

KHŌRA

Thus myth puts in play a form of logic which could be called—in contrast to the logic of noncontradiction of the philosophers—a logic of the ambiguous, of the equivocal, of polarity. How can one formulate, or even formalize, these see-saw operations, which flip any term into its opposite whilst at the same time keeping them both apart, from another point of view? The mythologist was left with drawing up, in conclusion, this statement of deficit, and to turn to the linguists, logicians, mathematicians, that they might supply him with the tool he lacked: the structural model of a logic which would not be that of binarity, of the yes or no, a logic other than the logic of the *logos*.

—Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Raisons du mythe," *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1974), p. 250.

§ *Khōra*

Khōra reaches us, and as the name. And when a name comes, it immediately says more than the name: the other of the name and quite simply the other, whose irruption the name announces. This announcement does not yet promise, no more than it threatens. It neither promises nor threatens anyone. It still remains alien to the person, only naming imminence, even only an imminence that is alien to the myth, the time, and the history of every possible promise and threat.

It is well known: what Plato in the *Timaeus* designates by the name of *khōra* seems to defy that "logic of noncontradiction of the philosophers" of which Vernant speaks, that logic "of binarity, of the yes or no." Hence it might perhaps derive from that "logic other than the logic of the *logos*." The *khōra*, which is neither "sensible" nor "intelligible," belongs to a "third genus" (*triton genos*, 48a, 52a). One cannot even say of it that it is *neither* this *nor* that or that it is *both* this *and* that. It is not enough to recall that *khōra* names neither this nor that, or, that *khōra* says this and that. The difficulty declared by *Timaeus* is shown in a different way: at times the *khōra* appears to be neither this nor that, at times both this and that, but this alternation between the logic of exclusion and that of participation—we shall return to this at length—stems perhaps only from a provisional appearance and from the constraints of rhetoric, even from some incapacity for naming.

The *khōra* seems to be alien to the order of the "paradigm," that intelligible and immutable model. And yet, "invisible" and without sensible form, it "participates" in the intelligible in a very troublesome and indeed aporetic way (*aporōtata*, 51b). At least we shall not be lying, adds Timaeus, at least we shall not be saying what is false (*ou pseudometha*) in declaring this. The prudence of this negative formulation gives reason to ponder. Not lying, not saying what is false: is this necessarily telling the truth? And, in this respect, what about testimony, bearing witness [*témoignage*]?

Let us recall once more, under the heading of our preliminary approach, that the discourse on the *khōra*, as it is *presented*, does not proceed from the natural or legitimate *logos*, but rather from a hybrid, bastard, or even corrupted reasoning (*logismō nothō*). It comes "as in a dream" (52b), which could just as well deprive it of lucidity as confer upon it a power or divination.

Does such a discourse derive, then, from myth? Shall we gain access to the thought of the *khōra* by continuing to place our trust in the alternative *logos/mythos*? And what if this thought called *also* for a third genus of discourse? And what if, perhaps as in the case of the *khōra*, this appeal to the third genre was only the moment of a detour in order to signal toward a genre beyond genre? Beyond categories, and above all beyond categorial oppositions, which in the first place allow it to be approached or said?

As a token of gratitude and admiration, here then is homage in the form of a question to Jean-Pierre Vernant. The question is addressed to the one who taught us so much and gave us so much pause for thought about the opposition *mythos/logos*, certainly, but also about the unceasing inversion of poles; to the author of "Raisons du mythe" and of *Ambiguïté et renversement*: how are we to think that which, while going outside of the regularity of the *logos*, its law, its natural or legitimate genealogy, nevertheless does not belong, *stricto sensu*, to *mythos*? Beyond the retarded or johnny-come-lately opposition of *logos* and *mythos*, how is one to think the necessity of that which, while *giving place* to that opposition as to so many others, seems sometimes to be itself no longer subject to the law of the very thing which it *situates*? What of this *place*? It is

nameable? And wouldn't it have some impossible relation to the possibility of naming? Is there something to *think* there, as I have just so hastily said, and to think according to *necessity*?

I

The oscillation of which we have just spoken is not an oscillation among others, an oscillation between two poles. It oscillates between two types of oscillation: the double exclusion (*neither/nor*) and the participation (*both this and that*). But have we the right to transport the logic, the para-logic or the meta-logic of this super-oscillation from one set to the other? It concerned first of all types of existent thing (sensible/intelligible, visible/invisible, form/formless, icon, or mimeme/paradigm), but we have displaced it toward types of discourse (*mythos/logos*) or of relation to what is or is not in general. No doubt such a displacement is not self-evident. It depends on a sort of metonymy: such a metonymy would displace itself, by displacing the names, from types [*genres*] of being to types [*genres*] of discourse. But on the one hand it is always difficult, particularly in Plato, to separate the two problematics: the quality of the discourse depends primarily on the quality of the being of which it speaks. It is almost as if a name should only be given to whom (or to what) deserves it and calls for it. The discourse, like the relation to that which is in general, is qualified or disqualified by what it relates to. On the other hand, the metonymy is authorized by passing through *genre*, from one genre to the other, from the question of the genres/types of being to the question of the types of discourse. Now the discourse on the *khōra* is also a discourse on genre/type (*genos*) and on different types of type. Later we will get on to genre as *gens*, or people (*genos, ethnos*), a theme which appears at the opening of the *Timaeus*. In the narrow context on which we are dwelling at present, that of the sequence on the *khōra*, we shall encounter two further genres of genre or types of type. The *khōra* is a *triton genos* in view of the two types of being (immutable and intelligible/corruptible, in the process of becoming and sensible), but it seems to be equally deter-

mined with regard to the sexual type: Timaeus speaks of “mother” and “nurse” in regard to this subject. He does this in a mode which we shall not be in a hurry to name. Almost all the interpreters of the *Timaeus* gamble here on the resources of rhetoric without ever wondering about them. They speak tranquilly about metaphors, images, similes.¹ They ask themselves no questions about this tradition of rhetoric which places at their disposal a reserve of concepts which are very useful but which are all built upon this distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, which is precisely what the thought of the *khōra* can no longer get along with—a distinction, indeed, of which Plato unambiguously lets it be known that this thought has the greatest difficulty getting along with it. This problem of rhetoric—particularly of the possibility of naming—is, here, no mere side issue. Nor is its importance limited to some pedagogic, illustrative, or instrumental dimension (those who speak of metaphor with regard to the *khōra* often add: didactic metaphor). We shall be content for the moment with indicating it, and situating it, but it is already clear that, just like the *khōra* and with just as much necessity, it cannot easily be situated, assigned to a residence: it is more situating than situated, an opposition which must in its turn be shielded from some grammatical or ontological alternative between the active and the passive. We shall not speak of metaphor, but not in order to hear, for example, that the *khōra* is properly a mother, a nurse, a receptacle, a bearer of imprints or gold. It is perhaps because its scope goes beyond or falls short of the polarity of metaphorical sense versus proper sense that the thought of the *khōra* exceeds the polarity, no doubt analogous, of the *mythos* and the *logos*. Such at least would be the question which we should like here to put to the test of a reading. The consequence which we envisage would be the following: with these two polarities, the thought of the *khōra* would trouble the very order of polarity, of polarity in general, whether dialectical or not. Giving place to oppositions, it would itself not submit to any reversal. And this, which is another consequence, would not be because it would inalterably be *itself* beyond its name but because in carrying beyond the polarity of sense (metaphorical or proper), it would no

longer belong to the horizon of sense, nor to that of meaning as the meaning of being.

After these precautions and these negative hypotheses, you will understand why it is that we left the name *khōra* sheltered from any translation. A translation, admittedly, seems to be always at work, both *in* the Greek language and from the Greek language into some other. Let us not regard any of them as sure. Thinking and translating here traverse the same experience. If it must be attempted, such an experience or experiment [*expérience*] is not only but of concern for a word or an atom of meaning but also for a whole tropological texture, let us not yet call it a system, and for ways of approaching, in order to *name* them, the elements of this “tropology.” Whether they concern the word *khōra* itself (“place,” “location,” “region,” “country”) or what tradition calls the figures—comparisons, images, and metaphors—proposed by Timaeus (“mother,” “nurse,” “receptacle,” “imprint-bearer”), the translations remain caught in networks of interpretation. They are led astray by retrospective projections, which can always be suspected of being anachronistic. This anachronism is not necessarily, not always, and not only a weakness from which a vigilant and rigorous interpretation would be able to escape entirely. We shall try to show that no-one escapes from it. Even Heidegger, who is nonetheless one of the only ones never to speak of “metaphor,” seems to us to yield to this teleological retrospection,² against which, elsewhere, he so rightly puts us on our guard. And this gesture seems highly significant for the whole of his questioning and his relationship to the “history-of-philosophy.”

What has just been said of rhetoric, of translation, or of teleological anachronism, could give rise to a misunderstanding. We must dispel it without delay. We would never claim to propose the exact word, the *mot juste*, for *khōra*, nor to name it, *itself*, over and above all the turns and detours of rhetoric, nor finally to approach it, *itself*, for what it will have been, outside of any point of view, outside of any anachronistic perspective. Its name is not an exact word, not a *mot juste*. It is promised to the ineffaceable even if what

it names, *khōra*, is not reduced to its name. Tropology and anachronism are inevitable. And all we would like to show is that it is structure which makes them thus inevitable, makes of them something other than accidents, weaknesses, or provisional moments. It is this structural law which seems to me never to have been approached *as such* by the whole history of interpretations of the *Timaeus*. It would be a matter of a structure and not of some essence of the *khōra*, since the question or essence no longer has any meaning with regard to it. Not having an essence, how could the *khōra* be [*se tiendrait-elle*] beyond its name? The *khōra* is anachronistic; it "is" the anachrony within being, or better: the anachrony of being. It anachronizes being.

The "whole history of interpretations," we have just said. We will never exhaust the immense literature devoted to the *Timaeus* since antiquity. It is out of the question to deal with it here in its entirety. And, above all, to presuppose the unity or homogeneity of this whole, the very possibility of totalizing it in some ordered apprehension. What we shall presuppose, by contrast, and one could still call it a "working hypothesis," is that the presumption of such an order (grouping, unity, totality organized by a *telos*) has an essential link with the structural anachronism of which we spoke a moment ago. It would be the inevitable effect produced by *something like* the *khōra*—which is not something, and which is not *like* anything, not even like what *it* would be, *itself*; there beyond its name.

Rich, numerous, inexhaustible, the interpretations come, in short, to give form to the meaning of *khōra*. They always consist in *giving form* to it by determining it, it which, however, can "offer itself" or promise itself only by removing itself from any determination, from all the marks or impressions to which we say it is exposed: from everything which we would like to give to it without hoping to receive anything from it . . . But what we are putting forward here of the interpretation of the *khōra*—of Plato's text on the *khōra*—by speaking about a form given or received, about mark or impression, about knowledge as information, etc., all of that already draws on what the text itself says about the *khōra*, draws on

its conceptual and hermeneutic apparatus. What we have just put forward, for example, for the sake of the example, on the subject of "*khōra*" in the text of Plato, reproduces or simply brings back, with all its schemas, Plato's discourse on the subject of the *khōra*. And this is true even down to this very sentence in which I have just made use of the word *schemas*. The *skhemata* are the cut-out figures imprinted into the *khōra*, the forms which inform it. They are of it without belonging to it.

Thus there are interpretations which would come to give form to "*khōra*" by leaving on it the schematic mark of their imprint and by depositing on it the sediment of their contribution. And yet, "*khōra*" seems never to let itself be reached or touched, much less broached, and above all not exhausted by these *types* of tropological or interpretative translation. One cannot even say that it furnishes them with the support of a stable substratum or substance. *Khōra* is not a subject. It is not the subject. Nor the support [*subjectile*]. The hermeneutic *types* cannot inform, they cannot give form to *khōra* except to the extent that, inaccessible, impassive, "amorphous" (*amorphon*, 51a) and still virgin, with a virginity that is radically rebellious against anthropomorphism, it *seems to receive* these types and *give place* to them. But if *Timaeus* names it as receptacle (*dekhomenon*) or place (*khōra*), these names do not designate an essence, the stable being of an *eidōs*, since *khōra* is neither of the order of the *eidōs* nor of the order of mimemes, that is, of images of the *eidōs* which come to imprint themselves in it—which thus *is not* and does not belong to the two known or recognized genera of being. It is not, and this nonbeing cannot but be *declared*, that is, be caught or conceived, via the anthropomorphic schemas of the verb *to receive* and the verb *to give*. *Khōra* is not, is above all not, is anything but a support or a subject which would *give place* by receiving or by conceiving, or indeed by letting itself be conceived. How could one deny it this essential significance as a receptacle, given that this very name is given to it by Plato? It is difficult indeed, but perhaps we have not yet thought through what is meant by *to receive*, the receiving of the receptacle, what is said by *dekhomai*, *dekhomenon*. Perhaps it is from *khōra* that we are begin-

ning to learn it—to receive it, to receive from it what its name calls up. To receive it, if not to comprehend it, to conceive it.

You will already have noticed that we now say *khōra* and not, as convention has always required, *the khōra*, or again, as we might have done for the sake of caution, the word, the concept, the significance, or the value of “*khōra*.” This is for several reasons, most of which are no doubt already obvious. The definite article presupposes the existence of a thing, the existent *khōra* to which, via a common name [*nom commun*, or “common noun”—Ed.], it would be easy to refer. But what is said about *khōra* is that this name does not designate any of the known or recognized or, if you like, received types of existent, *received* by philosophical discourse, that is, by the *ontological logos* which lays down the law in the *Timaeus*: *khōra* is neither sensible nor intelligible. There is *khōra*; one can even ponder its *physis* and its *dynamis*, or at least ponder these in a preliminary way. But what *there is*, there, is not; and we will come back later to what this *there is* can give us to think, this *there is*, which, by the way, *gives* nothing in giving place or in giving to think, whereby it will be risky to see in it the equivalent of an *es gibt*, of the *es gibt* which remains without a doubt implicated in every negative theology, unless it is the *es gibt* which always summons negative theology in its Christian history.

Instead of *the khōra*, shall we be content to say prudently: the word, the common name, the concept, the signification, or the value of *khōra*? These precautions would not suffice; they presuppose distinctions (word/concept, word-concept/thing, meaning/reference, signification/value, etc.) which themselves imply the possibility, at least, of a *determined* existent, distinct from another, and acts which aim at it, at it or its meaning, via acts of language, designations or sign postings. All of these acts appeal to generalities, to an *order* of multiplicities: genus, species, individual, type, schema, etc. Now what we can read, it seems, of *khōra* in the *Timaeus* is that “something,” which is not a thing, puts in question these presuppositions and these distinctions: “something” is not a thing and escapes from this order of multiplicities.

But if we say *khōra* and not *the khōra*, we are still making a name

out of it. A proper name, it is true, but a word, just like any common name, a word distinct from the thing or the concept. Besides, the proper name appears, as always, to be attributed to a person, in this case to a woman. Perhaps to a woman; indeed, to a woman. Doesn't that aggravate the risks of anthropomorphism against which we wanted to protect ourselves? Aren't these risks run by Plato himself when he seems to “compare,” as they say, *khōra* to a mother or a nurse? Isn't the value of receptacle also associated, like passive and virgin matter, with the feminine element, and precisely in Greek culture? These objections are not without value. However, if *khōra* indeed presents certain attributes of the word as proper name, isn't that only via its apparent reference to some uniqueness (and in the *Timaeus*, more rigorously in a certain passage of the *Timaeus* which we will approach later, there is *only one khōra*, and that is indeed how we understand it; there is only one, however divisible it be), the referent or this reference does not exist. It does not have the characteristics of an existent, by which we mean an existent that would be receivable in the *ontologic*, that is, those of an intelligible or sensible existent. There is *khōra* but *the khōra* does not exist. The effacement of the article should for the moment suspend the determination, within invisible quotation marks (we cite a saying of Plato's in a certain passage of the *Timaeus*, without knowing yet what it means and how to determine it) and the reference to something which is not a thing but which insists, in its so enigmatic uniqueness, lets itself be called or causes itself to be named without answering, without giving itself to be seen, conceived, determined. Deprived of a real referent, that which in fact resembles a proper name finds itself also called an X which has as its property (as its *physis* and as its *dynamis*, Plato's text will say) that it has nothing as its own and that it remains unformed, formless (*amorphon*). This very singular impropriety, which precisely is nothing, is just what *khōra* must, if you like, *keep*; it is just what *must be kept for it*, what *we* must keep for it. To that end, it is necessary not to confuse it in a generality by properly attributing to it properties which would still be those of a determinate existent, one of the existents which it/she “receives” or whose image it/she

receives: for example, an existent of the female gender—and that is why the femininity of the mother or the nurse will never be attributed to it/her as a property, something of her own. Which does not mean, however—we shall return to this—that it is a case here of mere figures of rhetoric. *Khōra* must not receive for *her own sake*, so she must not *receive*, merely let herself be lent the properties (of that) which she receives. She must not receive, she must receive not that which she receives. To avoid all these confusions, it is convenient, paradoxically, to formalize our approach (to it/her) and always to use the same language about it/her (“ταυτόν αὐτὴν ἀεὶ προσητέον,” 50b). Not so much to “give her always the same name,” as it is often translated, but to speak of it/her and to call it/her *in the same manner*. In short, faithfully even if this *faith* is irreducible to every other. Is this “manner” unique or typical? Does it have the singularity of an idiomatic event or the regulated generality of a schema? In other words, does this regularity find, in Plato’s text, or rather in a particular passage of the *Timaeus*, its unique and best formulation, or rather one of its examples, however privileged? In what regard, in what sense, will it be said of the *Timaeus* that it is exemplary? And if it is important that the *appellation*, rather than the *name*, should stay the same, will we be able to replace, relay, translate *khōra* by other names, striving only to preserve the regularity of the appellation, namely of a discourse?

This question cannot but resound when we know that we are caught in such a scene of reading, included in advance in the immense history of interpretations and reappropriations which in the course of the centuries come to buzz and hum around *khōra*, taking charge of it/her or overloading it/her with inscriptions and reliefs, giving it/her form, imprinting it/her with types, in order to produce in it/her new objects or to deposit on it/her other sediments [the translation of the French pronoun *elle*, referring to *khōra*, includes both “her” and “it,” in order to stress that *elle* could also be understood as a personal feminine pronoun—Ed.]. This interminable theory of exegeses seems to reproduce what, following the discourse of *Timaeus*, would happen, not with Plato’s text,

but with *khōra* herself/itself. With *khōra itself/herself*, if one could at all speak thus about this X (χ or *khi*) which must not have any proper determination, sensible or intelligible, material or formal, and therefore must not have any identity of its/her own, must not be identical with herself/itself. *Everything happens as if* the yet-to-come history of the interpretations of *khōra* were written or even prescribed in advance, *in advance reproduced and reflected* in a few pages of the *Timaeus* “on the subject” of *khōra* “herself” (“itself”). With its ceaseless re-launchings, its failures, its superimpositions, its overwritings and reprintings, this history wipes itself out in advance since it programs itself, reproduces itself, and reflects itself by anticipation. Is a prescribed, programmed, reproductive, reflexive history still a history? Unless the concept of history bears within itself this teleological programming which annuls it while constituting it. In saying, in short, “this is how one can glimpse *khōra*—in a difficult, aporetic way and as if in a dream—,” someone (*Timaeus*, Plato, etc.) would have said: this is what henceforth all the interpretations, for all eternity, of what I say here will look like. They will resemble *what I am saying* about *khōra*; and hence what I am saying about *khōra* gives a commentary, in advance, and describes the law of the whole history of the hermeneutics and the institutions which will be constructed *on this subject*, over this subject.

There is nothing fortuitous about that. *Khōra* receives, so as to give place to them, all the determinations, but she/it does not possess any of them as her/its own. She possesses them, she has them, since she receives them, but she does not possess them as properties, she does not possess anything as her own. She “is” nothing other than the sum or the process of what has just been inscribed “on” her, on the subject of her, on her subject, right up against her subject, but she is not the *subject* or the *present support* of all these interpretations, even though, nevertheless, she is not reducible to them. Simply this excess is nothing, nothing that may be and be said ontologically. This absence of support, which cannot be translated into absent support or into absence as support, provokes *and* resists any binary or dialectical determination, any

inspection of a philosophical *type*, or let us say, more rigorously, of an *ontological* type. This type finds itself both defied and re-launched by the very thing that appears to give it place. Even then we shall have to recall later, insisting on it in a more analytical manner, that *if there is place*, or, according to our idiom, *place given*, to give place here does not come to the same thing as to make a present of a place. The expression *to give place* does not refer to the gesture of a donor-subject, the support or origin of something which would come to be given to someone.

Despite their timidly preliminary character, these remarks permit us perhaps to glimpse the silhouette of a "logic" which seems virtually impossible to formalize. Will this "logic" still be a logic, "a form of logic," to take up Vernant's saying when he speaks of a "form of logic" of myth which must be "formulated, or even formalized"? Such a logic of myth exists, no doubt, but our question returns: does the thought of *khōra*, which obviously does not derive from the "logic of noncontradiction of the philosophers," belong to the space of mythic thought? Is the "bastard" *logos* which is regulated according to it [i.e., according to mythic thought—Tr.]—still a *mythos*?

Let us take the time for a long detour. Let us consider the manner in which Hegel's speculative dialectic inscribes mythic thought in a teleological perspective. One can say of this dialectic that it is and that it is not a logic of noncontradiction. It integrates and *sublates* contradiction as such. In the same way, it *sublates* mythic discourse as such into the philosopheme.

According to Hegel, philosophy becomes serious—and we are also thinking *after* Hegel and *according to* him, following his thought—only from the moment when it enters into the sure path of logic: that is, after having abandoned, or let us rather say *sublated*, its mythic *form*: after Plato, with Plato. Philosophical logic comes to its senses when the concept wakes up from its mythological slumber. Sleep and waking, for the event, consist in a simple unveiling: the making explicit and taking cognizance of a philosopheme enveloped in its virtual potency. The mytheme *will*

have been only a prephilosopheme offered and promised to a dialectical *Aufhebung*. This teleological future anterior resembles the time of a narrative but it is a narrative of the going outside of narrative. It marks the end of narrative fiction. Hegel explains it³ while defending his "friend Creuzer" and his book, *Symbolism and Mythology of Ancient Peoples, especially of the Greeks* (1810–12). The mythological *logos*, of course, can emit the pretension of being a species of "philosophizing" (p. 108). There are philosophers who have used myths in order to bring philosophemes closer to the imagination (*Phantasie*). But "the content of myth is thought" (*ibid.*). The mythic dimension remains formal and exterior. If Plato's myths are "beautiful," one would be wrong to think that myths are more "eminent" (*vortrefflicher*) than the "abstract mode of expression." In truth, Plato has recourse to myth only to the extent of his "impotence" (*Unvermögen*) to "express himself in the pure modality of thought." But that is also in part because he does so only in the introduction to the dialogues—and an introduction is never purely philosophical: you know what Hegel thinks of introductions and prefaces in general. When he gets on to the thing itself, to the principal subject, Plato expresses himself quite otherwise. Let us think of the *Parmenides*, for example: the simple determinations of thought do without image and myth. Hegel's dialectical schema here just as much concerns the mythic—the figurative or the symbolic. The *Parmenides* is "serious," whereas the recourse to myth is not entirely so. In the form in which, still today, this opposition dominates so many evaluations—and not only in so-called Anglo-Saxon thought—the opposition between the serious and the nonserious overlaps here with that of philosophy *as such* and of its ludico-mythological drift [*dérive*]. The *value* of philosophical thought, which is also to say its *seriousness*, is measured by the nonmythic character of its terms. Hegel here emphasizes value, seriousness, the value of seriousness, and Aristotle is his guarantor. For after having declared that "the value of Plato, however, does not reside in myths" ("der Wert Platons liegt aber nicht in den Mythen," p. 109), Hegel quotes and translates Aristotle. It is appropriate to dwell on this. We know, let us recall in passing

before approaching this problem directly, how great a weight the Aristotelian interpretation of the *Timaeus* carries in the history of the interpretations. Hegel translates then, or paraphrases, the *Metaphysics*:

περι μὲν τῶν μυθικῶς σοφισζομένων οὐκ ἄξιον μετὰ σπουδῆς σκοπεῖν

Von denen, welche mythisch philosophieren, ist es nicht der Mühe wert, ernstlich zu handeln.

Those who philosophize with recourse to myth are not worth treating seriously.

Hegel seems to oscillate between two interpretations. In a philosophical text, the function of myth is at times a sign of philosophical impotence, the incapacity to accede to the concept as such and to keep to it, at other times the index of a dialectic and above all didactic potency, the pedagogic mastery of the serious philosopher in full possession of the philosopheme. Simultaneously or successively, Hegel seems to recognize in Plato both this impotence and this mastery. These two evaluations are only apparently contradictory or are so only up to a certain point. They have this in common: the subordination of myth, as a discursive *form*, to the *content* of the signified concept, to the meaning, which, in its essence, can only be philosophical. And the philosophical theme, the signified concept, whatever may be its formal *presentation*—philosophical or mythic—always remains the force of law, the mastery or the dynasty of discourse. Here one can see the thread of our question passing by: if *khōra* has no meaning or essence, if she is not a philosopheme and if, nevertheless, she is neither the object nor the form of a fable of a mythic type, where can she be situated in this schema?

Apparently contradictory, but in fact profoundly coherent, this logico-philosophical evaluation is not *applied* to Plato. It derives already from a certain "Platonism." Hegel does not read Plato through Aristotle as if doing something unknown to Plato, as if he [Hegel] were deciphering a practice whose meaning would have remained inaccessible to the author of the *Timaeus*. A certain

programme of this evaluation seems already legible in this work, as we shall verify. But perhaps with one reservation, and this supplementary reservation could lodge, shelter, and thereby exceed the said programme.

First, the programme. The cosmogony of the *Timaeus* runs through the cycle of knowledge on all things. Its encyclopedic end must mark the term, the *telos*, of a *logos* on the subject of everything that is: "καὶ δὴ καὶ τέλος περὶ τοῦ παντὸς νῦν ἤδη τὸν λόγον ἡμῖν φῶμεν ἔχειν"; "And now at length we may say that our discourse concerning the Universe has reached its termination" (92c).

This encyclopedic *logos* is a general ontology, treating of all the types of being, it includes a theology, a cosmology, a physiology, a psychology, a zoology. Mortal or immortal, human and divine, visible and invisible things are situated there. By recalling it in conclusion, one picks up the distinction between the visible living thing, for example, the sensible god, and the intelligible god of which it is the image (*eikōn*). The cosmos is the heavens (*ouranos*) as living, visible thing and sensible god. It is unique and alone of its race, "monogenic."

And yet, half-way through the cycle, won't the discourse on *khōra* have opened, between the sensible and the intelligible, belonging neither to one nor to the other, hence neither to the cosmos as sensible god nor to the intelligible god, an apparently empty space—even though it is no doubt not *emptiness*? Didn't it name a gaping opening, an abyss or a chasm? Isn't it starting out from this chasm, "in" it, that the cleavage between the sensible and the intelligible, indeed, between body and soul, can have place and take place? Let us not be too hasty about bringing this chasm named *khōra* close to that chaos which also opens the yawning gulf of the abyss. Let us avoid hurling into it the anthropomorphic form and the pathos of fright. Not in order to install in its place the security of a foundation, the "exact counterpart of what Gaia represents for any creature, since her appearance, at the origin of the world: a stable foundation, sure for all eternity, opposed to the gaping and bottomless opening of Chaos."⁴ We shall later encounter a brief allusion of Heidegger's to *khōra*, not to the one in the

Timaeus but, outside of all quotation and all precise reference, the one which in Plato would designate the place (*Orr*) between the existent and being,⁵ the “difference” or place between the two.

The ontologico-encyclopedic conclusion of the *Timaeus* seems to cover over the open chasm in the middle of the book. What it would thus cover over, closing the gaping mouth of the quasi-banned discourse on *khōra*, would perhaps not only be the abyss between the sensible and the intelligible, between being and nothingness, between being and the lesser being, nor even perhaps between being and the existent, nor yet between *logos* and *muthos*, but between all these couples and another which would not even be *their* other.

If there is indeed a chasm in the middle of the book, a sort of abyss “in” which there is an attempt to think or say this abyssal chasm which would be *khōra*, the opening of a place “in” which everything would, at the same time, come to take *place* and *be reflected* (for these are images which are inscribed there), is it insignificant that a *mise en abyme* regulates a certain order of composition of the discourse? And that it goes so far as to regulate even this mode of thinking or of saying which must be similar without being identical to the one which is practiced *on the edges* of the chasm? Is it insignificant that this *mise en abyme* affects the forms of a discourse on *places* [*places*], notably political places, a politics of place entirely commanded by the consideration of sites [*lieux*] (jobs in the society, region, territory, country), as sites assigned to types or forms of discourse?

II

Mise en abyme of the discourse on *khōra*, site [*lieu*] of politics, politics of sites [*lieux*], such would be, then, the structure of an overprinting without a base.

At the opening of the *Timaeus*, there are considerations of the guardians of the city, the cultivators and the artisans, the division of labor and education. Let us note in passing, although it is an analogy whose structure is formal and external: those who are

raised as guardians of the city will not have anything that is properly their own (*idion*), neither gold nor silver. They “will receive the salary of their rank from those they protect” (18b). To have nothing that is one’s own, not even the gold which is the only thing comparable to it (50a), isn’t this also the situation of the site, the condition of *khōra*? This question can be asked, even if one does not wish to take it seriously; however formal it may be, the analogy is scarcely contestable. One can say the same thing about the remark which follows immediately (18c) and touches on the education of women, on marriage, and above all, with the most pronounced insistence, on the community of children. All possible measures must be taken in order to ensure that no-one can know and recognize as his own (*idia*) the children who are born (18c–d). In procreation (*paidopoiia*), any attribution or natural or legitimate property should find itself excluded by the very milieu of the city. If one bears in mind the fact that a moment ago the text had prescribed a similar education for men and for women, who must be prepared for the same activities and for the same functions, one can still follow the thread of a formal analogy, namely, that of the said “comparison” of *khōra* with the mother and, a supplementary sign of expropriation, with the nurse. This comparison does not assure it/her of any property, in the sense of the subjective genitive or in the sense of the objective genitive: neither the properties of a genetrix (she engenders nothing and, besides, possesses no property at all), nor the ownership of children, those images of their father who, by the way, is no more their owner than is the mother. This is enough to say about the impropriety of the said comparison. But we are perhaps already in a site [*lieu*] where the law of the proper no longer has any meaning. Let us consider even the political strategy of marriages. It manifests a relation of abyssal and analogous reflexivity with what will be said later about *khōra*, about the “riddles” or sieves (*seiomena*, 52e, 53a) shaken in order to sort or select the “grain” and the “seed”; the law of the better is crossed with a certain chance. Now from the first pages of the *Timaeus*, in a purely political discourse, are described the apparatuses intended to bring about *in secret* the arranging of marriages in order that the

children will be born with the best possible naturalness. And this does not happen without some drawing of lots (*kléros*, 18d–e).

Let us explain it at once. These formal analogies or these *mises en abyme*, refined, subtle (too subtle, some will think), are not considered here, *in the first place* [*en premier lieu*], as artifices, boldness, or secrets of formal composition: the art of Plato the writer! This art interests us and ought to do so more still, but what is important in this very place [*ici même*], and first of all, independently of the supposed intentions of a composer, are the constraints which produce these analogies. Shall we say that they constitute a *programme*? A *logic* whose authority was imposed on Plato? Yes, up to a point only, and this limit appears in the abyss itself: the being-programme of the programme, its structure of pre-inscription and of typographic prescription forms the explicit theme of the discourse *en abyme* on *khōra*. The latter figures the place of inscription of *all that is marked on the world*. Likewise the being-logical of logic, its essential *logos*, whether it be true, probable, or mythic, forms the explicit theme of the *Timaieus*, as we shall yet have occasion to explain. Thus one cannot calmly, with no further ado, call by the name *programme* or *logic* the form which dictates to Plato the law of such a composition: programme and logic are apprehended in it, *as such*, though it be in a dream, and put *en abyme*.

Having taken this precaution with regard to analogies which might seem imprudent, let us recall the most general trait which both gathers and authorizes these displacements, from one place to the other “in” the “same” place [*lieu*]. It is obvious, too obvious even to be noticed, and its generality has, so to speak, no other limit than itself: it is precisely that of the *genos*, of the genus in all genders and genera, of sexual difference, of the generation of children, of the kinds of being and of that *triton genos* which *khōra* is (neither sensible nor intelligible, “like” a mother or a nurse, etc.). We have just alluded to all these genres of genres, but we have not yet spoken of the *genos* as race,⁶ people, group, community, affinity of birth, nation, etc. Now we’re there.

Still at the opening of the *Timaieus*, there is recalled an earlier

conversation, a discourse (*logos*) of Socrates on the *politeia* and on its better government. Socrates sums it up, and these are the themes of which we have just spoken. In passing, he uses the word *khōra* (19a) to designate the place assigned to children: you must rear the “children of the good,” transport the others in secret to another country, continue to keep them under observation, and carry out a further sifting operation in attributing to each his place (*khōran*). After this reminder, Socrates declares himself incapable of praising this city and its men. In this he feels himself to be comparable to the poets and imitators. And here is the *genos* or *ethnos*. Socrates claims to have nothing against the people or the race, the tribe of the poets (*poiētikon genos*). But allowing for the place and the conditions of birth as well as the education, the nation, or race of imitators (*mimētikon ethnos*) will have difficulty in imitating what it has remained alien to, namely, that which happens in actions and words (*ergois, logois*) rather than in spectacles or simulacra. There is also the genre or the tribe of the sophists (*tōn sophistōn genos*). Socrates privileges here again the *situation*, the relation to place: the genus of sophists is characterized by the absence of a proper place, an economy, a fixed domicile; these people have no domesticity, no house that is proper to them (*oikēsis idias*). They wander from place to place, from town to town, incapable of understanding these men who, being philosophers and politicians, *have (a) place* [ont lieu; from *avoir lieu*, or “to take place”—Ed.], that is, act by means of gesture and speech, in the city or at war. *Poiētikon genos, mimētikon ethnos, tōn sophistōn genos*, after this enumeration what remains? Well, then, you, to whom I am speaking now, you who are also a *genos* (19e), and who belong to the genre of those who *have (a) place*, who take place, by nature and by education. You are thus both philosophers and politicians.

Socrates’ strategy itself operates from a sort of nonplace, and that is what makes it very disconcerting, not to say alarming. In starting by declaring that he is, a little *like* the poets, the imitators, and the sophists, incapable of describing the philosopher-politicians. Socrates pretends to rank himself among those who feign. He affects to belong to the *genos* of those whose *genos* consists in affecting: in

simulating the belonging to a place and to a community, for example, to the *genos* of true citizens, philosophers, and politicians, to “yours.” *Socrates thus pretends to belong to the genus of those who pretend to belong to the genus of those who have (a) place, a place and an economy that are their own.* But in saying this, Socrates denounces this *genos* to which he pretends to belong. He claims to speak the truth on the subject of it: in truth, these people have no place, they are wanderers. *Therefore I who resemble them, I have no place* [je n’ai pas de lieu]: in any case, as for me I am similar to them, I do not take place [je n’ai pas lieu], but if I am similar to them or if I resemble them, that does not mean that I am their fellow. But this truth, namely that they and I, if we seem to belong to the same *genos*, are without a place of our own, is enunciated by me, since it is a truth, from *your* place, you who are on the side of the true *logos*, of philosophy and politics. I address you from your place [place] in order to say to you that I have no place [place], since I am like those who make their trade out of resemblance—the poets, the imitators, and the sophists, the genus of those who have no place. You alone have place and can say both the place and the nonplace in truth, and that is why I am going to give you back the floor. In truth, give it to you or leave it to you. To give back, to leave, or to give the floor to the other amounts to saying: you have (a) place, have (a) place, come.

The duplicity of this self-exclusion, the simulacrum of this withdrawal, plays on the belonging to the proper place, as a political place and as a habitation. Only this belonging to place authorizes the truth of the *logos*, that is, also its political effectivity, its pragmatic and praxical [praxique] efficiency, which Socrates regularly associates with the *logos* in this context. It is the belonging of a *genos* to a proper place which guarantees the truth of its *logos* (effective relation of the discourse to the thing itself, to the matter, *pragma*) and of its action (*praxis*, *ergon*). The specialists of the nonplace and of the simulacrum (among whom Socrates for a moment affects to rank himself) do not even have to be excluded from the city, like *pharmakoi*; they exclude themselves by themselves, as does Socrates here in giving back the word. They exclude

themselves by themselves, or pretend to do so, also, because they quite simply have no room [*pas de place*]. There is no room for them in the political place [*lieu*] where affairs are spoken of and dealt with, the *agora*.

Although the word was already uttered (19a), the question of *khōra* as a general place or total receptacle (*pandekhēs*) is, of course, not yet posed. But if it is not posed as such, it gestures and points already. The note is given. For on the one hand, the ordered polysemy of the word always includes the sense of political place or, more generally, of *invested* place, by opposition to abstract space. *Khōra* “means”: place occupied by someone, country, inhabited place, marked place, rank, post, assigned position, territory, or region. And in fact, *khōra* will always already be occupied, invested, even as a general place, and even when it is distinguished from everything that takes place in it. Whence the difficulty—we shall come to it—of treating it as an empty or geometric space, or even, and this is what Heidegger will say of it, as that which “prepares” the Cartesian space, the *extensio* of the *res extensa*. But on the other hand, the discourse of Socrates, if not the Socratic discourse, the discourse of Socrates in this precise place and on this marked place, proceeds from or affects to proceed from errancy [*depuis l’errance*], from a mobile or nonmarked place, in any case from a space or exclusion which happens to be, into the bargain, neutralized. Why neutralized? If Socrates pretends to include himself among those whose *genos* is to have no place, he does not assimilate himself to them, he says he resembles them. Hence he holds himself in a third genus, in a way, neither that of the sophists, poets, and other imitators (*of whom he speaks*), nor that of the philosopher-politicians (*to whom he speaks*, proposing only to listen to them). His speech is neither his address nor what it addresses. His speech *occurs* in a third genus and in the neutral space or a place without place, a place where everything is marked but which would be “in itself” unmarked. Doesn’t he already resemble what others, later, those very ones to whom he gives the word, will call *khōra*? A mere resemblance, no doubt. Only a discourse of the sophists’ type would be so indecent as to misuse it. But to misuse a resemblance,

isn't that to present it as an identity, isn't it to assimilate? One can also ponder the reasons for resemblance as such.

We are in the preamble, our preamble on the preamble of the *Timaeus*. There is no serious philosophy in introductions, only mythology, at most, said Hegel.

In these preambles, it is not yet a question of *khōra*, at least not of the one that gives place to the measure of the cosmos. However, in a singular mode, the very place of the preamble gives place, on the threshold, to a treatment of place, to an assigning of their place to interlocutors who will be brought to treat of it later. And this assignation of places obeys a criterion: that of the place of the *genos* with regard to the *proper place*. Now, one has never, it seems, taken into account, taken particular count of, such a staging [*mise en scène*]. It distributes the marked places and the unmarked places according to a schema analogous to the one which will later order the discourse on *khōra*. Socrates *effaces himself*, effaces in himself all the types, all the genera, both those of the men of image and simulacrum whom he pretends for a moment to resemble and that of the men of action and men of their word, philosophers and politicians to whom he addresses himself while effacing himself before them. But in thus effacing himself, he situates himself or institutes himself as a *receptive addressee*, let us say, as a *receptacle of all* that will henceforth be inscribed. He declares himself to be *ready and all set* for that, disposed to *receive* everything he's offered. The words *kosmos* and *endekhomenon* are not far away: "πάρεμι τε οὖν δὴ κεκοσμημένος ἐπ' αὐτὰ καὶ πάντων ἐτοιμότητος ὄν δέχεσθαι"; "So here I am, all ready to accept it and full of drive for receiving everything that you will have to offer me" (20c). Once more the question returns: what does *receive* mean? What does *dekhomai* mean? With this question in the form of "what does X mean?" it is not so much a question of meditating on the *sense* of such and such an expression as of remarking the fold of an immense difficulty: the relationship, so ancient, so traditional, so determinant, between the question of sense and the sensible and that of receptivity in general. The Kantian moment has some privilege here, but even before the *intuitus derivativus* or pure sensibility has been deter-

mined as receptivity, the intuitive or perceptive relation to *intelligible sense* has always included, in finite being in general, an irreducible receptivity. It is true *a fortiori* for sensory intuition or perception. *Dekhomai*, which will determine the relation of *khōra* to everything which is not herself and which she receives (it/she is *pandekhēs*, 51a), plays on a whole gamut of senses and connotations: to receive or accept (a deposit, a salary, a present), to welcome, to gather, or even to expect, for example, the gift of hospitality, to be its addressee, as is here the case for Socrates, in a scene of gift and counter-gift. It is a matter of returning (*antapodidōmi*) the gift of the hospitality of (the) discourses. Socrates says he is ready to receive in exchange the discourses of which he becomes the welcoming, receptive, grateful addressee (20b-c). We are still in a system of gift and debt. When we get on to *khōra* as *pandekhēs*, beyond all anthropomorphy, we shall perhaps glimpse a beyond of the debt.

Socrates is not *khōra*, but he would look a lot like it/her if it/she were someone or something. In any case, he puts himself in its/her place, which is not just a place among others, but perhaps *place itself*, the irreplaceable place. Irreplaceable and unplaceable place from which he receives the word(s) of those before whom he effaces himself but who receive them from him, for it is he who makes them talk like this. And us, too, implacably.

Socrates does not occupy this undiscoverable place, but it is the one from which, in the *Timaeus* and elsewhere, *he answers to his name*. For as *khōra* he must always "be called in the same way." And as it is not certain that Socrates himself, this one here, is someone or something, the play of the proper names becomes more abyssal than ever: What is place? To what and to whom does it give place? What takes place under these names? Who are you, *Khōra*?

III

The permutations, substitutions, displacements don't only touch upon names. The staging unfolds according to an embedding of discourses of a narrative type, reported or not, of which the origin

or the first enunciation appears to be always relayed, appearing to disappear even where it appears. Their mythic dimension is sometimes exposed as such, and the *mise en abyme*, the putting *en abyme* is there given to be reflected without limit. We no longer know whence comes at times the feeling of dizziness, on what edges, up against the inside face of what wall: chaos, chasm, *khōra*.

When they explicitly touch on myth, the propositions of the *Timaeus* all seem ordered by a *double motif*. In its very duplicity, it would constitute the philosopheme of the mytheme such as we just saw it being installed, from Plato to Hegel.

1. On the one hand, myth derives from play. Hence it will not be taken seriously. Thus Plato warns Aristotle, he gets in ahead of the serious objection of Aristotle and makes the same use of the opposition play/seriousness (*paidia/spoudé*), in the name of philosophical seriousness.

2. But on the other hand, in the order of becoming, when one cannot lay claim to a firm and stable *logos*, when one must make do with the probable, then myth is the done thing [*de rigueur*]; it is rigor.

These two motifs are necessarily interwoven, which gives the game its seriousness and the seriousness its play. It's not forbidden and not difficult to discourse (*dialogisasthai*, 59c) on the subject of bodies when one seeks only probability. One can then make do with the form (*idean*) of probable myths (*tōn eikotōn mythōn*). In these moments of recreation, one abandons reasonings on the subject of eternal beings; one seeks what is probable on the subject of becoming. One can then take a pleasure there (*hēdonēn*) without remorse; one can moderately and reasonably enjoy the game (*paidian*, 59d). The *Timaeus* multiplies propositions of this type. The mythic discourse plays with the probable image because the sensory world is itself (an) image. Sensory becoming is an image, a semblance; myth is an image of this image. The demiurge formed the cosmos *in the image* of the eternal paradigm which he contemplates. The *logos* which relates to these images, to these iconic beings, must be of the same nature: merely probable (29b–c–d). We are obliged to accept in this domain the “probable myth” (*ton*

eikota mython) and not to seek any further (29d, see also 44d, 48d, 57d, 72d–e).

If the cosmo-ontologic encyclopedia of the *Timaeus* presents itself as a “probable myth,” a tale ordered by the hierarchized opposition of the sensible and the intelligible, of the image in the course of becoming and of eternal being, how can one inscribe therein or situate therein the discourse on *khōra*? It is indeed inscribed there for a moment, but it also has a bearing on a *place of inscription*, of which it is clearly said that it *exceeds* or *precedes*, in an order that is, moreover, alogical and achronic, anachronistic too, the constitutive oppositions of mytho-logic as such, of mythic discourse and of the discourse *on* myth. On the one hand, by resembling an *oneiric* and *bastard* reasoning, this discourse reminds us of a sort of myth within the myth, of an open abyss in the general myth. But on the other hand, in giving to be thought that which belongs neither to sensory being nor to intelligible being, neither to becoming nor to eternity, the discourse on *khōra* is no longer a discourse on being, it is neither true nor probable and appears thus to be heterogeneous to myth, at least to mytho-logic, to this philosopho-mytheme which orders myth to its philosophical *telos*.

The abyss does not open all at once, at the moment when the general theme of *khōra* receives its name, right in the middle [*milieu*] of the book. It all seems to happen just *as if*—and the *as if* is important to us here—the fracture of this abyss were announced in a muted and subterranean way, preparing and propagating in advance its simulacra and *mises en abyme*: a series of mythic fictions embedded mutually in each other.

Let us consider first, in the staging of the *Timaeus*, from the outset, what Marx calls the “Egyptian model.”⁷ Certain motifs, which we could call *typomorphic*, anticipate there the sequence on the *ekmageion*, this print-bearer, that matter always ready to receive the imprint, or else on the imprint and the seal themselves, the imprinted relief (*ektupōma*)—these are so many tricks for approaching the enigma of *khōra*.

First occurrence: to write for the child. Such as it reaches us, borne

by a series of fictional relays which we shall analyze later, the speech of the old Egyptian priest puts (something) forward in a way prior to all writing. He opposes it to myth, quite simply. You Greeks, he says to Solon, you are like children, for you have no written tradition. After a cataclysm you have to reinvent everything. Here in Egypt everything is written (*panta gegrammena*) since the most ancient times (*ek palaiou*) (23a), and so too is even your own history, the history of you Greeks. You don't know where your present city comes from, for those who survive the frequent catastrophes die in their turn without having been capable of expressing themselves in writing (23c). Deprived of written archives, you have recourse in your genealogies to "childish myths" (23b). Since you have no writing, you need myth.

This exchange is not without some formal paradoxes. As the myth of its origin, the memory of a city is seen to be entrusted not only to a writing but to the writing of the other, to the secretariat of another city. It must thus *be made other* twice over in order to be saved, and it is indeed a question of salvation, of *saving* a memory (23a) by writing on the walls of temples. The living memory must be exiled to the graphic vestiges of *another place*, which is also another city and another political space. But the techno-graphic superiority of the Egyptians is nonetheless subordinated to the service of the Greek *logos*: you Greeks, "you surpassed all men in all sorts of qualities, as befits the scions and the pupils of the gods. Numerous and great were your exploits and those of your city: they are here by writing [*gegrammena*] and are admired" (24d). The memory of a people inspected, appropriated by another people, or even by another culture: a phenomenon in the history of cultures well known as the history of colonization. But the fact appears highly significant here: the memory is deposited, entrusted to a depot on the shores of a people which declares, here at least, its admiration, its dependence, its subordination. The Egyptian is supposed to have appropriated the culture of the Greek masters, who now depend on this *hypomnesis*, on this secretariat's writing, on these monuments: Thoth or Hermes, whichever you prefer. For this discourse of the priest—or Egyptian interpreter—is uttered

here and interpreted in Greek, for the Greeks. Will we ever know who is holding this discourse *on* the dialectic of the master and the slave and on the two memories?

Second occurrence: to receive and perpetuate childhood. So Critias reports a tale of Solon, who himself reports the tale which an Egyptian priest told him on the subject of the *mythological* foundation, precisely, in the memory of the Athenians. Still more precisely: Critias repeats a tale which he had already told the night before and in the course of which he reported a conversation between Solon and Critias, his great-grandfather, a conversation which had been recounted to him when he was a child by his ancestor Critias, who himself had heard from Solon the account of the talk which the latter had had in Egypt with the old priest, the same one who explained to him, in short, why all the Greeks are at the mercy of oral tale-telling, of the oral tradition which, by depriving them of writing, destined them to perpetual childhood! So here is a tale-telling about oral tale-tellings, a chain of oral traditions by which those who are subject to it explain to themselves how someone else, coming from a country of writing, explains to them, orally, why they are doomed to orality. So many Greek children, then, ancestors, children and grandchildren, reflecting amongst themselves but thanks to the mediation of someone other, at once foreigner/stranger and accomplice, superior and inferior, the mythopoetics of oral tale-telling. But once again, this will not make us forget (since it is written!) that all this is written in that place which *receives* everything, in this case, namely, the *Timaeus*, and is therein addressed to the one who, as we do, and before us, *receives* everything, in this theory of receptions—Socrates.

At the end of these tales of tales, after these recountings that are mutually inscribed in each other to the point where one often wonders who is, after all, *holding* this discourse, who is *taking up* speech and who is *receiving* it, the young Critias recounts how he remembers all this. A tale about the possibility of the tale, a proposition about origin, memory, and writing. As I most often do, I quote a current translation (here that of Rivaud, in the Budé

edition [F. M. Cornford's translation, *Plato's Cosmology: The "Timaeus" of Plato* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, n.d.) has been used, and modified at need, in this English version—Tr.], modifying it or mentioning the Greek word only where our context requires it:

Accordingly, as Hermocrates has told you, no sooner had I left yesterday than I set about repeating the story to our friends as I recalled it, and when I got home I recovered pretty well the whole of it by thinking it over at night. How true it is, as they say [τὸ λεγόμενον] that what we learn in childhood [τὰ παίδων μαθήματα] has a wonderful hold on the memory [θαυμαστὸν ἔχει τι μνημεῖον]! I doubt if I could recall everything that I heard yesterday; but I should be surprised [θαυμάσαιμ'] if I have lost any detail of this story told me so long ago. I listened at the time with much childish delight, and the old man was very ready to answer the questions I kept on asking; so it has remained in me, as if painted with wax in indelible letters [ὥστε οἶον ἐγκαύματα ἀνεκπλύτου γραφῆς ἔμμονά μοι γέγονεν]. (26b–c)

In the space of so-called natural, spontaneous, living memory, the originary would be better preserved. Childhood would be more durably inscribed in this wax than the intervening times. Effacement would be the figure for the *middle* [*milieu*; Derrida plays on this word with its suggestion of “half-way place,” “something that is only half place,” *mi-lieu*—Tr.] both for space and for time. It would affect only second or secondary impressions, average or mediated. The originary impression would be ineffaceable, once it has been engraved in the virgin wax.

Now what is *represented* by a virgin wax, a wax that is always virgin, absolutely preceding any possible impression, always older, because atemporal, than everything that seems to affect it in order to take form *in it*, in it which *receives*, nevertheless, and in it which, for the same reason, is always younger, infant even, achronic and anachronistic, so indeterminate that it does not even justify the name and the form of wax? Let us leave this question suspended until the moment when there will be grounds for [οὐ ἰλ' *aura lieu de*] renaming *khōra*. But it was already necessary to show the homology of this schema with the very content of the tales. In

truth, each narrative content—fabulous, fictive, legendary, or mythic, it doesn't matter for the moment—becomes in its turn the content of a different tale. Each tale is thus the *receptacle* of another. There is nothing but receptacles of narrative receptacles, or narrative receptacles of receptacles. Let us not forget that receptacle, place of reception or harboring/lodging (*hypodokhè*), is the most insistent determination (let us not say “essential,” for reasons which must already be obvious) of *khōra*.

But if *khōra* is a receptacle, if it/she gives place to all the stories, ontologic or mythic, that can be recounted on the subject of what she receives and even of what she resembles but which in fact takes place in her, *khōra* herself, so to speak, does not become the object of any *tale*, whether true or fabled. A secret without secret remains forever impenetrable on the subject of it/her [*à son sujet*]. Though it is not a true *logos*, no more is the word on *khōra* a probable myth, either, a story that is reported and in which another story will take place in its turn.

Let us take it up again from farther back. In that fiction which is the *written* ensemble of the dialogue entitled *Timaeus*, someone speaks at first of a dialogue which is said to have taken place “last night” (*khthes*, 17a). This second fiction (F2) has a content, the fictive model of an ideal city (17c), which is described in a narrative mode. A structure of inclusion makes of the *included* fiction, in a sense the theme of the prior fiction, which is its *including* form, its capable container, let us say its receptacle. Socrates, who, as we have noted, figures as a general addressee, capable of understanding everything and therefore of receiving everything (like ourselves, even here), then affects to interrupt this mythopoetic string of events. But this is only in order to relaunch it even more forcefully:

I may now go on to tell you how I feel about the State [*politeia*] we have described. I feel rather like a man who has been looking at some beautiful creatures [*zōa kala*], either represented in painting [*hypo graphés*] or really alive but motionless, and conceives a desire to watch them in motion and actively exercising the powers promised by their

form. That is just what I feel about the State we have described: I should like to hear an account of it putting forth its strength in such contests as a State will engage in against others, going to war in a manner worthy of, and achieving results befitting, the training and education given to its citizens, both in feats of arms and in negotiation with various other States. (19b–c)

Desire of Socrates, of the one who receives everything, once again: to give life, to see life and movement given to a *graphé*, to see a zoography become animated, in other words, a pictorial representation, the description or the dead inscription of the living. To give birth—but this is also war. And therefore death. This desire is also political. How would one animate this representation of the political? How would one set in motion, that is, set walking/marching, a dead representation of the *politeia*? By showing the city in relation to other cities. One will thus describe by words, by discursive painting, a State's movement of going outside of itself. Thanks to a *second graphic fiction*, one will go outside of the first *graphé*. The latter was more dead, less living than the second one to the extent that it described the city in itself, internal to itself, at peace with its own interiority, in its domestic economy. The possibility of war makes the graphic image—the description—of the ideal city go out, not yet into the living and mobile real, but into a better image, a living image of this living and mobile real, while yet showing a functioning that is internal to the test: war. In all the senses of the word, it is a *decisive exposition* of the city.⁸

At the moment when he asks that one should at last get out of this graphic hallucination to see the image of the things themselves in movement, Socrates points at, without denouncing them, poets and sophists: by definition they are incapable of getting out of the simulacrum or the mimetic hallucination in order to describe political reality. Paradoxically, it is to the extent that they are always outside, without a place of their own and with no fixed abode, that these members of the *mimetikon ethnos*, or the *genos tōn sophistōn* or of the *poiētikon genos* remain powerless, incapable of speaking of the political reality inasmuch as it is measured *on the outside*, precisely, in the test of war.

At the same time, affecting to rank himself on the side of this *ethnos* or of this *genos*, Socrates confesses that he too is incapable of going outside, by himself and of himself, of his mythomimeticographic dream in order to give life and movement to the city. (“I know myself well enough to know that I will never be capable of celebrating as one should this city and its citizens [in war, negotiation, and movement]. My incapacity is not surprising; but I have formed the same judgment about the poets,” 19d.)

A supplementary irony: Socrates is not content to side for a moment with the men of the zoographic simulacrum; he declares that he does not despise their *genos* or their *ethnos*. This confers on the play between the text and the theme, between what is done and what is declared, as between the successive inclusions of the “receptacles” for themes and theses, a structure without an indivisible origin.

In this theatre of irony, where the scenes interlock in a series of receptacles without end and without bottom, how can one isolate a thesis or a theme that could be attributed calmly to the “philosophy-of-Plato,” indeed to *philosophy* as the Platonic thing? This would be to misrecognize or violently deny the structure of the textual scene, to regard as resolved all the questions of topology in general, including that of the places of rhetoric, and to think one understood what it means to receive, that is, to understand. It's a little early. As always.

IV

Should one henceforth forbid oneself to speak of the philosophy of Plato, of the ontology of Plato, or even of Platonism? Not at all, and there would undoubtedly be no error of principle in so speaking, merely an inevitable *abstraction*. *Platonism* would mean, in these conditions, the thesis or the theme which one has extracted by artifice, misprision, and abstraction from the text, torn out of the written fiction of “Plato.” Once this abstraction has been supercharged and deployed, it will be extended over all the folds of the text, of its ruses, overdeterminations, and reserves, which the

abstraction will come to cover up and dissimulate. This will be called Platonism or the philosophy of Plato, which is neither arbitrary nor illegitimate, since a certain force of thetic abstraction at work in the heterogeneous text of Plato can recommend one to do so. It works and presents itself precisely under the name of philosophy. If it is not illegitimate and arbitrary to call it as it is called, that is because its arbitrary violence, its abstraction, consists in making the law, up to a point and for a while, in dominating, according to a mode which is precisely all of philosophy, other motifs of thought which are also at work in the text: for example, those which interest us here both by privilege and from another situation—let us say, for brevity, from another *historical* situation, even though history depends most often in its concept on this philosophical heritage. “Platonism” is thus certainly one of the effects of the text signed by Plato, for a long time, and for necessary reasons, the dominant effect, but this effect is always turned back against the text.

It must be possible to analyze this violent reversion. Not that we have at our disposal at a given moment a greater lucidity or new instruments. Prior to this technology or this methodology, a new situation, a new experience, a different *relation* must be possible. I leave these three words (*situation, experience, relation*) without complement in order not to determine them too quickly and in order to announce new questions through this reading of *khōra*. To say, for example, situation or topology of being, experience of *being* or relation *to being*, would perhaps be to set oneself up too quickly in the space opened up by the question of the meaning of being in its Heideggerian type. Now, it will appear later, a propos the Heideggerian interpretation of *khōra*, that our questions are also addressed to certain decisions of Heidegger and to their very horizon, to what forms the horizon of the question of the meaning of being and of its epochs.

The violent reversion of which we have just spoken is always interested and interesting. It is naturally at work in this ensemble without limit which we call here *the text*. In constructing itself, in being posed in its dominant form at a given moment (here that of

the Platonic thesis, philosophy, or ontology), the text is neutralized in it, numbed, self-destructed, or dissimulated: unequally, partially, provisionally. The forces that are thus inhibited continue to maintain a certain disorder, some potential incoherence, and some heterogeneity in the organization of the theses. They introduce parasitism into it, and clandestinity, ventriloquism, and, above all, a general tone of denial, which one can learn to perceive by exercising one's ear or one's eye on it. “Platonism” is not only an example of this movement, the first “in” the whole history of philosophy. It commands it, it commands this *whole* history. A philosophy as such would henceforth always be “Platonic.” Hence the necessity to continue to try to think what takes place in Plato, with Plato, what is shown there, what is hidden, so as to win there or to lose there.

Let us return to the *Timaeus*. At the point we have now reached, how can we recognize the *present* of the tale? Who is *presented* there? Who holds the discourse there? To whom is the speech addressed? Still to Socrates: we have already insisted on this singular dissymmetry: but that remains still too indeterminate, by definition. At this point, then, three instances of textual fiction are mutually included in one another, each as content given form in the receptacle of another: F1, the *Timaeus* itself, a unit(y) that is already difficult to cut up; F2, the conversation of the evening before (*The Republic, Politeia*? This debate is well known); and F3, its present résumé, the description of the ideal *politeia*.

But this is merely to begin (17a–19b). In front of the dead picture [*tableau mort*, a pun on *tableau vivant*—Tr.] Socrates thus demands that one pass on to life, to movement and to reality, in order to speak at last of philosophy and politics, those things that the *mimētikōn ethnos*, the *poiētikōn genos*, and the *tōn sophistōn genos* are, somewhat like Socrates, incapable of. He addresses his interlocutors as a different *genos*, and this apostrophe will make them speak while according to them the necessary right and competence for that. In effacing himself and in rendering up the word, Socrates seems also to induce and to program the discourse of his addressees,

whose listener and receiver he affects to become. Who will speak henceforth through their mouths? Will it be they, Socrates' addressees? Or Socrates, their addressee? The *genos* of those who by nature and by education participate in the two orders, philosophy and politics ("ἅμα ἀμφοτέρων φύσει καὶ τροφῇ μετέχον," 20a), sees itself thus being assigned the word by the one who excludes himself from their *genos* and pretends to belong to the *genos* of the simulators.

So young Critias accepts (F4) to recount a tale which he had already told the night before, on the road, according to old oral traditions (*ek palaias akoēs*, 20d). In the course of this tale, which, the night before, already repeated an old and ill-determined tradition, young Critias recounts another tale (F5), which old Critias, his ancestor, had himself told of a conversation which he (said he) had with Solon, a conversation in the course of which the latter relates (F6) in his turn a conversation which he (said he) had with an Egyptian priest and in the course of which the latter relates (F7) in his turn the origin of Athens: according to Egyptian scriptures.

Now it is in this last tale (the first one in the series of narrative events, the last one to be reported in this telling of tellings) that the reference to Egyptian writing returns. In the course of this first-last tale, the most mythic in its form, it is a matter of reminding the Greeks, who have remained children, of what the childhood of Athens was. Now, Athens is a figuration of a city which, though it did not have the correct usage of writing, nonetheless served as a model to the Egyptian city from which the priest came—hence as an exemplary paradigm in the place from which, in short, he advances this tale. That place, which seems to inspire or produce the tale thus has another place, Athens, as its model.

So it is Athens or its people who, as the apparent addressees or receptacles of the tale, would thus be, according to the priest himself, its utterers, producers, or inspirers, its informers.

In fiction F1—itself written, let us never forget that—there is thus developed a theory or a procession of writing referring, *in writing*, to an origin older than itself (F7).

In the center, between F3 and F4, is a sort of reversal, an apparent

cataposte, and the appearance is that we think we're passing then at last into reality, exiting from the simulacrum. In truth, everything still remains confined in the space of the zoographic fiction. We can gauge the ironic ingenuity that Socrates needs in order to congratulate himself here on passing over to serious things and going beyond the inanimate painting to get on to real events at last. Indeed, he applauds when Critias announces to him that he is getting ready to recount what his grandfather told him Solon had told him on the subject of what an Egyptian priest had confided to him about "the marvelous exploits accomplished by this city" (20e), one of these exploits being "the greatest of all" (*pantōn de hen megiston*). Therefore, we will say (mimicking the argument of Saint Anselm, unless it be that of Gaunilon): an event which must have been *real*, or else it would not have been the greatest of all. That's well said, replies Socrates in his enthusiasm, *eu legeis*. And he goes on to ask at once what is this exploit, this *effective* work (*ergon*) which was not reported only as a fiction, a fable, something said, something one is content to talk about (*ou legomenon*) but also as a high fact really accomplished (*ontōs*) by that city, in former times about which Solon thus heard tell.

We ought, then, to speak at last of a fact (*ergon*) veritably, really accomplished. Now what happens? Let us note first that the essential would come to us from Solon's mouth, himself quoted by two generations of Critias.

Now who is Solon? He is hastily presented as a poet of genius. If political urgency had left him the leisure to devote himself to his genius, he would have surpassed Hesiod or Homer (21a–b). After what Socrates has just said about poets, after the "realist" turn which the text pretended to take, this is a further excess of irony, which destabilizes even more the firmness of the theses and themes. It accentuates the dynamic tension between the thetic effect and the textual fiction, between on the one hand the "philosophy" or the "politics" which is here associated with him—contents of identifiable and transmissible meanings like the identity of a knowledge—and on the other hand a textual drift [*dérive*] which takes the form of a myth, in any event of a "saying" (*legomenon*), whose

origin appears always undefined, pulled back, entrusted to a responsibility that is forever adjourned, without a fixed and determinable subject. From one telling to the next, the author gets farther and farther away. So the mythic saying resembles a discourse without a legitimate father. Orphan or bastard, it is distinguished from the philosophical *logos*, which, as is said in the *Phaedrus*, must have a father to answer for it and about it. This familial schema by which one situates a discourse will be found again at work at the moment of situating, if we can still say this, the place [*lieu*] of any site [*site*], namely *khōra*. On the one hand, *khōra* would be the “receptacle—as it were, the nurse—of any birth” (“πάσης εἶναι γενέσεως ὑποδοχὴν αὐτὴν οἶον τιθήνην,” 49a). As a nurse, she thus drives from that *tertium quid* whose logic commands all that is attributed to it. On the other hand, a little further on, another suitable “comparison” is proposed to us: “And it is convenient to compare [*proseikasai prepei*] the receptacle to a mother, the paradigm to a father, and the intermediary nature between the two to a child [*ekgonon*]” (50d). And yet, to follow this other figure, although it no longer has the place of the nurse but that of the mother, *khōra* does not couple with the father, in other words, with the paradigmatic model. She is a third gender/genus (48e); she does not belong to an oppositional couple, for example, to that which the intelligible paradigm forms with the sensible becoming and which looks rather like a father/son couple. The “mother” is supposedly apart. And since it’s only a figure, a schema, therefore one of these determinations which *khōra* receives, *khōra* is not more of a mother than a nurse, is no more than a woman. This *triton genos* is not a *genos*, first of all because it is a unique individual. She does not belong to the “race of women” (*genos gynaiκōn*).⁹ *Khōra* marks a place apart, the spacing which keeps a dissymmetrical relation to all that which, “in herself,” beside or in addition to herself, seems to make a couple with her. In the couple outside of the couple, this strange mother who gives place without engendering can no longer be considered as an origin. She/it eludes all anthropo-theological schemes, all history, all revelation, and all truth. Preoriginary, *before* and outside of all generation, she no

longer even has the meaning of a past, of a present that is past. *Before* signifies no temporal anteriority. The relation of independence, the nonrelation, looks more like the relation of the interval or the spacing to what is lodged in it to be received in it.

And yet the discourse on *khōra*, conducted by a bastard reasoning without a legitimate father (*logismō tini nothō*; 52b), is inaugurated by a new return [*retour*] to the origin: a new raising of the stakes in the analytic regression. Backward steps [*retours en arrière*] give to the whole of the *Timaeus* its rhythm. Its proper time is articulated by movements which resume from even farther back the things already dealt with farther back. Thus:

If, then, we are really [ὄντως] to tell how the world was born, we must bring in also the Errant Cause [καὶ τὸ τῆς πλανωμένης εἶδος αἰτίας] and in what manner its nature is to cause motion. So we must return upon our steps [πάλιν] thus, and take up again, for these phenomena, an appropriate new beginning [προσήκουσαν ἑτέραν ἀρχήν] and start once more upon our present theme from the beginning, as we did upon the theme of our earlier discourse [νῦν οὕτω περὶ τούτων πάλιν ἀρκτέον ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς] (48a–b).

We will not begin again at the beginning. We will not go back, as is stated immediately after, to first principles or elements of all things (*stoikheia tou pantos*). We must go further onward, take up again everything that we were able to consider hitherto as the origin, go back behind and below [*en deçà*] the elementary principles, that is, behind and below the opposition of the paradigm and its copy. And when, in order to do this, it is announced that recourse will be made only to probable affirmations (“τὴν τῶν εἰκότων λόγων δύνανμιν,” or again “τὸ τῶν εἰκότων δόγμα,” 48d–e), it is in order also to propose to “divide further” the principle (48e): “Now let us divide this new beginning more amply than our first. We then distinguished two forms [δύο εἶδη] of being; now, we must point out a third [τρίτον ἄλλο γένος ἡμῖν δηλωτέον].”

Let us take things up again from farther back, which can be translated thus: let us go back behind and below the assured discourse of philosophy, which proceeds by oppositions of princi-

ple and counts on the origin as on a *normal couple*. We must go back toward a preorigin which deprives us of this assurance and requires at the same time an impure philosophical discourse, threatened, bastard, hybrid. These traits are not negative. They do not discredit a discourse which would simply be interior to philosophy, for if it is admittedly not true, merely probable, it still tells what is necessary on the subject of necessity. The strange difficulty of this whole text lies indeed in the distinction between these two modalities: the true and the necessary. The bold stroke consists here in going back behind and below the origin, or also the birth, toward a *necessity* which is neither generative nor engendered and which carries philosophy, "precedes" (prior to the time that passes or the eternal time before history) and "receives" the effect, here the image of oppositions (intelligible and sensible): philosophy. This necessity (*khōra* is its sur-name) seems so virginal that it does not even have the figure of a virgin any longer.

The discourse on *khōra* thus plays for philosophy a role analogous to the role which *khōra* "herself" plays for that which philosophy speaks of, namely, the cosmos formed or given form according to the paradigm. Nevertheless, it is from this cosmos that the proper—but necessarily inadequate—figures will be taken for describing *khōra*: receptacle, imprint-bearer, mother, or nurse. These figures are not even true figures. Philosophy cannot speak directly, whether in the mode of vigilance or of truth (true or probable), about what these figures approach. The dream is between the two, neither one nor the other. Philosophy cannot speak philosophically of that which looks like its "mother," its "nurse," its "receptacle," or its "imprint-bearer." As such, it speaks only of the father and the son, as if the father engendered it all on his own.

Once again, a homology or analogy that is at least formal: in order to think *khōra*, it is necessary to go back to a beginning that is older than the beginning, namely, the birth of the cosmos, just as the origin of the Athenians must be recalled to them from beyond their own memory. In that which is formal about it, precisely, the analogy is declared: a concern for architectural, textual (histological) and even organic composition is presented as such a little

further on. It *recalls* the organicist motif of the *Phaedrus*: a well-composed *logos* must look like a living body. Timaeus: "Now that, like the builders [*tektosin*], we have the materials [*hylè*: material, wood, raw material, a word that Plato never used to qualify *khōra*, let that be said in passing to announce the problem posed by the Aristotelian interpretation of *khōra* as matter—JD] ready sorted to our hands, namely, the kinds of cause [necessary cause, divine cause—JD] we have distinguished, which are to be combined in the fabric [*synyphanthènai*] of reasoning [*logos*] which remains for us to do. Let us go back, then, once more, briefly, to the beginning [*palin ep'arkhèn*], and rapidly trace the steps that led us to the point from which we have now reached the same position once more; and then attempt to crown our story with a completion fitting all that has gone before [*teleutèn tōn mythō kephalèn*]" (69a).

TRANSLATED BY IAN MC LEOD

Notes

Notes

Passions

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: I would like to thank Leslie Hill, Peter Larkin, and Will McNeill for their considerable help in uprooting errors and suggesting numerous felicitous phrasings and construals. Without their help this translation would have betrayed considerably greater linguistic eccentricity.

1. What does *the narrator* suggest on the subject of the analysis and the analyst in *The Purloined Letter*, but especially in the first pages of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*? To give the greatest sharpness to the *unrulebound* concept of the analyst, he suggests that the analyst would have to proceed beyond calculation, even without rules: "Yet to calculate is not in itself to analyze. . . . But it is in matters beyond the limits of mere rules that the skill of the analyst is evinced. He makes, *in silence* [my emphasis—JD], a host of observations and inferences. So, perhaps do his companions. . . . It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the truly imaginative never otherwise than analytic." See Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales* (New York: Library of America), pp. 388–89. In *The Purloined Letter* (*ibid.*, pp. 691–92), Dupin quotes Chamfort and denounces as "folly" the *convention* by which mathematical reason would be "*the reason par excellence*," and as a perfectly *French* "scientific trickery" the application of the term "analysis" only to "algebraic operations." Note already, since this will be our theme, that these exchanges between the narrator and Dupin take place *in secret*, in a "secret place." Like them, with them, we are *au secret* [isolated, shut

away—Tr.), as we say in French, and “in the secret,” which does not mean that we know anything. It is at least and precisely what the narrator, in a form written and published by Poe, *tells* (us): twice the secret is *told* (even the address supplied: “at an obscure library in the rue Montmartre,” then “in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St Germain,” then “in his little back library, or book closet, No 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St Germain” [ibid., p. 680]) without for all that the same secret ever being penetrated at all. And this is because it is all a matter of trace, both in the trace of discourse, and in the discourse of inscription, of transcription or, if one wishes to follow convention, of writing, both in the writing of literature, and in the literature of fiction, both in the fiction of narration, and placed in the mouth of a narrator, to whom, for all these reasons, nothing requires us to give credit. That a secret can be announced without being revealed, or, alternatively, that the secret is manifest, this is what there is [*il y a*] (*es gibt*) and will always remain to translate, even here, etc.

2. “I was deeply interested in the little family history which he detailed to me with all the candor which a Frenchman indulges whenever mere self is the theme” (Edgar Allan Poe, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, in *Poetry and Tales*, p. 400). “Je fus profondément intéressé par sa petite histoire de famille, qu’il me raconta minutieusement avec cette candeur et cet abandon—ce sans-*façon* du *moi*—qui est le propre de tout Français quand il parle de ses propres affaires” (Poe, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, trans. Charles Baudelaire in his *Oeuvres complètes: Histoires extraordinaires* [Paris: Louis Conard, 1932], p. 6). Is it enough to speak French, to have learned to speak French, to be or to have become a French citizen to appropriate for oneself, to appropriate oneself to, what is, according to Baudelaire’s translation, so strictly personal—a translation more appropriating than appropriate—“le propre de tout Français” (the property of all French people)?

3. One ought not to have, *On devrait ne pas devoir*, even for reasons of economy, to dispense with here [*faire ici l’économie de*] a slow, indirect, uncertain analysis of that which, in *certain* determined linguistic and cultural regions [*aires*] (*certain*, hence not all nor all equally), would root duty in debt. Even before getting involved in that, we cannot detach ourselves from a feeling, one whose linguistic or cultural conditioning is difficult to assess. It is doubtless more than a feeling (in the most common sense of the term, that of the sensibility or the “pathological” of which Kant spoke), but we keenly *feel* this paradox: a gesture remains

a-moral (it falls short of giving affirmation, unlimited, incalculable, or uncalculating, without any possible reappropriation, against which one must measure the ethicity or the morality of ethics), if it was accomplished out of *duty* in the sense of “duty of restitution,” out of a duty which would come down to the discharge of a debt, out of such a duty as having to return what has been lent or borrowed. Pure morality must exceed all calculation, conscious or unconscious, of restitution or reappropriation. This feeling *tells* us, perhaps without *dictating* anything, that we must go beyond duty, or at least beyond *duty as debt*: duty owes nothing, it must owe nothing, it ought at any rate to owe nothing [*le devoir ne doit rien, il doit ne rien devoir, il devrait en tous cas ne rien devoir*]. But is there a duty without debt? How are we to understand, how translate a *saying* which tells us that a duty ought to prescribe nothing [*un devoir doit ne rien devoir*] in order to be or to do what it should be or should do, namely, a duty, its duty? Here a discrete and silent break with culture and language announces itself, and it is, it would be, *this* duty.

But if debt, *the economy of debt*, continues to haunt all duty, then would we still say that duty insists on being carried beyond duty? And that between these two duties no common measure should resist the gentle but *intractable* [*intraitable*] imperative of the former? Now, who will ever show that this haunting memory of debt can or should ever cease to disturb the feeling of duty? Should not this disquiet predispose us indefinitely against the good conscience? Does it not dictate to us the first or the last duty? It is here that conscience and etymologico-semantic knowledge are indispensable, even if as such they must not have the last word. We must be content *here* with indicative references (*here* provides the rule: a place, a certain limited number of pages, a certain time, a *deadline* [English in original—Tr.], yes, time and space ruled by a mysterious ceremony). One would have to cross-reference between them, and try, if possible, to link them up in a network. One very accidental trajectory would follow the movements back and forth [*aller et retours*: also “return tickets”; “outgoing and returns” would perhaps capture a more financial idiom—Tr.], for example, between the determination of duty in *The Critique of Practical Reason* or *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, the determination of debt and of culpability in the Kantian metaphysics of law, the meditation of *Being and Time* on the “attestation” (*Bezeugung*), call (*Ruf*), and on originary *Schuldigsein* (being-guilty), and (for example) the second essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* on “guilt” (*Schuld*), “bad conscience” (*Schlechtesgewissen*) and the

like (*und Verwandtes*), in which Nietzsche begins (section 2) by recalling "the long history of the origin of *responsibility*" ("die lange Geschichte von der Herkunft der Verantwortlichkeit") and asks (section 4) whether "these genealogists of morality had ever had the faintest suspicion that, for example, the central moral concept of guilt [*zum Beispiel jener moralische Hauptbegriff "Schuld"*] draws its origin from the very material concept of 'debt' [*Schulden*]." In the same movement, Nietzsche recalls (section 6) the cruel aspect (*Grausamkeit*) of "old Kant's" categorical imperative. Freud would not be far away, the Freud of *Totem and Taboo* on the religions of the father and the religions of the son, on the origin of remorse and of the moral conscience, on the sacrifices and the puttings to death that they require, on the accession of the confraternal law (let us say, of a *certain concept* of democracy).

Accidental back and forth movements [*aller et retours*—see above, Tr.], comings and goings, then, between all these already canonical texts and meditations of a type apparently different but in fact very close—and closer to our time, for example, the most recent proposals of Emile Benveniste (*Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer [Miami: University of Miami Press, 1973], ch. 16, "Lending, Borrowing and Debt") or of Charles Malamoud (*Lien de vie, noeud mortel: Les Représentations de la dette en Chine, au Japon et dans le monde indien* [Paris: EHESS, 1988]). Two quotations will explain better, if more obliquely, the direction which I ought to pursue here, but cannot. One from Benveniste (pp. 148–49), the other from Malamoud (pp. 7, 8, 13, 14). Each quotation finds ample expansion, of course, in the work of these two authors.

Benveniste: "The sense of the Latin *debeo* 'owe' seems to result from the composition of the term *de + habeo*, a compound which is not open to doubt since the Latin archaic perfect is still *dehibui* (for instance, in Plautus). What does *debeo* mean? The current interpretation is 'to have something (which one keeps) from somebody': this is very simple, perhaps too much so, because a difficulty presents itself immediately: the construction with the dative is inexplicable, *debere alicui* alicui.

"In Latin, contrary to what it might seem, *debere* does not constitute the proper expression for 'to owe' in the sense of 'to have a debt.' The technical and legal designation of the 'debt' is *aes alienum* in the expressions 'to have debts, to settle a debt, in prison for debt.' *Debere* in the sense of 'to have debts' is rare, it is only a derived usage.

"The sense of *debere* is different, although it is also translated by 'to

owe.' One can 'owe' something without having borrowed it: for instance, one 'owes' rent for a house, although this does not involve the return of a sum borrowed. Because of its formation and construction, *debeo* should be interpreted according to the value which pertains to the prefix *de*, to wit: 'taken, withdrawn from'; hence 'to hold [*habere*] something which has been taken from [*de*] somebody.'

"This literal interpretation corresponds to an actual use: *debeo* is used in circumstances in which one has to give back something belonging to another and which one keeps without having literally 'borrowed' it: *debere* is to detain something taken from the belongings or rights of others. *Debere* is used, for instance, 'to owe the troops their pay' in speaking of a chief, or the provisioning of a town with corn. The obligation to give results from the fact that one holds what belongs to another. That is why *debeo* in the early period is not the proper term for *debt*.

"On the other hand, there is a close relation between 'debt,' 'loan,' and 'borrowing,' which is called *mutua pecunia*: *mutuam pecuniam solvere* 'pay a debt.' The adjective *mutuus* defines the relation which characterizes the loan. It has a clear formation and etymology. Although the verb *mutuo* has not taken on this technical sense, the connection with *mutuus* is certain. We may also cite *munus* and so link up with an extensive family of Indo-European words which, with various suffixes, denote the notion of 'reciprocity.' . . . The adjective *mutuus* indicates either 'loan' or 'borrowing,' according to the way in which the expression is qualified. It always has to do with money [*pecunia*] paid back exactly in the amount that was received."

Malamoud: "In the modern European languages to which we have just alluded, there appears to be a direct relationship between the forms of the verb *devoir*, which deal with obligation properly speaking or with obligation as probability, and those which mean 'being in debt [*dette*].' This relationship appears at one time in the fact that 'duty [*devoir*]' used absolutely is the equivalent of 'being indebted, being in debt,' with, when appropriate, a substantive complement indicating what debt consists of ('I owe [*dois*] a hundred francs'); at other times, in the very name of debt, which, in a more or less perceptible fashion for the speaker who is not an etymologist, derives from the verb *devoir* [should, ought, must—Tr.]: the debt, is what is *dû* [owed, due], what is carried into 'debit', the French term *dette* [debt], derives from the Latin *debitum*, which itself, past participle of *debere*, *devoir*, is used in the sense of 'debt.'

"In debt are combined duty and fault [*faute*; also lack]: a connection for which the history of the Germanic languages provides evidence: the German *Schuld* means both 'debt' and 'fault' [*faute*], and *schuldig* means both 'guilty' and 'debtor.' But *Schuld* derives from the Gothic *skuld*, which itself is connected with a verb *skulan* 'to have an obligation', 'to be in debt' (it translates, in the Gospel, the Greek verb *opheilō*, which has these two acceptations) and also 'to be at fault.' On the other hand, from the same Germanic radical, **skal*, but with another treatment of the initial letter, derives the German verb *sollen* 'should (do)' [*devoir (faire)*] and the English *shall*, which, although enjoying a specialist usage today in the expression of the future, meant, at a much older stage of the language, 'duty' in the full sense.

"Groups of this type, more or less dense, more or less articulated, appear in a great number of Indo-European languages. They do not always delineate the same configurations, and each particular situation would demand a careful study. . . .

"The linguistic analyses of Jacqueline Pigeot for Japanese, of Viviane Alleton for Chinese, show, with all the requisite nuances, that the sphere of moral debt is clearly distinct from that of material debt, and that neither is connected with the morphemes corresponding to the word *devoir* [ought/should] as an auxiliary of obligation or of probability. The configurations that we notice in the languages that we have mentioned cannot be detected either in Japanese or Chinese. It is not quite the same for Sanskrit: there is no word *devoir* in Sanskrit, and there is no etymological connection between the different names for moral obligation and the name of debt. On the other hand, debt, named by a term which refers just as well to economic debt (including that which results from borrowing money with interest) as it does to moral debt, is presented, in Brahmanism, as the prototype and the principle by which debts are explained. . . .

"However, the notion of *créance* [belief, credence, credit, also debt, claim!—Tr.] can also lend itself to polysemic games: one only has to recall that in French *croissance* [belief] and *créance* are originally one and the same word, that in German *Gläubiger* means both *croissant* [believer] and *créancier* [creditor]. But the connection between *faire crédit* [to give credit] and *croire* [believe] is less fecund, ideologically, than that which binds *devoir* [duty/ought] to *être en dette* [being in debt]. . . .

"That man, according to Brahmanism, is born 'as debt', that this debt is the mark of his mortal condition, does not mean that human nature is

determined by original sin. As the Sanskrit word *rna*, *dette*, can sometimes be colored by *faute* [fault, lack], the German philologists of the last century, influenced perhaps by the ambiguity of the word *Schuld*, as both 'debt' and 'fault', suggested making *rna* derive from the same Indo-European radical as Latin: *reus*, 'accused', 'culpable.' The etymology is erroneous, as would be a similarity between fundamental debt and original sin. Debt is neither the sign nor the consequence of a fall, nor, moreover, of any such occurrence. It does not result from a contract, but directly places man in the condition or the status of debtor. This status itself is made concrete and is diversified in a series of duties or of partial debts, which are invoked, in the Hindu laws, to justify the rules of positive law which organize the administration of material debt. . . .

"The most concrete example, and if we may say so, the best illustration of this 'connection and drawing together [*colligence*] of heaven and earth' which would be debt, was provided for us by Hou Ching-lang, who shows us excellently how man buys his destiny by pouring into the celestial treasury the bad money of a true sacrifice."

4. On this "problematic" of the semantic configuration of *cap*, of *capital*, of the *capital*, of *front* (in the double sense of "front"—for example, a military front or *faire front* [to face someone] as in *affrontement* [face, brave, tackle], or *confrontation* [confrontation]—and the prominence of the face, the *forehead* [English in original—Tr.]), of the frontal and of the frontier, I would refer the reader particularly to my *L'Autre Cap*, followed by *La Démocratie ajournée* (Paris: Minuit, 1991); in English, *The Other Heading*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

5. The child is the problem. As always. And the problem is always childhood. Not that I am distinguishing here, as we used to do in my student days, and in the tradition of Gabriel Marcel, between *problem* and *mystery*. The mystery would rather depend here on a certain problematicity of the child. Later I will try perhaps to distinguish the *secret* from both the *mystery* and the *problem*. In the Sophoclean tragedy which bears his name, Philoctetus makes this supplementary use of the word *problema*: the substitute, the deputy, the prosthesis, whatever or whoever one *puts forward* to protect oneself while concealing oneself, whatever or whoever comes in the place or in the name of the other, delegated or diverted responsibility. It is at the moment when, abandoned by his friends after a serpent bite had left a fetid wound on his body, Philoctetus still keeps the secret of the Heracleian bow, an invincible bow from which

they will temporarily separate him. Right now, they are in need of both the weapon and the secret. Acting always indirectly, after many detours and stratagems, without ever facing him [*faire front*], Ulysses gives the order that the bow be seized. Philoctetus accuses, protests, or complains. He is astonished at the *offerings*, he no longer recognizes a child and bewails his hands: “Hands of mine [*O kheires*], quarry of Odysseus’ hunting, now suffer your lack of the loved bowstring. You who have never had a healthy thought or noble, you Odysseus, how you have hunted me, how you have stolen upon me with this boy [Neoptolemus] as your shield [*labôn problema sautou paidia*]; because I did not know him that is no mate to you but worthy of me . . . now to my sorrow you have me bound hand and foot, intend to take me away, away from this shore on which you cast me once without friends or comrades or city, a dead man among the living. . . . To you all I have long been dead. God-hated wretch, how is it that now I am not lame and foul-smelling? How can you burn your sacrifice to God if I sail with you? Pour your libations? This was your excuse for casting me away” (1008–35; trans. David Grene in David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, eds., *The Complete Greek Tragedies, Sophocles II* [New York: Washington Square Press, 1967]).

6. I refer to the related treatment of the secret, the *stricture*, the Passion, and the Eucharist in *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974), pp. 60–61; in English, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 50–51.

7. I have made use of the word *oblique* very often, too often and for a long time. I no longer remember where, nor in what context. In *Margins of Philosophy*, certainly (the *loxōs* of “Tympan”), and in *Glas*, in any case. Very recently, and in a very insistent way, in “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” (in “Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice,” *Cardozo Law Review* 11, nos. 5–6 [1990]: 928, 934, 944–47; reprinted in Drucilla Cornell, Mark Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson, eds., *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* [New York: Routledge, 1992], and in *Du droit à la Philosophie* [Paris: Galilée, 1990], esp. pp. 71ff). On the oblique inclination of *clinamen*, cf. “Mes chances: Au rendezvous de quelques stéréophonies épïcuriennes,” in *Confrontation* (Paris, 1988) (previously published in English in *Taking Chances* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984]).

8. Without asking his approval, I think I may quote certain fragments of the letter which he wrote to me on 28 May 1991. I leave it to the reader to decide how far this letter (including the entry for “oblique” from the

Oxford English Dictionary, which did not fail to accompany the consignment) will have prescribed the logic and the lexicon of this text. Perhaps I had already, again, uttered the word *oblique* in the course of an earlier conversation to which David Wood was thus referring. Fragments to share out, therefore, in the course of the ceremony, and David ventures to speak of “passion,” as he ventures elsewhere to distinguish (perhaps to associate, *aut . . . aut* or *vel*, and without doubt to call up Shakespeare and the ghost of Marc Antony), praise and murder, praising to the skies and burying, “to praise” and “to bury.” (“Its remit,” he says of the book, “is neither to praise nor to bury Derrida, but . . .” but what, exactly?)

Here, then, is the fragment of the letter of 28 May 1991, and his “germ of a passion”: “Dear Jacques, As you will see, I have taken you at your/my word, using my phrase ‘an oblique offering’ to describe what you agreed would be the only appropriate mode of entry into this volume. It is hardly suprising, perhaps, that the *most* oblique entry into this collection of already oblique offerings would be the most vertical and traditional auto-critique, or confession, or levelling with the reader (see e.g. S. Kierkegaard’s ‘A First and Last Declaration’ at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: ‘Formally and for the sake of regularity I acknowledge herewith (what in fact hardly anyone can be interested in *knowing*) that I am the author, as people would call it of . . .’ . . . This (and the whole sequence of thematizations of the interleavings of texts that you have offered us) suggests to me that the problem of an oblique entry might not simply be a problem, but a stimulus, the germ of a passion. Obviously, I would be equally happy (?) with something not yet published in English that would *function* in this text in an appropriate way: as a problematizing (or indeed reinscription) of the very idea of critique, as a displacement of the presumed subject of the collection (‘Derrida’), as something that will *faire trembler* [French in the original, an allusion to Derrida’s use of this expression in *De la grammatologie* (1967)—Tr.] the ‘on’ of writing *on* Derrida.”

The allusive reference to Kierkegaard is very important to me here, because it names the great paradoxical thinker of the imitation of Jesus Christ (or of Socrates)—of the Passion, of attestation, and of the secret.

9. If elsewhere it has often forced itself upon me, the French word *intraitable* is doubtless difficult to translate. In a word, it can mean [*dire*] at one and the same time (1) what cannot be *traité* [treated, dealt with] (this is the impossible, or the inaccessible, it is also the theme of an impossible discourse: one would not know how to *thematize* it or to

formalize it, one would not know how to treat it [*en traïter*]); and (2) something whose imperative rigor or implacable law allows for no mercy and remains impassive before the required sacrifice (for example, the severity of duty or the categorical imperative). Which is as much as to say that the word *intraïtable* is itself *intraïtable* (for example, untranslatable)—and this is why I said that it had forced itself on me.

10. Other titles for this aporetic paradox: mimesis, mimicry, imitation. Morality, decision, responsibility, etc. require that one act without rules, and hence without example: that one never imitates. Mime, ritual, identifying conformity have no place in morality. And yet, the simple respect for the law, as (well as) for the other, this first duty, is it not to accept this iterability or this iterative identification which contaminates the pure singularity and untranslatability of the idiomatic secret? Is it by chance that, touching on this logic, Kant quotes, but *against the example*, the very example of *passion*, of a moment of the sacrificial passion of Christ, who provides the best example of what it is necessary not to do, namely, to offer oneself as an example. Because God alone—the best and only possible example?—remains, in Kant's eyes, invisibly secret and must himself put his exemplary value to the test of moral reason, that is, to a pure law whose concept conforms to no example. The reference to Mark 10: 17, and to Luke 18: 18, lies behind the passage in Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, which comes not long after the condemnation of suicide ("to preserve one's life is a duty"; "sein Leben Zu erhalten, ist Pflicht" [Berlin: de Gruyter]), 4: 397; trans. Lewis White Beck [New York: Bobs-Merrill, 1959], p. 14; hereafter, page numbers of the English translation will be in italic; it is, in short, what one would like to reply to someone who invites you, directly or indirectly, to commit suicide or to sacrifice your own life): "Nor could one give poorer counsel to morality than to attempt to derive it from examples [*von Beispielen*]. For each example of morality which is exhibited to me must itself have been previously worthy to serve as an original example, i.e., as a model [*ob es auch würdig sei, zum ursprünglichen Beispiele, d.i. zum Muster, zu dienen*]. By no means could it authoritatively furnish [offer, *an die Hand zu geben*] the concept [*den Begriff*] of morality. Even the Holy One of the Gospel must be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before He is recognized as such: even He says of Himself, 'Why call ye me [whom you see] good? None is good [the archetype of the good, *das Urbild des Guten*] except God only [whom you do not see].' But whence do we have the concept of God as the highest good? Solely from the idea

of moral perfection which reason formulates a priori and which it inseparably connects with the concept of a free will. Imitation has no place in moral matters, and examples serve only for encouragement [*nur zur Aufmunterung*]. That is, they put beyond question the practicability of what the law commands, and they make visible that which the practical rule expresses more generally. But they can never justify our guiding ourselves by examples and our setting aside their true original [*ihr wahres Original*] which lies in reason" (4: 408–9; 25). Elsewhere, in connection with the imperative of morality (*Imperatif der Sittlichkeit*): "But it must not be overlooked that it cannot be shown by any example [*durch kein Beispiel*] [i.e., it cannot be empirically shown] whether or not there is [*ob es gebe*] such an imperative" (4: 419; 37). This is a most radical claim: no experience can assure us of the "there is" at this point. God himself cannot therefore serve as an example, and the concept of God as sovereign Good is an idea of reason. It remains that the discourse and the action (the passion) of Christ demonstrates *in an exemplary way*, singularly, par excellence, the inadequacy of the example, the secret of divine invisibility and the sovereignty of reason; and the encouragement, the stimulation, the exhortation, the instruction (*Aufmunterung*) is indispensable for all finite, that is to say, sensory beings, and for all intuitive singularity. The example is the only visibility of the invisible. There is no legislator that can be figured [*figurabel*] outside reason. Put another way, there are only "figures" of the legislator, never any legislator *proprio sensu*, in particular any legislator to sacrifice (Moses, Christ, etc.). But no finite being will ever provide an economy of these figures, nor of mimesis in general, nor of anything that iterability contaminates. And passion is always a matter of example.

On the motives which act in secret (*insgeheim*), duty, sacrifice, example, and respect, it is necessary above all to return, of course, to the third chapter of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* ("The Motives of Pure Practical Reason").

11. *Apophasis*: [1657] "a kind of an Irony, whereby we deny that we say or do that which we especially say or do" (*Oxford English Dictionary*)—Tr.

12. *Geheimnis, geheim*. It is precisely in respect of duty that Kant often evokes the necessity of penetrating behind secret motives (*hinter die geheimen Triebfedern*), to see if there might not be a secret impulse of self-love (*kein geheimer Antrieb der Selbstliebe*) behind the greatest and most moral sacrifice (*Aufopferung*), the sacrifice that one believes can be

achieved properly by duty (*eigentlich aus Pflicht*), by pure duty (*aus reiner Pflicht*), when one accomplishes it in a manner solely in conformity to duty (*pflichtmässig*). This distinction is equivalent in Kant's eyes to that which opposes the letter (*Buchstabe*) to the spirit (*Geist*), or legality (*Legalität*) to moral legislation (*Gesetz-mässigkeit*) (cf. further the beginning of ch. 3 of the *Critique of Practical Reason*). But if, as Kant then recognized, it is "absolutely impossible to establish by experience with complete certainty a single case" in the world in which one could eliminate the suspicion that there is a secret (that is to say, that which would allow us to distinguish between "out of duty" and "conforming to duty"), then the secret no more offers us the prospect of some interpretation [*déchiffrement*], even infinite, than it allows us to hope for a rigorous decontamination between "in conformity with duty" and "out of pure duty." Nor to finish with mimesis, whose principle of iterability will always connect the constitutive mimesis of one (the "in conformity with duty," *pflichtmässig*) to the nonmimesis constitutive of the other ("out of pure duty," *aus reiner Pflicht*), as nonduty to duty, nondebt to debt, nonresponsibility to responsibility, nonresponse to response. The decontamination is impossible not by virtue of some phenomenal or empirical limit, even if indelible, but precisely because this limit is not empirical; its possibility is linked *structurally* to the possibility of the "out of pure duty." Abolish the possibility of the simulacrum and of external repetition, and you abolish the possibility both of the law and of duty themselves, that is, of their recurrence. Impurity is principally inherent in the purity of duty, i.e., its iterability. Flouting all possible oppositions: *there* would be the secret [*là serait le secret*]. The secret of passion, the passion of the secret. To this secret that nothing could confine, as Kant would wish, within the order of "pathological" sensibility, no sacrifice will ever disclose its precise meaning. Because there is none.

13. In this paragraph I have translated *histoire* mostly as *story* (though *history* was usually also possible) except in those cases where *history* was clearly more appropriate—Tr.

14. I attempt elsewhere this "de-monstration" of the secret in connection with Baudelaire's *La Fausse Monnaie* (in *Donner le temps*, 1: *La Fausse Monnaie*, [Paris: Galilée, 1991]; *Given Time. I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992]). As for the *exemplary* secret of literature, allow me to add this note before concluding. Something of literature will have begun when it is not possible to decide whether, when I speak of something, I am indeed speaking of

something (of the thing itself, this one, for itself) or if I am giving an example, an example of something or an example of the fact that I can speak of something, of my way of speaking of something, of the possibility of speaking in general of something in general, or again of writing these words, etc. For example, suppose I say "I," that I write in the first person or that I write a text, as they say "autobiographically." No one will be able seriously to contradict me if I claim (or hint by ellipsis, without thematizing it) that I am not writing an "autobiographical" text but a text *on* autobiography of which this very text is an example. No one will seriously be able to contradict me if I say (or hint, etc.) that I am not writing about myself but on "I," on any I at all, or on the I in general, by giving an example: I am only an example, or I am exemplary. I am speaking of something ("I") to give an example of something (an "I") or of someone who speaks of something. And I give an example of an example. What I have just said about speaking on some subject does not require utterance [*la parole*], i.e., a discursive statement and its written transcription. It is already valid for every trace in general, whether it is preverbal, for example, for a mute deictic, the gesture or play of an animal. Because if there is a dissociation between myself [*moi*] and "I" [*moi*], between the reference to me and the reference to (an) "I" through the example of my "I," this dissociation, which could only *resemble* a difference between "use" and "mention" [both in English in original—Tr.], is still a pragmatic difference and not properly linguistic or discursive. It has not necessarily to be marked *in* words. The same words, the same grammar, can satisfy two functions. Simultaneously or successively. No more than in irony, and other similar things, does the difference between the two functions or the two values need to be thematized (sometimes it *must not*—and that is the secret), neither explained earnestly, nor even marked by quotation marks, visible or invisible, or other nonverbal indices. That is because literature can all the time play economically, elliptically, ironically, with these marks and nonmarks, and thus with the exemplarity of everything that it says and does, because reading it is at the same time an endless interpretation, a pleasure [*jouissance*] and an immeasurable frustration: it can always mean, teach, convey, more than it does, or at any rate something else. But I have said, literature is only exemplary of what happens everywhere, each time that there is some trace (or grace, i.e., each time that there is something rather than nothing, each time that *there is* (*es gibt*)) and each time that it gives [*ça donne*] without return, without reason, freely, and if

there is what there is then, i.e., *testimony, bearing witness*) and even before every *speech act* [English in original—Tr.] in the strict sense. The “strict” sense is, moreover, always extended by the structure of exemplarity. It is beginning from these undecidabilities or from these aporias, across them, that one has a chance of being able to accede to the rigorous possibility of *testimony*, if there is such a thing: to its problematic and to the experience of it.

I am always speaking about myself, without speaking about myself. This is why one cannot count the guests who speak or who squeeze around the table. Are they twelve or thirteen, or more or less? Each can be redoubled ad infinitum.

As this last note is a note on the first notes to which it could respond, let me add here: it is owing to this structure of exemplarity that each one can say: I can speak of myself without further ado [*sans façon*: also directly, without ceremony], the secret remains intact, my politeness unblemished, my reserve unbreached, my modesty more jealous than ever, I am responding without responding (to the invitation, to my name, to the word or the call [*appel*] which says “I”), you will never know whether I am speaking about myself, about this very self, or about another self, about any self or about the self in general, whether these statements concern [*relèvent de*] philosophy, literature, history, law, or any other identifiable institution. Not that these institutions can ever be assimilated (it has been said often enough, and who could contradict it?), but the distinctions to which they lend themselves become rigorous and reliable, statutory and stabilizable (through a long history, certainly) only so as to master, order, arrest this turbulence, to be able to make decisions, to *be able* tout court. It is of this, and for this, that literature (among other things) is “exemplary”: it always is, says, does something other, something other than itself, an itself which moreover is only that, something other than itself. For example or par excellence: philosophy.

Saufle nom

1. “Ben jenen Mystikern gibt es einige Stellen, die außerordentlich kühn sind, voll von schwierigen Metaphern und beinahe zur Gottlosigkeit hinneigend, so wie ich Gleiches bisweilen in den deutschen—im übrigen schönen—Gedichten eines gewissen Mannes bemerkt habe, der sich Johannes Angelus Silesius nennt” (Leibniz, letter to Paccius, 28 January 1695, in L. Dutens, ed., *Leibnitii opera* [Geneva, 1768]: 6:56).

Cited by Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), p. 68; *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 35 [translation modified].

2. Aurelius Augustine, *Confessionum*, ed. Martin Skutella (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1981); *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: New American Library, 1963), pp. 243, 212, 257, 210 (translation modified), 207, 212, 257 respectively—Trans.

3. Angelus Silesius (Johannes Scheffler), *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, ed. Louise Gnädinger (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1984); *The Cherubic Wanderer*, trans. Maria Shradly (New York: Paulist, 1986). The translation by Shradly, which is a selection, does not contain all the maxims cited and has been modified in the translations cited. Concerning the editions he uses, Derrida states: “*La Rose est sans pourquoi* [extracts from *Pélerin Chérubinique*, trans. Roger Munier (Paris: Arfuyen, 1988)]. I nearly always modify the translations and reconstitute the original transcription in Old German, as it is found published in the complete edition of *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, by H. Plard [Paris: Aubier, 1946, bilingual ed.]. Some of the maxims cited refer to this edition and are not found in the extracts proposed by Roger Munier.” In this English translation I have followed Gnädinger’s critical edition and indicated the one significant difference of versions in brackets in maxim 4: 21—Trans.

4. Mark Taylor, “nO nOt nO,” in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 176 and 186.

5. See, notably, J. Derrida, “Psyché: Invention de l’autre,” in *Psyché: Invention de l’autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), notably p. 59; “Psyche: Invention of the Other,” trans. Catherine Porter, in Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, eds., *Reading de Man Reading* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 60.

6. Numerous references to this subject are gathered in J. Derrida, *Donner le temps*, 1. *La Fausse Monnaie* (Paris: Galilée, 1991); *Given Time*, 1. *Counterfeit Money*, Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

7. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 16th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), §50, p. 250; *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 294. On this Heideggerian theme, cf. *Aporias* (Paris: Galilée, 1994); *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

8. "Comment ne pas parler," in *Psyché*.
9. For example, see *ibid.*, pp. 168 and 187.
10. See J. Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship," trans. Gabriel Motzkin, *The Journal of Philosophy* 85, 11 (November 1988): 632–44. That is the very schematic résumé of ongoing research on the history and the major or canonic traits of the concept of friendship.
11. Pp. 174 and 175.
12. Cf. "Nombre de oui," in *Psyché*; "A Number of Yes," trans. Brian Holmes, *Qui Parle* 2, no. 2 (1988): 120–33.
13. On Plotinus, see above, p. 70. On Heidegger and Lacan, cf. *Donner le temps*, pp. 12–13, n. 1.

Khōra

NOTE: The first version of this text appeared in *Poikilia: Etudes offertes à Jean-Pierre Vernant* (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1987).

1. We hope to come back to this point, one of the most sensitive ones of our problematic, often and at length, in particular by sketching a history and a typology of the interpretations of *khōra*, or rather, when we shall try to describe the law of their paradoxes or of their aporias. Let us note for the moment only that in these two works—which, in the French language and separated by an interval of seventy years, propose a synoptic table and conclude with a general interpretation of all the past interpretations—the meta-linguistic or meta-interpretative recourse to these values of metaphor, of comparison, or of image is never questioned for what it is. No question on interpretive rhetoric is posed, in particular, no question on what it necessarily borrows from a certain Platonic tradition (metaphor is a sensory detour for acceding to an intelligible meaning), which would render it little suited to provide a metalanguage for the interpretation of Plato and in particular of a text as strange as some passages of the *Timaeus* on *khōra*. Rivaud speaks thus of a "crowd of comparisons and metaphors whose variety is surprising" (p. 296), of "metaphors" and of "images" brought back to an "idea," that of the "in what" (p. 298), even if, against Zeller, he refuses to "see only metaphors in Plato's formulations" (p. 308). ("La Théorie de la *khōra* et la cosmogonie du *Timée*," in *Le Problème du devenir et la notion de matière*, 1905, ch. 5).

Luc Brisson in turn speaks of "the metaphor of the dream used by Plato to illustrate his description" (*Le même et l'autre dans la structure*

ontologique au Timée de Platon, 1974, p. 197, cf. also pp. 206, 207). He even systematizes operative recourse to the concept of metaphor and proposes classifying all the said metaphors at the moment of determining what he calls "the ontological nature of the 'spatial milieu' (we shall come back later to this title and to the project it describes): 'This [determining the "ontological nature" of the "spatial milieu"] poses a considerable problem, for Plato only speaks of the spatial milieu by using a totally metaphorical language, which gets away from any technical quality. That is why we shall first analyze two sequences of images: one of them bearing on sexual relations, and the other on artisanal activity" (p. 208, cf. also pp. 211, 212, 214, 217, 222).

Of course, it is not a question here of criticizing the use of the words *metaphor*, *comparison*, or *image*. It is often inevitable, and for reasons which we shall try to explain here. It will sometimes happen that we too will have recourse to them. But there is a point, it seems, where the relevance of this rhetorical code meets a limit and must be questioned as such, must become a theme and cease to be merely operative. It is precisely the point where the concepts of this rhetoric appear to be constructed on the basis of "Platonic" oppositions (intelligible/sensible, being as *eidos*/image, etc.), oppositions from which *khōra* precisely escapes. The apparent multiplicity of metaphors (or also of mythemes in general) signifies in these places not only that the proper meaning can only become intelligible via these detours, but that the opposition between the proper and the figurative, without losing all value, encounters here a limit.

2. Heidegger does this in particular in a brief passage, in fact a parenthesis, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Let us do no more than quote here the translation, and we shall come back to it at length in the last part of this work: "(The reference to the passage in *Timaeus* [50d–e] is intended not only to clarify the link between the *paremphinon* and the *on*, between also-appearing [*des Miterscheinens*] and being as permanence, but at the same time to suggest that the transformation of the barely apprehended essence of place [*topos*; *Ortes*] and of *khōra* into a "space" [*Raum*] defined by extension [*Ausdehnung*] was prepared [*vorbereitet*] by the Platonic philosophy, i.e. in the interpretation of being as *idea*. Might *khōra* not mean: that which abstracts itself from every particular, that which withdraws, and in such a way precisely admits and 'makes place' [*Platz macht*] for something else?)" (Pp. 50–51; English trans. by Ralph Manheim, Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Meta-*

physics [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961], p. 55, t.m.) Among all the questions posed for us by this text and its context, the most serious will no doubt bear upon all the decisions implied by this “is prepared” (*vorbereitet*).

3. *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Einleitung*, 8, 2b, *Verhältnis der Philosophie zur Religion, Werke* 18 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp), p. 103.

4. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Les Ruses de l'intelligence, la métis des Grecs*, p. 66. Gaia is evoked by the Egyptian priest of the *Timaeus*, in a discourse to which we shall return. It is at the moment when he recognizes the greater antiquity of the city of Athens, which, however, has only a mythic memory and whose written archive is located as if on deposit in Egypt (23d–e). Cf. also Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 1: 350: “Chaos, *khaos, khaine*, signifies the yawning [*das Gähnen*], the gaping, that which is split in two [*Auseinanderklaffende*]. We understand *khaos* in close connection with an original interpretation of the essence of the *aletheia* inasmuch as it is the abyss which opens (cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*). The representation of Chaos, in Nietzsche, has the function of preventing a ‘humanization’ [*Vermenschung*] of existence in its totality. The ‘humanization’ includes as much the moral explanation of the world on the basis of the resolution of a Creator, as its technical explanation on the basis of the activity of a great artisan [*Handwerker*] (the Demiurge).”

5. “An interpretation decisive [*massgebende Deutung*] for Western thought is that given by Plato. He says that between beings and Being there is [*bestehe*] the *chorismos*; the *khōra* is the locus, the site, the place [*Ort*]. Plato means to say: beings and Being are in different places. Particular beings and Being are differently placed [*sind verschieden geortet*]. Thus when Plato gives thought to the *Chorismas*, to the different location of beings and Being, he is asking for the totally different place [*nach dem ganz anderen Ort*] of Being, as against the place of beings.” (*Was heisst Denken?* [Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1954], pp. 174–75, English translation by J. Glenn Gray, Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* [New York: Harper & Row, 1968], p. 227, t.m.) Later we shall return at length to this passage and its context.

6. This is one of the motifs which link this essay to the one I wrote on *Geschlecht* in Heidegger. Cf. the introduction to that essay, “*Geschlecht, différence sexuelle, différence ontologique*,” in *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987).

7. *Capital*, fourth section, 14, 5. In another context, that of a seminar

held at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1970 (Theory of Philosophical Discourse: The Conditions of Inscription of the Text of Political Philosophy—the Example of Materialism), these reflections on the *Timaeus* intersected with other questions which here remain in the background and to which I shall return elsewhere. Other texts were studied, in particular those of Marx and Hegel, for the question of their relation to the politics of Plato in general, or of the division of labor, or of myth, or of rhetoric, or of matter, etc.

8. The possibility of war breaks into the ideality, in the ideal description of the ideal city, in the very space of this fiction or of this representation. The vein of this problematic, which we cannot follow here, seems to be among the richest. It might lead us in particular toward an original form of fiction which is *On the Social Contract*. According to Rousseau, the state of war between States cannot give rise to any pure, that is purely civil, law like the one which must reign inside the State. Even if it has its original law, the law of the people (*genos*, race, people, ethnic group), war makes us come back to a sort of specific savagery. It brings the social contract out of itself. By this suspension, it also shows the limits of the social contract: it throws a certain light on the frontiers of the social contract itself and of the theoretical or fabulous discourse which describes it. Thus it is at the end of the book of this ideal fiction that Rousseau in a few lines gets on to the problems which he is not going to deal with. We would have to analyze closely this conclusion and these considerations on war, the singular relation which they maintain with *the inside* of the social contract at the moment where they open onto its outside. It is both a thematic relation and a formal relation, a problem of composition: Rousseau seems to rub his eyes so as to perceive the outside of the fable or of the ideal genesis. He opens his eyes, but he closes the book: “Chap. X, *Conclusion*. After having set down the true principles of political law and tried to found the State on this basis, it remains to support it by its external relations: which would include the law of nations, commerce, the law of war and conquest, public law, leagues, negotiations, treaties, etc. But all that forms a new object too vast for my short sight: I should have fixed it ever closer to me.”

9. Cf. Nicole Loraux, “Sur la race des femmes,” in *Les Enfants d'Athéna* (Paris: 1981, pp. 75ff). In the context which we are here delimiting, see also, in the preceding chapter, “L'Autochtonie: Une Topique athénienne,” that which concerns Athens in particular: “nurse (*trophos*), fatherland, and mother at the same time” (*Panegyric* of Isocrates) and the

"rival and complementary poles, *logos* and *mythos*" which "share the theatrical stage, in mutual confrontation but also in complicity" (pp. 67–72). As for the race of men (*genos anthropōn*), the Egyptian priest of the *Timaeus* assigns "places" to it: these are the places propitious for memory, for the conservation of archives, for writing and for tradition, these temperate *zones* which provide protection from destruction by excesses of heat and cold (22e–23a).

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