

Note

Certainly there are always books published in every country and in every language, some of which are taken as critical works or works of reflection, while others bear the title of novel, and others call themselves poems. It is probable that such designations will endure, just as there will still be books a long while after the concept of book is exhausted. Still, this remark must be made: since Mallarmé (reducing the latter to a name and the name to a reference point), what has tended to render such distinctions sterile is that by way of them, and more important than they are, there has come to light the experience of something one continues to call, but with a renewed seriousness, and moreover in quotation marks, "literature." Essays, novels, poems seem only to be there, and to be written in order to allow the labor of literature (now considered as a singular force or a position of sovereignty) to accomplish itself, and through this labor to allow formulation of the question "What would be at stake in the fact that something like art or literature exists?" This question is extremely pressing, and historically pressing (I refer here to certain texts of *The Space of Literature* and *Le Livre à venir*, as well as to the pages entitled "Literature and the Right to Death"), but it is a question that a secular tradition of aestheticism has concealed, and continues to conceal.

I will not say we have gotten past this moment: this would have scarcely any meaning. Whatever we do, whatever we write—and the magnificent surrealist experience has shown this—literature takes possession of it, and we are still in the civilization of the book. Yet literary work and research—let us keep this qualifying adjective—contribute to an unsettling of the principles and the truths that are sheltered by literature. In correlation with certain possibilities offered by knowledge, by discourse, and by political struggle, this labor has caused to emerge, although not for the first time (inasmuch as repetition, the eternal going over again, is its very origin) but rather in a more insistent manner and as affirmed in these works, the question of language; then, through the question of language,

the question that perhaps overturns it and comes together in a word that today is apparently and easily accepted, even rendered ordinary, but that only a few dozen years ago in its neutral simplicity was considered nearly unreasonable, even the most unreasonable: *writing*, "this mad game of writing."

Writing, the exigency of writing: no longer the writing that has always (through a necessity in no way avoidable) been in the service of the speech or thought that is called idealist (that is to say, moralizing), but rather the writing that through its own slowly liberated force (the aleatory force of absence) seems to devote itself solely to itself as something that remains without identity, and little by little brings forth possibilities that are entirely other: an anonymous, distracted, deferred, and dispersed way of being in relation, by which everything is brought into question—and first of all the idea of God, of the Self, of the Subject, then of Truth and the One, then finally the idea of the Book and the Work—so that this writing (understood in its enigmatic rigor), far from having the Book as its goal, rather signals its end: a writing that could be said to be outside discourse, outside language.

Yet another word of elucidation or obfuscation. When I speak of "the end of the book," or better "the absence of the book," I do not mean to allude to developments in the audiovisual means of communication with which so many experts are concerned. If one ceased publishing books in favor of communication by voice, image, or machine, this would in no way change the reality of what is called the "book"; on the contrary, language, like speech, would thereby affirm all the more its predominance and its certitude of a possible truth. In other words, the Book always indicates an order that submits to *unity*, a system of notions in which are affirmed the primacy of speech over writing, of thought over language, and the promise of a communication that would one day be immediate and transparent.

Now it may be that writing requires the abandonment of all these principles, that is to say, the end and also the coming to completion of everything that guarantees our culture—not so that we might in idyllic fashion turn back, but rather so we might go beyond, that is, to the limit, in order to attempt to break the circle, the circle of circles: the *totality* of the concepts that founds history, that develops in history, and whose development history is. Writing, in this sense—in this direction in which it is not possible to maintain oneself alone, or even in the name of all without the tentative advances, the lapses, the turns and detours whose trace the texts here brought together bear (and their interest, I believe, lies in this)—supposes a radical change of epoch: interruption, death itself—or, to speak hyperbolically, "the end of history." Writing in this way passes through the advent of communism, recognized as the ultimate affirmation—communism being still always beyond communism. Writing thus becomes a terrible responsibility. Invisibly, writing is called upon to undo the discourse in which, however unhappy we believe ourselves to be, we who have it at our disposal remain comfortably installed. From this point of view writing is the greatest violence, for it transgresses the law, every law, and also its own.

M.B.

± ± *His feeling, each time he enters and when he studies the robust and courteous, already aged man who tells him to enter, rising and opening the door for him, is that the conversation began long ago.*

A little later, he becomes aware that this conversation will be the last. Hence the kind of benevolence that emerges in their talk. "Have we not always been benevolent?"—"Always. Yet we are to be asked to bring proof of a more perfect benevolence, unknown to us as yet: a benevolence that would not be limited to ourselves."—"Nor that is content with extending itself to everyone, but maintains itself in face of the event in regard to which benevolence would not be fitting."—"The event that we promised to evoke today."

As always, one of the two awaits from the other a confirmation that, in truth, does not come, not because accord would be lacking, but because it was given in advance: this is the condition of their conversation.

± ± *He tells him to enter, he stays near the door, he is weary, and it is also a weary man who greets him; the weariness common to both of them does not bring them together.*

"As if weariness were to hold up to us the preeminent form of truth, the one we have pursued without pause all our lives, but that we necessarily miss on the day it offers itself, precisely because we are too weary."

± ± *They take seats, separated by a table, turned not toward one another, but opening, around the table that separates them, an interval large enough that an-*