

Lead, as I do, the flown-away virtue back to earth—  
yes, back to body and life; that it may give the earth its  
meaning, a human meaning! May your spirit and your  
virtue serve the meaning of the earth. . . . Man and  
man's earth are still unexhausted and undiscovered.

—Nietzsche

This epigraph is chosen quite deliberately. I run the risk of its seeming to lend itself to a certain Christian, idealist, and humanist tone, a tone in which it is easy to recognize those well-meaning virtues and values that have loosed upon the world all the things that have driven the humanity of our century to despair over itself, where these values are both blind to and complicit in this letting loose. In his own way, Nietzsche himself would have undoubtedly participated in this dubious, moralizing piety. At any rate, the word “meaning” rarely appears in his work, and still more rarely in any positive sense. One would do well, therefore, not to give any hasty interpretations of it here. The above excerpt appeals to a “human meaning,” but it does so by affirming that the human [*l'homme*] remains to be discovered.<sup>1</sup> In order for the human to be discovered, and in order for the phrase “human meaning” to acquire some meaning, everything that has ever laid claim to the truth about the nature, essence, or end of “man” must be undone. In other words, nothing must remain of what, under the title of meaning, related the earth [*la terre*] and the human to a specifiable horizon. Again, it is Nietzsche who said that we are now “on the horizon of the infinite”; that is, we are at that point where “there is no more ‘land,’” and where “there is nothing more terrible than the infinite.”<sup>2</sup>

Are we finally going to learn this lesson? Are we perhaps finally able to hear it, or is it now impossible for us to learn anything

else? Can we think an earth and a human such that they would be only what they are—*nothing but* earth and human—and such that they would be none of the various horizons often harbored under these names, none of the “perspectives” or “views” *in view* of which we have disfigured humans [*les hommes*] and driven them to despair?

“The horizon of the infinite” is no longer the horizon *of the whole*, but the “whole” (all that is) as put on hold everywhere, pushed to the outside *just as much as* it is pushed back inside the “self.” It is no longer a line that is drawn, or a line that will be drawn, which orients or gathers the meaning of a course of progress or navigation. It is the opening [*la brèche*] or distancing [*l'écartement*] of horizon itself, and in the opening: *us*. We happen as the opening itself, the dangerous fault line of a rupture.



I want to emphasize the date on which I am writing this. It is the summer of 1995, and as far as specifying the situation of the earth and humans is concerned, nothing is more pressing (how could it really be avoided?) than a list of proper names such as these, presented here in no particular order: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Rwanda, Bosnian Serbs, Tutsis, Hutus, Tamil Tigers, Krajina Serbs, Casamance, Chiapas, Islamic Jihad, Bangladesh, the Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, ~~Hamas~~, Kazakhstan, Khmers Rouges, ETA militia, Kurds (UPK/PDK), Montataire, the Movement for Self-determination, Somalia, Chicanos, Shiites, FNLC-Canal Historique, Liberia, Givat Hagadan, Nigeria, the League of the North, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Sikhs, Haiti, Roma gypsies of Slovenia, Taiwan, Burma, PLO, Iraq, Islamic Front Salvation, Shining Path, Vaulx-en-Velins, Neuhof. . . Of course, it would be difficult to bring this list to an end if the aim was to include all the places, groups, or authorities that constitute the theater of bloody conflicts among identities, as well as what is at stake in these conflicts. These days it is not always possible to say with any assurance whether these identities are intranational, infranational, or transnational; whether they are “cultural,” “religious,”

"ethnic," or "historical"; whether they are legitimate or not—not to mention the question about which law would provide such legitimization; whether they are real, mythical, or imaginary; whether they are independent or "instrumentalized" by other groups who wield political, economic, and ideological power. . . .

This is the "earth" we are supposed to "inhabit" today, the earth for which the name Sarajevo will become the martyr-name, the testimonial-name: this is us, we who are supposed to say *we* as if we know what we are saying and *who* we are talking about. This earth is anything but a sharing of humanity. It is a world that does not even manage to constitute a world; it is a world lacking in world, and lacking in the meaning of world. It is an enumeration that brings to light the sheer number and proliferation of these various poles of attraction and repulsion. It is an endless list, and everything happens in such a way that one is reduced to keeping accounts but never taking the final toll. It is a litany, a prayer of pure sorrow and pure loss, the plea that falls from the lips of millions of refugees every day: whether they be deportees, people besieged, those who are mutilated, people who starve, who are raped, ostracized, excluded, exiled, expelled.

What I am talking about here is compassion, but not compassion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness.

cf. Beny-  
amin on  
Klee's  
angel of  
history

What does the above-named proliferation require of us, this proliferation that seems to have no other meaning than the indeterminate multiplication of centripetal meanings, meanings closed in on themselves and supersaturated with significance—that is, meanings that are no longer meaningful because they have come to refer only to their own closure, to their horizon of appropriation, and have begun to spread nothing but destruction, hatred, and the denial of existence?

What if this autistic multiplicity, which tears open and is torn

vs  
intuition  
as a  
'meaning'  
or an  
inner  
transparen-  
without a  
closure

open, lets us know that we have not even begun to discover what it is to be many, even though "la terre des hommes"<sup>3</sup> is exactly this? What if it lets us know that it is itself the first laying bare [*mise à nu*] of a world that is only the world, but which is the world absolutely and unreservedly, with no meaning beyond this very Being of the world: singularly plural and plurally singular?

## Preface

The first and principal essay of this book, which gives it its title, was not composed in an altogether sequential manner, but rather in a discontinuous way, repeatedly taking up several themes. To a certain extent, then, the sections can be read in any order, since there are repetitions here and there. But this is the result of a fundamental difficulty. This text does not disguise its ambition of redoing the whole of first philosophy by giving the “singular plural” of Being<sup>1</sup> as its foundation. This, however, is not *my* ambition, but rather the necessity of the thing itself and of our history. At the very least, I hope to make this necessity felt. At the same time, apart from the fact that I do not have the strength to deliver the treatise “of the singular plural essence of Being,” the form of the ontological treatise ceases to be appropriate as soon as the singular of Being itself, and therefore also of ontology, is in question. This is nothing new. At least since Nietzsche, and for all sorts of reasons that no doubt come together in the reason I invoke, philosophy is at odds with its form, that is, with its style, which is to say, finally, with its address. How does thinking address itself to itself, to thinking (which also means: how does thinking address itself to everyone, without its being a matter of a “comprehension” or “understanding” that might be called “common”)? How is thinking addressed? (The philosophical treatise, and “philosophy” as such, is the neutralization of address, the subjectless discourse of

Being-Subject [l'Etre-Sujet] itself.) Put another way, what is the “di-  
alogue of the soul with itself” that Plato talks about, which demon-  
strates that this question, or this worry, has always been part of our  
history? If thinking is addressed, then it is because there is meaning  
in this address, and not in discourse (but it is in the address of dis-  
course). This obeys the primordial, ontological condition of being-  
with or being-together, which is what I would like to talk about. A  
treatise, therefore, is not sufficiently discursive.) Nor is it enough to  
dress discourse in the form of an address (for me to address you  
with the familiar “you” [*tu*] the whole way through). The address  
means that thinking itself addresses itself to “me” and to “us” at the  
same time; that is, thinking addresses itself to the world, to history,  
to people, to things: to “us.” Another ambition springs from this  
or, better yet, another, more restricted, attempt: to allow thinking’s  
address to be perceived, an address that comes to us from every-  
where simultaneously, multiplied, repeated, insistent, and variable,  
gesturing only toward “us” and toward our curious “being-with-  
one-another,” [*être-les-uns-avec-les-autres*], toward our addressing-  
one-another.<sup>2</sup>

(By the way, the logic of “with” often requires heavy-handed syn-  
tax in order to say “being-with-one-another.” You may suffer from  
it as you read these pages. But perhaps it is not an accident that  
language does not easily lend itself to showing the “with” as such,  
for it is itself the address and not what must be addressed.)

In this, there is an illusion that lies in wait, the illusion of willing  
the adequation of “form” and “content,” of willing truth itself into  
presence: as if I could write to every addressee a seismographical  
account of our upsets, our agitations, our troubles, and our ad-  
dresses without addressees. My only response is no: no will, “on  
my life I did not know what it was to will” (Nietzsche). Or I might  
say the following: willing (or desire) is not a thinking; it is a dis-  
turbance, an echo, a reverberating shock.

The latter essays were chosen because their subjects converge  
with that of the primary essay. As you will see, the first two are con-  
nected to the exact circumstances of the most violent events of  
these last years.

# BEING SINGULAR PLURAL

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## § Of Being Singular Plural

It is good to rely upon others. For no one can bear this life alone.

—Hölderlin

Since human nature is the true community of men, those who produce thereby affirm their nature, human community, and social being which, rather than an abstract, general power in opposition to the isolated individual, is the being of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own joy, his own richness. To say that a man is alienated from himself is to say that the society of this alienated man is the caricature of his real community.

—Marx

### We Are Meaning

It is often said today that we have lost meaning, that we lack it and, as a result, are in need of and waiting for it. The “one” who speaks in this way forgets that the very propagation of this discourse is itself meaningful. Regretting the absence of meaning itself has meaning. But such regret does not have meaning only in this negative mode; denying the presence of meaning affirms that one knows what meaning would be, were it there, and keeps the mastery and truth of meaning in place (which is the pretension of the humanist discourses that propose to “rediscover” meaning.) Whether it is aware of it or not, the contemporary discourse on meaning goes much further and in a completely different direction: it brings to light the fact that “meaning,” used in this absolute way, has become the bared [dénudé] name of our being-with-one-another. We do not “have” meaning anymore, because we ourselves are meaning—entirely, without reserve, infinitely, with no meaning other than “us.”

This does not mean that we are the content of meaning, nor are we its fulfillment or its result, as if to say that humans were the meaning (end, substance, or value) of Being, nature, or history. The meaning of this meaning—that is, the signification to which a state of affairs corresponds and compares—is precisely what we say we

# Being is a verb

2

Being Singular Plural

have lost. But we are meaning in the sense that we are the element in which significations can be produced and circulate. The least significance just as much as the most elevated (the meaning of "nail" as well as the meaning of "God") has no meaning in itself and, as a result, is what it is and does what it does only insofar as it is communicated, even where this communication takes place only between "me" and "myself." Meaning is its own communication or its own circulation. The "meaning of Being" is not some property that will come to qualify, fill in, or finalize the brute givenness of "Being" pure and simple.<sup>1</sup> Instead, it is the fact that there is no "brute givenness" of Being, that there is no desperately poor there is presented when one says that "there is a nail catching. . . ." But the givenness of Being, the givenness inherent to the very fact that we understand something when we say "to be" (whatever it may be and however confused it might be), along with the (same) givenness that is given with this fact—cosubstantial with the givenness of Being and the understanding of Being, that we understand one another (however confusedly) when we say it, is a gift that can be summarized as follows: Being itself is given to us as meaning. Being does not have meaning. Being itself, the phenomenon of Being, is meaning that is, in turn, its own circulation—and we are this circulation.

There is no meaning if meaning is not shared,<sup>2</sup> and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because meaning is itself the sharing of Being. Meaning begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart [se disjoint] in order to be itself as such. This "as" presupposes the distancing, spacing, and division of presence. Only the concept of "presence" contains the necessity of this division. Pure unshared presence—presence to nothing, of nothing, for nothing—is neither present nor absent. It is the simple implosion of a being that could never have been—an implosion without any trace.

This is why what is called "the creation of the world" is not the production of a pure something from nothing—which would not, at the same time, implode into the nothing out of which it could never have come—but is the explosion of presence in the original

presence to  
nothingness is  
impossible

"meaning is the originary sharing of this truth. Being Singular Plural [The ~~mid~~ of creation is the ~~the~~ truth of meaning]"

multiplicity of its division. It is the explosion of nothing; in fact, it is the spacing of meaning, spacing as meaning and circulation. The nihil of creation is the truth of meaning, but meaning is the originary sharing of this truth. It could be expressed in the following way: Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence.

If one can put it like this, there is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation. But this circulation goes in all directions at once, in all the directions of all the space-times [les espaces-temps] opened by presence to presence: all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods—and “humans,” that is, those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying “we,” by saying we to themselves in all possible senses of that expression, and by saying we for the totality of all being.

~ responsibility rather than right

(Let us say we for all being, that is for every being, for all beings one by one, each time in the singular of their essential plural. Language speaks for all and of all: for all, in their place, in their name, including those who may not have a name. Language says what there is of the world, nature, history and humanity, and it also speaks for them as well as in view of them, in order to lead the one who speaks, the one through whom language comes to be and happens (“man”), to all of being, which does not speak but which is nevertheless—stone, fish, fiber, dough, crack, block, and breath. The speaker speaks for the world, which means the speaker speaks to it, on behalf of it, in order to make it a “world.” As such, the speaker is “in its place” and “according to its measure”; the speaker occurs as its representative but also, at the same time (and this has all the values of pro in Latin), in anticipation of it, before it, exposed to it as to its own most intimate consideration. Language says the world; that is, it loses itself in it and exposes how “in itself” it is a question of losing oneself in order to be of it, with it, to be its meaning—which is all meaning.)

~  
other speaking:

- listening, sense
- speech which dialectically promotes and holds accountable

Circulation goes in all directions: this is the Nietzschean thought of the “eternal return,” the affirmation of meaning as the repetition of the instant, nothing but this repetition, and as a result, nothing (since it is a matter of the repetition of what essentially does not return). But it is a repetition already comprised in the affirmation of the instant, in this affirmation/request (*re-petitio*) seized in the letting go of the instant, affirming the passing of presence and itself passing with it, affirmation abandoned in its very movement. It is an impossible thought, a thinking that does not hold itself back from the circulation it thinks, a thinking of meaning right at [à même]<sup>3</sup> meaning, where its eternity occurs as the truth of its passing. (For instance, at the moment at which I am writing, a brown-and-white cat is crossing the garden, slipping mockingly away, taking my thoughts with it.)

It is in this way that the thinking of the eternal return is the inaugural thought of our contemporary history, a thinking we must repeat (even if it means calling it something else). We must reappropriate what already made us who “we” are today, here and now, the “we” of a world who no longer struggle to have meaning but to be meaning itself. This is *we* as the beginning and end of the world, inexhaustible in the circumscription that nothing circumscribes, that “the” nothing circumscribes. *We make sense* [nous faisons sens], not by setting a price or value, but by exposing the absolute value that the world is by itself. “World” does not mean anything other than this “nothing” that no one can “mean” [*vouloir dire*], but that is said in every saying: in other words, Being itself as the absolute value in itself of all that is, but this absolute value as the being-with of all that is itself bare and impossible to evaluate. It is neither meaning [*vouloir-dire*] nor the giving of value [*dire-valoir*], but value as such, that is, “meaning” which is the meaning of Being only because it is Being itself, its existence, its truth. Existence is with otherwise nothing exists.

*Circulation—or eternity—goes in all directions, but it moves only insofar as it goes from one point to another; spacing is its absolute condition.* From place to place, and from moment to moment, without any progression or linear path, bit by bit and case by

value as  
such

case, essentially accidental, it is singular and plural in its very principle. It does not have a final fulfillment any more than it has a point of origin. It is the originary plurality of origins and the creation of the world in each singularity, creation continued in the discontinuity of its discrete occurrences. From now on, we, we others<sup>4</sup> are charged with this truth—it is more ours than ever—the truth of this paradoxical “first-person plural” which makes sense of the world as the spacing and intertwining of so many worlds (earths, skies, histories) that there is a taking place of meaning, or the crossing-through [passages] of presence. “We” says (and “we say”) the unique event whose uniqueness and unity consist in multiplicity.

aspects of personhood

## People Are Strange

Everything, then, passes between us.<sup>5</sup> This “between,” as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge. Perhaps it is not even fair to speak of a “connection” to its subject; it is neither connected nor unconnected; it falls short of both; even better, it is that which is at the heart of a connection, the interlacing [l'entrecroisement] of strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very center of the knot. The “between” is the stretching out [distension] and distance opened by the singular as such, as its spacing of meaning. That which does not maintain its distance from the “between” is only immanence collapsed in on itself and deprived of meaning.

From one singular to another, there is contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other. Contact is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection. If “to come into contact” is to begin to make sense of one another, then this “coming” penetrates nothing; there is no intermediate and mediating “milieu.” Meaning is not a milieu in which we are immersed. There is no *mi-lieu* [between place]. It is a mat-

ter of one or the other, one and the other, one with the other, but by no means the one in the other, which would be something other than one or the other (another essence, another nature, a diffuse or infuse generality). From one to the other is the syncopated repetition of origins-of-the-world, which are each time one or the other.

The origin is affirmation; repetition is the condition of affirmation. I say "that is, that it is." It is not a "fact" and has nothing to do with any sort of evaluation. It is a singularity taking refuge in its affirmation of Being, a touch of meaning. It is not an other Being; it is the singular of Being by which the being *is*, or it is of Being, which *is being* in a transitive sense of the verb (an unheard of, inaudible sense—the very meaning of Being). The touch of meaning brings into play [*engager*] its own singularity, its distinction, and brings into play the plurality of the "each time" of every touch of meaning, "mine" as well as all the others, each one of which is "mine" in turn, according to the singular turn of its affirmation.

Right away, then, there is the repetition of the touches of meaning, which meaning demands. This incommensurable, absolutely heterogeneous repetition opens up an irreducible strangeness of each one of these touches to the other. The other origin is incomparable or inassimilable, not because it is simply "other" but because it is an origin and touch of meaning. Or rather, the alterity of the other is its originary contiguity with the "proper" origin. You are absolutely strange because the world begins its turn with you.

We say "people are strange."<sup>7</sup> This phrase is one of our most constant and rudimentary ontological attestations. In fact, it says a great deal. "People" indicates everyone else, designated as the indeterminate ensemble of populations, lineages, or races [*gentes*] from which the speaker removes himself. (Nevertheless, he removes himself in a very particular sort of way, because the designation is so general—and this is exactly the point—that it inevitably turns back around on the speaker. Since I say that "people are strange," I include myself in a certain way in this strangeness.)

The word "people" does not say exactly the same thing as the Heideggerian<sup>8</sup> "one,"<sup>9</sup> even if it is partly a mode of it. With the word "one," it is not always certain whether or not the speaker in-

a touch of meaning

*is this an existential project?  
critique of existence or  
an intimacy with existence  
/Being;  
intuition,  
Familiarity  
with Life*

cludes himself in the anonymity of the “one.” For example, I can say “someone said to me” [“on m'a dit”] or else “it is said that” [“on dit que”] or else “that is how it is done” [“c'est comme ça qu'on fait”] or else “one is born; one dies” [“on naît, on meurt”]. These uses are not equivalent and, moreover, it is not certain that it is always the case that the “one” speaks of himself (from and about himself). Heidegger understood that “one” would only be said as a response to the question “who?” put to the subject of *Dasein*, but he does not pose the other inevitable question that must be asked in order to discover who gives this response and who, in responding like this, removes himself or has a tendency to remove himself. As a result, he risks neglecting the fact that there is no pure and simple “one,” no “one” in which “properly existing” existence [l'existant “proprement existant”] is, from the start, purely and simply immersed. “People” clearly designates the mode of “one” by which “I” remove myself, to the point of appearing to forget or neglect the fact that I myself am part of “people.” In any case, this setting apart [*mise à l'écart*] does not occur without the recognition of identity. “People” clearly states that we are all precisely people, that is, indistinctly persons, humans, all of a common “kind,” but of a kind that has its existence only as numerous, dispersed, and indeterminate in its generality. This existence can only be grasped in the paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness (anonymous, confused, and indeed massive) and disseminated singularity (these or those “people(s),” or “a guy,” “a girl,” “a kid”).

“People” are silhouettes that are both imprecise and singularized, faint outlines of voices, patterns of comportment, sketches of affects, not the anonymous chatter of the “public domain.” But what is an affect, if not each time a sketch? A comportment, if not each time a pattern? A voice, if not each time a faint outline? What is a singularity, if not each time its “own” clearing, its “own” imminence, the imminence of a “propriety” or propriety itself as imminence, always touched upon, always lightly touched: revealing itself *beside*, always beside. (“Beside himself” [“a côté de ses pompes”]<sup>10</sup>], as the saying goes. The comedy of this expression is no accident, and, whether it masks an anxiety or liberates the laughter

of the ignorant, it is always a matter of an escape, an evasion, and an emptying out of what is closest, an oddity presented as the rule itself.)

*Bordieu*

"I" take refuge in an exception or distinction when I say "people," but I also confer this distinction on each and every person, although in just as obscure a way. This is undoubtedly why people so often make the judgment "people are strange" or "people are incredible." It is not only, or even primarily, a question of the tendency (however evident) to set up our own habitus as the norm. It is necessary to uncover a more primitive level of this particular judgment, one where what is apprehended is nothing other than singularity as such. From faces to voices, gestures, attitudes, dress, and conduct, whatever the "typical" traits are, everyone distinguishes himself by a sort of sudden and headlong precipitation where the strangeness of a singularity is concentrated. Without this precipitation there would be, quite simply, no "someone." And there would be no more interest or hospitality, desire or disgust, no matter who or what it might be for.

"Someone" here is understood in the way a person might say "it's him all right" about a photo, expressing by this "all right" the covering over of a gap, making adequate what is inadequate, capable of relating only to the "instantaneous" grasping of an instant that is precisely its own gap. The photo—I have in mind an everyday, banal photo—simultaneously reveals singularity, banality, and our curiosity about one another. The principle of indiscernability here becomes decisive. Not only are all people different but they are also all different from one another. They do not differ from an archetype or a generality. The typical traits (ethnic, cultural, social, generational, and so forth), whose particular patterns constitute another level of singularity, do not abolish singular differences; instead, they bring them into relief. As for singular differences, they are not only "individual," but infraindividual. It is never the case that I have met Pierre or Marie per se, but I have met him or her in such and such a form, in such and such a state, in such and such a mood, and so on.

*infraindividual*

This very humble layer of our everyday experience contains an-

*the distinct present suchness or  
state of an other or mine proper  
(what is communicated and accessed)*

other rudimentary ontological attestation: what we receive (rather than what we perceive) with singularities is the discreet passage of other origins of the world. What occurs there, what bends, leans, twists, addresses, denies—from the newborn to the corpse—is neither primarily “someone close,” nor an “other,” nor a “stranger,” nor “someone similar.” It is an origin; it is an affirmation of the world, and we know that the world has no other origin than this singular multiplicity of origins. The world always appears [surgit]<sup>11</sup> each time according to a decidedly local turn [of events]. Its unity, its uniqueness, and its totality consist in a combination of this reticulated multiplicity, which produces no result.

Without this attestation, there would be no first attestation of existence as such, that is, of the nonessence and non-subsistence-by-itself that is the basis of being-oneself. This is why the Heideggerian “one” is insufficient as the initial understanding of existentielle “everydayness.” Heidegger confuses the everyday with the undifferentiated, the anonymous, and the statistical. These are no less important, but they can only constitute themselves in relation to the differentiated singularity that the *everyday* already is by itself: each day, each time, day to day. One cannot affirm that the meaning of Being must express itself starting from everydayness and then begin by neglecting the general differentiation of the everyday, its constantly renewed rupture, its intimate discord, its polymorphy and its polyphony, its relief and its variety. A “day” is not simply a unit for counting; it is the turning of the world—each time singular. And days, indeed every day, could not be similar if they were not first different, difference itself. Likewise “people,” or rather “peoples,” given the irreducible strangeness that constitutes them as such, are themselves primarily the exposing of the singularity according to which existence exists, irreducibly and primarily—and an exposition of singularity that experience claims to communicate with, in the sense of “to” and “along with,” the totality of beings. “Nature” is also “strange,” and we exist there; we exist *in* it in the mode of a constantly renewed singularity, whether the singularity of the diversity and disparity of our senses or that of the disconcerting profusion of nature’s species or its various

there is no matrix without a nexus, or multiple nexes  
(cf. notes of occasions of experience)

the turning of the world

ecstatic  
mysticism

metamorphoses into "technology." Then again, we say "strange," "odd," "curious," "disconcerting" *about* all of being.

Themes of "wonder" and the "marvel of Being" are suspect if they refer to an ecstatic mysticism that pretends to escape the world. The theme of scientific curiosity is no less suspect if it boils down to a collector's preoccupation with rarities. In both cases, desire for the exception presupposes disdain for the ordinary. Hegel was undoubtedly the first to have this properly modern consciousness of the violent paradox of a thinking whose own value is as yet unheard of, and whose domain is the grayness of the world. This ordinary grayness, the insignificance of the everyday—which the Heideggerian "one" still bears the mark of—assumes an absent, lost, or far away "grandeur." Yet, truth can be nothing if not the truth of being in totality, that is, the totality of its "ordinariness," just as meaning can only be right at [à même] existence and nowhere else. The modern world asks that this truth be thought: that meaning is right at It is in the indefinite plurality of origins and their coexistence. The "ordinary" is always exceptional, however little we understand its character as origin. What we receive most communally as "strange" is that the ordinary itself is originary. With existence laid open in this way and the meaning of the world being what it is, the exception is the rule. (Is this not the testimony of the arts and literature? Is not the first and only purpose of their strange existence the presentation of this strangeness? After all, in the etymology of the word *bizarre*,<sup>12</sup> whether the word comes from Basque or Arabic, there is a sense of valor, commanding presence, and elegance.)

### Gaining Access to the Origin

As a consequence, gaining access to the origin,<sup>13</sup> entering into meaning, comes down to exposing oneself to this truth.

What this means is that we do not gain access to the origin: access is refused by the origin's concealing itself in its multiplicity. We do not gain access; that is, we do not penetrate the origin; we do not identify with it. More precisely, we do not identify ourselves in

entering  
meaning  
into

it or as it, but with it, in a sense that must be elucidated here and is nothing other than the meaning of originary coexistence.

The alterity of the other is its being-origin. Conversely, the originarity of the origin is its being-other, but it is a being-other than every being for and in crossing through [à travers] all being. Thus, the originarity of the origin is not a property that would distinguish a being from all others, because this being would then have to be something other than itself in order to have its origin in its own turn. This is the most classic of God's aporias, and the proof of his nonexistence. In fact, this is the most immediate importance of Kant's destruction of the ontological argument, which can be deciphered in a quasi-literal manner; the necessity of existence is given right at the existing of all existences [*l'exister de tout l'existant*], in its very diversity and contingency. In no way does this constitute a supplementary Being. The world has no supplement. It is supplemented in itself and, as such, is indefinitely supplemented by the origin.

This follows as an essential consequence: the being-other of the origin is not the alterity of an "other-than-the-world." It is not a question of an Other (the inevitably "capitalized Other")<sup>14</sup> than the world; it is a question of the alterity or alteration of the world. In other words, it is not a question of an *aliud* or an *alius*, or an *alienus*, or an other in general as the essential stranger who is opposed to what is proper, but of an *alter*, that is, one of the two. This "other," this "lowercase other," is "one" among many insofar as they are many; it is each one, and it is each time one, one among them, one among all and one among us all. In the same way, and reciprocally, "we" is always inevitably "us all," where no one of us can be "all" and each one of us is, in turn (where all our turns are simultaneous as well as successive, in every sense), the other origin of the same world.

The "outside" of the origin is "inside"—in an inside more interior than the extreme interior, that is, more interior than the intimacy of the world and the intimacy that belongs to each "me." If intimacy must be defined as the extremity of coincidence with oneself, then what exceeds intimacy in interiority is the distancing of

*originary  
coexistence*

*other  
origin*

*same  
world*

coincidence itself. It is a coexistence of the origin "in" itself, a co-existence of origins; it is no accident that we use the word "intimacy" to designate a relation between several people more often than a relation to oneself. Our being-with, as a being-many, is not at all accidental, and it is in no way the secondary and random dispersion of a primordial essence. It forms the proper and necessary status and consistency of originary alterity as such. The plurality of beings is at the foundation [fondment] of Being.

A single being is a contradiction in terms. Such a being, which would be its own foundation, origin, and intimacy, would be incapable of *Being*, in every sense that this expression can have here. "*Being*" is neither a state nor a quality, but rather the action according to which what Kant calls "the [mere] positing of a thing"<sup>15</sup> takes place ("is"). The very simplicity of "position" implies no more, although no less, than its being discrete, in the mathematical sense, or its distinction *from*, in the sense of *with*, other (at least possible) positions, or its distinction among, in the sense of between, other positions. In other words, every position is also dis-position, and, considering the appearing that takes the place of and takes place in the position, all appearance is co-appearance [com-parution]. This is why the meaning of *Being* is given as existence, being-in-oneself-outside-oneself, which we make explicit, we "humans," but which we make explicit, as I have said, for the totality of beings.

If the origin is irreducibly plural, if it is the indefinitely unfolding and variously multiplied intimacy of the world, then not gaining access to the origin takes on another meaning. Its negativity is neither that of the abyss, nor of the forbidden, nor of the veiled or the concealed, nor of the secret, nor that of the unrepresentable. It need not operate, then, in the dialectical mode where the subject must retain in itself its own negation (since it is the negation of its own origin). Nor does it have to operate in a mystical mode, which is the reverse of the dialectical mode, where the subject must rejoice in its negation. In both of these, negativity is given as the *aliud*, where alienation is the process that must be reversed in terms of a reappropriation. All forms of the "capitalized Other" presume this alienation from the proper as their own; this is exactly what con-

for the  
totality of  
beings —  
for in the  
sense of  
being Nature's  
proper voice  
reflective agents;  
for as a  
responsibility,

We touch the origin. (Truly)  
Being Singular Plural we have access<sub>3</sub> (to the truth).

stitutes the “capitalization” of the “Other,” its unified and broken transcendence. But, in this way, all forms of the capitalized “Other” represent precisely the exalted and overexalted mode of the propriety of what is proper, which persists and consists in the “some-where” of a “nowhere” and in the “sometime” of a “no time,” that is, in the punctum aeternum outside the world.

The outside is inside; it is the spacing of the dis-position of the world; it is our disposition and our co-appearance. Its “negativity” changes meaning; it is not converted into positivity, but instead corresponds to the mode of Being which is that of disposition/co-appearance and which, strictly speaking, is neither negative nor positive, but instead the mode of being-together or being-with. The origin is together with other origins, originally divided. As a matter of fact, we do have access to it. We have access exactly in the mode of having access; we get there; we are on the brink, closest, at the threshold; we touch the origin. “(Truly) we have access (to the truth). . . .”<sup>16</sup> [“À la vérité, nous accédons . . .”] is Bataille’s phrase,<sup>17</sup> the ambiguity of which I repeat even though I use it in another way (in Bataille, it precedes the affirmation of an immediate loss of access). Perhaps everything happens between loss and appropriation: neither one nor the other, nor one and the other, nor one in the other, but much more strangely than that, much more simply.

“To reach<sup>18</sup> [toucher] the end” is again to risk missing it, because the origin is not an end. End, like Principle, is a form of the Other. To reach the origin is not to miss it; it is to be properly exposed to it. Since it is not another thing (an *aliud*), the origin is neither “missable” nor appropriable (penetrable, absorbable). It does not obey this logic. It is the plural singularity of the Being of being. We reach it to the extent that we are in touch with ourselves and in touch with the rest of beings. We are in touch with ourselves insofar as we exist. Being in touch with ourselves is what makes us “us,” and there is no other secret to discover buried behind this very touching, behind the “with” of coexistence.

We have access to the truth of the origin as many times as we are in one another’s presence and in the presence of the rest of beings.

Access is “coming to presence,” but presence itself is dis-position, the spacing of singularities. Presence is nowhere other than in “coming to presence.” We do not have access to a thing or a state, but only to a coming. We have access to an access.

“Strangeness” refers to the fact that each singularity is another access to the world. At the point where we would expect “something,” a substance or a procedure, a principle or an end, a signification, there is nothing but the manner, the turn of the other access, which conceals itself in the very gesture wherein it offers itself to us—and whose concealing is the turning itself. In the singularity that he exposes, each child that is born has already concealed the access that he is “for himself” and in which he will conceal himself “within himself,” just as he will one day hide under the final expression of a dead face. This is why we scrutinize these faces with such curiosity, in search of identification, looking to see whom the child looks like, and to see if death looks like itself. What we are looking for there, like in the photographs, is not an image; it is an access.

Is this not what interests us or touches us in “literature” and in “the arts”? What else interests us about the disjunction of the arts among themselves, by which they are what they are as arts: plural singulars? What else are they but the exposition of an access concealed in its own opening, an access that is, then, “inimitable,” untransportable, untranslatable because it forms, each time, an absolute point of translation, transmission, or transition of the origin into origin. What counts in art, what makes art art (and what makes humans the artists of the world, that is, those who expose the world for the world), is neither the “beautiful” nor the “sublime”; it is neither “purposiveness without a purpose” nor the “judgment of taste”; it is neither “sensible manifestation” nor the “putting into work of truth.” Undoubtedly, it is all that, but in another way: it is access to the scattered origin in its very scattering; it is the plural touching of the singular origin. This is what “the imitation of nature” has always meant. Art always has to do with cosmogony, but it exposes cosmogony for what it is: necessarily plural, diffracted, discreet, a touch of color or tone, an agile turn of phrase

or folded mass, a radiance, a scent, a song, or a suspended movement, exactly because it is the birth of a world (and not the construction of a system). A world is always as many worlds as it takes to make a world.

We only have access to ourselves—and to the world. It is only ever a question of the following: full access is there, access to the whole of the origin. This is called “finitude” in Heideggerian terminology. But it has become clear since then that “finitude” signifies the infinite singularity of meaning, the infinite singularity of access to truth. Finitude is the origin; that is, it is an infinity of origins. “Origin” does not signify that from which the world comes, but rather the coming of each presence of the world, each time singular.

question of starting point (not “from which,” but rather, as a  
The Creation of the World and Curiosity nexus of occasion)

The concept of the “creation of the world”<sup>19</sup> represents the origin as originally shared, spaced between us and between all beings. This, in turn, contributes to rendering the concept of the “author” of the world untenable. In fact, one could show how the motif of creation is one of those that leads directly to the death of God understood as author, first cause, and supreme being. Furthermore, if one looks at metaphysics carefully, there is not a God who simply and easily conforms to the idea of a producer. Whether in Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, or Leibniz, one always finds that the theme of creation is burdened with and misrepresented as a problem of production, right up until the decisive moment of the ontological argument’s downfall. (Hegel’s restoration of the argument, the one to which Schelling assigned significant importance, is nothing but an elaboration of the concept of creation.)

The distinctive characteristic of the concept of creation is not that it posits a creator, but that, on the contrary, it renders the “creator” indistinct from its “creation.” (It has to be said, here, in a general way, that the distinctive characteristic of Western monotheism is not the positing of a single god, but rather the effacing of the divine as such in the transcendence of the world. With respect to the question of origin, this is surely the precise point at which the link

is forged that makes us unfailingly Jew-Greek in every respect. And, with respect to the question of destination, this is the point from which we are sent into the “global” space as such.<sup>20)</sup> In mythological cosmogonies, a god or demiurge makes a world starting from a situation that is already there, whatever this situation may be.<sup>21)</sup> In creation, however, it is the being-already-there of the already-there that is of concern. In fact, if creation is *ex nihilo*, this does not signify that a creator operates “starting from nothing.” As a rich and complex tradition demonstrates, this fact instead signifies two things: on the one hand, it signifies that the “creator” itself is the *nihil*; on the other, it signifies that this *nihil* is not, logically speaking, something “from which” [“d’où”] what is created would come [*provenir*], but the very origin [*provenance*], and destination, of some thing in general and of everything. Not only is the *nihil* nothing prior but there is also no longer a “nothing” that preexists creation; it is the act of appearing [*surgissement*], it is the very origin—insofar as this is understood only as what is designated by the verb “to originate.” If the nothing is not anything prior, then only the *ex* remains—if one can talk about it like this—to qualify creation-in-action, that is, the appearing or arrival [*venue*] in nothing (in the sense that we talk about someone appearing “in person”).

The nothing, then, is nothing other than the dis-position of the appearing. The origin is a distancing. It is a distancing that immediately has the magnitude of all space-time and is also nothing other than the interstice of the intimacy of the world: the among-being [*l'entre-être*] of all beings. This among-being itself is nothing but [a] being, and has no other consistency, movement, or configuration than that of the being-a-being [*l'être-être*] of all beings. Being, or the among, shares the singularities of all appearings. Creation takes place everywhere and always—but it is this unique event, or advent, only on the condition of being each time what it is, or being what it is only “at each time,” each time appearing singularly.

One can understand how the creation, as it appears in any Jewish-Christian-Islamic theoglico-mystic configuration, testifies less (and certainly never exclusively) to a productive power of God than to his goodness and glory. In relation to such power, then,

generative

creatures are only effects, while the love and glory of God are deposited right at [à même] the level of what is created; that is, creatures are the very brilliance *éclat*<sup>22</sup> of God's coming to presence. It is necessary, then, to understand the theme of the "image of God" and/or the "trace of God" not according to the logic of a secondary imitation, but according to this other logic where "God" is itself the singular appearance of the image or trace, or the disposition of its exposition: place as divine place, the divine as strictly local. As a consequence, this is no longer "divine," but is the dislocation and dis-position of the world (what Spinoza calls "the divine extension") as that opening and possibility [ressource] which comes from further away and goes farther, infinitely farther, than any god.

If "creation" is indeed this singular ex-position of being, then its real name is *existence*. Existence is creation, our creation; it is the beginning and end that we are. This is the thought that is the most necessary for us to think. If we do not succeed in thinking it, then we will never gain access to who we are, we who are no more than us in a world, which is itself no more than the world—but we who have reached this point precisely because we have thought *logos* (the self-presentation of presence) as creation (as singular coming).

This thinking is in no way anthropocentric; it does not put humanity at the center of "creation"; on the contrary, it transgresses [traverse] humanity in the excess of the appearing that appears on the scale of the totality of being, but which also appears as that excess [demeure] which is impossible to totalize. It is being's infinite original singularity. In humanity, or rather right at [à même] humanity, existence is exposed and exposing. The simplest way to put this into language would be to say that humanity speaks existence, but what speaks through its speech says the whole of being. What Heidegger calls "the ontico-ontological privilege" of *Dasein* is neither its prerogative nor its privilege [apanage]: it gets Being on its way [*il engage l'être*], but the Being of *Dasein* is nothing other than the Being of being.

If existence is exposed as such by humans, what is exposed there also holds for the rest of beings. There is not, on the one side, an

particular  $\Rightarrow$  universal

originary singularity and then, on the other, a simple being-there of things, more or less given for our use. On the contrary, in exposing itself as singularity, existence exposes the singularity of Being as such in all being. The difference between humanity and the rest of being (which is not a concern to be denied, but the nature of which is, nevertheless, not a given), while itself being inseparable from other differences within being (since man is "also" animal, "also" living, "also" physio-chemical), does not distinguish true existence from a sort of subexistence. Instead, this difference forms the concrete condition of singularity. We would not be "humans" if there were not "dogs" and "stones." A stone is the exteriority of singularity in what would have to be called its mineral or mechanical actuality [*littéralité*]. But I would no longer be a "human" if I did not have this exteriority "in me," in the form of the quasi-minerality of bone: I would no longer be a human if I were not a body, a spacing of all other bodies and a spacing of "me" in "me." A singularity is always a body, and all bodies are singularities (the bodies, their states, their movements, their transformations).

Existence, therefore, is not a property of *Dasein*; it is the original singularity of Being, which *Dasein* exposes for all being. This is why humanity is not "in the world" as it would be in a milieu (why would the milieu be necessary?); it is in the world insofar as the world is its own exteriority, the proper space of its being-out-in-the-world. But it is necessary to go farther than this in order to avoid giving the impression that the world, despite everything, remains essentially "the world of humans." It is not so much the world of humanity as it is the world of the nonhuman to which humanity is exposed and which humanity, in turn, exposes. One could try to formulate it in the following way: humanity is the exposing of the world; it is neither the end nor the ground of the world; the world is the exposure of humanity; it is neither the environment nor the representation of humanity.

Therefore, however far humanity is from being the end of nature or nature the end of humanity (we have already tried all the variations of this formula), the end is always being-in-the-world and the being-world of all being.

*The Being-world of all Being*

*mineral  
or  
mechanical  
actuality*

Even supposing one still wished to take the world as the representation of humanity, this would not necessarily imply a solipsism of humanity: because, if that is the case, then it is the representation itself that instructs me about what it necessarily represents to me, an irrefutable exteriority as my exteriority. The representation of a spacing is itself a spacing. An *intuitus originarius*, which would not be a representation but rather an immersion in the thing-itself, would exist alone and would be for itself the origin and the thing: this was shown above to be contradictory. Descartes himself testifies to the exteriority of the world as the exteriority of his body. Because he hardly doubts his body, he makes a fiction of doubting it, and this pretension as such attests to the truth of *res extensa*. It is also not surprising that for Descartes the reality of this world, about which God could not deceive me, is maintained in Being by the continuous creation on the part of this very God. Reality is always in each instant, from place to place, each time in turn, which is exactly how the reality of *res cogitans* attests to itself in each "ego sum," which is each time the "I am" of each one in turn [*chaque fois de chacun à son tour*].

Once again, this is the way in which there is no Other. "Creation" signifies precisely that there is no Other and that "there is" is not an Other. Being is not the Other, but the origin is the punctual and discrete spacing between us, as between us and the rest of the world, as between all beings.<sup>23</sup>

We find this alterity primarily and essentially intriguing. It intrigues us because it exposes the always-other origin, always inappropriable and always there, each and every time present as inimitable. This is why we are primarily and essentially curious about the world and about ourselves (where "the world" is the generic name of the object of this ontological curiosity). The correlate of creation, understood as existence itself, is a curiosity that must be understood in a completely different sense than the one given by Heidegger. For him, curiosity is the frantic activity of passing from being to being in an insatiable sort of way, without ever being able to stop and think. Without a doubt, this does testify to being-with-one-another, but it testifies to it without being able to gain access to

each time, for each one

the Beauty of the Origin:  
Being Singular Plural Beauty in Intimacy

(20)

### Sharing the Fire, Irigaray

Listening what can't be communicated  
P. 129 Sense of the World

the existent opening that characterizes *Dasein* in the "instant."<sup>24</sup> It is necessary, then, to disconnect the most primitive layer of curiosity, the level on which we are primarily interested by what is interesting par excellence (the origin), from this inconsistent curiosity and also from the attention that takes care of others (*Fürsorge*). At this level, we are interested in the sense of being intrigued by the ever-renewed alterity of the origin and, if I may say so, in the sense of having an affair with it. (It is no accident that sexual curiosity is an exemplary figure of curiosity and is, in fact, more than just a figure of it.)

As English [and French] allows us to say, other beings are curious (or bizarre) to me because they give me access to the origin; they allow me to touch it; they leave me before its turning, which is concealed each time. Whether an other is another person, animal, plant, or star, it is above all the glaring presence of a place and moment of absolute origin, irrefutable, offered as such and vanishing in its passing. This occurs in the face of a newborn child, a face encountered by chance on the street, an insect, a shark, a pebble . . . but if one really wants to understand it, it is not a matter of making all these curious presences equal.

If we do not have access to the other in the mode just described, but seek to appropriate the origin—which is something we always do—then this same curiosity transforms itself into appropriative or destructive rage. We no longer look for a singularity of the origin in the other; we look for the unique and exclusive origin, in order to either adopt it or reject it. The other becomes the Other according to the mode of desire or hatred. Making the other divine (together with our voluntary servitude) or making it evil (together with its exclusion or extermination) is that part of curiosity no longer interested in dis-position and co-appearance, but rather has become the desire for the Position itself. This desire is the desire to fix the origin, or to give the origin to itself, once and for all, and in one place for all, that is, always outside the world. This is why such desire is a desire for murder, and not only murder but also for an increase of cruelty and horror, which is like the tendency toward the intensification of murder; it is mutilation, carving up, relentlessness, metic-

Come Softly  
- Grouper

ulous execution, the joy of agony. Or it is the massacre, the mass grave, massive and technological execution, the bookkeeping of the camps. It is always a matter of expediting the transformation of the other into the Other or making the Other appear in the place of the other, and, therefore, a matter of identifying the Other and the origin itself.

The Other is nothing more than a correlate of this mad desire, others are but others, in fact, are our originary interests. It is true, however, that our originary interests are the possibility of this mad desire is contained in the very disposition of originary interests: the dissemination of the origin upsets [*affole*] the origin in "me" to exactly the same extent that it makes me curious about it, makes "me" a "me" (or a "subject," someone in any case). (It follows, then, that no ethics would be independent from an ontology. Only ontology, in fact, may be ethical in a consistent manner. It will be necessary to return to this elsewhere.)

cf. WS  
abstract  
(stabilize a  
discursive  
point of departure)

## Between Us: First Philosophy

When addressing the fact that philosophy is contemporaneous with the Greek city, one ends up losing sight of what is in question—and rightly so. As is only fitting, however, losing sight of what is in question returns us to the problem in all its acuity after these twenty-eight centuries.

It returns us to the question of the origin of our history. There is no sense of reconstituting a teleology here, and it is not a matter of retracing a process directed toward an end. To the contrary, history clearly appears here as the movement sparked by a singular circumstance, a movement that does not reabsorb this singularity in a universality (or "universal history," as Marx and Nietzsche understood it), but instead reflects the impact of this singularity in renewed singular events. Thus, we have a "future" [*avenir*] and a "to come" [*à venir*]; we have this "future" as a "past," which is not past in the sense of being the starting point of a directed process, but past in the sense of being a "curiosity" ["bizarrie"] (the "Greek miracle") that is itself intriguing and, as such, remains still "to come." This dis-position of history indeed makes there be *a* history