

Theory and History of Literature
Edited by Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse

- Volume 82. Maurice Blanchot *The Infinite Conversation*
Volume 81. Gregory Jusdanis *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature*
Volume 80. D. Emily Hicks *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*
Volume 79. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht *Making Sense in Life and Literature*
Volume 78. Giorgio Agamben *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*
Volume 77. Hélène Cixous *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*
Volume 76. Jean-Luc Nancy *The Inoperative Community*
Volume 75. Rey Chow *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East*
Volume 74. Paul J. Thibault *Social Semiotics as Praxis: Text, Social Meaning Making, and Nabokov's Ada*
Volume 73. Hélène Cixous *Reading with Clarice Lispector*
Volume 72. N. S. Trubetzkoy *Writings on Literature*
Volume 71. Neil Larsen *Modernism and Hegemony: A Materialist Critique of Aesthetic Agencies*
Volume 70. Paul Zumthor *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*
Volume 69. Giorgio Agamben *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*
Volume 68. Hans Robert Jauss *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*
Volume 66. Paul de Man *Critical Writings, 1953-1978*
Volume 64. Didier Coste *Narrative as Communication*
Volume 63. Renato Barilli *Rhetoric*
Volume 62. Daniel Cottom *Text and Culture: The Politics of Interpretation*
Volume 61. Theodor W. Adorno *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*
Volume 60. Kristin Ross *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*
Volume 59. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich *Reading de Man Reading*
Volume 58. F. W. J. Schelling *The Philosophy of Art*
Volume 57. Louis Marin *Portrait of the King*
Volume 56. Peter Sloterdijk *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*
Volume 55. Paul Smith *Discerning the Subject*
Volume 54. Réda Bensmaïa *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*
Volume 53. Edmond Cros *Theory and Practice of Sociocriticism*
Volume 52. Philippe Lejeune *On Autobiography*
Volume 51. Thierry de Duve *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*
Volume 50. Luiz Costa Lima *Control of the Imaginary: Reason and Imagination in Modern Times*

For other books in the series, see p. 472

The Infinite Conversation

Maurice Blanchot

Translation and Foreword by Susan Hanson

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ler's time Nietzsche's work was indeed marshaled under his banner and yet struggled against him. The name that was officially celebrated remained nonetheless the symbol of a non-official truth and the rallying word of a thought that had not fallen in line. This ambiguity, one that is proper to Nietzsche, does not relieve him of responsibility but rather offers its measure. It must be added that if in Germany his work has known—but at what level?—a certain disfavor, the heavily lavished favor he received during those political times in no way favored the reading of his work. Nietzsche's official commentators were read; one was careful not to read Nietzsche. Schlechta had this curious experience: when in 1938 the first volume of letters of the critical edition appeared—where clear allusion was made to the maneuverings of Mme Förster-Nietzsche, who just two years before had been treated at her national funeral as a heroine of the regime—the editors expected the worst. But nothing happened, no one noticed anything (with the exception of a Swiss professor, who remained silent), because even the Nazi Nietzsche specialists did not read him and wished to know nothing more about him. Very little is read. This is the fact dissimulated by the enormous diffusion of authors and books.

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Nietzsche's thought remains associated with nihilism, a word he no doubt borrowed—an ironic detour—from Paul Bourget,⁶ but that he examined enthusiastically and fearfully: sometimes through simple and radical statements, at other times with a hesitating, uncertain approach and through a thought impossible to think, treating it finally as an extreme that cannot be gotten beyond and yet is the only path of a true going beyond, the principle of a new beginning. These oscillations are not to be attributed to Nietzsche's unstable genius, or to his "shortcomings." They are the very sense of his thought. Certainly the question "What is nihilism?" can be answered without difficulty, and Nietzsche has given many clear responses, for example, this one: "That the highest values devalue themselves." He no less clearly indicates the origin of this decline: "God is dead." This event, which acquired a sort of tiresome celebrity by the dramatic form he gave it, does not aim at the personal phenomenon of unbelief. Kierkegaard's Christianity and, more especially, Dostoyevski's, like the atheism of Nietzsche or the young Marx ("I hate all gods"), belong to that turning point in the history of the world from which the light of the divine has withdrawn. God is dead; God means God, but also everything that, in rapid succession, has sought to take his place—the ideal, consciousness, reason, the certainty of progress, the happiness of the masses, culture: everything that, not without value, nonetheless has no value of its own; there is nothing man can lean upon, no thing of value other than through the meaning, in the end suspended, that man gives to it.

This analysis can no longer move us, so familiar has it become. Would this

be nihilism? A mere humanism!: the recognition of the fact that, from now on deprived or freed of the ideal of some absolute meaning conceived on the model of God, it is man who must create the world and above all create its meaning. An immense, intoxicating task. Nietzsche, with a joy only he felt so purely and expressed so fully, saw in this movement of infinite negation that withdraws from us every solid foundation the sudden opening on a space of unlimited knowledge: "*At last the horizon seems open once more . . . every audacity of knowledge is again permitted to the discerners; and the sea, our sea, again lies open before us.*" "*There is yet another world to be discovered—and more than one! Embark, philosophers!*" We could fill pages with citations. Nietzsche is inexhaustible in expressing this happiness in knowing and seeking freely, infinitely, with everything at risk and without having the sky as limit, or even truth, the all-too-human truth, as measure. One cannot read Nietzsche without being swept up with him by the pure movement of the research. If anyone denigrates him, it is because he has become insensitive to this movement, a movement that is in no way a call to some vague, irrational awareness, but the affirmation of a rigorous knowledge, "clear, transparent, and virile"—the kind that is particularly manifest in the natural sciences. "*And that is why: long live physics! And even more, what compels us to arrive at that: our probity!*"

Here, then, is a first approach to nihilism: it is not an individual experience, not a philosophical doctrine, nor is it a fatal light cast over human nature, eternally destined to nothingness. Rather, nihilism is an event accomplished in history that is like a shedding of history—the moment when history turns and that is indicated by a negative trait: that values no longer have value in themselves. There is also a positive trait: for the first time the horizon is infinitely open to knowledge, "Everything is permitted." This new authorization given to man when the authority of values has collapsed means first of all: knowing everything is permitted, there is no longer a limit to man's activity. "*We have a still undiscovered country before us, the boundaries of which no one has seen, a beyond to all countries and corners of the ideal known hitherto, a world so over-rich in the beautiful, the strange, the questionable, the frightful.*"

Nietzsche, we are told, had only a mediocre acquaintance with the sciences. That is possible. But in addition to the fact that he had been professionally trained in a scientific method, he knew enough about science to have a presentiment of what it would become,⁷ to take it seriously, and even to foresee—not to deplore—that from now on all that is serious in the modern world would be entrusted to science, to scientists, and to the prodigious force of technology. On the one hand, he saw with a striking force that since nihilism is the possibility of all going beyond, it is the horizon upon which every particular science, as well as every exigency of knowledge, opens—in order to hold themselves in the very movement of this opening. On the other hand, he saw no less clearly that when the world no longer has any meaning, or when it becomes the pseudo-meaning

of some great possible non-sense, what alone can overcome the disorder of this void is the cautious movement of science; its power to give itself precise rules and to create meaning, but of a sort that is limited, and in this sense operational—thus the power at once to extend to the furthest limits and to restrict most closely its field of application.

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Agreed. And here, once again, is something that reassures us. At the moment when nihilism shows us the world, its counterpart, science, creates the tools to dominate it. The era of universal mastery opens. But there are consequences. First, science cannot but be nihilist; it is the meaning of a world deprived of meaning, a knowledge that is founded on the last ignorance. One can respond that this reservation is only theoretical, a reservation of principle. But we must not hasten to disregard this objection, for science is essentially productive: knowing that the world is not to be interpreted, science transforms it, and through this transformation there passes the nihilistic exigency that is proper to it—the power of nothingness that science has made into the most effective of tools, but with which it plays a dangerous game. Knowledge is fundamentally dangerous. Nietzsche has given the most brutal formulation of this danger: *"We experiment on truth! Perhaps humanity will be destroyed by it! Well, so be it!"* This is what the scientist is liable to say, and must say if he renounces the hypocrisy of deploring catastrophe, which is one of the results of science. For one cannot construct the universe without the possibility of its being destroyed. Destruction and creation, when they bear upon the essential, says Nietzsche, are hardly distinguishable: the risk, therefore, is immense. Moreover, with its probity and measured steps, science bears this very contradiction within itself: it can produce a world in which scientists would no longer continue to exist as such, a world in which they would no longer be permitted to work according to the objectivity of knowledge, but rather only according to the arbitrary sense of the new world. In other words, by making science possible, nihilism becomes science's possibility—which means that, by it, the human world can perish.

Another consequence is the following: to the void made by nihilism corresponds the movement of science; to the achievement of science, the domination of the earth. The greatest force of surpassing is set into motion. Now what happens to man when this transformation is realized and history turns? Does he become transformed? Has he set out to go beyond himself? Is he ready to become what he is, the lucid man who can rely on nothing and who is going to make himself master of all? No. Man, such as he is, the bourgeois at the end of the nineteenth century that Nietzsche knew, is a man of small aims, small certainties, conniving and inadequate, a man who still knows nothing of the event that is in the process of being accomplished through his intervention; an event, as it were, be-

yond him, an event that is going to give him infinite powers, and impose upon him duties as extreme as he has ever known since he must freely create the meaning of the world and create himself in proportion to this world without measure.

I will pass over the succession of upheavals, the "formidable logic of terror," and the vast wars that Nietzsche foresaw to be the appanage of the twentieth century and the immediate consequence of a disequilibrium: present-day man believes himself to be definitive, stable in his nature and happy in the small circle he has closed around himself, committed to the spirit of vengeance; yet, impelled by the impersonal force of science and by the very force of the event that frees him from values, he possesses a power that exceeds him, but without his ever seeking to surpass himself through this power. Present-day man is man of the lowest rank, but his power is that of a being who is already beyond man. How could this contradiction not harbor the greatest danger? But instead of holding to the conservative attitude and condemning knowledge in order to safeguard the eternal in man (the man of his time), Nietzsche sides with science and with the being of exceeding, which is the becoming of humanity.

In several commentaries, Heidegger has indicated that such is the meaning of the overman: the overman is not the man of today elevated disproportionately, nor a species of man who would reject the human only to make the arbitrary his law and titanic madness his rule; he is not the eminent functionary of some will to power, any more than he is an enchanter destined to introduce paradisiacal bliss on earth. The overman is he who alone leads man to be what he is: the being who surpasses himself, and in whose surpassing there is affirmed the necessity of his passing.

If such is the case (but is it?), we see why the overman could be considered as the first decisive affirmation to follow the extreme negation of nihilism—without, however, himself being anything other than this consequent negation: the overman is the being who has overcome the void (created by the death of God and the decline of values), because he has known how to find in this void the power of overcoming, a power in him that has not only become a power, but will—the will to overcome himself. Freed from all that represses, diverts, or degrades the will in its capacity to will, and free of all reactive will, there is no longer anything negative in what he wills: by a free act, he commands himself and decides the extent of his destiny.

The figure of the overman, however, even interpreted in this way, remains ambiguous. As the end of human becoming, self-surpassing is thereby negated in this very figure. And if this figure is *not* the end, it is because there is still something to overcome. His will, therefore, is not free of all external meaning; his act of willing is still a Will to Power. With the overman, Nietzsche may well have had a presentiment of a man who is indistinguishable from present-day man except for his negative characteristics, and thus qualitatively different—poorer, simpler, more sober, more capable of sacrificing himself, slower in his resolu-

tions, quieter in his speech. Nonetheless, his essential trait, the will, would make him, in his pure rigor and his harshness, the very form of nihilism for, according to Nietzsche's clear statement, "*the will would rather will nothingness than not will.*" The overman is he in whom nothingness makes itself will and who, free for death, maintains this pure essence of will in willing nothingness. This would be nihilism itself.

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Enthusiastically and with categorical clarity, Zarathustra announces the overman; then anxiously, hesitatingly, fearfully, he announces the thought of eternal return. Why this difference in tone? Why is the thought of the eternal return, a thought of the abyss, a thought that in the very one who pronounces it is unceasingly deferred and turned away as though it were the detour of all thought? This is its enigma and, no doubt, its truth. I want to note here that for a long time nearly all of Nietzsche's commentators, whether on the right or the left (Bäumler, the official Nazi interpreter, eliminates the theory of eternal return), have been troubled by this "doctrine," which seemed to them arbitrary, useless, mystical, and, furthermore, very antiquated, since it has been around since Heraclitus. It is perhaps conceivable that a modern man could come up with such an idea, but that he should be seized with such terror in approaching it, that he should see it as the most weighty of thoughts, the most anguishing and the most properly able to overturn the world, here was an absurdity that one hastened to avoid, concluding that it derived all its force for Nietzsche precisely from the ecstatic vision in which he had grasped it. One of the changes in the interpretation of Nietzsche is that this idea should be taken seriously. Karl Löwith, to whom we owe several important books, has contributed a good deal to making us more attentive to this idea; as has also, no doubt, the very spirit of our age, which has led us to reflect on time, on the circularity of meaning, and on the end of history: on the absence of being as recommencement.⁸

The thought of the eternal return remains strange in its antiquated absurdity. It represents the logical vertigo that Nietzsche himself could not escape. It is the nihilist thought par excellence, the thought by which nihilism surpasses itself absolutely by making itself definitively unsurpassable. It is therefore the most able to enlighten us as to the kind of trap that nihilism is when the mind decides to approach it head-on. Nietzsche (or Zarathustra) said with perfect clarity that when the will becomes liberating it collides with the past. The rock of accomplished fact that the will (however forceful and willing it may be) cannot displace is what transforms all *sentiment* into *ressentiment*: the spirit of revenge consists in the movement that turns the will back into a counter-will, a willing-against, when the will stumbles on the "it was." But so long as man is characterized by *ressentiment*, he will remain at the level of his present complacency, seeking only

to degrade all earthly things, and himself, and time in the name of some absolute ideal, far from the highest hope. He must, then, no longer be limited in his temporal dimension by the necessity of an irrecoverable past and an irreversible time: he needs time as total accomplishment.

But the reversal of time lies outside the possible, and this impossibility takes on here the highest meaning: it signifies the defeat of the overman as will to power. The overman will never be capable of the extreme. Eternal return is not of the order of things that are in our power. The experience of the eternal return entails a reversal of all these perspectives. The will that wills nothingness becomes the will that wills eternity—and in this process, eternity, without either will or end, returns to itself. Personal and subjective all-powerfulness is transformed into the impersonal necessity of "being." Transvaluation does not give us a new scale of values on the basis of the negation of every absolute value; it makes us attain an order to which the notion of value ceases to apply.

Having thus recovered the idea of eternity, and the idea of "being," love of the eternal and knowledge of the depth of "being," does it not seem that we are definitively sheltered from nihilism? In fact, we are at the heart of nihilism. With the incisive simplicity that is proper to him (and that leads Lukács to call him barbaric), Nietzsche expressed it in this way: "Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence, as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: the eternal recurrence"—"the most extreme form of nihilism." What do we learn from this remark? Until now we thought nihilism was tied to nothingness. How ill-considered this was: nihilism is tied to being. Nihilism is the impossibility of being done with it and of finding a way out even in that end that is nothingness. It says the impotence of nothingness, the false brilliance of its victories; it tells us that when we think nothingness we are still thinking being. Nothing ends, everything begins again; the other is still the same. Midnight is only a dissimulated noon, and the great Noon is the abyss of light from which we can never depart—even through death and the glorious suicide Nietzsche recommends to us. Nihilism thus tells us its final and rather grim truth: it tells of the impossibility of nihilism.

This has the air of a joke. But if we will grant that all modern humanism, the work of science, and planetary development have as their object a dissatisfaction with what is, and thus the desire to transform being—to negate it in order to derive power from it and to make of this power to negate the infinite movement of human mastery—then it will become apparent that this sort of weakness of the negative, and the way in which nothingness unmasks itself in the being that cannot be negated, lays waste at one stroke to our attempts to dominate the earth and to free ourselves from nature by giving it a meaning—that is, by denaturing it. But this is no more than a first way of translating the strange account of the abyss; one that in part explains Zarathustra's distress in understanding that he will never definitively go beyond man's insufficiency, or that he will only be able to do so,

paradoxically, by willing his return. But what does this return mean? It means what it affirms: that the extreme point of nihilism is precisely there where it reverses itself, that nihilism is this very turning itself, the affirmation that, in passing from the No to the Yes, refutes nihilism, but does nothing other than affirm it, and henceforth extends it to every possible affirmation.⁹

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In the dialogue between Jünger and Heidegger, which marked the double celebration of their sixtieth birthday and took the form of a treatise on nihilism, Jünger leads one to believe, by the very title of their exchange ("Over the Line"), that the crossing of the critical zone was being accomplished, or could be accomplished. But Heidegger, more rigorously and in giving another meaning to the same title,¹⁰ immediately remarks that the movement of nihilism, as it comes to an end, is to leave what it means to reach the end undecided: end or accomplishment? Also undecided is the meaning of such an accomplishment: either passage into the nullity of nothingness or into the region of a new turning of being. By the same token, he observes, it is very dangerous to describe the action of nihilism, for the description already belongs to the action; and yet, if to want to give "a good definition" of nihilism is a bizarre pretension, to renounce this temptation is to leave the field open to what in it is perhaps essential: its gift of travesty, its refusal to avow its origins, its power to slip away from every decisive explication. We speak of man's passage through the critical zone, but man is not simply a passerby who would have only a geographical relation with what he crosses; he does not merely hold himself in this zone, he is himself, though not by or for himself alone, this zone and this line. Let us therefore be circumspect. Let us handle these provocative notions with prudence and not allow these words to speak with the realist efficacy they have acquired; let us gently lead them back toward the silence from which they come. Heidegger suggested—and this was his principal contribution to the examination of this strange adversary—that we would henceforth be well advised in writing both the word being and the word nothingness only as crossed out with a Saint Andrew's cross: being, nothingness.

It is certainly appropriate to meditate on this invitation, but by returning to quite another reflection that would ask whether all the preceding interpretations do not tend to forget Nietzsche by placing him back into a tradition that he himself was not content simply to put into question (contestation does not suffice; it always keeps one within the horizon of the same interrogation): the tradition of the logical discourse issuing from the *logos*, of thought as a thought of the whole, and of speech as a relation of unity—a relation that would have no other measure than light or the absence of light.

With Nietzsche philosophy is shaken. But is this only because he would be the last of the philosophers (each one always being the last)? Or because, summoned

by a very different language, the writing of effraction (whose vocation it would be to take "words" only as set apart, struck or crossed out by the movement that separates them, but which holds them through this separation as a site of difference), he must face an exigency of rupture that constantly turns him away from what is in his *power* to think? What, then, would be this exigency, supposing that we ourselves who are held by it are able to designate it without interrupting it and without being interrupted by it?

3

Nietzsche and fragmentary writing

± ± It is relatively easy to bring Nietzsche's thoughts into a coherency that would justify their contradictions, either by lining them up according to a hierarchy or by making them dialectical. There is a possible—a virtual—system whereby the work, abandoning its dispersed form, would give rise to a continuous reading. To useful, necessary discourse. Now we understand everything, without obstacles and without weariness. We are reassured that such a thought, tied to the movement of a research that is also the seeking of becoming, can lend itself to a general exposition. Moreover, this is a necessity. Even in its opposition to dialectic, it must arise out of a dialectic. Even disengaged from a unitary system and engaged in an essential plurality, this thought must still designate a center on the basis of which the Will to Power, the Overman, the Eternal Return, nihilism, perspectivism, tragic thought, and so many other separate themes go toward one another and reach harmony according to a single interpretation: even if this occurs precisely as the diverse moments or stages of a philosophy of interpretation.

± ± There are two kinds of speech in Nietzsche. One belongs to philosophical discourse, the coherent discourse he sometimes wished to bring to term by composing a work of great scope, analogous to the great works of the tradition. Commentators strive to reconstitute this. His broken texts can be considered as elements of this ensemble or whole. The whole keeps its originality and power. It is in this great philosophy that we find the assertions of a terminal thought, assertions brought to a high point of incandescence. Thus it is possible to ask whether it ameliorates or refutes Kant, what it owes to or retracts from Hegel, if it is dialectical or antidialectical, if it ends metaphysics or replaces metaphysics, if it prolongs an existential mode of thinking, or if it is essentially a Critique. All of this, in a certain sense, belongs to Nietzsche.

Let us admit this. Let us admit as well that such a continuous discourse may be behind these divided works. It remains nonetheless true that Nietzsche does not content himself with such a continuity. And even if a part of these fragments can be brought back to this kind of integral discourse, it is manifest that such a

discourse—philosophy itself—is always already surpassed by Nietzsche; that he presupposes it rather than gives it exposition, in order, further on, to speak according to a very different language: no longer of the whole but of the fragment, of plurality, of separation.

± ± It is difficult to grasp this speech of fragment without altering it. Even what Nietzsche says of it intentionally leaves it covered over. There is no doubt that such a form marks his refusal of system, his passion for the unfinished and his belonging to a thought that would be that of *Versuch* or of *Versucher*; there is no doubt also that this form is linked to the mobility of research, to the thought that travels (to the thought of a man who thinks while walking and according to the truth of the march). It is also true that it seems to be close to aphorism, since it is agreed that the aphoristic form is the form in which Nietzsche excels: "*The aphorism, in which I am the first master among Germans, is a form of eternity; my ambition is to say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book—what everyone else does not say in a book.*" But is this truly his ambition?; and does the term aphorism meet the real measure of what he is seeking? "*I myself am not narrow-minded enough for a system—not even for my own.*" The aphorism works as a force that limits, encloses. A form that takes the form of a horizon: its own. We can see from this what is attractive about it, always drawn back into itself and with something somber, concentrated, obscurely violent about it, something that makes it resemble the crimes of Sade. Entirely opposed to the maxim, that sentence designed for the beau monde and polished until it becomes lapidary, the aphorism is as unsociable as a stone (Georges Perros) (but a stone of mysterious origin, a grave meteorite that, scarcely fallen, would like to volatilize). A speech that is unique, solitary, fragmented, but, by virtue of being a fragment, already complete in the breaking up from which it proceeds and of a sharpness of edge that refers back to no shattered thing. It thus reveals the exigency of the fragmentary, which is such that the aphoristic form could never suit it.

± ± Fragmentary speech does not know self-sufficiency; it does not suffice, does not speak in view of itself, does not have its content as its meaning. But neither does it combine with other fragments to form a more complete thought, a general knowledge. The fragmentary does not precede the whole, but says itself *outside* the whole, and after it. When Nietzsche affirms "*Nothing exists apart from the whole,*" he means to lighten the burden of our guilty particularity and also to challenge judgment, measure, and negation ("*for one cannot judge, measure or compare the whole, to say nothing of denying it*"); but he still thereby affirms the question of the whole as the only valid one and reinstates the idea of totality. Dialectic, system, and thought as a thought of the whole recover their rights, founding philosophy as a finished discourse. But when he says "*It seems to me important that we should get rid of the Whole, of Unity; . . . we must shatter the universe, un-*

learn our respect for the Whole," he then enters into the space of the fragmentary, and risks a thought no longer guaranteed by unity.

± ± This speech that reveals the exigency of the fragmentary—a non-sufficient speech, but not through insufficiency, unfinished, but because foreign to the category of completion—does not contradict the whole. On the one hand, the whole must be respected; and if one does not say it, one must at least accomplish it. We are beings of a Universe and thus turned toward a still absent unity. Our wish, says Nietzsche, is "*to bring the universe under our control.*" But there is another thought and a very different wish that in truth is not one. It is as though everything were now already accomplished: the universe is our lot, time has ended, we have left history through history. What, then, is there still to say, what is there still to do?

± ± The fragmentary speech that is Nietzsche's does not know contradiction. This is strange. We noted, after Jaspers, that one cannot understand Nietzsche or do justice to Nietzsche's thought unless one seeks, each time it affirms with certitude, the opposed affirmation with which this certainty is in relation. And, in fact, this thought does not cease to oppose itself, without ever being content either with itself or with this opposition. But, here again, we must make distinctions. There is the work of a critique: the critique of Metaphysics, principally represented by Christian idealism but also present in all speculative philosophy. The contradictory affirmations are a moment of this critical work: Nietzsche attacks the adversary from several points of view at the same time, for plurality of viewpoint is precisely the principle that the adverse thought fails to recognize. Nietzsche, however, is not unaware that he is obliged to think from where he is, and obliged to speak on the basis of the discourse he is challenging. He still belongs to this discourse—we all belong to it; thus the contradictions cease to be polemical, or even only critical. They aim at him, he himself, in his thought; they are the expression of this energetic thought that cannot be content with its own truths without putting them to the test, assaying them, going beyond them, and then again coming back to them. The Will to Power will therefore sometimes be a principle of ontological explanation, saying the essence, the foundation of things, and at other times saying the exigency of all going beyond, and going beyond itself as an exigency. At times the Eternal Return is a cosmological truth, at times the expression of an ethical decision, and at other times the thought of being understood as becoming, etc. These oppositions say a certain multiple truth and the necessity of thinking the multiple if one wants to say what is true in accordance with value—but this multiplicity is still in relation with the one, still a multiplied affirmation of the One.

± ± Fragmentary speech does not know contradiction, even when it contradicts. Two fragmentary texts may be opposed: they are simply posed one after another,

one without relation to the other, or related one to another by this indeterminate blank that neither separates nor unites them but brings them to the limit they designate, which would be their meaning—if, precisely, they did not thereby, hyperbolically, escape a speech of signification. The fact of being always posed in this way *at the limit* gives to the fragment two different traits: it is first a speech of affirmation, affirming nothing but this plus, this surplus of affirmation that is foreign to possibility; and yet it is nonetheless in no way categorical, neither fixed as a certainty nor posited in a relative or an absolute positivity, still less saying being in a privileged manner, or saying itself on the basis of being but rather already effacing itself, slipping outside itself by a sliding that leads it back toward itself in the neutral murmur of contestation.

There where opposition does not oppose but rather juxtaposes, where juxtaposition gives together what escapes all simultaneity, without becoming a succession, there a non-dialectical experience of speech is proposed to Nietzsche. Not a manner of saying and thinking that would claim to refute or to express itself against the dialectic (Nietzsche, on occasion, does not fail to salute Hegel or even recognize himself in him, as he also does not fail to denounce the Christian idealism that carries him forward); this is rather a speech that is other, separate from discourse, neither negating nor (in this sense) affirming, and yet allowing the unlimited in difference to play between the fragments by its interruption and arrest.

± ± The fact that Nietzsche takes his leave from the thought of the One God, that is to say, from the god of Unity, must be taken seriously. Yet for him it is not simply a matter of contesting the categories that govern Western thought. Neither is it enough to arrest the opposition of contraries before the synthesis that would reconcile them, or enough even to divide the world into a plurality of centers of vital domination whose principle, still one of synthesis, would be the Will to Power. Here Nietzsche is tempted by something more bold, something that draws him, in the strict sense of the term, into the maze of detour before exalting him to the height of the enigma of return: thought as the affirmation of chance, the affirmation wherein thought relates to itself necessarily, infinitely, by way of that which is aleatory (not fortuitous); a relation wherein thought gives itself as a thought that is plural.

Pluralism is one of the decisive traits of the philosophy elaborated by Nietzsche; but, here again, there is philosophy and there is what will not be content with philosophy. There is philosophic pluralism, very important, of course, since it reminds us that meaning always comes severally and that there is an overabundance of signification; that "*One is always wrong*," whereas "*truth begins at two*." Hence the necessity of an interpretation that does not consist in the unveiling of a truth that is unique and hidden, or even ambiguous, but rather entails the reading of a text in several senses at once, with no other meaning than "*the pro-*

cess, the becoming" that is interpretation. There are therefore two kinds of pluralism. One is a philosophy of ambiguity, the experience of being as multiple. Then there is this other, this strange pluralism; a pluralism neither of plurality nor of unity that the speech of the fragment bears in itself as the provocation of language—a language still speaking when all has been said.

± ± The thought of the overman does not first of all signify the advent of the overman, but rather the disappearance of something called man. Man disappears, he whose essence is disappearance. Man thus continues to exist only insofar as one can say he has not yet begun. "*Humanity still has no goal or end* (kein Ziel). *But . . . if humanity suffers from the lack of an end, would this not be because there is not yet a humanity?*" Scarcely does man enter into beginning than he enters into his end, begins to end. Man is always man of the decline, a decline that is not a degeneration but, on the contrary, a lack that one can love; a lack that, in separation and distance, makes "human" truth one with the possibility of perishing. Man of the last rank is the man of permanence, of substance, the man who does not want to be the last one.

Nietzsche speaks of the man who *synthesizes, who totalizes and justifies*. Remarkable expressions. This man who totalizes and who therefore has a relation to the whole, either because he establishes the whole or because he masters it, is not the overman but higher man. Higher man, properly speaking, is a man who is integral, the man of the whole and of synthesis. This is "*the goal humanity needs*." But Nietzsche also says in *Zarathustra*: "*Higher man is a failure* (missgeraten)." He is not a failure because he has failed; he has failed because he has succeeded, has reached his goal ("*Once you have reached your goal . . . , precisely upon your height, Higher Man, will you stumble*"). We may ask: what is the language of the higher man, or what would it be? The answer is easy. It, too, is an integral discourse, the logos that says the whole, the seriousness of philosophic speech (the characteristic proper to higher man is the seriousness of his probity and the rigor of his veracity): a speech that is continuous, without intermittence and without blanks, the speech of logical completion that knows nothing of chance, play, or laughter. But man disappears; not only failed man, but superior man, that is to say successful man, the man wherein everything, the whole, is realized. What, then, does this failure of the whole signify? The fact that man disappears—the man to come who is the man of the end—finds its full meaning because it is also man as a whole who disappears, the being in whom the whole in its becoming has become being.

± ± Speech as fragment has a relation with the fact that man disappears; a fact more enigmatic than one might think, since man is in a sense the eternal or the indestructible and, as indestructible, disappears. Indestructible: disappearance. And this relation, too, is enigmatic. One can perhaps understand—and this can

even seem evident—that what speaks in this new language of brisure only speaks through waiting, through the announcement of this indestructible disappearance. It is necessary that what one calls man have become the whole of man and the world as a whole; and it is necessary that, having made of his truth the universal truth and made of the Universe his already accomplished destiny, he engage himself with all that is, and even with being itself in the possibility of perishing in order that, free of all the values proper to his knowledge—transcendence (that is to say, also, immanence), the other world (that is, also, the world), God (that is, also, man)—the speech of the outside can be affirmed: that which is said beyond the whole and beyond language inasmuch as language, the language of consciousness and of acting interiority, says the whole and the whole of language. It is not nothing that man should disappear, but this is no more than a disaster within our measure; thought can bear this. It seems that one can accommodate oneself to, and even rejoice in, the idea that truth and every possible value, even the very possibility of value, should cease to have currency and be swept away, as though with a casual gesture: thought is also this lighthearted movement that tears itself from the origin. But what about thought, when being—unity, the identity of being—has withdrawn without giving way to nothingness, that too easy refuge? What about thought when the Same is no longer the ultimate meaning of the Other, and Unity no longer that in relation to which the multiple is said? When plurality is said, without referring back to the One? Then, perhaps then, one might have a sense of the exigency of fragmentary speech, not as a paradox but as a decision: speech that, far from being unique, is not predicated of the one and does not say the one in its plurality. Language: affirmation itself, that which no longer affirms by reason of, nor with a view to Unity. An affirmation of difference, but nonetheless never differing. Plural speech.

± ± The plurality of plural speech: a speech that is intermittent, discontinuous; a speech that, without being insignificant, does not speak by reason of its power to represent, or even to signify. What speaks in this speech is not signification, not the possibility of either giving meaning or withdrawing meaning, even a meaning that is multiple. From which we are led to claim, perhaps with too much haste, that this plurality designates itself on the basis of the between [*l'entre-deux*], that it stands a sort of sentry duty around a site of divergence, a space of dis-location that it seeks to close in on, but that always dis-closes it, separating it from itself and identifying it with this margin or separation, this imperceptible divergence where it always returns to itself: identical, non-identical.

However, even if this sort of approach is in part justified—we are still unable to decide—let us keep in mind that it is not enough to replace the continuous with the discontinuous, plenitude with interruption, gathering with dispersion, in order to bring us close to the relation we claim to receive from this other language. Or, to state this more precisely, discontinuity is not the simple reverse of the con-

tinuous, nor, as occurs in dialectics, a moment within a coherent development. Discontinuity, the arrest of intermittence, does not arrest becoming; on the contrary, it provokes becoming, calls it up in the enigma that is proper to it. This is the great turning in thought that comes about with Nietzsche: becoming is not the fluidity of an infinite (Bergsonian) *durée*, nor the mobility of an interminable movement. The first knowledge is knowledge of the tearing apart—the breaking up—of Dionysus, that obscure experience wherein becoming is disclosed in relation with the discontinuous and as its play. The fragmentation of the god is not the rash renunciation of unity, nor a unity that remains one by becoming plural. Fragmentation is this god himself, that which has no relation whatsoever with a center and cannot be referred to an origin: what thought, as a consequence—the thought of the same and of the one, the thought of theology and that of all the modes of human (or dialectic) knowledge—could never entertain without falsifying it.

± ± Man disappears. This is an affirmation. But this affirmation immediately doubles into a question. Does man disappear? Does the disappearance he bears and that bears him liberate knowledge?; does it free language of forms and structures, or of the finalities that define our cultural space? With Nietzsche, the response falls with an almost terrible decisiveness, and yet it also holds back, remaining in suspense. This is translated in several ways, and first by a philosophical ambiguity of expression. When, for example, he says man is something that must be surpassed, man must be what is beyond man; or, in a more striking manner, Zarathustra himself must overcome himself; or again, nihilism, vanquished by nihilism, the ideal, ruin of the ideal—it is almost inevitable that this exigency of going beyond, this use of contradiction and negation for an affirmation that maintains what it does away with while developing it, should place us back within the horizon of dialectical discourse. One has to conclude from this that far from debasing man, Nietzsche still exalts man by giving him as task his true accomplishment: then the overman is but a mode of man; man freed from himself and aiming at himself through the summons of the greatest desire. This is correct. Man stands for a self-suppressing that is nothing but a self-surpassing; he is the affirmation of his own transcendence. Many texts (the greater part of them) authorize us to hear this with the guarantee of a still traditional philosophical knowledge. The commentator who Hegelianizes Nietzsche cannot, in this sense, be refuted.

And yet we know that Nietzsche follows an entirely different path, even if he does so against himself, always aware, to the point of suffering, of a rupture within philosophy so violent that by it philosophy is dislocated. Going beyond, creation, the creative exigency—we may become enchanted by these terms and open ourselves to their promise; but they tell, finally, of nothing but their wearing away inasmuch as they keep us still close to ourselves, under the infinitely

prolonged sky of men. Going beyond means going beyond without end, and nothing is more foreign to Nietzsche than such a future of continuous elevation. Would the overman, in the same way, be man ameliorated, man carried to the extremity of his knowledge and his own essence? In truth, what is the overman? We do not know and, properly speaking, Nietzsche does not know. We know only that the thought of the overman signifies: man disappears; an affirmation that is pushed furthest when it doubles into a question: does man disappear?

± ± Fragmentary speech is not a speech in which the site would already be designated, as though in filigree—white on white—where the overman would find his place. Fragment speech is speech of the *between-two*. This between-two is not the intermediary between two times, the time of man already disappeared—but does he disappear?—and that of the overman in whom the past is to come—but does it come, and by what coming? The speech of fragment does not form a joinder from one to the other, it rather separates them; as long as it speaks, and in speaking remains silent, it is the moving tear of time that maintains, one infinitely distant from the other, these two figures wherein knowledge turns. Thus, on the one hand marking rupture, this speech hinders thought from passing by degrees from man to overman; that is, from thinking them according to the same measure or even according to measures that are merely different; that is, it keeps thought from thinking of itself according to the measure of identity and unity. On the other hand, fragment speech marks more than rupture. If the idea of going beyond—whether understood in a Hegelian or a Nietzschean sense, a creation that does not preserve but destroys—is insufficient for Nietzsche; if thought is not only a going beyond; if the affirmation of Eternal Return is understood (first) as a failure of this going beyond, then does fragmentary speech open us to this “perspective,” does it permit us to speak in this sense? Perhaps, but in an unexpected manner. This is not the speech that announces “*the dance over every here and there and over there*.” It is not annunciatory. In itself, it announces nothing, represents nothing: it is neither prophetic nor eschatological. When it speaks everything has already been announced, including the eternal repetition of the unique, the most vast of affirmations. Its role is still more strange. It is as though, each time the extreme is said, it called thought outside (not beyond), designating to thought by its fissure that thought has already left itself, that it is already outside itself: in relation—without relation—with an outside from which it is excluded to the degree that thought believes itself able to include this outside and, each time, necessarily, does truly make the inclusion by which it encloses itself. And it is still saying too much of this speech to say that it “calls forth” thought, as though it possessed some absolute exteriority and as though its function were to make this exteriority resound as a never situated site. This extreme speech does not say, in relation to what has been said, anything new. And if, for Nietzsche, it suggests that the *Eternal Return* (where all

that is affirmed is eternally affirmed) could not be the ultimate affirmation, it is not because this speech would affirm something more, it is because it repeats the ultimate affirmation in the mode of fragmentation.

In this sense, fragmentation is bound up with the revelation of the Eternal Return. The eternal return says time as an eternal repetition, and fragment speech repeats this repetition by stripping it of any eternity. The eternal return says the being of becoming, and the repetition repeats it as the incessant ceasing of being. The eternal return says the eternal return of the Same, and the repetition says the detour wherein the other identifies itself with the same in order to become the non-identity of the same and in order that the same become, in the return that turns it aside, always other than itself. The eternal return, in a speech strangely, marvelously scandalous, says the eternal repetition of the unique, and repeats it as a repetition without origin, as the re-beginning where what has not yet begun begins again. And thus repeating repetition ad infinitum, this speech renders repetition in some sense parodic, but also withdraws it from everything that has the power of repeating: both because this speech says repetition as an affirmation that is unidentifiable and unrepresentable, an affirmation impossible to recognize, and because it ruins repetition by giving it back, in the guise of a sort of indefinite murmur, to the silence that speech in turn ruins by giving silence to be heard as the speech that, from the most profound past, from the furthest future, has always already spoken as a speech ever yet to come.

± ± I would note that the philosophy of Nietzsche takes its distance from dialectical philosophy less in contesting it than in repeating it, that is, in repeating the principal concepts or moments that it deflects: i.e., the idea of contradiction, the idea of going beyond, the idea of transvaluation, the idea of totality, and above all the idea of circularity, of truth or of affirmation as circular.

± ± Fragmentary speech is barely speech—speech only at the limit. This does not mean that it speaks only at the end, but that in all times it accompanies and traverses all knowledge and all discourse with another language that interrupts speech by drawing it, in the turn of a redoubling, toward the outside where the uninterrupted speaks, the end that is never done with. In Nietzsche's wake, then, it too always alludes to the man who disappears, not disappearing; to the overman who comes without a coming and, inversely, to the overman who has already disappeared, to the man not yet come: an allusion that is the play of the oblique and the indirect. To put one's trust in this speech is to exclude oneself from all faith, all trust, all confidence: that is to say from all defiance, including even the force of the challenge itself. And when Nietzsche says: “*the desert grows*,” fragment speech takes the place of this desert without ruins, except that in it the devastation always more vast is always reconfirmed within the dispersion of limits. A becoming of immobility. That this speech may seem to play the game of nihilism and

lend to nihilism, in its unseemliness, a suitable form—this it will never deny. And yet how far it leaves this power of negation behind. It is not that in playing with it negation undoes it. To the contrary, it leaves this power of negation a free field. Nietzsche recognized—this is the meaning of his untiring critique of Plato—that being is light, and he submitted the light of being to the labor of the most severe suspicion.¹¹ A decisive moment in the destruction of metaphysics and, even more, of ontology. Light gives pure visibility to thought as its measure. To think is henceforth to see clearly, to stand in the light of evidency, to submit to the day that makes all things appear in the unity of a form; it is to make the world arise under the sky of light as the form of forms, always illuminated and judged by this sun that does not set. The sun is the overabundance of clear light that gives life, the fashioner that holds life only in the particularity of a form. The sun is the sovereign unity of light—it is good, the Good, the superior One that makes us respect as the sole true site of being all that is “above.” At first Nietzsche criticizes in ontology only its degeneration into metaphysics: the moment at which, in Plato, light becomes idea and makes of the idea the supremacy of the ideal. His first works—and there is a trace of his first preferences in nearly all his works—maintain the value of form, and in the face of an obscure Dionysian terror, the calm luminous dignity that protects us from the terrifying abyss. But just as Dionysus, in dispersing Apollo, becomes the unique force without unity in which everything divine holds back, so does Nietzsche little by little seek to free thought by referring it back to what does not allow itself to be understood either as clarity or as form. Such is finally the role of the Will to Power. It is not as a power [*pouvoir*] that the will to power [*puissance*] imposes itself in principle, and it is not as a dominating violence that this force becomes what must be thought. But force escapes light: it is not something that would simply be deprived of light, an obscurity still aspiring to the light of the day. Scandal of scandals, it escapes every optical reference; and thus, while it may only act under the determination and within the limits of a form, form—an arrangement of structure—nevertheless always allows it to escape. Neither visible nor invisible.

± ± “How can one understand force, or weakness, in terms of clarity and obscurity?” observes Derrida.¹² Form allows force to escape, but it is not received by the formless. Chaos, the indifference without shore from which every gaze is averted, this metaphoric site that organizes disorganization, does not serve as its matrix. If force—without relation to form, even when form seeks shelter in the amorphous depths, refusing to let itself be reached either by clarity or by non-clarity—exercises upon Nietzsche an attraction for which he also feels distaste (“*Blush before power*”), it is because force interrogates thought in terms that will oblige it to break with its history. How to think “force,” how to say “force?”

Force says difference. To think force is to think it by way of difference. This is first to be understood in a quasi-analytical fashion: whoever says force says it

always as multiple; if there were a unity of force there would be no force at all. Deleuze expressed this with a decisive simplicity: “All force is in an essential relation with another force. The being of force is plural, it would be absurd to think it in the singular.” But force is not simply plurality. The plurality of forces means that forces are distant, relating to each other through the distance that makes them plural and inhabits each of them as the intensity of their difference. (“*It is from the height of this feeling of distance*,” says Nietzsche, “*that one arrogates to oneself the right to create values or to determine them: what matter utility?*”) Thus the distance that separates forces is also their correlation—and, more characteristically, is not only what distinguishes them from without, but what from within constitutes the essence of their distinction. In other words, what holds them at a distance, the outside, constitutes their sole intimacy; it is that by which they act and are subject, “the differential element” that is the whole of their reality, they being real only inasmuch as they have no reality in and of themselves, but only relations: a relation without terms. But then what is the Will to Power? “*Not a being, not a becoming, but a pathos*”: the passion of difference.

The intimacy of force resides in its exteriority. The exteriority thus affirmed is not a tranquil spatial and temporal continuity, a continuity whose key is provided by the logic of the *logos*—a discourse without *discursus*. Exteriority—time and space—is always exterior to itself. It is not correlative, a center of correlations, but instead institutes relation on the basis of an interruption that does not bring together or unify. Difference is the outside’s reserve; the outside is the exposition of difference; difference and outside designate the originary disjunction—the origin that is this very disjunction itself, always disjoined from itself. Disjunction, where time and space would rejoin by their mutual disjoining, coincides with that which does not coincide, the non-coinciding that in advance turns away from all unity.

Just as high, low, noble, ignoble, master, slave have neither any meaning nor any established value in themselves, but affirm force in its always positive difference (this is one of Deleuze’s unerring remarks: the essential relation of one force with another is never conceived as a negative element), so the force that is always plural seems—if not to Nietzsche, at least to the Nietzsche that fragmentary writing calls forth—to propose itself only in order to put thought to the test of difference; the latter not being derived from unity, any more than it would imply it. A difference, however, that one cannot call primary, as though, inaugurating a beginning, it were to refer back, paradoxically, to unity as secondary. This is rather a difference that always defers, and thus never gives itself in the present of a presence nor allows itself to be seized in the visibility of a form. It defers, as it were, from differing, and in this redoubling that withdraws it from itself, affirms itself as discontinuity itself, difference itself: the difference in play where there is dissymmetry as space at work, discretion or distraction as time, interrup-

tion as speech, and becoming as the "common" field of these three relations of dehiscence.

± ± One can suppose that if, with Nietzsche, thought had need of force conceived as a "*play of forces and waves of forces*" in order to think both plurality and difference, even if it entails exposure to all the difficulties of an apparent dogmatism, it is because force supports the presentiment that difference is movement; or, more exactly, that difference determines the time and the becoming in which difference is inscribed, just as the Eternal Return will make it be felt that difference is experienced as repetition and that repetition is difference. Difference is not an intemporal rule, it does not have the fixity of law. As Mallarmé discovers at about the same time, difference is space—space inasmuch as "*it spaces and disseminates itself*"—and time: not the oriented homogeneity of becoming, but becoming when it "*becomes scansion and intimation*," when it interrupts itself and, in this interruption, does not continue, but dis-continues itself. One must conclude from this that difference, the play of time and of space, is the silent play of relations, "*the multiple disengagement*" that governs writing—which amounts to saying that difference, essentially, writes.

± ± "*The world is deep: deeper than the day can comprehend.*" Nietzsche does not content himself here with calling up the Stygian night. He suspects more and he interrogates more profoundly. Why, he asks, this relationship between day, thought, and world? Why do we say confidently of lucid thought the same thing we say of the day, and thus believe we have in our grasp the power to think the world? Why would light and seeing furnish us all the modes of approach that we would like to see thought provided with in order to see the world? Why is intuition—intellectual vision—proposed to us as the great gift that men are lacking? Why do we see essences, Ideas, and God? But the world is more profound. And perhaps one will respond that, when one speaks of the light of being, one is speaking metaphorically. But then why, among all possible metaphors, does the optical metaphor predominate? Why this light that as metaphor has become the source and the resource of all knowing, and thus subordinated all knowledge to the exercise of (a primary) metaphor? Why this imperialism of light?

± ± These questions are latent in Nietzsche, sometimes suspended, as when he elaborates the theory of perspectivism, that is to say, point of view; a theory he ruins, it is true, by pushing it to its term. Latent questions, questions that are at the bottom of the critique of truth, of reason, and of being. Nihilism is invincible as long as, submitting the world to the thought of being, we entertain and seek truth on the basis of the light of its meaning, for it is perhaps in light itself that meaning is dissimulated. Light illuminates—this means that light hides itself: this is its malicious trait. Light illuminates: what is illuminated by light presents itself

in an immediate presence that discloses itself without disclosing what makes it manifest. Light effaces its traces: invisible, it renders visible; it guarantees direct knowledge and ensures full presence, all the while holding itself back in that which is indirect and suppressing itself as presence. Light's deception, then, would be in the fact that it slips away in a radiating absence, infinitely more obscure than any obscurity, since the absence proper to light is the very act of its light, its clarity, and since the work of light is accomplished only when light makes us forget that something like light is at work (thus making us forget, in the evidency in which it holds itself, all that it supposes—the relation to unity to which light returns and that is its true sun). Clarity: the non-light of light, the non-seeing of seeing. Light is thus (at least) doubly deceptive: because it deceives us as to itself, and deceives us in giving as immediate what is not immediate, as simple what is not simple. The light of the day is a false day, not because there would be a truer day, but because the truth of the day, the truth about it, is dissimulated by it; we see clearly only because light is clear and does not offer itself in the clarity it provides. But the most serious problem—in any case, the one with the gravest consequences—remains the duplicity by which light causes us to have confidence in the simplicity of the act of seeing, proposing im-mediation to us as the model of knowledge whereas light itself, out of sight and in a hidden manner, acts only as a mediator, playing with us through a dialectic of illusion.

It would seem that Nietzsche thinks, or, to be more exact, writes (when he gives himself over to the exigency of fragmentary writing) under the sway of a double suspicion that inclines toward a double refusal: refusal of the immediate, refusal of mediation. It is from the true—this true that is in some sense inevitable, whether it be given to us by way of a developed movement of the whole or in the simplicity of manifest presence, whether it come forth at the end of a coherent discourse or is immediately affirmed in a speech that is linear, continuous, and univocal—that we should attempt to withdraw, "*we, philosophers of the beyond, of the beyond of good and evil, if you please*," if we wish to speak, to write in the direction of the unknown. Double rupture, all the more dominant for never being accomplished, or only accomplished by way of suspicion.

± ± "*And do you know what 'the world' is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror?*" Nietzsche thinks the world: this is his concern. And when he thinks the world, be it as "*a monster of energy*," "*this mystery-world of twofold voluptuous delight*," "*my Dionysian world*," or as the play of the world, this world here below, the enigma that is the solution to every enigma, it is not being that he is thinking. On the contrary. Whether rightly or wrongly, he thinks the world in order to free thought as much from the idea of being as from the idea of the whole, as much from the exigency of meaning as from the exigency of the good: in order to free thought from thought, obliging it not to abdicate but to think more than it can, to think something other than what for it is possible. Or, again, to speak

in saying this "more," this "surplus" that precedes and follows all speech. One can criticize this way of proceeding; one cannot renounce what is announced in it. For Nietzsche, being, meaning, aim, value, God, day and night, and the whole, and unity, have validity only within the world; but the "world" cannot be thought, cannot be said as meaning or as a whole, even less as a world-beyond. The world is its very outside: the affirmation that *exceeds* every power to affirm and, in the endlessness of discontinuity, is the play of its perpetual *redoubling*—will to power, eternal return.

Nietzsche expresses himself in still another way: "*The world: the infinite of interpretation (the unfolding of a designation, infinitely).*" Hence the obligation to interpret. But who, then, will interpret? Is it man? And what sort of man? Nietzsche responds: "*One may not ask: 'who then interprets?' for interpretation itself is a form of the will to power, it exists (not as a 'being' but as a 'process,' a 'becoming') as affect.*"¹³ A fragment rich in enigmas. One can take it to mean—and this happens to Nietzsche—that philosophy should be a philosophy of interpretation. The world is to be interpreted, interpretation is multiple. Nietzsche will even say that "*to understand everything*" is to "*misunderstand the essence of knowledge*," for totality is not of the same measure as what there is to be understood, any more than it exhausts the power to interpret (interpreting implies there is no term). But Nietzsche goes even further: "*Unsere Werte sind in die Dinge hineininterpretiert; our values are introduced into things by the movement that interprets.*" Then would we have before us an integral subjectivism wherein things have meaning only insofar as the subject who interprets them gives them meaning, and according to his pleasure? "*There are no facts in themselves,*" Nietzsche says again, "*but one must always begin by introducing meaning in order for there to be facts.*" Yet in the fragment we saw earlier, Nietzsche dismisses the "who?,"¹⁴ authorizes no interpreting subject, and recognizes interpretation only as the neutral becoming—without subject and without complement—of interpreting itself, which is not an act but a passion and, by this fact, holds in itself "*Dasein*"—a *Dasein* without *Sein*, Nietzsche immediately adds. Interpreting, the movement of interpretation in its neutrality—this is what must not be taken as a means of knowing, an instrument thought would have at its disposal in order to think the world. The world is not an *object* of interpretation, any more than it is proper for interpretation to give itself an object, even an unlimited object, from which it would distinguish itself. The world: the infinite of interpreting; or again, to interpret: the infinite: the world. These three terms can only be given in a juxtaposition that does not confound them, does not distinguish them, does not put them in relation, and that thus responds to the exigency of fragmentary writing.

± ± "*We others, philosophers of the beyond . . . who in reality are interpreters and malicious soothsayers, we to whom it has been given to be placed, as spectators of things European, before a mysterious and as yet undeciphered*

text . . ." One can understand that the world would be a text whose exegesis must only be carried out well in order that its proper meaning be revealed: the work of philological probity. But written by whom? And interpreted in relation to what previously given signification? The world does not have meaning, meaning is within the world; the world: that which is exterior to sense and non-sense. Here, since it is a matter of an event within history—of things European—we admit this contains some sort of truth. But what if it is a matter of the "world"? And what if it is a matter of interpretation, of the neutral movement of interpreting that, having neither subject nor object, is the infinite of a movement that relates to nothing but to itself? (And this is saying still too much, for it is a movement without identity.) A movement, in any case, that has no preceding thing to which it relates and no term capable of determining it. Interpreting, being without being; the passion and the becoming of difference? This text, then, indeed deserves to be called mysterious: not because it would contain some mystery as its meaning but because, if this is a new name for the world (this world, enigma and solution of all the enigmas), if it is the difference that is at stake in the movement of interpreting and is in a sense what prompts it always to differ, to repeat by differing or deferring, if, finally, in its infinite scattering (in this sense, Dionysus), in the play of its fragmentation, and even more precisely, in the exceeding of what withdraws it, it affirms this plus of affirmation that does not hold to the exigency of clarity or light or give itself in the form of a form, then it is a text that is certainly not already written, any more than the world is produced once and for all time, but, not separating itself from the neutral movement of writing, is what gives us writing; or rather, through it, writing gives itself as that which, turning thought away from all things visible and invisible, is able to free thought from the primacy of signification understood either as light or as the retreat of light and able, perhaps, to liberate it from the exigency of unity, that is to say, from the primacy of all primacy, since writing is difference, since difference writes.

± ± In thinking the world, Nietzsche thinks it as a text. Is this a metaphor? It is a metaphor. Thinking the world at this depth that is not reached by the light of the day, he substitutes for it a metaphor that seems to restore to the day all its prerogatives. For what is a text? A set of phenomena that hold themselves in view; and what is writing if not bringing into view, making appear, bringing to the surface? Nietzsche does not think highly of language: "*Language depends upon the most naive prejudices. If our reading of things discovers problems and disharmonies, this is because we think only in the form of language—and thus believe in the 'eternal truth' of 'reason' (for example: subject, attribute, etc.). We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language.*" Let us set aside the objection that it is still in the form of language that Nietzsche denounces language. Let us also not respond by indicating speech's power to falsify, that goodwill of illusion that is speech's and that would also be art's. The

first objection throws us back into dialectics; the second gives us over to Apollo, who, having already become long ago dispersed in Dionysus, will no longer be able to keep us from perishing, were we ever to come up against the true. ("We possess art lest we perish of the truth." Words that would be most scornful of art, if they did not immediately turn around in order to say: But do we have art? And do we have truth, even if it causes us to perish? And do we, dying, perish? "But art is of a terrible seriousness.")

The world: a text; the world: "divine play beyond Good and Evil." But the world is not signified in the text; the text does not render the world visible, legible, able to be grasped in the moving articulation of forms. Writing does not refer back to this absolute text that would have to be reconstituted on the basis of fragments, in the lacuna of writing. Nor is it through the breaks in what is written, in the interstices thus delineated, in the pauses thus arranged and the silences thus reserved that the world, always exceeding the world, would testify to itself in the infinite plenitude of a mute affirmation. For it is now, when we risk becoming complicitous with an ingenuous and indigent mysticism, that we must laugh and withdraw, saying by our laughter: *Mundus est fabula*. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche explains his suspicion with regard to language; it is the same suspicion as with regard to being and unity. Language implies a metaphysic, the metaphysic. Each time we speak, we tie ourselves to being, we say being, be this only by implication, and the more brilliant our speech the more it shines with the light of being. "Nothing, in fact, has hitherto had a more naive power of persuasion than the error of being . . . , for every word, every sentence we utter speaks in its favor." And Nietzsche adds, with a profundity that does not cease to surprise us: "I fear indeed that we shall never rid ourselves of God because we still believe in grammar." There is, however, this "hitherto." Are we to conclude from this qualification that we are at a turning point—a turning of necessity—where, in place of our language and by the play of its difference, up to now folded back into the simplicity of sight and equalized in the light of a signification, another sort of exteriorization would come forward, and such that, in this hiatus opened in it, in the disjunction that is its site, there would cease to live these guests who are unwonted because too habitual, unreassuring because too sure, masked but endlessly exchanging their masks: divinity in the form of logos, nihilism in the guise of reason?

The world, text without pretext, interlacing without woof or texture. If the world of Nietzsche is not handed over to us in a book, and even less in the book imposed upon him by an infatuation with culture and known by the title *The Will to Power*, it is because he calls us outside this language that is the metaphor of a metaphysics, a speech in which being is present in the double light of a representation. It does not result from this that the world is unsayable, nor that it can be expressed in, or by, a manner of speaking. It simply advises us that if we are sure we can never hold the world either within speech or outside of speech, the only

destiny from now on fitting is that language, in perpetual pursuit and perpetual rupture and without having any other meaning than this pursuit and this rupture, should indefinitely persist (whether silent, whether speaking—a play always in play and always undone), and persist without concern for having something to say—the world—or someone—man with the stature of overman—to say it. It is as though Nietzsche had no other chance of speaking of the "world" than by speaking (of) himself in accordance with the exigency that is his, which is to speak without end, and in accordance with the exigency of difference, always to defer speaking. The world? A text? The world refers text back to text, as the text refers the world back to affirmation of the world. The text: certainly a metaphor; but if it no longer claims to be the metaphor of being, neither is it the metaphor of a world free of being: at most, the metaphor of its own metaphor.

± ± This pursuit that is rupture, this rupture that does not interrupt, this perpetuity of both the one and the other, the perpetuity of an interruption without stop and of a pursuit without attainment: neither the progress of time nor the immobility of a present—a perpetuity that perpetuates nothing, not enduring, not ceasing, the return and the turning aside of an attraction without allure: Is this the world? Is it language? The world that cannot be said? Language that does not have the world to say? The world? A text?

± ± Marks of breakage [*brisées*], fragments, chance, enigma: Nietzsche thinks these words together, especially in *Zarathustra*. His effort is thus double. First, wandering among men, he feels a kind of pain at seeing them only in the form of debris, always in pieces, broken, scattered, and thus as though on a field of carnage or slaughter; he therefore proposes, through the effort of a poetic act, to carry together and even bring to unity—the unity of the future—these chaotic pieces, shards, and accidents that are men. This will be the work of the whole, a work that will accomplish the integral. "Und das ist mein Dichten und Trachten, dass ich in eins dichte und zusammentrage, was Bruchstück ist und Rätsel und grauser Zufall; And the whole dense aim of my poetic act is to bring together, gathering poetically to unity, what is no more than fragment, enigma, horrendous chance." But his *Dichten*, his poetic decision, takes as well a very different direction. Redeemer of chance is the name he claims for himself. What does this mean? Saving chance does not mean returning it to a series of conditions; this would be not to save it, but to lose it. To save chance is to safeguard it from everything that would keep it from being affirmed as dreadful chance: what the throw of the dice could never abolish. And, by the same token, to decipher (to interpret) the enigma—is this simply to make the unknown pass into the category of the known or, on the contrary, to will it as enigma in the very speech that elucidates it, to open it, beyond the clarity of meaning, to this other language that is not governed by light nor obscured by the absence of light? Thus these marks of breakage, these

fragments, should not appear as moments of a still incomplete discourse but rather as the language, the writing of effraction by which chance, at the level of affirmation, remains aleatory and by which the enigma frees itself from the intimacy of its secret so that, in writing itself, it might expose itself as the very enigma that writing maintains, because writing always takes it up again in the neutrality of its own enigma.

± ± When Nietzsche writes, "*And when my eye flees in vain from 'now' to 'then,' it always discovers the same thing: debris, fragments, horrible chances—but nowhere men,*" he obliges us once again to examine ourselves, not without terror: would the truth of the fragment and the presence of men be incompatible? Is it prohibited, where there are men, to maintain the affirmation of chance, writing without discourse, the play of the unknown? What does this incompatibility, if it is one, signify? On the one hand, the world, presence, human transparency; on the other, the exigency that makes the earth tremble "*when words, creative and new, ring out and the gods throw the dice.*" Or, to state this more precisely, would men in some sense have to disappear in order to communicate? A question that is only posed and, in this form, is not yet even posed as a question. All the more so if one pursues it as follows: would not the Universe (that which is turned toward the One), and the cosmos (which presumes the existence of a physical time that is oriented, continuous, homogeneous although irreversible, obviously universal and even superuniversal), far from reducing man by its sublime majesty to the nothingness that frightened Pascal, not rather be the safeguard and the truth of human *presence*? Not because men, conceiving it in this way, would still construct the cosmos according to a reason that is only their own, but because there is no cosmos, Universe, or the whole except through the submission to light that human reality represents when it is *presence*—whereas where "knowing," writing, and, perhaps, speaking come about, it is a question of a very different "time" and of an absence such that the difference that governs it unsettles, disconcerts, and decenters the very reality of the universe—the universe as a real object of thought? To put this another way, there would not only be incompatibility between man and the power to communicate that is man's most proper exigency, but incompatibility as well between the Universe—substitute for a God, guarantee of human presence—and the speech without traces wherein writing nonetheless calls us and calls to us as men.¹⁵

± ± Interpreting: the infinite: the world. The world? A text? The text: the movement of writing in its neutrality. When we posit these terms—positing them with a concern for holding them outside themselves, without however making them leave themselves—we are not unaware of the fact that they still belong to the preliminary discourse that at a certain moment has allowed them to be put forward. Thrown out ahead, they do not yet leave the whole. They prolong it by their

rupture; they say this pursuit-rupture by virtue of which they say themselves, disjoined in their movement. They are isolated as though out of discretion, but this is a discretion already indiscreet (too marked); they follow one another, but in such a way that this succession is not one, since, with no relation other than that of a sign that punctuates, a sign of space by which space indicates itself as a time of indication, they also dispose themselves, and as though having previously done so, in a reversible-irreversible simultaneity; succeeding one another but given together; given together, but apart, without constituting a whole; interchanging themselves according to a reciprocity that equalizes them and according to a non-reciprocity always ready to reverse itself: thus at the same time bearing and refusing all the ways of becoming, as they bear and refuse all positions of spatial plurality. For they write: designated here by writing, it is writing they designate explicitly, implicitly, coming from this writing that comes from them, returning to writing as though turning away from it by this difference that always writes.

± ± Juxtaposed words, but words whose arrangement is entrusted to signs that are modalities of space, and that make space a play of relations wherein time is at stake: we call these signs of punctuation. Let us understand that they are not there to replace sentences from which they would silently borrow meaning. (Nonetheless, one might perhaps compare them to Spinoza's mysterious *sive: deus sive natura, causa sive ratio, intelligere sive agere*, which inaugurates an articulation and a new mode, namely in relation to Descartes even if it seems to be borrowed from him.) Whether they be more indecisive, that is to say, more ambiguous, is not important either. Their value is not one of representation. They figure forth nothing, except the void they animate without declaring it. For, in effect, it is the emptiness of difference they retain by their accentuation, preventing it, though without giving it form, from being lost in indetermination. On the one hand, their role is to give an impetus; on the other (and it is the same), to suspend. But the pause they institute has the remarkable character of not posing the terms whose passage they both ensure and arrest, and neither does it set them aside; it is as though the alternative of positive and negative, the obligation to begin by affirming being when one wants to deny it, were here, at last, enigmatically broken. Signs, of course, that have no magical value. Their entire worth (even if they were done away with or not yet invented, and in a certain way they always disappear in the accessory or accidental aspects of a graphics) derives from discontinuity—an absence that is unfigurable and without foundation—whose power [*pouvoir*] they bear up under rather than carry, there where lacuna becomes cesura, then cadence, and perhaps juncture. To articulate the void by a void, to structure it as a void by drawing from it the strange irregularity that always from the outset specifies it as empty; it is in this way that the signs of space—punctuation, accent, scansion, rhythm (configuration)—which are the preliminary to all writing, lend themselves to difference and engage in its play.

Not that they serve to translate this void or render it visible in the manner of a musical notation: on the contrary, far from keeping the written at the level of the marks writing leaves or the forms it concretizes, their property is to indicate in it the tearing, the incisive rupture (the invisible tracing of a trait) through which the inside turns eternally back into the outside, while what designates itself there, to the point of giving meaning, and as its origin, is the gap that removes it from meaning.

± ± Difference: the non-identity of the same, the movement of distance; that which carries, by carrying off, the becoming of interruption. Difference bears in its prefix the detour wherein all power to give meaning seeks its origin in the distance that holds it from this origin. The "to differ/deferring" of difference is borne by writing, but never inscribed by it—demanding of writing on the contrary that, at the limit, it not inscribe; a becoming without inscription, that it describe a vacancy, an irregularity that no trace can stabilize (or inform): a tracing without trace that is circumscribed only by the endless erasure of what determines it.

Difference: it can only be a difference of speech, a speaking difference that permits speech, but without itself coming directly to language—or coming to it and then referring us back to the strangeness of the neutral in its detour, to that which does not let itself become neutralized. A speech that always in advance, in its difference, is destined to the exigency that is written. To write: trait without trace, writing without transcription. Writing's characteristic trait will never be the simplicity of a trait capable of tracing itself and merging with this trace; it will be rather the divergence on the basis of which begins, without beginning, this pursuit-rupture. The world? A text?¹⁶

VII

Reflections on Hell

1

One can reflect on this situation. It can happen that someone is very close to us, not close: the walls have fallen. Sometimes still very close, but without relation: the walls have fallen, those that separate, and also those that serve to transmit signals, the language of prisons. Then one must once again raise a wall, ask for a little indifference, that calm distance by which lives find equilibrium. A native desire that takes form after having already been realized. But from such an astonishing approach to an other, one retains the impression that there was a brief moment of luck; a moment bound not to the favor of the look that may have been exchanged, but to something like a movement that would have preceded us both, just before our encounter. At this instant it seems that *he* was truly our companion in an infinite and infinitely deserted space where, by a marvelous chance, he had suddenly appeared at our side; so it was and so it was going to be, inexplicable, certain, and marvelous. But who was *he*? Only the desert, perhaps? The desert become our companion? Marvelous, this remains marvelously desolate, and then the companion has once again disappeared—there is nothing but desert. But in its harsh truth and arid presence it is suddenly close to us, familiar, a friend. A proximity that at the same time says to us: "*the desert is growing.*"

One could perhaps compare this movement to the movement of the absurd experience to which, for a time, Albert Camus attached his name. In many respects, this experience—and it could not be otherwise—was properly his. Personal, also, was the way in which he moved through analyses and ideas, and personal the