Oedipus's father, and for that reason would sit in session at the top of a mountain to the west of the capital from which he or she would ravage the country, where she or he would propose impossible riddles to the passers-by, seeking to devour them. When Oedipus guessed, *that* threw itself to the bottom of its rock.

The questioner and the questioned now stand on both sides of this summit, in equilibrium: which of the two is going to die from the riddle? In Latin the word "examination" signifies the needle of a balance and the

act of weighing [*peser*], that verb from which the verb “to think” [*penser*] is derived. The sphinx examines Oedipus who examines the sphinx in return. In which direction is the beam going to strike down so as to kill? In which sense of the word hidden beneath the question or problem? The word is equivalent to decision or the saying to death. Everything flows back into language. Now at the beginning of the drama everything was presented as undecided: male or female, human, bestial, dead or living, in the things themselves and in the said riddle: animal or man, this multipede? The upright beast stumbles; the risen animal doesn't know how to stand.

A primitive scene of justice. The balance swings, an examiner. And the decision rests on the clarification of words.

Once again, the riddle.

What animal stands on four feet? The quadrupedal animal.

What animal is supported by two feet? The bipedal human.

What is the tripod called now? Work? Not yet.

The riddle becomes more profound in questioning its own staging. It was transiting from animal to man on the question of equilibrium, then from equilibrium to man's institutions, a term that repeats equilibrium.

On the rock overlooking the city, Oedipus and the sphinx are face to face, to the death. Who will decide who

is going to die? Nobody. But a disequilibrium precedes the equilibrium or follows it: the needle of the examination or the balance stumbles and swings, undecided like the body and sex of the monster or like the riddle itself.

The sphinx—Oh, Oedipus, guess and say a three-footed word. *Oedipus*—The tribunal. The very one before which we're both appearing today, at the article of death. Or the one that we're forming, you, death, and me. *The sphinx*—Now say or guess a two-footed word. *Oedipus*—The scales or balance, which is what the tribunal amounts to. On both sides of the rock, our two bodies move in disequilibrium on this seesaw. *The sphinx*—The last word, with one foot? *Oedipus*—The beam—the rod—which is what the balance amounts to, therefore the tribunal; the authority that immediately decides which of the two of us will die. You've only posed riddles of equilibrium, stations or statues, institutions, and now we're reaching this unique needle together, without seat, deprived of statics, unstable, which wanders in space like our two bodies and our two lives, which moves, which doesn't stand, which suddenly falls in the midst of us, like the time of death, the first or final authority. *The sphinx*—Three, two, one. *Oedipus*—Your life comes to an end at the zero instant.

Here is our first tribunal, set up on the counsel rock to the west of Thebes, on a tarpeian rock. A certain crime required a punishment; some passer-by arrived in order to suspend it. For the first prescription in history. A monster undecided in nature or sex sits in session in that high place and judges who knows or doesn't know the word.¹⁰ Oedipus, with the same word, judges it and sentences it. This duel has laid down force and arms so as to submit to language, exterior or superior to the two legendary beings, animal and man. Justice passes through the precise solution. Does the notion of truth begin there by means of an accuracy obtained in the debate of a legal authority and paid for by the life of a man?¹¹

Here is our first tribunal and its first decision, bringing a cessation to the ravages exercised by the undecided animal. Men will no longer die here because the tribunal amasses social violence and freezes it. The set of the murders around Thebes is summarized in the judicial death of the animal, said responsible for the murders, punished by a final word. Peace arises.

The tribunal brings off the miracle of checking the scattered and unobstructed violence by means of a language trick. The envelopment of meaning in a linguistic black box and its exit out of secrecy into the light of day seems to appease, at least for a time, the murderous fury.

They are three: the man, the real mixed body of man and animal, sphinx, and the animal–man of the questions who’s enveloped in language. Hence this new riddle: how did the debate by questions and answers or detective riddles and solutions suddenly replace the deadly tragedy that was devastating Thebes? In the last act of *Horace*, Corneille likewise left the deadly tragedy that was devastating Rome and Alba in order to stage in its stead the tribunal in which the king judged the hero in a contradictory manner, causing the judicial authority to be born on the dangerous remains of a fratricide. The old man of law rediscovered with a sovereignly profound gesture the anthropological foundations buried by its practice. The judicial staged a real tragedy in which language didn’t represent but was performatively equivalent to death. But the battle itself didn’t go without staging, in which Horace represented Rome and the triple Curiatii substituted for the city of Alba. It was likewise necessary therefore to clarify the enigma of the staging in the representation of Oedipus.¹²

A moment ago animal sacrifice substituted for human sacrifice; the search for meaning now substitutes for the victims’ blood. As though the time or the sun of this enigmatic day was advancing by a play, unforeseen or regular, of substitutions.¹³ If combinatorial algebra cannot produce time, the operation that makes this algebra

possible and puts such and such in place of such and such seems to be able to do so. Language in the end holds therefore as the substitute for all possible substitutions and effaces its effectiveness as soon as it establishes its global law. For after everything had distributively been god, leader or sun, stone or father, each in its turn, the religions of the book or speech appeared, whose sayings and writings cast every thing or non-speaking animal into an undecipherable enigma. We will no longer know what the idols were nor what lies under the statues—the things in themselves. The final substitute for substance, the substantive effaces it and makes it unknowable.

Such a transubstantiation takes place at the tribunal, whose scene was already represented in the tragic space of collective murder in which the victim already represents the multiple in its unity, in which Horatius and Curiatius were substituted for their respective cities, whose scene borders on the tripods on which holocausts are smoking: the inaugural place where the word is equivalent to the thing, entirely, without excess or lack, and where first and foremost the verdict is equivalent to the body. If you don't know the answer you die, your life being answerable. The colossal sphinx's body, lying, crouched on four legs, wildcat, human-headed, an animal raised on two feet, its body that is going to die already forms almost the entire secret of its riddle: it is already becoming word or letter, hieroglyph.

The birth of the performative, in this place: the word is equivalent to the thing. What thing?

At a tribunal, a case is debated.¹⁴ The term “accusation” repeats this “case” in its way. Never has observation followed so subtly the invisible line that separates or unites the domain of words and the world of things. The case here is equivalent to the death of the body, a real stake: is said, debated, and developed in arguments, secrets to be discovered and hidden responsibilities. Every trial or pending case more or less envelops an enigma to be deciphered. Research, even now, often adopts the detective or judicial method. *Cause* [case], again, is a word whose history we can follow in our language and others more foreign. There the miracle and solution of the final riddle is awaiting us. The word *cause* designates the root or origin of the word *chose* [thing]: *causa*, *cosa*; likewise, “thing” or *Ding* in English or German refer to the same origin and root in their respective languages, designating the judicial authority that decides in an assembly. The tribunal stages the identity of the case and the thing, of the word and the object or the substitutive passage of the ones and the others. A thing emerges there.

And for example the box, mysterious and black, that the statufied conversation of the man with the wildcat projects before it, or that the sphinx holds between its hands, a reduced model of the statue and the riddle.

The sphinx—The real evening is falling for me: what animal goes on three feet? *Oedipus*—The old man leaning on his cane when age wears him out: the answer to the examination of old presupposed that the day governed by the rhythm of the sun indicated the duration of a life. But that day indexes the sequence of history, as I have said. The aging, experienced generations shape, cut or carve branches or marble, adapt the tool to he who uses or desires it, beat, hit, shoot, hunt, dig, kill, or aid a hesitant gait by means of the new object or even, by digging and beating, decorate. This twilight animal adds together a man and a thing the way the morning animal mixed man with animal. *The sphinx*—Animals have feet, not hands. In the mixed body, the box is put forward held by human hands. *Oedipus*—Of the three, one foot matters more, leaving the two others to their living parity and to the upright posture that causes hands to be born: the foot that could be said to be orthopedic or false, the prosthesis serving as a support but that can be detached, marking the final and decisive advance of this living being delivered from death by the animal and from the animal by death, risen at noon, soon talking and measuring—at the price of his life—language by things, and bringing death again before the object-box. This living being suddenly recognizes the world. *The sphinx*—Farewell. *Oedipus*—Stay. Consider, before you, *that*, and forget, behind you, the old cases. Look, in silence, for a long time at these

boxes and these stable pyramids, at this peaceful objective world. What good is it to die, for what archaic causes?

The metaphor or homothetic projection of the solar day onto a human life is not easily justified, although familiar: child of the dawn, adult at noon, old man in the evening. A similar projection of ontogenetic life onto phylogenetic evolution, also ordinary, is no more justified, although the new solutions to one of our oldest riddles just used it. Why would the body follow the regular course of the sun? Why would a group or species grow old like an individual? These images identify the time of life and that of history with the astronomical model. The odds that history, life and inert trajectory would beat with the same duration can be estimated to be low. For that, it would be necessary for the rhythm to remain everywhere the same as the unit of the day, in two, three or four feet as it's said in poetry, in four, double, or triple time as it's measured in music, and nothing assures us of this. Everything leads us to think the opposite, for example the unforeseeability that increases when one goes from sunset to death and from this latter to the end of history, at times that are respectively certain, uncertain, unthinkable. There is often newness under the sun.

And thus pockets of haste border on lakes of frost; an advance adjoins a delay, both contingent; the units or the times mix all the more confusedly because you pass from

the sky to living matter and from this latter to collective adventures, day, existence, epochs. The primitive can still be found here and the contemporary in the past.

Does the riddle only have one solution? Then, time would flow in a single direction. But the riddle delivers several, the one at least that Oedipus found, millions of years ago, plus those that have just come to light. Therefore time percolates in several directions, multiple speeds and numerous rhythms, multivalent like tolerance, rich like a peaceful thought.

Behind the plume of smoke left by the rocket, whose name issues a challenge to the stars—does it lift off? does it explode?—past time is unfurled across stations whose ages mix dates, eras, and references. The situation is, in reality, the same as in this book.

Therefore the riddle returns, the same and different: humanity in its sum today is facing its own death the way a unique Oedipus in the past confronted a questioning animal.

What word is this humanity going to answer? What object must be produced? What man should we educate and raise, still buried to mid-body in animals and things?

Undated

THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS
ORPHEUS, LOT'S WIFE
THE STATUE OF HESTIA

Falling Bodies
Sculpture, Music
Epistemology

THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

Falling Bodies

Sisyphus's work is fascinating owing to its eternal return: the same rock ceaselessly falls back to the start, and the same hero always rolls it to the top of the same slope. A certain romanticism, idly blind to what we undertake every morning made by the hand of God—dredging the silt that returns in the port, irrepressible, washing what gets dirty, separating what gets mixed, repairing holes and wear and tear, winding watches—makes us sorrowfully discourse on our absurd condition, whereas the myth furnishes a correct definition of work—force and displacement—and its dynamic measure at the same time as it describes its natural condition of indefinite resumption; or the absurdity must be understood in its scientific resonance, for it is indeed a question of a

perpetual motion in its three types, mechanical, thermodynamic, informational, an eminent example of what experiment refuses: a weight does not climb back up by itself; energy does not recreate itself; negentropy must be paid for.¹ Here then is a set that works all by itself, the perfect, gapless cycle, impossible and supernatural; at the doorway to the Underworld, from the entry on, eternity is measured by a clock: the fall of the rock ticks the motionless seconds.

Now the interpretations of the myth, including my own and its scientific calculation, only speak of the scene and the hero, guilty, miserable, sentenced to hard labor. We only ever see ourselves; human speech debates crime and punishment endlessly.

But, stubborn, the myth shows the perpetual fall of the rock. It always falls back down; it has fallen, it will fall. Someone brings it back up; pushes it back, forces it back, throws it back, defers it, moves it away, drives it back, shifts it, takes it away, and here it is returned: it comes back here just as often. Yet however much it may return identical to itself to the same place, no one ever talks about it. Put anything whatsoever in its place—a statue of a god, a table or a basin—and the interpretations will not vary. Yet how can we shout more loudly that we notice it than by this silent obstinacy? Can you find a better case of blindness? From the bottom of the ages, from the hollow

of the underworld, from an abyss of pain, the narrative repeats that a thing returns there, and we only talk about he who evacuates it, narcissuses.

And if for once we looked at the rock, invariably present beneath our eyes, the stubborn object, thrown, fallen, lying before?

Here is the figure of a loss of memory: the shadow of a force brings back up into the shadow the shadow of a rock without it reaching the light of day. The memory is reborn, recurring, and the mechanism, inexorably, drives it back into forgetfulness. We leave the thing in obscurity: and yet it turns and returns there. We recall the crimes of the condemned man and lament the eternal expiation, another way to pity ourselves for our work conditions. Sisyphus himself seems to brood over his culpability, concentrated on his effort in the shadow of the rock. Just as we forget what we're working on and what we repress during the course of the day, cadenced by our schedules and watches, similarly the convict doesn't seem to see the thing he's pushing back before him, as though nothing were there. But the things of the world take silent vengeance for acts that nullify them.

We have forgotten the ancient times; Sisyphus no longer remembers his old parents. Aeolus's son, he descends from Pyrrha, Pandora's daughter, the first woman with the

primordial black box. The men of the Bronze Age got lost in so many vices and crimes that Zeus, to punish them, drowned them in the Deluge, with the exception of Pyrrha and her husband Deucalion who together constructed an ark, a chest again, in which they floated for nine days and nine nights. Apart from the chest or the capital collected in the box, we've lost all memory of the antediluvian world effaced beneath the waters and silt. We no longer remember such an old moment; the destruction of humanity took place, meanwhile: the ark contained the only monuments of the archaic period. When Deucalion and Pyrrha landed, Hermes, sent by Zeus, ordered them to throw the bones of their mother over their shoulders. Frightened of impiety, Pyrrha refused but Deucalion understood that it had to do with stones, the bones of our mother, the Earth. More Noah than Adam, Deucalion therefore threw the stones over his shoulder, from which men were born; less Eve than Pandora, Pyrrha likewise threw the stones behind her, from which women arose.

And once again forgetfulness covered the things: the inundation hid the plain and the hills, the entire relief of the past; the hermetic message remained incomprehensible; the creation happened behind the backs of the first couple. We no longer remember either the earth or the stones. And yet after a several generation interval, beneath the earth, the ancient stones came back. Did Sisyphus have to push the bones of his mother, of my

mother, the Earth, back into the shadows? Did he have to endlessly reinter the corpse of his parents? This corpse was exactly reborn, since behind their backs their children arose from those bones; and him and us and those that followed. This rolled stone, we had lost all memory that it was at the same time our immemorial anteriority and our total posterity, that is, the human race. Stones form the skeletons of the dead and the seeds of the future.

Scholars generally refuse popular customs or prefer to look down on them by studying them: for do you know a more humiliating position than that of the observed or described subject? Now it was said, already, in Antiquity, that Sisyphus's proper name hid poorly the common name for the wise man such as it can be found in the title philosopher. How many of the learned wouldn't get irritated at hearing themselves ridiculously called Sosophes? But the people, for whom the meaning of the apt nickname has never been belied, observe in return and describe, surely, a loveless science or wisdom.

Buried in silence among the taciturn shades, outside the buzzing language above the ground, this science or wisdom works at a pure loss at the rock of our foundations on which it will be said that the community will be built. We tread on the earth, we drive back the rock, we look down on vernacular names, we've forgotten everything.² For do you know a worse position or one

more external to what counts for men than that of the entire scene below the earth? Subject, certainly, but also humiliated object.

We must return to the foundations.

You are Peter [*Pierre*] and on this rock [*pierre*], I will build my Church. This founding sentence plays off a single word: the limestone thing, the corporeal flesh and the first name, a puff of wind and meaning, all exchange their functions and places by substitution; the Church, on the other hand, an instituted assembly calling a number of corporated individuals by every name, in turn, changes into a hard edifice and substitutes for it.³ The man founds the community the way the thing does for a building. The series implicates or unfolds: the inert, the living, a singular, the constructed, the given, language, in all the hard and the soft, but also what depends on us, building, and what depends much less on us, knowing how to form an “us” and which sometimes occurs by blows of rocks, in stonings. Who has ever stated, with greater economy, an ontological maxim that’s as complete and as brief? How to mark the return of rock at each level or function more insistently?

The building stands if the rock supports it.⁴ Translating the maxim, the traditional language of philosophy talks endlessly about statues: it calls substance the stay or the support that in the final analysis conditions stability; but

the founding sentence exactly describes a transubstantiation: from living or dead flesh to inert rock, thing or statue, from the body to its proper name, substantive, and from everyone to a Church or institution, the whole by a chain of substitutions. What, truly, remains stable across these changes or substitutes if not the rock itself, always invariant and returning, in the word, the name, the body, the thing, the construction and the assembly?

How to say with more insistence and truth that everything is founded on it?

The eternity of the punishment follows a final judgment: definitive, without appeal. Punished by the gods themselves, Sisyphus no longer has any recourse. Philosophy, for once, reaches what happens after the ultimate authority.

We therefore speak about the man whose fate interests us and never about the rock whose distressing return only touches us by means of the torture it brings back. We see the case, blind to the thing: the human, moral, criminal, judicial case, debated and then decided by civil, political, divine tribunals, from the county court to the ultimate authority, hides the thing from us for eternity.⁵

Yet, it turns. Like an unpaid bill, the stone infinitely represents itself again. Not in the head or through some show, but with its weight and roughness.

A case already settled, a thing always owed, a stone endlessly there.

We finally understand why the myth of Sisyphus expresses perpetual motion or the eternal return so many times. The scandal or absurdity of a resumption without end always comes from the fact that, wherever this is represented, there is an effect without a factual cause.⁶ How is that possible?

Because the cause/case passes quite entirely to the side of the tribunal, of morality, of ethics, crime, arbitration, the social sciences, until its exhaustion, until no more of it is left for the things as such; passes quite entirely onto the head of that accused that it charges with all of his offenses as well as those of past history, as though the rock by itself had no weight nor the earth any slope or gravity. The law according to which heavy bodies fall, ignored, is effaced so as to leave room only for the one that passes through the jury's mouth or the tribunal's decision.

Thus the Latin language called the object of the judicial procedure or the case itself *res*, the thing, from which we derive "reality," so that, for the Ancients, the accused bore the name *reus* because the magistrates summoned him. As though the only human reality came from tribunals alone. The real only weighs on Sisyphus through the authority that sentenced him. Positive law precludes or hides natural law. The rock falls because the

decree fell.

And yet it turns. Giordano Bruno, Galileo, and many others as well from history forced a passage from cases to things, precisely before and despite the tribunals, against the assemblies. They substituted the law of physics for the rules of the court and the rules of law, a ball that rolls on an inclined plane in a lawful manner for the guilty king sentenced to the underworld. The case was forgetting the things; the thing will leave the cases/causes, except for those that are followed by simple effects.

The myth of Sisyphus, a sage or scholar with a reviled name, stages the archaeology of falling bodies. The rock falls all by itself, no more guilty party.

Myth ignores nature and only knows history. If for example it recounts that it rained stones somewhere it conceals the crowd of lapidaters in the neuter subject of this verb. Nature for it is only the reserve of unavowable histories. Consequently, things and stones, hard, remain outside an enclosed zone that's blocked and sealed off, in aiding one another, by legend, courts of law, politics, in short, all the social sciences, which are only occupied with relations. They're equivalent to each other in the softness of languages: history is as good as myth, and religion as good as politics and so on ... since, commonly, all of them ignore the things. This sealed zone that's entirely devoted to the light languages sends the hard

handled by the convicts back into the underworld, a hard heaped with scorn and transformed into shadow.

No culture, ever, has sculpted a god for gravity. The fall of bodies came, in the absence of this god, when the convict made the rock emerge from its underground room.

I began my writing life by meditating on statues and finished my first work with the place of reference, generalized into interference in the second.⁷ The stone commander, hard, leaves the fixed spot determined by it and resurrects from the tomb so as to take there he who talks frantically, without faith, law or weight, soft. Here, already in place, is the stone and the death that gives meaning and direction to the place of settlement or tribulation. Although mathematical, at the subtle forefront of demonstration and logos, the approach weighed itself down at its birth with a mass of granite or marble: thus Thales, in the shadow of the Pyramids, made soft and light geometry rise from their millions of tons.

The statues never ceased to return, in the course of a thousand feasts, parasitical or sensory, and over the course of a hundred voyages: in the Scottish coal basin, following Verne, in *The Child of the Cavern* or in the cave full of amethysts and rubies in which the young chemist of *The Vanished Diamond*, dazzled, discovers at the same time the tomb and the source from which the

black diamond came that disappeared from its pedestal as if by magic. Lucretius demonstrates the existence of atoms by means of the long wearing away of idols beneath the caresses and light kisses of their worshippers: even stone wears away. Comte and Zola explain themselves through the opposition of motors to staters. At the bottom of the loggias of the Vatican, Tommaso Laureti painted as a trompe-l'oeil a vertiginous ceiling whose vertical chimney is interrupted by a crucifix placed on a column from which a Hermes has just fallen, breaking. *The Exaltation of the Faith* makes the hermetic corpus broken into scattered, petrified appendages fly above our heads and at the feet of the Word. Here, the double death of the gods or the substitution of the new God for the old idol, of marble by speech fascinates or aspirates upwards, a replacement carried to its utmost refinement since the divine Hermes was already carrying the word, oral or written, the angel of the old gods and annunciator of the News. But doesn't the word "substitution" repeat the act of passing under the statue? Have I ever ceased, thinking I was wandering, substituting one boundary stone for another? The reclining statues of lectisternia for the flying stones of lapidations? And the idol whose doors open to nameless odors weren't of any use to Condillac and the statue of snow Diogenes hugged, the naked philosopher ...

This convict's work that's deaf to the dominant

languages moved these heavy rocks in the dark without recompense or cease. Philosopher, who will say it? Sisyphus in any case.

This ceaselessly resumed work, in which this invariant appears, finally allows, here, the trajectory of the stone to be plotted that no one, ever, has drawn. At the base of the slope where breath is caught, the bottom of the tomb gapes, the shadowy mouth; at the top of the hillside where the rock goes up again, at effort's end, a trapdoor opens onto the day that dimly lights the thing's path, all of history being taken up again or implicated at each station; stemming from among the dead, from the underworld, from the tombs or from Egypt, dried out bones of fossil forefathers, a black box, the thing emerges from there, endlessly falls back there, but sometimes stands up outside the ground, menhir, meteor, cairn, cippus or funerary statue, gate, tower, soon to be shaped, finely carved, openworked, open, complex, and—miracle—mobile ... rocketing toward the sky. Climbs certainly but, most often, falls again to the same place, to restart once again.

An anadyomene thing, stemming from beneath the ground by means of the convicts' mole strength along the geodesic line of the fall, but in reversing its direction.

Does it finally leave the underworld? On that Sunday of philosophy, Sisyphus will rest.

After the solutions that efface the problems, problems without solutions reappear, quasi-invariant across variations; actively dredged, the sands of river mouths are replaced there in equilibrium and the mouth becomes congested, as though thickened; the environment collapses under the pressure of a conquest that destroys its own conditions; work produces work that precedes work; viruses without cures suddenly occupy the place purified by the cures for the viruses. In total, the things of the world return in the very hollow of the terms that say they efface them.

ORPHEUS, LOT'S WIFE

Sculpture, Music

How he escaped from the thundering abyss where the clamors, the crashes, cries, clanking, motors and dull musics, vibrations and moanings tear from the damned of this world and the other their flesh, their soul and substance, the inner voice of their conscience so as to make vapors, scarcely upright floating specters of them, he couldn't have said: fingernails on the lyre and ear at string level, he escaped, in one piece, the torments of the din. The deafening acclamations of the vote hadn't torn him to bits. Does death decompose us into shreds, rot, and dust by destroying the harmony of our joints through slaps of noise?

He was climbing the internal slope of the crater, scarcely emerging from the chimney. The underworld sinks into an end of the world chaos in which rhythmless and endless explosions, burstings, and deflagrations make

a hubbub that's symmetrical, billions of years after, it seems, to the confusion of the origin: from this latter comes everything, from the former never anything. And yet the two chaoses approach one another to the point of almost becoming contemporaries and mix in the course of real time, which skips here and there without us being able to decide whether it shoots out toward newness or descends into platitude. The destruction of flesh and things makes noise; the noise destroys things and flesh.

Enchained to the weft of the strings, unified by harmony, carried along with the rhythm, lifted by inspiration, Orpheus's body had resisted. Whether he had saved his skin or the nudity of his lover long dead and buried or the corpus of his works, he couldn't have said. Who ever knows what his own life trails behind it, like a comet's tail?

He who composes descended into the underworld to abduct Eurydice's body. If he follows the easy path that falls away toward the pit, his eyes and face are turned in the right direction, for the light, coming from behind, lights up the shadow. The fall into decomposition follows the easiest slope: you can't go wrong when you add fragments to the fracas. Everything begins on the climb back up during which, on the contrary, the light hinders: the eyes can no longer see where the feet are going. You mustn't turn around.

Orpheus delivers his own recomposed body from the

easy analytic, plus Eurydice whom he loves and brings back, the companion, equal, mistress, inspiration, muse who merges with the music, piece by piece, composed measure by measure, a precariously balanced chord supported by the preceding one and following each another in a loss of equilibrium along a free melodic path.

If he turns around, the music vanishes.

Abraham's nephew and separated from him, settled in the Jordan Valley in which five cities are situated, among which are Gomorrah and Sodom, one evening Lot learns, from two angels come from heaven to spend the night at his house, that the following day the two sinful cities are going to collapse under a rain of stones and fire. He escapes in the early morning from that terrible place in the company of his two unmarried and promised to incest daughters, as well as his wife. You mustn't turn around.

In hell, behind, the dead bury the dead and the living bury each other living: and if we decided never to look at the ordinary and interesting things that happen there, violence, chaos, destruction, history? Lot's wife hears the explosions and din; a fiery blast burns her and pushes her from behind: struck with pity for those who are shouting with terror and distress, called, jostled, terrified, she turns around. And sees. Seized with horror, punished, she congeals into a statue of salt.

Let her turn around, and a sculpture will appear.

The surviving family watches her change into a living pillar, proof that she was fleeing in front, the first escapee. Why did she turn around? Why did she become solidified? A Gomorrhahn herself, was she showing solidarity with all the women and men who were transforming around the Dead Sea into blocks in the sheet of natron?

It seems that stones from a rare shower were falling on these cities and men: everyone became petrified, like the woman. Covered with stones coming from the sky. It was raining. Who rains when it rains, particularly stones? Who is concealed behind the transparent, innocent, naturalized subject of the verb “to rain”? Who is stoning Sodom and Gomorrah? Likewise in Livy: it rained rocks that day as well as scraps of flesh that the predatory birds flying in the carnage seized to devour before they hit the ground.¹ Is there any need for a haruspex to recognize vultures and the transparent scene of stoning? The executioners hide behind the names of birds or melt into the neuter pronoun. How many human laws seek to pass themselves off as laws of nature? Reciprocally, the naturalist reading or legend of myths and histories runs up against miracles: the explication, which did not understand, ought to have been brought under attack; it was preferable to scorn mythology. Natural miracles, here, the rain of stones, reveal how human atrocities are concealed. Flesh

transformed into stone is a lapidated body. It rained shields or bracelets on Tarpeia; when it is recounted that a shield fell from the sky, search then for the vestal victim who was aimed at, search especially for he who aimed at her.

If, by this same stroke, Lot's wife became, that day, a pillar or a statue, we might understand the prohibition of idols as a measure of mercy. Do not lapidate anyone any more so as to afterwards adore the statuary, a lapidary stone.

What is a statue? A living body covered with stones.

In the middle of the Ephesus Museum, standing, risen from our terror, Artemis or some other woman-goddess, unnamable whatever name may have been tossed on her, shows, naked, her breasts, her entire body covered with breasts, an immense proliferating cancer of mammaries, a multiparous mother with a pelvis full of ovaries, ova, eggs bursting her skin in order to spread all over her belly, a mother saturated with fecundities in dense vegetations: a polymastic monster, a statue on which breasts metastasize.

The monster shows birth in large numbers, the primary female, essential, with large and round cells. But what if we claimed that she bears fifteen breasts in order to transform her as well into a monster? By saying it, we're casting her out and still stoning this poor body covered, in

fact, in reality, with polished and heavy stones. In the past we left Tarpeia lying, knocked over beneath the mad burst of stones, strewn with corundum and beryl, tourmaline or lapis lazuli, a dazzling, incomprehensible source of value. Here she is, come back, resurrected, standing, lapidated, covered not with breasts but with the stones that the Sabines and we threw on her.

What is a statue? A stone body, lapidated.

We are nevertheless right to see and perceive proliferating breasts on this polymastic woman and to think her the great mother, the original fertile goddess of the Mediterranean basin. For the originary scene of lapidation or transformation into stone gives death and life and gives the object. We still suckle at these multiple and old breasts, sources of our cultural formations. The great death gave us life. We no longer remember whether we stoned or simply buried this dead body under a slab. But we do know that we owe our lives to it, us, resurrected children of this standing form. When she collapsed to the ground, at the moment when life left her, her beauty decomposed and became covered with an unnamable swarming of little lives. Our stones then covered over what has no name in any language. They substitute for the terrifying life after death. So, the stony tumulus—the first statue—in the silence before every language, at a blow tied life, death, body, and object, into a supernatural density from which everything surges,

hominity as well as value, knowledge or speech. Yes, those stones became breasts or heavy and round female cells, irrepressible donors of food to the lineages that emerge from there as from their source.

The kingdom of Lydia is thought to have issued the first coins. Everything there speaks of gold: Croesus reigned there, rich; the Pactolus flowed there as well. King Midas, in neighboring Phrygia, transmuted everything he touched and only lost this cursed power, which he nearly died of, starving beneath fortune, by washing in this same Pactolus, in which he left the source of the auriferous flakes. It's not advisable to transform oneself into a philosopher's stone.

Gyges, a shepherd of the king of that locality, was peacefully grazing his flocks when a thunderstorm arose; an earthquake opened the ground, two lips gaped, repeating the earth on the left and right, as in the name Gyges.

What could be more banal than the everyday plain whose green grass the animals graze on? Undifferentiated like the desert in which the nomadic and pastoral tribes of Israel passed. On this dreary expanse, the lightning falls. The Romans used to put up a stone coping around the impact point. The earth opens. The same Romans used to celebrate the world's manifest and dark gaping with a special festival: *mundus patet*. The well's low wall

highlights and conceals the trace that effaces the banality. Conversely, the indifference of space holds up when what comes from the sky melts and disappears like manna. After the white plain, another white plain. The manna melts like the icons, like the idols beneath the thunderbolt of the jealous God.

Gyges descends into the chaos of the origin to visit the place that was just born in the indifferent meadow. In the abyss, he first sees a horse: a bronze statue, hollow and pierced with little doors. Let's not be deceived like the Trojans were by the horse shape: it's a question of a box.

On the plain, Gyges doesn't see anything. He doesn't yet know that the earth is a box. The ground opens like a tomb; the black box is lit up a bit. What's inside? A second box, white and black, with observation holes in its sides. Putting his head through the windows, the shepherd sees again. Blind and lucid, deprived or endowed with sight, he observes the box's contents: a corpse, naked, of a more than human size. A sort of superman about whom we know nothing other than that he closes the series of what must be seen, other than that he completes the descent into the underworld or the origins.

What is a statue? Enclosed in a tomb, itself concealed in the ground, it encloses and conceals, as in a box, a corpse.

Who, passing today on the shores of the Dead Sea, suspects that this pile of solidified salt, glimmering in the

sun, contains the corpse of Lot's wife?

That gigantic dead man, naked, was wearing a gold ring on his hand. Naked like the plain itself, but remarkable in the place of the finger. Naked and wearing gold on that spot on the body. Covered with a small stone or collet, then covered with bronze like armor, lastly covered with earth. The ring lets almost everything be seen; the bronze envelope opens with several observation holes, but the burial closes everything, except in the exceptional circumstance of an earthquake. The increasing coverings correspond to the progressive discovery.

No one has said, but I hasten to do so, that the gemstone of the ring on the corpse's finger was in the correct position: otherwise Gyges would never have seen the dead man, become invisible by the ring's rotation. The ground would have hidden the tomb, and the tomb the statue, and the form of the horse the form of a man and the stone the corpse. Empty ground, empty tomb, empty statue, no remains. That's the general case, where we don't see anything when it's a question of death and the object. The ground must shake or the volcano thunder.

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Diodorus Siculus carefully described the Egyptian funeral ceremonies: how the corpse crosses the lake aboard a

small boat whose pilot is named Charon, and the forty judges who take a seat all around and the trial of purity ... we don't know whether he had traveled there, whether he had copied out the *Book of the Dead* or of emerging forth into the daylight.² But it's claimed that Orpheus himself had witnessed similar funerals and derived his fable of the nether regions in part from what he had lived there. We will never know whether, in his narrative, the musician tore himself away from the underworld, emerged from the tomb or really returned from Egypt.

In the course of the long preparation of the dead body, which lasted more than seventy days, the Egyptian embalmers customarily placed a gold ring on the pinkie of the corpse's left hand, on the collet of which jewelers mounted a scarab on which could be read, imprinted, the names and titles of the departed. The ring no doubt gave the deceased some power for they didn't bury anyone, whether powerful or impoverished, without him wearing one. The scarab stones we have preserved symbolize, as we know, self-production, the world, and the father, resurrection. This coprophagic insect, which was in the past said to have no female, has fascinated our ancestors for millennia since Saint Ambrose still compared it to Christ, dead and resurrected: Saint Ambrose, whose name signifies immortality. What do we know about the man who is now exiting the tomb, a gold ring on his finger, in

the middle of the plain and the day? Does he come back as humble, as pastoral as before, or is he reborn, already king, of a gigantic size? There is only one man in the story of Gyges.

The lying man, bigger reclining than standing and dead than living, shows the shepherd, besides his nudity, a ring whose collet gives power and glory to whoever wears it through withdrawing into the shadow or emerging forth into the daylight. Sometimes we fall into the dark night, sometimes we reappear in the light of the sun. And what if the Platonic book was translating the *Book of the Dead* into its abstract language? And what if the cave itself was repeating the shepherd's vault or the Egyptian tomb? The gold ring's lawful circle makes the corpse, the poor shepherd, and the sovereign king a single being in three persons through the power of the collet, self-production, rebirth.

The Lydian myth, recounted in Greek, brings us back again to Egypt and its funerals. And philosophy to its thanatocratic foundation.

Hellenic culture everywhere confesses its Egyptian debt. Before entering into the creation of the world by the Demiurge, as though it was a question of the absolute beginning of time, Plato at the start of the *Timaeus* presented an old priest or sage from over there who measured the overwhelming ancientness of his knowledge

against the childhood of Greek science. “Still young, you don’t have,” he said, “any knowledge that has, like ours, gone gray with time. Catastrophes break up your history and make you forget antiquity.” The history of our sciences is always more or less in need of mythic anamneses. And Democritus pointed to the art of the *harpedonaptai* as the origin of geometry. The flooding Nile blurred the boundaries of the fields; it was necessary to measure the land once again when the waters receded, he said. Another origin myth parallel to what is said in the *Timaeus*: the mixed silt of earth and water produces a return to chaos; and order and measure, economy must be reborn from the confusion. Lastly, tradition has Thales facing the Pyramids in order to discover his theorem. As though mathematics also came from death.

Not only does myth draw us toward Egypt but science does too and its history, as though toward its interior and enveloped womb.

I know the same geometry that Thales and Democritus knew, my contemporaries in some way or in that thought: I don’t know, just as Democritus, Thales, and Plato didn’t know, the antiquity of the knowledge implicated in the flood or the pyramid. When we ask the question of the origin, we must think out who is accompanying us in time and who preceded us. The Greeks didn’t precede us since we think or calculate the way they did. We find ourselves therefore standing facing the Great Pyramid with the same

thought as Thales. We return to Egypt with him.

Hebraic culture conceals a similar debt poorly. Two great figures at least reach the Nile, stay for a long time and maintain from there complex relations with the land of their fathers or with the father and sons of their land: Moses and Joseph. Both approached Pharaoh and seemed to know the most profound and most secret things that Egypt bore.

After the Massacre of the Innocents, Jesus fled into Egypt accompanied by Joseph.

Every Jew celebrating Passover or passage for millennia has had to consider himself as being saved from Egypt, as having left there, been pulled from there, by miracle torn away from a place where he must not stay, Sheol, but where the will of God nonetheless drove him. Joseph knew burial in a water tank before being interred elsewhere than in his land. Leaving for exile, returning from yonder, through the desert.

Every Christian taking his Easter communion, a new man, is risen.³ And has to consider himself as being saved from death, as having left the underworld, been pulled from the tomb, by divine grace torn away from a place where he must not stay, the tomb, but where vital human law throws him. Exile for all of us, sons of Eve, that's the land over which or under which we pass.

How to leave Egypt, tear oneself from the tomb,

escape from hell or leave one morning a city bombarded by rocks and fire?

The lessons suddenly converge toward a common focus of light and shadow, or rather diverge from it. Gyges descended, a shepherd, into the primary chaos, autochthonous into the earth and came back up king, master of the visible and the invisible. Might that Platonic and philosophical capacity to see the ideas or numbers and no longer see the everyday things of the sensible world come from the kingdom of the dead? From the land of Egypt? Orpheus returned from the darkness without Eurydice: resurrection of the femaleless scarab? Lot delivered himself with and without his wife from the Sodomite disorder and destruction, as others did from the plagues of Egypt. The gold ring, the descent, the deliverance to the morning, into the light of day, from an abominable chaos left behind oneself, all of that comes from Egypt: concretely, really, historically, factually. All these narratives come from there and turn their backs to the unbearable vision of origin: turning around is prohibited. All these fables spread around the eastern Mediterranean come out of, pull themselves out of, extricate themselves from, yes, deliver themselves, escape from a place, have as a source a land that's simultaneously named Egypt and tomb, Sheol or hell, Egypt and chaos or origin. For that primordial culture

from which the entire West emerged identified with death. The land of tombs, the civilization of corpses, techniques for mummies.

Philosophy readily speaks the Greek or Hebraic language, particularly frequenting these two cultures of speaking and writing, but rarely cites Rome and Egypt, toward which turning around is forbidden. Language forgets death and the object.

Lot and his daughters deliver themselves from their destroyed country; the wife stands still to contemplate the apocalypse. Two histories and two times are defined there and split off: on one side, life continues on condition of not looking behind and of supposing that destruction, acting behind one's back, impels and causes one to run; we have been living, now and since then, we have been thinking and inventing at this pace and this speed, leaving the dead to bury the dead, sons of Lot and his daughters, of Christianity, who have, to engender our works, erased the other side where, by turning around, history and the other time look at death face to face. Time doesn't flow the same when death presents itself in front and when it moves us from behind.

The mother became a pillar of salt: what then is a statue, and why such material? Let's consider the boundary between the bodies of the survivors, fleeing,

and the mutilated corpses in the rain of fire or stones: like an intermediate form, half animate or dead by half. This, retaining the appearance of a body, confronts the long duration by means of saturation of salt content; it will not decompose nor be divided limb from limb under the bombing of the catastrophe or wearing away but will nonetheless remain as stiff and inanimate as every victim in the city. That's a threshold, a well-defined border that unites and separates death and life; Lot's wife, converted, contemplating, on the other side, the first and last chaos, is transformed into a mummy: prepared in natron or sodium carbonate.

Another time, another history is revealed there, facing the original or terminal transcendental death. We've lost all idea of this death. We've replaced it out of a fearsome anxiety. Lot or Hebraic history, Orpheus or the Greek narrative, already good news, caused death to pivot through a gigantic effort and to no longer wait in front of us like a well that attracts us, concealing the superficial ground beneath our feet, but rather to inspire us from behind, to jab us with its spur, an effective and little known motor behind our backs. They therefore invented or foresaw an improbable time, our very history, without anything in front except the future flowing along its asymptote. Orpheus, Lot, Jesus Christ advised us to forget that we're going to die, to turn our backs on what Egypt or the mummy-woman was contemplating.

Everything happens as though our time and our history began the morning of the resurrection, at the break of the emerging forth into the day. The hell of shadows closed over Eurydice, half dead, half-alive; Lot left his half-mummy or statue—and the prohibition concerning representation is equivalent to this foreclosure of death; Ulysses, Aeneas were reborn, left the Elysian Fields when they wanted to; Jesus Christ abandoned linens and bandages at the bottom of the tomb; the holy women didn't know what to do with their vases of herbs, the end of embalmings and mummifications; our culture's texts and religions say the opposite, the end, the success of the *Book of the Dead*.

Before the invention of this new course of history which has made us what we are, intoxicated with immortality, we were going toward death, put in front of us like an end. That statue named end. Stop. Egypt, for thirty centuries, accepted and contemplated it. Worked, studied, digested it for us. Entered into the black box, rolled enormous stones in front of the tombs, folded mummies, implicated them in thousands of kilometers of crossed bandages, patiently preparing the emerging forth into the daylight, positively preparing our history.⁴

We are meditating today on Egyptian wisdom and the strange and unforeseeable turnaround that shaped our history and systems of thought because, ever since

Hiroshima's flash, a new death—the collective disappearance or eradication without remainder of the human species—has stood before us. We were able to put death behind us because it would leave a remainder when it only concerned individuals or groups among which the angels would save a few just ones: it spurred humanity toward progress or promises as long as this remainder survived. Today death overkills.⁵ The future closes within that integral. All of modern history, understood by “modern” the time that began the day death was installed as the motor behind our backs, all the time started then stops. We stand still like statues of salt before the bifurcation. How do we place that inevitable death behind us again, that inevitable death that our history, now ancient, has produced? Didn't we produce it precisely because we had forgotten death itself and its inevitable presence in our actions, words and thought? Like a collective and historical unknown?

Recounting, in the language of myth, that one figure leaves the underworld, another death and the tomb, yet another destruction, or saying, in the language of history, that such and such a group, such and such a science or circumstance comes from Egypt amounts to one and the same lesson. In the precise sense of the verb, Egypt was consecrated to death. Our culture and time were born from the shores of the Nile and the dark tombs by turning

their backs to them. These two places of origin overlap. The positive and probable history describing a country, a state, and customs merges here, for once, and no doubt for the first and only time, with the symbolic myth speaking of the subterranean world and with the ontology meditating on death. We have to think here, at one and the same time, the history of science and that of religion, for our exodus frees itself from an accumulation point in which the factual and the conceptual are mixed and involuted. Leaving Egypt is equivalent to climbing back up from the tomb or again to coming from death, to deducing everything from death, to inferring everything from it. The term “exodus” has to be understood in all these senses: production of meaning from a dense and black source.

Our time comes from death, our history begins in Egypt, our knowledge and our adventure have their source in these two places which form only one; the Hebrew people escaped from the country and the underworld—modern time starts from there, the point of departure for Moses and his text; Orpheus drew his work from subterranean worlds, understand, from the tomb, understand, from Egyptian ritual; Thales came to the Pyramids to search for his theorem; translate: to the Pharaoh’s tombs; translate into the language of history: to Egypt; translate philosophically: to death. Our science comes from death. Jesus Christ ties all these threads at the

zero time.

With a single utterance we speak ontology and history, concept and fact, as though our metaphysics was rooted in Egyptian mortuary techniques. It forbids us to turn back around toward them.

What is a statue? A mummy first of all.

The answer appears historical; it seems to mean: before such and such sculpture lies the corpse, stiffened. Mummification slows, sometimes indefinitely, the inevitable process of decomposition: retains the stiffness of the dead body and announces statuary stability. History, myth, religion, and ontology speak inseparably here: death explicates the statue; this latter implicates the former, the way appearance contains the concept or essence or, better said in this circumstance, substance; the dead man reposes in the bronze horse like the torture victim in Phalaris's bull or Baal's breast, like Tarpeia under the volley of stones, like any remains in the coffin box and the crash victims in the twisted metal of the automobile. The statue is a black box: open it, and you'll look death in the face. Don't open it. Philosophy, just like Egyptian archaeology, opens chests: the one finds meaning or concepts or words, and perfumes in the Silenus-shaped cabinet, the second explicates or develops corpses enveloped in bandages.⁶ Egypt, conversely, buries, covers, binds, ties, conceals, whereas we explicate

and bring to light what stands below, substances. Our logic and the meaning of our logos were born there, from a factual and conceptual gesture that's exactly contrary to their own. He who lies in the bandages, coffins, tombs, and pyramids finds himself implicated.

What is a statue? That box for implications. Already object.

In the book of foundations, I discovered that Rome—an opaque city, a black box, raw stone—was hiding; in the round Temple of Vesta, for example, or its thousand tombs; that its mystery and strength were residing in the density of the envelopment: we can't say anything about it as long as what we say is deployed in the smoothed-out inflation of explication or analysis. By means of this way of thinking or speaking, we remain Greek and Jewish, developing along the time that descends the details of distinction without understanding that anyone has ever been able to work on a whole other side of acts, ideas or words, at folding, implicating, binding, tying, tightening. Entire peoples, for millennia, worked at deflation, amassed, accumulated, built up, buried stocks, created value, shut doors in the shadow, didn't squander their treasures, but—if I dare say—lapidated them, like the Pyramids did with Pharaoh.⁷

Become incomprehensible to the light of our quick as a will-o'-the-wisp discursive intelligences, Rome makes

without exposing or binds without unrolling, surrounds its glimmers of knowledge with round walls, builds. For wanting to bring everything to daylight, we've lost shame and density. We fear the darkness and lose our reserves, live the time of the explosion, fire and vertical growths, inflation. Some predecessor necessarily had to prepare, before us and for us, concentrations to be spent some day. We thus succeed Rome, and Rome succeeds itself the way a linear stream comes out of groundwater or a source, the way a flow emerges from a stock, a bank, a dam or capital. Founding signifies putting such a dense, black, deep, fearsome blockage below ground. We ceaselessly remove bodies from tombs; it puts them there and hides and piles.

If we educated young people to implicate texts, we would see works blossom.

In the same book and like an effigy, a baker kneads bread dough by patient implications and resumptions, by closings of a volume or a mass over itself. Her work doesn't show or exhibit anything but on the contrary removes from the express light what can resist wear. She buries and folds in such a way that the bread becomes a complex of folds.⁸ Thus before appearing in the daylight, we spent time in a women's womb intertwining our tissues over one another in the dark: the development of the embryo, as it is said by antiphrasis, ought to be called

envelopment. As though the organism was amassing time, stocking it, even creating it, before squandering it in the sun. The baker models the bread dough with her hands the way the gravid woman unintentionally kneads the prenatal living mass. Thus the sculptor of statues folds and implicates the clay like a thousand veils or coats, encloses and drives the form, through such work, into the hard and black density and founds it there. At the origin of the world, it is said, God created man by modeling him with mud: he bound, tied, implicated him. Objects are gigantic inter-nested stocks of time.

These few notes about Rome, relating the work of foundation, hold true for Egypt even more. Built in speech, Athens and Jerusalem analyzed and commented on, explicated, irreversibly launched the linear direction of time, they separated, cut and came from Egypt. This latter, like Rome but more originarily, more profoundly, and over a longer time, founded: concealed, buried, enveloped, piled in caverns hollowed out beneath the pyramids or mastabas and kept quiet. Thales drew the uninterrupted development of geometric rigor from this treasure amassed over many centuries; the Hebrew people, come out of this prison as though from out of its own tomb, advanced endlessly toward history and the promise. To understand such long achievements, a baker's work—embryonic, statuary, precreator or procreator—had to occupy millions of men over a

colossal accumulation of time. No doubt we no longer understand this burying in shadow and the silence of the foundation.

That's the secret of the mute, stony, and objective Sphinx.

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Lot, Orpheus: the Jewish lesson has the wife run in front; the mistress in the Greek legend follows behind; a solidified woman in the first text, for the second narrative, a vanished one; in one case, forever visible, permanent; lost forever, unable to be found in the other. Crystallized or sublimated. There, she's transformed because she turns around, herself, toward the forbidden; her guide, her lover dissolves her, here, for turning around toward her: a passive object of the gaze or an active subject of sight. She crystallizes on her own; someone else sublimates her into smoke. Let her observe and here she is, manifest, exposed, motionless; there she is, undone in the temporary breaths of air, invisible as soon as the other observed her.

Orpheus will become a pederast, it is said; Lot's daughters will sleep with their father after the complete stoning of the homosexuals of both sexes, a holocaust with no other remainder than these committers of incest. The prohibition of turning around, identical, has some

connection with inversion. But, for once, let's leave sex.

An identical text is contraposed into two dual legends, a feature that's quite remarkable when the invariance consists in repeating that you must not turn around. At the common risk of hell, of death, chaos, a rain of fire, and falling of stones. At the risk incurred also by Gyges or Empedocles in the cavern and the volcano. But thanks to the ring the former cyclically traveled the sum of these two inverted paths.

One of the two dual legends concerns music, the other sculpture. The end of music and the beginning of sculpture. A strange light predominates the too lit or not lit up enough whole in which this can be read: by contraposing what can be said about the one, what can be said about the other can be obtained. These two fundamental arts that must be sought below ground, in the heart of chaos, maintain a secret relation of duality with one another. A dazzling turnaround: music and sculpture complement or oppose one another; who would have believed it?

Softness and hardness hold the universe by themselves.

The question must be asked: where? The question seeks a locale in space. A place. For example: where are the gates to the underworld, the remains of Sodom, the stone of the tomb with the bronze horse? Answer: chaos can be defined as a variety in which disorder prevents the

appearance of a place. Chaos doesn't provide any markers, or we can't discern any there. Hence quite precisely this: the underworld has no door or window by which one can enter or leave. Chaos remains as such right up to its edges. Those who got lost almost to the point of death in primeval forests, below the Equator or the tropics, still swear that, cautious, they never set foot in one. They didn't realize they were entering it. Consequently, they weren't able to deliver themselves from it, just as they hadn't understood that that's where they were. The chaotic border is marked out just as poorly from outside as from within. No place, no door, no observation hole. Chaos doesn't answer the question "where?"

Now: where is Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem* to be found? Where does the work of François Couperin take place, in comparison with which every other music rings coarsely? In a piece of writing or a score, but which ones? On which instrument, along the logarithmic arc of which fingerboard? In which hall, under which baton? And yet music occupies space starting from a localizable listening post: how far? The sonata is present and yet absent. Everywhere, not quite everywhere, nowhere. Music doesn't answer the question "where?"

Eurydice is leaving the underworld. By which door? We don't know, or we know that none exist. At what stage is she in her ascent? What distance can be marked

between music and background noise? Distance presupposes space, again this question “where?,” without any answer for Eurydice, music or for the country she is crossing. Music frees itself from noise and can ceaselessly fall back into it. What distance, likewise, can be marked between it and some language? Music seeks language but doesn’t get there.

The statue stands in equilibrium in a singular place in space and marks the well-founded here whose marker orders that space in return. There is the statue: at the crossroads, along the road, in the middle of the garden, on Capitoline Hill, in the holy of holies, next to the ordinary oven where the gods stand, at the back of the common room where the family prays, evenings. Should the statue, box, horse, or ark contain a corpse, then the expression “there is” has to be read or written or engraved “here lies.” There is the statue, “here lies” the corpse that marks the place. Sculpture invents the question “where?” by answering it before it is asked.

“Here lies” someone or other, a bandit, shepherd or king, earth in earth, ashes in black darkness, an autonomous or transposed ancestor, rapidly invisible since dissolved. What do his name, his quality, his lived body, his title—all endlessly substitutable—matter? For what lies, in fact, is the here. Not “here lies” [*ci-gît*] the shepherd or King Gyges since “Gyges” resays the earth itself just as “Orpheus” says the darkness, but “here lies”

period, where “here” [*ci*] becomes the subject of the verb “to lie” [*gésir*]. The lying person [*gisant*] is reduced to the place or shows the being of the place in his hidden or visible home [*gîte*] and on his layer [*gisement*]. *Gésir* is a verb that’s as rare and defective as the verb “to be” abounds and proliferates, cancerous, infinitely substitutable for every verb or substantive. Substitutable like corpse, a corpse-like word. *Gésir*, a singular verb, as though the dual of the verb of generality. The universality of being, scattered in space, densifies, compacts or is formed here, in this singular or quasi-defective place.

Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*: here sleeps the ancestor, in the tomb. The family built the house around the Lares and Penates or the cult of its forefathers. Here, the place. Here, Being [*l’Être*]. I’m delighted that the French language calls the layout of places in a building *aîtres* or *êtres*. Starting from there the city spreads out. As though the necropolis was engendering the megalopolis. The here orders extension: familial, tribal, agricultural, rustic, urban, political space. What name can we give this progressive ordering around the statue, around the place and the primary tomb? What can we call this spatial and objective expansion? Antiquity. Better: the history of Antiquity. Better still: the time of Antiquity. Even better still: the antiquity of time, its archaeology, the oldest genesis of our time, which flows in the other direction. Fustel de Coulanges: from the being that’s enveloped,

implicated, densified in the place, from being-there, time mysteriously wells up.

But isn't there some trickery in deriving everything from the couple being and there, that is to say, from the sum of the global and the local, from the greatest extension and the greatest comprehension? The entire universe is already found in the sum one gives oneself. Nothing could be easier than to derive it from that. Already, the last century deduced the world and history from the yes and the no, from dialectical affirmation and negation: first give yourself the sum of this negative and this positive, and you'll have the universal at hand as well from the start. Logical trickery, quickly found out. The modern trickery can be called topological, just as easy to circumvent.

Eurydice vanishes like vapor: the rare and adorable place of her body and her forms comes undone, leaving ribbons floating in the air. Just as a wave passes and is propagated, music combs extension in such a way that the folds [*plis*] open. By invading space with its non-presence, it dissipates the light non-being in every place and, present everywhere, absent there, completes the homogeneous isotropy. Absent everywhere, except there, a statue presents itself, unique in a singular place, in such a way that it becomes the head of a local grasp, a seed, a navel of space or being, heavy. What the one does away

with, the other creates. Lot's wife fleeing, passing, vague and floating, freezes, sets, crystallizes, in the midst of fire, paradoxically. Hazy and soft bonds suddenly harden. The first woman, the first art disappear; the two others appear: the disappearance effaces a singularity, the appearance makes it be born or reinforces it. Two dual or contraposed phenomenologies.

Both of them at the vague border of being and non-being: the statue, appearing, is born to being, makes it be born, drives it to propagate itself in its own and dense neighborhood, whereas music, disappearing, ceaselessly leaves being toward non-being. Two dual or contraposed ontologies.

Two dual or contraposed religions. Just as the universal lays waste to places and crosses the desert, listens to Israel, so the monotheisms of language break statues; a piece of the pagan place, the pagus extends, idol by idol, toward an uncertain global, without refusing to pass, respectfully, before the colossus of speech or the fetishes of writing.

The statue begins to order space by distributing a thousand topologies: stones, balls or paving stones, spirits of the places.⁹ Music perfects a certain spatial labor, through a sweeping that discovers Euclidian or metric space, undifferentiated. The universal and pure and homogeneous isotropy substitutes for the mixed multi-

coloredness of singular and local topologies. Two dual and contraposed geometries. Consequently, sculpture occupies sites and forms, whereas music occupies the metric, saturated with numbers. Quality or quantity, deformations or measure.

Statics. The appearance of statuary equilibrium is perpetuated in a permanent and definitive stability. In deviation from equilibrium, music goes and runs by means of a perpetual and immanent instability: stopping marks its disappearance. Phoronomy and dynamics.¹⁰ Two dual or contraposed mechanics.

Music, starting from the global, launches itself and weaves time. The statue ends time and starts space; music finishes space and makes its *début* in time. Each art defies the space or time in the other. Two dual and contraposed aesthetics. Moving in duration, a fragile caprice, a little phrase, the sonata scoffs at space; the Sphinx, placed there, as though eternal, scorns history.

Through the signal, music passes from noise to language, without touching either of them. The statue remains in silence. The result of this is that all our forms of thought or knowledge, defined in fact or virtually by terms having the suffix “-logy,” designate music as their mother or antecedent. Sculpture remains excluded from this game. If one gives the word “logic” a broad and deep enough meaning for it to say everything that concerns the

logos in general then here are two dual or contraposed logics. The absence of any treatise on sculpture is due to this transcendental silence, placing statues outside the logos.

Have I succeeded in showing a philosophy, a knowledge, an experience of silence by making an effort toward that hardness? Since music and sculpture both precede language—subject side, object side, hard side, and soft side—they go beyond traditional philosophy, which is entirely devoted to the soft and languages. Socrates, the son of a sculptor, learned how to play an instrument clumsily, maladroit fingers in strings that were ringing off key, at the point of death.

Consequently, the genesis of knowing is contraposed in the same way. Everything we know derives from language, whereas this latter derives from music. Nothing surprising, therefore, in finding this latter at the origins of geometry, of arithmetic, but also of epics, tragedy, every literature, philosophy even. Everything we know emanates from it, the mother of our maternal languages, whereas it itself comes from noise. From noise emerges the music from which emerges the language from which knowledge emerges. Around the latter, the preceding one continues to emit volatile and vain words around which the first continuously makes noise. A canonical genealogy, preserving the monopoly of the sayable, whose line follows the soft, in the direction of the little

energies.¹¹

But this genealogy doesn't include the hard, the dual of the soft, remaining in the double silence of language and noise, and whose local presence, whose equilibrium and definition, whose appearance, whose forms don't make any noise.

Soft waves, hard sculpture.

Impenetrable or resistant, the stone has weight, like marble, bronze or trees. Forces are needed to lift them, steam or horses; only high energies carve or crush them; transporting them requires some power. This labor relation to solid things is called work. Whereas the musical call rises from noise to meaning while avoiding both, a work of leisure, digital information.¹²

Vibrating softness and the hammer's hardness.

Meaning descends into mass or plunges deep into the bronze as though it wanted to seal itself to the pedestal and no longer budge from it. The account of the waves, conversely, leaves the brass or bronze, emerges from the wood, from force, from weights, rising, light, as though some message wanted to leave the powers or evaporate from the hard heavinesses.

A procession toward the sublime or a descent into the dense.

Orpheus climbs back up from the underworld, a composer, and Lot's wife turns around toward it, statuary.

The soft is buried in the object, immersed in its black box, locked. Whereas, mouth closed, eyes shut, ears plugged, finding the solitude and the night of the sack of skin, I only find inchoative music in my proprioceptive box, as though the I were born from the murmuring and made its substance from the clamor that reverberates, under every language, at the bottom of what was called the soul.

Objective statue, musical subject.

When this discrete hubbub fades away, when the waves level out into the flat, the I vanishes or dies and reverts to the object: then the dead body becomes a statue. The death throes feel the music flee; living and thinking consist in hearing it, warm. Working in general designates the relation of a certain song to the immobile stone, between music and sculpture.

The essential of this latter, the being of its substance, is silence.

A trivial drawing simplifies these words: here is a circle and a point chosen outside it; from this point, let's draw two tangents to the circle; let's call the straight line that connects the two tangential points thus obtained the polar of the first point, which point is therefore named the pole in relation to the circle. A point, a straight line: the pole and its polar. Let's begin again. From a second point chosen outside the circle, let's draw two tangents and

connect the two places again. Another point, second, and its polar, another straight line.

One of those pretty insights that mathematics sometimes gives occurs from the fact that one can in a way turn the drawing around. Let's start from the two points and the two straight lines. Connect the two former, here is a straight line; the two latter intersect: there is a point. On the straight line thus obtained, each point-pole will have for its polar in relation to the circle a straight line that will pass through the point thus obtained. If the poles align or join up on the straight line then the polars meet or intersect at the same point. This turnaround resembles, allowing for differences, some translation from one language into another. If we were speaking at the start the language of points or poles, the circle or dictionary soon translates it into the other language of polars and straight lines. The first language says at one moment and in its turn the straight line, the joining of the aligned poles: the circle-dictionary then translates it into a point, the intersection of these polars forming a bundle.

Let's forget language and keep the correspondence that we know it announced, from afar, in the nineteenth century, our comparisons between structures. Let's even leave geometry as well as the logic or the algebra that it displays and simplifies in order to observe, naively, this indefinite straight line, a joining of points whose course runs at a distance alongside a point or center radiating like

a star, an intersection of straight lines. I haven't drawn any other schema or suspected any other secret connection between the two arts, at first glance so dissimilar.

By one of those unexpected good fortunes that research sometimes encounters, two undated narratives—myths or fables—teach us that two first or fundamental arts, for the hard and for the soft, maintain relations comparable to those of that line and that point. Global, local; unique God, idols.

In one of those extraordinary joys that philosophy sometimes reserves for the end of the most austere exoduses, a book shows an object whose starred presence suddenly turns the usual, dominant and monotonous languages around.

*

He got into his car as usual and, in setting off, absentmindedly turned on the tape deck below the dashboard. The oblong box in which he was squatting rolled along a road passing through low hills. Seen from high up, from a plane for example, the automobile would have looked like a boat going down a winding river, for the route climbed, turned, left, right, very curvy, as though a corkscrew; his tires screeched as they skid; the dense plane trees filed past like the pillars of a cathedral

supporting a vault of foliage open to the clear sky.

They found the steel shell, burst, burnt, the tomb opening onto a body already gripped by cadaverous rigidity, a statue attentive, solemnly, to the slow movement of Couperin's motet which was invading the leaves that were being stirred by a light wind, while ceaselessly returning owing to the automatic replay mechanism, chapters of a time infinitely begun again.

THE STATUE OF HESTIA

Epistemology

Sculpture, hard, like music, soft, precedes language, the one in its own order and the other in the order of things; the one participates in the little energies, the other in the high ones.

Since statues remain indefinitely in silence, the monotheisms of speech and writing move away from them as they do from the underworld, expel them and command their sectarians to hate idols, to break them. Thus language takes over their place of origin. Likewise you will not find, in history or the tradition, any general philosophical treatise on sculpture or statues. Language does not speak about silence.

The voyage to the underworld or toward the center of the earth, into the silent abode of the dead, on the contrary

brings the wanderer of good will—let's call “good will” the one that doesn't exclude anything—into the presence of these stones: Lot's wife as a pillar of salt, Sisyphus's rock, Rodin's massive gates, Empedocles's sandals as bombs, the collet attached to the ring that Gyges found on the corpse; these rocks, certainly, but also a few shades: Eurydice's shade leaves the pale phantoms whose whispering preserves and remakes history in Ulysses's and Aeneas's museums. At wandering's end, the hard and the soft. But more hard than soft, this latter vanishing more and more in the calm and silence of the black box.

There is a silent meditation place where all paths join together, mix and merge as in the center of a star. Philosophy has traveled every road: its only method is the summation of voyages.

With Empedocles of Agrigentum, from the origin of science, it sought science's foundations. With the Orpheus of the archaic legend and the quasi-contemporary Rodin, it sought beauty, inspiration and the work in the mass and the noise of things, sought raw and black experience, the softness that disappears, woman cloud, or hard appearance, woman stiffness. With Lot and his family, or Mary Magdalene, it conversed with archangels in the evening and aspired from the dawn only to holiness, in the midst of a hundred disasters. Simple and forgetful of all knowledge, it descended into the

fissure with the shepherd, calling lost lambs and chasing after treasure. Approached the vicinity of the dead. What good is philosophy, if it doesn't open every adventure without forbidding a single one, science, educated ignorance, naivety, beauty, intoxication with God?

Lost for a long time, serenely without hope, ascetically continuing its wandering but in hope, it stumbles—oh, wondrous surprise—across a place that every method shares in common.

Pillar, rock, bomb, collet, all bear the common noun “statues” or the proper noun “Hestia.” These two designations are so alike you can't tell them apart. Together they signify immobility, fixity or invariance, stability. The term “wandering” finds its reference. Here, in this place designated by these nouns and these things, in this fixed and stable point, every tribulation is tied together as in the center of a star; from here they spread as though from a common source.

So the history of philosophy has never produced a general treatise on sculpture? In wanting to make up for this lack, in itself remarkable and never remarked, the itinerary of aesthetics brings us to the feet of statues. But they sit in session or enthroned most often at the far end of temples where they are adored by idolaters who are scorned as superstitious. The itinerary of the history of religion meets with and highlights this term of abuse, in

itself remarkable and so akin to the statue that it contributes to breaking or overturning. The goddess who repeats the same term is called Hestia. She who remains.¹ The research of aesthetics merges with the religious route.

In archaic Rome, a Vestal was sometimes stoned and buried alive, a virgin priestess of Vesta, the Latin equivalent for the Greek goddess Hestia. We find the corpse of the Vestal beneath the ground at the end of the nocturnal voyage.

Now philosophy has created a noun that's part of Hestia's constellation. Epistemology. It talks about the *episteme*, which we translate with the word "knowledge," but which, through its origin and root, says invariance and stability again.² Everything happens as though science was resting, standing or erected on an immutable pedestal. Well founded. Or as though it gave itself invariance as a rule. This foundation, the fixed point in this matter, echoes Hestia's statue. Two Greek words, very related, of the same family, signify: the one science and the other the funerary cippus, put up vertically. Here the two first routes, aesthetics and religion, join or flow into the philosophy of knowledge. Here, in this triply immobile place. From which the elements come.

In search of foundations and hurling himself for that reason into one of Etna's chimneys, Empedocles, a physicist, merges with Orpheus, a musician in pursuit of

beauty, who launched himself for that reason into the underworld, and both melt with Lot who left at dawn beneath the rain of fire in search of God.

A multiple voyager, most often lost, Hermes, wandering, finds Hestia, the immobile one, his lifelong consort and melts with her, a hermaphrodite or androgyne. The lover meets the beloved. Piously, fuses with the divinity. Can no longer, actively, do without beauty. Knows, finally, the foundations of knowledge. In the same act, at the same place, the end of the wanderings.

NOTES

The Rocket

- 1 In 1973 the Soviet Tu-144 crashed, killing 13 people.
- 2 Blast-off = *mise à feu*, which literally reads as “put to fire.”
- 3 Meaning = *sens*, which can also mean “direction.”
- 4 Us = *nous*, which serves as both a subject and an object in French.
- 5 Fall under the blow of = *tombent sous le coup de*. This phrase can also mean fall within the scope of, be covered by, be subject to.
- 6 It rains = *il pleut*. The pronoun *il* could either mean either “he” or “it.” So Serres’s point is that “he is raining stones [down upon something]” becomes “it is raining stones.”
- 7 Here is a short rendering of the story from *The Aesop*

Romance that I found here: <http://www.language-translation-help.com/greek-translation.html>

Aesop was a slave of Xanthus, a rich man, but much wiser than his master. One day, he cleverly helped Xanthus and his wife to reconcile. The next day, Xanthus, wishing to give a dinner for his friends, entrusted Aesop to go to the market and buy the choicest victuals that money could buy. Aesop bought tongues.

The dinner consisted of four courses. When Xanthus with his guests found that each course was made of tongues cooked in a different way, they got furious. "Didn't I tell you to buy the best thing imaginable that money could buy?" asked Xanthus. "Yes," replied Aesop, "But is there anything better than the tongue? It is a channel of learning, a key to all knowledge, an organ that proclaims truth and praises God."

"Well," said Xanthus, "Go to the market tomorrow and buy the worst thing you can find for the dinner. We'll see what you'll bring."

Aesop went to the market and bought tongues again. When Xanthus asked for explanations, Aesop said,

“It was an evil tongue that caused a quarrel between you and your wife. The tongue is the source of deviation and wars. It is used to spread blasphemy, slander and lies. Undoubtedly, there is nothing worse in the world than the tongue.”

- 8 “For better or for worse” is written using superlatives in French, so it echoes the Aesop reference.
- 9 Holistic = *ensembliste*, which normally means having to do with sets.
- 10 Polytechnic = *polytechnique*, which literally means many techniques or technologies as well as referring to someone or something that embraces several arts and sciences.
- 11 Narrowly specialized = *pointues*. The translation misses the metaphor of the point as opposed to the whole. Holistic projects = *les projets de l’ensemble*. The following instance of “holistic” translates *ensembliste*.
- 12 One etymology of the word “religion” has it coming from the Latin *religare*, to bind. Such bonds are rendered by the French word *lien*, which I have translated as both “bond” and “link,” depending on the context.

- 13 By small points = *en pointillé*.
- 14 Gift = *don*; injury = *dommage*.
- 15 Another word the French have for news. We have only the one.
- 16 The next man = *le voisin*, which also means neighbor; neighbor = *le prochain*, which as a term is based on *proche*, near or close.

The Shell, The Cannon

- 1 Cockpit = *habitacle*, which evokes a habitation.
- 2 “Ark” above is *arche* in French.
- 3 “Forget” in the previous sentence is *oublier*.
- 4 That which brings itself back and brings back = *ce qui se rapporte et rapporte*. I haven’t succeeded in discovering the source of this etymology. The use of *se rapporte* here is also unclear to me. It could also mean “that which is brought back.”
- 5 Ghosts = *revenants*, which literally reads as “those who come back.” Every instance of “ghost” in this text translates *revenant*.

- 6 From Wikipedia's entry *Serdab*: "A *serdab* ... is an ancient Egyptian tomb structure that served as a chamber for the Ka statue of a deceased individual. Used during the Old Kingdom, the *serdab* was a sealed chamber with a small slit or hole to allow the soul of the deceased to move about freely. These holes also let in the smells of the offerings presented to the statue."
- 7 *Cadavre* is the word that I have usually been translating as "corpse" and sometimes "body."
- 8 *Expliquait, dépliait ce qui s'impliquait*, all of which have a word meaning fold as a root, *pli*.
- 9 A statue of Hermes that the Romans used to indicate routes. It was a quadrangular pillar with Hermes's head perched on top.
- 10 Authority = *instance*. The usage is puzzling since *instance* can mean an authority that has the power of decision or the agencies of the psyche in Freudian psychology. Is the term perhaps meant in its etymological sense of *in* and *stand*, *in-stare*? The term "statue" also derives from *stare*. Every instance of "authority" or "deciding authority" in this book translates *instance* (except on page 103).

- 11 “Here lies” = *ci-gît*, the phrase used on tombstones. I’ll put “here lies” in quotes when it translates this phrase. Layer = *gisement*, which might normally be translated as “deposit,” in a geological sense.
- 12 Cast at the bottom of = *fondu au fond de*. “Cast” in the metallurgic sense.
- 13 What Serres means is a double cone. Each cone above and below the apex is called a “nappe.”

Driftings in the Cemeteries

- 1 Tenants = *locataires*.
- 2 Yonder: and beyond = *Là-bas: et au-delà*.
- 3 It would be more idiomatic to render *par où passons-nous* by “which way are we going?” or “by which route?”, but Serres’s repeated use of the metaphor of passing requires this more formal translation.
- 4 Landscape = *paysage*; place = *lieu*.
- 5 Stage right, stage left = *côté cour, côté jardin*, which literally mean courtyard side and garden side. The Comédie-Française used to perform in a building

that had a courtyard on one side and a garden on the other. This phrase really should be translated as “house right, house left,” since the perspective is from the audience, but the given version is much more familiar and nothing is lost by the switch. All the phrases in this paragraph containing “side” involve the French *côté*.

- 6 *Cour* can mean a “yard” or “courtyard” as well as a judicial “court.” The high and low courts = *les hautes et basses-cours*. *Basse-cour* means “farmyard,” hence the agriculture reference.
- 7 “Closing” in the previous sentence is *fermeture*; “closes itself off” is *se ferme*. Farm = *ferme*.
- 8 Cleanliness = *propreté*, property = *propriété*.
- 9 Enclosure or fence = *clôture*.
- 10 Blossoming opening out = *éclosion*.
- 11 Landscape = *paysage*, which is derived from *pagus*.
- 12 See Descartes’s second maxim in the *Discourse on Method*.
- 13 Ensign-bearing thing = *chose porte-enseigne*, or standard-bearing thing, but clearly Serres is

highlighting the shop sign that *enseigne* can also mean.

- 14 Unit = *cellule*, which can also mean “cell.”
- 15 Being-there = *l'être-là*. This Heideggerian term is usually left in the German in English, *dasein*, so the reference may be a bit obscure if I don't point this out.
- 16 *Lise* is the silty local soil of the Garonne that's deposited by flooding.
- 17 Here = *ci*. The archaic spelling for *ici* makes it clearer in French that the “here” of “here lies”—*ci-gît*—is meant.
- 18 Software = *le logiciel*, which doesn't contain the French term “soft,” but does evoke the softness of the logos.
- 19 You are Peter and on this rock = *tu es Pierre et sur cette pierre*. In this book, *pierre* has mostly been translated as “stone.” The beginning of the following sentence reads: *Voici la transformation du Pierre-prénom, de la pierre-chair en pierre matière ...*
- 20 An allusion to a war memoir by Jacques Pericard.

- 21 Squander = *dilapide*. Lapidate = *lapider*, which, besides stoning, can also mean to represent in stone.
- 22 Ancient = *antique*.
- 23 Here I was a ghost = *me voici revenant*, which could also be translated as “here I was coming back.”
- 24 My epitaph or signature = *mon épitaphe ou mon paraphe*.
- 25 Snowdrop = *perce-neige*, which literally reads as “snow-pierce.” The steles are piercing the snow like the first spring flowers.
- 26 From country to page = *de pays en page*. Both *pays* and *page* are related to *pagus*. Provining = *provignement*, which can also mean “proliferating.”

Fetishes

- 1 Narrow anxiety = *angoisse étroite*, which could also mean intimate, close, or cramped anxiety.
- 2 Running of the bulls = *course de taureaux*. The Spanish *corrida de toros*, or bullfight, means “running of the bulls.”

- 3 Manuel Laureano Rodríguez Sánchez (1917–47), known as Manolete, a Spaniard, was one of the most famous bullfighters of his era. He died in Linares after being gored in the groin.
- 4 Lieutenancy = *lieutenance*, which literally reads as “place-holding.” “Vicariance” is also meant in its etymological sense. See the first chapter, page 10.

The Gates of Hell

- 1 The *rue de Varenne* is the site of the Rodin Museum in Paris. In French, *The Gates of Hell* is *la Porte de l’Enfer*, the door or gate of hell, in the singular. I will be translating *porte* by “gate” or “gates,” depending on the context.
- 2 *La porte est une espèce de port*. This latter term is used to designate a pass between France and Spain in the Pyrenees.
- 3 Gate of the Sun = *porte du Soleil*. Since I haven’t been able to ascertain just what structure Serres is referring to, I’m uncertain as to how to translate it. I’ve given a literal version.

- 4 Being from there = *de là étant*; Being = *l'Être*.
- 5 Serres probably means this in the sense of Being saying "I am."
- 6 Raw = *brute*, which could also be translated as "unhewn." This word recurs throughout the text.
- 7 Golden mouth = *bouche d'or*. Perhaps the closest equivalent we have is a "silver tongue," except a golden mouth is always eloquent with beauty and wise or clear words.
- 8 Lover = *amante*. The lover is female. Sex = *sexe*, which could also be translated as "genitalia."
- 9 For example, in a letter to Arnauld, "To be brief, I hold as axiomatic the identical proposition which varies only in emphasis: that what is not truly *one* being is not truly one *being* either" (April 30, 1687).
- 10 With all hands = *corps et biens*, literally "bodies and goods."
- 11 Partitive articles are used in some languages to indicate an indefinite quantity of some mass noun. The closest we have to it in English is "some." Rock, coal, and information are used with the partitive here.

- 12 By “catastrophe” here, Serres means defining the indefinite, giving it borders. In other words, the cutting and shaping of the indefinite.
- 13 Subject catalog = *catalogue matières*, catalog of matters.
- 14 The Latin *materia* can mean the hard inner wood of a tree. It derives from *mater*: mother, source or origin. Offshoots = *rejetons*, which can mean both “kids” and “offshoots.” Womb = *matrice*.
- 15 In the previous sentence “lies” translates *gît*. Layer = *gisement*. Serres’s use of *surgit*, “surges,” may not be fortuitous. In that case, it might mean “over-lies” or even “super-lies.”
- 16 Palette’s mixed paints = *pâte*, which can also mean “dough.”
- 17 Full-size = *en pied*, which contains the word for foot.
- 18 Womb-box = *boîte-matrice*; beams = *madriers*.
- 19 From which it is even born = *d’où elle naît encore*, which could also mean: from which it is born again.
- 20 Parasites = *parasites*, which can also mean “interference.”

- 21 Or: is the gate closing over the lack of works?
- 22 The Tribunal = *Le tribunal*, which would more typically be rendered as “The Court” but this could lead to confusion given the previous uses of the latter term in this book.
- 23 *Levée de troupes, levée de terre ou de pierres, le mauvais temps se lève.*
- 24 It was such a massive labor to establish the Roman nation. *The Aeneid* 1.33.
- 25 Go to the coal = *aller au charbon*, which means “going to a regular job” or more idiomatically “off to the mines.”
- 26 Matrix = *matrice*; womb = *matrice*.
- 27 Shows things outside of any case, exonerated = *montre les choses hors de cause*.

The Eiffel Tower

- 1 Only this place in the middle of the legs = *seul ce lieu au milieu des jambes*.
- 2 Layer = *gisement*.

- 3 Shades = *ombres*. Serres is playing off the two meanings of *ombre* here: shade, as in ghost, and shadow. Keep this in mind four paragraphs below.
- 4 Descended into hell. From the Apostles' Creed.
- 5 *Turba* = *tourbe*, which means "mob." Readers of Serres's first book of foundations, *Rome*, will know that he means the turbulent crowd, as the Latin root indicates.
- 6 In which languages merge, the first rocket = *où fusionnent les langues, première fusée*.
- 7 Busy = *passante*. "Passers-by" below is *passants*.
- 8 That the masons are pouring. Flow does the Garonne = *que les maçons coulent. Coule Garonne ... Couler* can mean pouring or flowing.
- 9 Unfinished = *non finie*, which could also be read as "not finite."
- 10 "This will kill that" is from Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, where one character worries that the printing press will kill the church or architecture.

The Tic

- 1 I highly recommend reading these three short stories by Maupassant before continuing. You should be able to find them on the internet, perhaps the Gutenberg site. For that matter I recommend reading every story Serres comments on before reading his commentary. “The Tic” is usually translated as “The Spasm,” “The Hair” as “A Tress of Hair,” and “Beside a Dead Man” as “Beside Schopenhauer’s Cadaver.”
- 2 Blossomings = *éclosions*, which means the opening of a flower. Its etymological root is to un-close.
- 3 Bad passage = *mauvais passage*.
- 4 Takes and understands = *prend et comprendre*. I’m not sure it’s important but both involve the verb for taking.
- 5 When the direction will be called the “meaning” = *quand la direction s’appelera le sens*. *Sens* can mean both “meaning” and “direction.”
- 6 “Toc” is the French onomatopoeia for “knock.”
- 7 *Le taquet ou pieu fiché en terre comme un stock nomme la première borne*.
- 8 Deals were concluded with a slap in the hand.

- 9 “The Horla” is a short story by Maupassant. Serres reads it as saying *hors là*, outside there.
- 10 Are always rational = *ont toujours raison*, an idiom which means “are always right.”

The Hair

- 1 “The snows of yesteryear” is a phrase from a famous poem by Villon, *The Ballade of the Women from Times Past*.
- 2 The “door” we hear pronounced in “adoration” does not exist in French. “Door” is *porte*. It is not at all clear how “adoration” says the opening of doors and drawers. It derives from *adorare*, to speak formally, to pray. Is Serres making a bilingual pun?
- 3 The quote is from Plutarch’s *Moral Works, The Treatise of Isis and Osiris*.
- 4 Piece of furniture = *meuble*, which is derived from *mobilis*, what can be moved, the movable.
- 5 It is called “animistic” in the English literature.
- 6 Its master key lies around everywhere = *son passe-*

partout traîne partout.

- 7 Immovable = *immeuble*, which contrasts here with *meuble* or “piece of furniture.”
- 8 The women are mentioned in Villon’s poem.
- 9 In this paragraph, “rest” and “remains” both translate *reste*.
- 10 Piece of furniture = *meuble*, which once again is derived from *mobilis*. Device = *appareil*, which is translated as “dentures” in the subtitle of the following chapter and can also mean many other things, as we shall see.

Beside a Dead Man

- 1 Edges = *lèvres*, which reads as “lips.” “Edges” as in the edges of a wound.
- 2 “Monk” and “monad” share the Latin root *monos*, meaning “alone.”
- 3 A reference to the Tintin comic book *Red Rackham’s Treasure*. The Knight of Hadoque is Captain Haddock’s ancestor from the time of Louis the XIV.

He was shipwrecked on an island, and Tintin and Haddock found a totem of him there.

- 4 Psalm 26.6, I will wash my hands among the innocent and will compass Thine altar.
- 5 Crockery dogs glaring at each other = *chiens de faïence*. *Se regarder en chiens de faïence* is an idiom for standing and glaring at one another. Authorities = *instances* in this paragraph. Again, it could also be translated as “agencies” in the Freudian sense.
- 6 Fitted to the living flesh of the subject, similar to it = *appareillées au vif du sujet, pareilles à lui*.
- 7 We make ourselves incomplete, we set sail piece by piece = *nous nous dépareillons, nous appareillons pièce à pièce*. Serres will make much of the verb *appareiller* and the noun *appareil* in what follows. *Appareiller* can mean to set sail, to fit with a prosthesis, and to pair or to match things up. The word also contains *pareil*, which means similar or alike. I’ll let the text demonstrate all the various meanings of *appareil*.
- 8 Artificial = *factice*.
- 9 **Serres’s footnote:** I have analyzed the transformation

of a statue into a bell in “*La Vénus d’Ille*” in the *Stanford French Review*, October 1987.

- 10 Hand to hand = *corps à corps*, which literally reads as “body to body.”
- 11 Or: at the same time as language.
- 12 Mordancy = *mordant*, which has a clear linguistic connection to biting in French.
- 13 Rejoicing = *réjouissance*, which in this context strongly evokes *jouissance*, orgasm.
- 14 The happy juxtaposition of birth and death here is not in the French.
- 15 **Serres’s footnote:** Michèle Montrelay, “L’appareillage,” Seminar of May 25, 1981, *Confrontation*, Fall 1981, pp. 23–43.
- 16 Remember the French word for furniture has “movable” as its root.

The Beam

- 1 **Serres’s footnote:** La Fontaine, *The Frogs who Ask for a King*, III, 4; Aesop, #44.

2 Cf. Matthew 18.20.

Costumes

- 1 Plenty of elbow room = *les coudées franches*, which also means having complete freedom of action.
- 2 Flabby flesh = *les chairs molles*, which would normally be translated as “soft” here, but as Serres also uses *doux* in this passage and this latter is a somewhat technical term for Serres I shall always translate *mou* and *molle* as “flabby” in this section.
- 3 The third person plural present form of *farder*, presumably meant in all the above senses.
- 4 Coat of fur = *poils*, which can refer to the hair of an animal or the body hair of a human.
- 5 *L'une appareillée, en grand apparat, les autres dépareillés.*

The Hammer

- 1 This is not fair to Nietzsche. The hammer he wanted

to philosophize with in *Twilight of the Idols* was the hammer for a tuning fork, so he could test idols for their hollowness. Surely, Serres knows this, and yet he perpetuates this misinterpretation.

- 2 The Armenian prince is Polyeuctus.
- 3 A mass = *une masse*, which can also mean a “sledgehammer.”
- 4 Offshoots = *rejetons*, which can mean “kids” as well as plant “shoots.”
- 5 On May 21, 1972, Laszlo Toth hit the *Pieta* fifteen times with a three-pound hammer.

Magdalene and Lazarus

- 1 Lying one = *gisant*, which is derived from *gésir*, to lie, as in “here lies.” It can also mean a recumbent statue.
- 2 This is a reference to the ancient Greek flood story. Serres more or less retells it below, on page 173. Hear = *entendons*, which can also mean “understand.”

- 3 A reference to Sartre's novel *Nausea*, in which an important scene involves the root of a chestnut tree. Fire hydrant = *borne*, which has usually been translated as "boundary stone" in this work.
- 4 Which does not weigh = *qui ne pèse pas*, which could also mean "which has no weight" or "is not heavy."
- 5 **Serres's footnote:** Cf. E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton, 1957 and R. Hertz, *Sociologie religieuse et folklore*, Paris: PUF, 1928. The paper on double funerals dates from before the First World War, in which the author was killed.
- 6 On Ushant, for example.
- 7 Thinks = *pense*; weighty = *pesant*.
- 8 "Reflection" in this sentence and the next does not mean an image in a mirror.
- 9 Toward its mouths or mouth = *vers ses bouches ou son embouchure*.
- 10 Discrete = *discrète*, which could also mean "discreet" in this context.
- 11 Speech = *Parole*, which in a religious context should be translated as "Word". But I translate it here as

“Speech” to distinguish it from *Verbe*, the Word.

- 12 Its face = *sa face*. The *sa* here could equally be translated as “her.” Serres probably means both.
- 13 The French word for halo is *auréole*, which originally meant a gold crown.

Rapture

- 1 “Seat” as used in horsemanship, hence a kind of balance in motion.

Empedocles’s Return

- 1 A giant who fought the Olympians and was buried under Etna.
- 2 Warp = *gauchisse*, which has “left” as a root.
- 3 Becoming all, everywhere = *devenant le tout, partout*.
- 4 Lost, distraught = *perdu, éperdu*.

The Secret of the Sphinx

- 1 **Serres's footnote:** Nina M. Davies and A.H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*, Chicago; The University of Chicago Press, 1936, Volume II, Plate 75.
- 2 Raw = *brute*, which evokes “brutes” in the sense of animals.
- 3 **Serres's footnote:** *Du Culte des dieux fétiches*, 1760, pp. 247–8 [*On the Cult of the Fetish Gods*].
- 4 Seat = *assiette*, which may be related to the French for “sitting,” and means the “seat” of good horsemanship.
- 5 Serres uses the term *Sphinge* here instead of *sphinx*, which he has been using uncapitalized throughout this interchange. A *Sphinge* is the Greek sphinx, whose the human part is female, unlike the masculine Egyptian sphinx. I will translate *sphinge* as “sphinxe,” adding the final *e* to denote femininity.
- 6 Deviners of riddles = *oedipes*.
- 7 Wooden club = *massue*; slaughtering = *massacrant*.
- 8 Talons = *serres*. Tightly bound = *serré* in the above sentences.

- 9 Golden skins = *oripeaux*, which is the etymological meaning. It normally means something like “rags” or “flashy rags.”
- 10 Word = *mot*, which also means the answer to a riddle.
- 11 Accuracy = *justesse*. In the previous sentence, precise = *juste*.
- 12 Enigma = *enigme*, which has been translated as “riddle” up to here, but from here on “enigma” will sometimes be more appropriate.
- 13 “Play” is not meant in the theatrical sense.
- 14 Case = *cause*, which can mean a legal case, a “cause” in the sense of something you fight for, and an efficient cause.

The Myth of Sisyphus

- 1 **Serres’s footnote:** I have analyzed these three returns with regard to the same myth in *Hermès IV, La distribution*, Paris: Minuit, 1977, pp. 219–25, “Sisyphé et les Danaïdes.”
- 2 We tread on the earth, we drive back the rock = *Nous*

foulons la terre, nous refoulons la pierre. “Drive back” could also be translated as “repress.”

- 3 Corporated = *corporés*, an uncommon word which means “well-built” when referring to a person. Etymologically, it derives from a word meaning “which has a body.” I’ve translated *pierre* as “rock” in this section.
- 4 Stands = *se tient*; supports = *soutient*, which adds a prefix signifying below to hold.
- 5 From the county court to the ultimate authority = *de la première à la dernière instance* or more literally, from the first to the last authority.
- 6 Remember that the French *cause* can mean both “case” and “cause.” I’ll combine the two when both seem to be meant.
- 7 The following is a brief summary of the “statues” in Serres’s previous works. *Hermès I* concludes with a discussion of Molière’s *Dom Juan*, in which a statue of a commander appears. Thales and the Pyramids appear in the appendix to *Hermès II*. Both of which are translated in *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*.

Orpheus, Lot's Wife

- 1 See Volume I, Book 3, Chapter 10.
- 2 According to Wikipedia's *Book of the Dead* entry, this is the original name for that text, though I changed "light" to "daylight" since the light of day is meant. In French, "emerging forth" is *la sortie*, the exit into the daylight. For Diodorus Siculus, see: *Bibliotheca historica*, Book I.
- 3 Passover = *pâque*; Easter communion = *pâques*.
- 4 Folded = *plie*.
- 5 In the previous sentence, survived = *survivait*. Overkills = *surtue*, which is not a standard French word.
- 6 Develop = *développe*; enveloped = *enveloppés*, which I'd normally translate as "unwrap" and "wrapped," but since Serres uses these same terms in different ways in this section (but always in their etymological senses) I feel the awkwardness is justified in the name of conceptual continuity.
- 7 Squander = *dilapident*.
- 8 The first "folds" in this sentence is *plie*; the second is *replis*.

- 9 “Balls” and “paving stones” are both terms invented for topology by Bourbaki. I’m not sure whether *pierre* or “stone” here was as well.
- 10 Kant uses these two terms in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.
- 11 Or: in the sense of the little energies.
- 12 Work = *œuvre*. In the previous sentence, work = *travail*.

The Statue of Hestia

- 1 “Hestia” is derived from a verb meaning “to dwell, stay.”
- 2 *Episteme*’s root means something like “to stand near” or “over.”

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