

A WITNESS'S GESTURE

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I was sitting in the small east-facing room where I had gone to sleep every night as a small child, thinking to myself how best to write. With all of the memories flitting before my eyes, my head hurt, and I really did not know what to do, or how to proceed. The small book I had been reading hurt my eyes, though I could see bright sunlight through the thin yellowing sheet that I had hung over the window to block out the feeling of being observed.

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Declaration

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Abstract

At least since Aristotle, Western culture has been dominated by a certain figure of the witness, the subject who sees and knows. The witness of seeing and knowing reckons only with what is useful and productive, deals only with what can be apprehended as matter of fact. This study seeks to challenge the dominance of this figure, if the modern witness is indeed to be understood in terms of a subject that presumes to know what it sees and hears.

In order to uncover new interpretations of the witness in the present, I turn to the past to investigate figures of the witness found in ancient Greece in Homer's *Iliad*, in classical Athens in the speeches of the Attic orators, in the plays of Aristophanes, in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, and, if this alternative witness can be thought of poetically, in more recent examples of poets, writers and artists. In all these figures I find possibilities to rethink the dominant formulation of the witness constituted in the historical process of modernity. This alternative witness suggests a way of wandering or erring, a kind of 'unknowing' that occurs when one does not confine oneself to the merely actual and apparent, without reference to facts, perhaps without reference even to meaning, but remains open to possibilities, gives thought to what is hidden and unseen, to what is inapparent. Its gesture begins with close reading, with writing, with photographing, which waken one at the threshold of a mysterious dream.

The research is developed through writing, through photography, which seek to invoke this gesture, seek to call into being movement toward action rather than identification with the actual, matters of facts of one's life, one's identities, activities, successes and failures, but where life and form of life are neither separate nor coincident, and the recognition that between them lies both a mystery and a way of keeping them in touch.

I am told that the photography consists in making a work. With a view to a proper way, the practice of vision is thus already put to work and the photograph appears as something foreign to me. I am told that the practice of language, writing, is theory. The writer, photographer, is thus bound, constricted, to look at the world as an observer who sees and knows. But this observer is a modern witness, the witness of matters of fact, a laborious way of being that leads only from possibility to action. Pushed down to the bottom is another, alternative, mysterious witness that is already always taking place. How to write, how to photograph beyond putting-to-work, how to think practice and theory differently, how to think an ethics emancipated from the concept of action? How to write the unsayable, how to show the unseeable?

Contribution to knowledge

In this thesis I offer possible alternatives to the witness of matters of fact, the power of which can be paused with a gesture, which marks the beginning of a poetic discourse. Through writing, through photography, this thesis explores the unsaid, the unseen, the inapparent, which can also be said to constitute something like 'non-knowledge'. Not the witness who knows, but the witness who 'unknows'. The thesis then, in its subject matter and in its form, does not aim to produce or contribute knowledge, but rather aims to remain ever in contemplation of the witness's gesture. It is thus never identification with the actual, the matters of facts of a life, events, experiences, activities; rather it offers to the reader, to the viewer, possibilities of a form where life and form of life are neither separate nor coincident, and the recognition that between them lies a terrain of unknowing, a way of holding life and form of life in touch, a terrain on which to think, perhaps even to dream.

Note

This PhD by practice consists of ‘thesis writing’, ‘writing practice’ and photographic practice.

Photographic practice

Each part has a body, or series, of photographic work by the side of it.

Thesis writing

Writing in the Serif Adobe Garamond font should be considered as ‘thesis’ writing.

Writing practice

Writing in the Sans Serif Alte Hass Grotesk font should be thought of as ‘practice’ writing.

Contents

i) Copyright.	5
ii) Declaration.	6
iii) Abstract.	7
iv) Contribution to knowledge.	9
v) Note.	11
vi) Contents.	12
vii) Acknowledgements.	17

<u>A</u>	<u>Introduction</u>	21
	1) Introduction.	23
	2) Method.	29
	⌘ Returning.	35
	⌘ A student.	37
	⌘ A path in the woods.	39
	⌘ The top of the hill.	40
	3) A beginning.	41
	⌘ Waking up.	45
	⌘ Undoing.	46
	⌘ Obscurity.	47
	⌘ Sitting in a tree.	49
	⌘ The Young Man.	54
	4) Endnotes Part A.	55
	⌘ Archaeology of the walk.	59
<u>B</u>	<u>Ancient Greece</u>	63
	1 a) An ancient witness I.	65
	⌘ Getting near dawn.	67
	b) Transliteration Latin script.	68
	c) Alexander Pope's translation.	61
	⌘ Belly-like.	71
	d) The student's translation.	73
	⌘ Meaning is never exhausted.	74
	⌘ Reading for possibilities.	77
	⌘ It is now quite light.	79
	⌘ A breeze.	83

e) The Iatmul.	88
⌘ Searching.	90
⌘ A man of no substance.	91
⌘ The world eats lunch.	93
⌘ What if you slept...	95
2) An ancient witness II.	97
⌘ Names everywhere.	100
⌘ Thunder outside.	101
⌘ The student writes.	106
⌘ The poetry of poetry.	108
⌘ Slowly light strengthens.	109
⌘ Phainetai moi.	110
⌘ Wet foot.	115
⌘ A poetic problem.	116
3) An ancient witness III.	125
⌘ The researcher.	131
⌘ The newspaper basement.	133
⌘ The missing photograph.	135
4) Endnotes Part B.	137
⌘ A whisper.	147
<u>C</u> Attic Athens	153
1 a) The activity of witness.	155
b) The character of witness.	167
2) The witness on stage.	173
⌘ A small dog.	183
⌘ A poet-witness.	184
⌘ A tree.	185

⌘ Becoming bee.	186
⌘ The limit.	188
⌘ In the dark.	193
⌘ No end.	194
⌘ At the <i>bema</i> .	195
⌘ An event of calling.	199
⌘ The red castle.	200
⌘ The castle proper.	201
⌘ The phone rings.	202
⌘ An interruption.	203
⌘ How to write breath.	204
⌘ The sigh.	205
⌘ Separation.	206
⌘ Dead in its tracks.	207
⌘ Swimming in the river.	208
⌘ Muddy paws.	210
3) The voice of the witness.	211
⌘ Feet in water.	214
⌘ Ball in play.	216
⌘ Physis 1.	226
⌘ Physis 2.	227
⌘ Joy tree.	228
4) Endnotes Part C.	229
⌘ Liar Liar.	247
⌘ To chant.	251

<u>D</u>	<u>A modern witness</u>	253
1)	A witness in gusto.	255
	⌘ Emptiness.	259
	⌘ Place Saint Sulpice.	260
	⌘ A confession.	271
	⌘ The Kaiserpanorama.	272
	⌘ Restlessness.	277
2)	The gesture of the witness.	278
	⌘ Shame.	283
	⌘ Surrounded by books.	287
	⌘ I.	289
3)	Conclusion.	295
4)	Endnotes Part D.	301
	I heard a Fly buzz — when I died.	303
<u>E</u>	<u>Appendices</u>	305
1)	⌘ Snippets.	307
2)	Etymology of the word ‘witness’.	313
3)	⌘ Epilogue.	317
4)	Endnotes Part E.	321
<u>F</u>	<u>Bibliography</u>	323
	⌘ The Ballad of Miss Adventure	343

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For my father
Rolf H. Lass.

















A Introduction

Introduction

1. What does 'witness' mean? It is already difficult to think the concept of a witness if one wants to steer clear of presupposing its nature. "I saw it with my own eyes." I was there, you weren't. My being there is proof of my knowing the facts of the matter. I present as obvious my witness of events because I was present. There is no need of further discussion. Yet everywhere a witness is being summoned and called, in interviews, cross-examination, CCTV footage, facial recognition, biometric capture. Even to write presupposes becoming a witness of one's own life, to step back from life in order to think. But this is only because today the present means 'now' as what presents itself (now) to the subject as an object, and witnessing means saying what is true and false.

By saying only what is true and false, the witness is forced to play a role, to show itself before others in a certain way. These notions (of truth and falsity) lie at the heart of Western culture.¹ But by the same stroke there is something in the witness that is off-centre, indirect, hidden. Not what is true or false, of the fact or the event, but the way in which something is known and understood.

The witness I propose in this study belongs to this forgotten undercurrent in Western culture, a different kind of witness that runs counter

to the dominant one. The method to discover this alternative current I borrow from the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, and it consists in tracing the trajectory of study back to a point where something remains obscure and unthematized. A witness is then only thinkable in terms of the unthematized structures from which it emerges, and which involve a journey from the past to the present, which, according to the method, is also a looking back to the past.

To take this journey, I limit myself to some reflections on three moments that seem to me particularly significant. It will be necessary to travel to ancient Greece, to the time of Homer and the epic poems the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, that is the sixth century before Christ. I investigate two concepts from the time of the *Iliad*: *histor* and *dike*, that I hope may shed light on the witness today. What is known as the witness today — derived from ideas of law, justice, religion, and their origins, which are the result of a long, historical process — was unknown to the Greeks. What is the meaning of the witness — and more generally, of life — at this moment?

I then travel to classical Greece at the time of Aristotle, of the playwright Aristophanes, and of Attic orators such as Demosthenes and Isocrates, that is around the fourth century before Christ. Here a witness is called to take the *bema*, the witness stand, at a time when speech is being written down. Yet what I discover is that the witness's words are missing from the manuscript tradition of the speeches of the orators, and that the witness in Aristophanes' play *Wasps* is subject to ridicule.

Aristotle, too, had something to say on the witness. He makes a distinction between the witness of fact and the witness of character, which I suggest shows an increasing dominance of the former in Attic Greece. This dominance of fact is present today as the activity of the witness that is seen to lie in its evidential value. However, I also believe that one should also say, more precisely, that unlike today the Greeks did not value the activity of the witness

in any special way. In the eyes of the Greeks, the important productive activity lay in the orator's speech and the witness was merely a supplementary (or technical) requirement, yet a necessity nonetheless. For this reason, the Greeks could not hold the witness in high esteem because the witness's value lay not in its words, but with the speech of the orator who called the witness to the *bema*. The witness for the Greeks is a constitutively incomplete being who never possesses its own end. The problem can therefore be regarded as metaphysical, and not technical. The Greek regard (or lack of) for the witness, and for jurors and trials in Attic Athens in general, is the theme of Aristophanes' *Wasps*.

Thus my suggestion is that at least since this time Western culture has been dominated by the witness of fact and a prominence of concepts of knowledge and of action. Yet the witness of character is the shadow cast over action and a study of Aristotle leads to a critique of the dominance of action by challenging the basis through which any pure 'cognitive' moment in language, and in vision, can be sustained. This opens the possibility of articulating knowledge that is not dominated by this cognitive moment, a kind of 'non-knowledge'.

And to accompany this idea of non-knowledge there is also the idea that the self can be negated. Mysticism works in this way, but at the last moment ends in negation (God is what He is not). However, the poet John Keats suggested in a letter to a friend that this non-knowledge is a capability. The poet, he writes, has no subjectivity, his 'I' is reduced to nothing. But this, according to Keats, is precisely the right condition for writing poetry (by which I read all art), a kind of thinking as a form of enthusiasm or 'gusto', an activity that is a capability and not a passivity. This generates a set of ideas on the poet's contemplation that is not a willing into words. The poet is not someone who has the potential to create, which, through an act of will he decides to put to work. Rather, he is a living being who gains experience of himself and

constitutes himself as a form of life. This is the only way in which the poet-witness maintains himself in relation with a practice, and seeks to constitute his life as a form of life, as the life of a poet, a writer, an artist, a photographer; in which, as in its every form of life, nothing but its joy is in question.

Thus my study of the witness is developed through writing that is both form and practice, and photography, that both seek to enact this 'condition'. However, the intention is not to separate 'theory' from 'practice', but to suggest an encounter between the two that opens possibilities. Both the writing and the photography seek to recall the possibilities of living well without a rule, making thought practical rather than disembodied, logical or propositional (i.e. in 'non-assertorial' language), as study and as research. I am wary of relying too heavily on the witness of fact and event, ways of finding out, for a given class of statements, and assertions and propositions, of whether something is true or false. In other words, I try to avoid the presupposition that the witness, and its language and vision, i.e. the very ground the modern witness stands on, is neutral and transparent. The origin of the witness is incorporated into the very experience of language (and vision) and in order to grasp this, I need to grasp a way of thinking and writing (and photographing) that also reflects the theme of my study. In my conclusion I attempt to show a possibility of this different kind of witness, a poet-witness, an artist-witness, and how such a form of witness can develop in a way of living, informed by an equivalent approach to writing and photography.

2. In order to do this I propose a figure: a student. What kind of student is he? He often wanders, not in desperation or despair, or even cynicism, but with joy, walking across fields with his dog, and he writes and photographs without any aim other than to look closely, to listen, where nothing is really happening other than the babbling of a small stream, the leaves that rustle on

the black poplar tree in the wind, the crows in the small wood nearby that shout and scream to no-one in particular, or the silent river flowing south. And in wandering he discovers that perhaps to create is to find a path or a way that is not reducible to categories that define him, is not an image coloured by his own times. The kind of happiness that could arouse envy exists only in the air that he has breathed, among people he could have talked to, in the ways he could have walked, on the grass he has trodden, in the river that he has swum in, the stream where he got his feet wet, in the small dog that he loves.

By deriving his vision of happiness from the world in which he finds himself, doing what he loves, photographing and writing and walking with his dog, he finds a way of life that is not strategic in the sense of having a goal, nor simply reducible to current politics. Rather it is one that opens up potentially new ways of thinking, a new form of life that is necessary to save him and resembles nothing so much as the life he lives today, or the politics he sees today, which thus distinguishes this student from those who exist behind their work, who take photographs solely for gallery walls, or write solely to be published. Whether it be the artist posting images online while ‘making work’, who thus separates performance or conceptual activity from what was once accustomed to be ‘the work’, the ‘being-work’ that resides in themselves, where nothing is produced beyond the performance of a being-work that is always yet presupposed.

Instead, the student’s practice becomes a self-practice, not detached from his life in any way, but rather the student is this practice wherever he finds himself, whether it be reading aloud in informal gatherings, showing a photograph to a neighbour over a shared fence, or even a moment standing with others in front of a communal wall for showing work outside the photographic darkroom. The student forgets that he is making ‘work’ altogether, until something reminds him that he is seeing, or hearing, or

touching, tasting, smelling. In realising what it is that he is already unwittingly involved in, he re-engages with life. It seems to me that this student is someone who has made himself into witness's experimental ground.

3. My concept of 'witness' deals with a word whose meaning has been displaced, in the course of time, from the seeable and knowable as bound by a proximity to the body, to a place where knowledge separates from life. This transformation implies that the passage of the witness does not so much concern an unchanging concept, as it does a migration. My study is a starting point only, a shift in focus that can help to shed light on what it is to witness. From this shift my hope is that 'witness' can stand out, all by itself, independent of any context that might ground it, and to avoid the idea that a witness somehow captures truth, that speech is neutral and independent of action, and that a witness only has a meaning as a detached observer, or in a juridical cross-examination.

Method

In reality one can only achieve an aesthetic enjoyment of life as a result of humble ethical experience. (Franz Kafka in conversation.)

1. In his short essay 'Philosophical Archaeology' the philosopher Giorgio Agamben sets out to answer his critics by defining his methodology. This method, he writes, and which he terms a 'philosophical archaeology', is to turn to certain seemingly foundational moments in the history of Western culture that organise human society over long periods of time, in order to charge the present with a power. What is this power? An answer might be found in an earlier essay where he refers to Walter Benjamin's theory of quotation. The power of quotations, Agamben writes in this essay (quoting Benjamin), "arise not from their ability to transmit the past and allow the reader to relive it, but, on the contrary, from their capacity to 'make a clean sweep, to expel it from the context, to destroy.'" He goes on to say that "alienating by force a fragment of the past from its historical context, the quotation at once makes it lose its character of authentic testimony and invest it with an alienating power that constitutes its unmistakable aggressive force." In the quotation, he suggests, the author is removed from a work, which alienates both the quotation and the reader from a shared cultural context, yet a new power is generated in the process that can expose and destroy older power structures. The strategy, in other words, is to use this power to understand the past, in order to reveal that the conceptual foundations of a shared culture, in this case Western culture, are without substance. These foundational structures are historically contingent, they do not emerge from obscure, transcendent, and so ungraspable origins, but are quite simply made up. The concealing of their made-up-ness, their historicity, a transcendental source of (current) power is established to which

only certain people (those who hold the current power) can make legitimate claim. Which is not to say that the structures are in themselves unjust. They are neither legitimate nor illegitimate in their founding moment. Since the origin of authority, the foundation or ground, cannot by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves without a ground. The concepts have long ceased to make sense, naturalised to such a degree that they are considered simply as given. Their ground rests on the groundless, their authority rests on forgetting that they are made up.

2. While in prison, the theorist Antonio Gramsci suggested that “one should not care a hoot about the solemn task of advancing ... criticism or adding one’s own little stone to the edifice of commentaries and elucidations.” Instead, what was important, he thought, was a “living philology,” a close reading and study in order to work on a concept, deconstruct it, and detail it until it loses its originary status. Philosophical archaeology is similar in its aims. The method seeks to expose the division between the legitimate and illegitimate through a philology or close reading of texts, and to suggest possibilities of how the division could be overcome or destroyed. Not to will to repeat the past in order to consent to what has been, transforming the ‘so it was’ into ‘so I willed it to be,’ but to will to let it go, to free itself from it, in order to access what was never willed in the living present. Only this way can the past be revealed for what it is: contemporary with the lived present. Human life can then be lived, suggests Agamben, and all that is unlived in life that is still contained in every present can be revealed, or at least glimpsed. This unlived remains inexperienced within every experience, a form of life where what is remembered and what is forgotten cannot be separated, and even to glimpse it is to begin to assume life in its potentiality (not as action, not as will), rather than separating the human being from what he or she can do. For this reason,

Agamben writes, “contemporaneity, co-presence with one’s own present, insofar as it entails the experience of an unlived and the memory of forgetting, is rare and difficult; for this reason, archaeology, going back to this side of memory and forgetting, constitutes the only path of access to the present.”²

3. What is at stake in this method is the intimate link between thinking and living, between witnessing the world and living it. ‘Philosophical archaeology’ can lead to a glimpse of a way or form of life where they might coincide. This new relation points to a life which is no longer determined by any foundation or principal authority. Only through study (“living philology”) can the division that is presupposed between the potentiality of human action (the ‘I can’) and its actualisation (the ‘I will’) be realised. What is decisive is to come at it the right way through study, for hidden within study is a possibility of a different kind of knowing, one that is worked out in terms of the things themselves rather than ideas of the things. Of course, this search for meaning can itself be historically situated, which is why it is important to work out the fore-structures, assumptions and stories that form the backdrop to thinking. They cannot be examined in themselves, but studying allows one to question and recognise their ‘power.’ The philosopher Martin Heidegger called these fore-structures the *Ge-stell*. *Ge-stell*, he said, means “humans are beset [*gestellt*], claimed, and challenged by a power that manifests itself in the essence of technology. It is precisely in humans’ experience of being forcibly beset [*Gestelltseins*] by something that is not they and that they do not control, that the possibility exists of realising that Being needs humans.”³

The experience of a power that human beings do not control, yet controls them, can open, for Heidegger, a way of being that is receptive to many forms and modes of being, and thus to particularising the possibilities of Being. To study, for example, is the possibility of bringing to fore the context

in which something emerges and the various uses that have been made of it in history. By tracing the etymology of a term, for example, it may be possible to uncover the possibilities of other forms of thinking and living, and to realise that language is only a tool for the current epoch. A poetics of etymology can work to distance a word from the lights of the epoch. As the word carries the concepts of the century, it also carries the old and the new. The present word is nothing other than these un-lived past elements within it. Likewise, the present is nothing other than the un-lived in everything that is lived. To be contemporary means to return the un-lived to the present, where one has never been. The method of a philosophical archaeology, which is nothing other than an historical *a priori*, thus suggests a possible form of a new life, an opening to human possibilities. This form of life has never happened, it is always actually happening, it is a return to a present where the human has never been (the un-lived), which is to say that it is always a possible future, or hope for change, a yet-to-come.

4. Searching for moments when language and vision break down, when a gap opens between sound and meaning, between sign and meaning, can prove helpful. In this gap language and vision can no longer communicate meaning, semiotics is freed from semantics, from the necessity of making words and images mean, such that they remain without definition. A new form of life (or a form of life that is realised) could be one that registers the inability to bear witness to anything other than language and vision as such, a form of thinking, of language and vision, that exists at the moment the human being has a sense of presence, a *praxis* where speech and vision are not transparent to themselves, but are a living speech, a living vision. Yet the human being always attempts to cover up the gap by giving meaning to words (and images), as he or she

simultaneously relies on the gap to tell stories and tales, to draw images, to take photographs.

The point is not to cover the gap but explore it, to transform how human beings speak and see, which is exactly the function of the archaeology, not to stand on its own as a theory in abstraction, but for it to become part of living speech and living vision. The 'ethics' of being a writer or photographer, perhaps, is to bring back stories and images and tell them or show them.⁴ As you now speak and show, that is ethics. As you now imagine, that is ethics. As you now dream, that is ethics. Ethics is the doctrine of a form of life that is the happy life, which lies in language and vision, and not in law (that can only determine guilt and responsibility, right and wrong). Thus the form of life that is also an ethical life would not be a doing, but rather an undoing, a reformulation of the idea of the human so that it has a more original sense before the law, a re-experiencing of language and vision as alive and living.

Not long ago I returned through circumstances beyond my control to my childhood home, the village of K—. I would still like to know what set me off on this path, which beginning. Wandering the surrounding fields and woods with a small dog, I found I was retracing paths I'd known only as a child, along which I would walk between writing, to think away from dusty books and archives, away from the type of writing that results from sitting down surrounded by the heavy weight of knowledge, but also to photograph. I rise at dawn and wander at twilight to capture the best light. I walk in the woods, around the castle, along the riverbank, dive into the river, slip down the banks of the badger's quarry, get my feet wet crossing the stream by stepping stones. Walking sunken paths I photograph the moon and the stars.

To walk and photograph is to let possibilities happen. The stopping and standing still, the rhythm of pausing, walking, pausing again induces contemplation. The photograph becomes something entirely chanced upon. Days can go by without my taking a single photograph, and then, suddenly, they present themselves in the most familiar of places. The ordinary becomes beautiful. Then, nothing is too big, or too small, or the wrong colour. And the roar of the waterfall rearranges the whispers of streams a loud sound not a din. So can a river swimmer, who has come to stand, on a day of glorious weather, at its bank, and is doubtful whether they still exist, those lands which he has left behind, let his eyes be dazzled, rather than casting another backwards glance, by the radiance streaming towards his eyes from the luminous and shimmering lustre of the many suns dancing on the surface of the water. If I have no eyes for the starry night, or if I do, close them, like dull stones, and rather than play with colours, trudge a dull, optical narrowing, wonder at seeing it refract. But my eyes can still be sun-like, though often what is most familiar is hardest to see.

Writing, I spend weeks agonising over words. To write is also to stop and lift the pen from the page in order to think. My hand moves across the page, its gesture a display of limits and possibilities. Its gesture sometimes resembles, I think, the reverie of a musician in play, the instrument entirely forgotten as the body dances, an encounter that in itself always stops short of any given meaning or content, the possibility of the hand at one with its own gesture. The more exacting the gesture becomes, the more occasion to think upon it. As the gesture attests to its own irreducible presence, this is also the moment I find myself captured in language.

A student

Here sits a student in a chair. On the table in front of him lies a book at hand. This seems to me the situation of every book, until someone comes along and opens it. As often happens, someone who is reading must pause, because all sorts of ideas having to do with what he is reading engage him. Perhaps the student is comparing his hopes with his dreams. Perhaps he is thinking. As if determined to see something in the passage of one thought to the next. Directly above his head, in a softer, more delicate distance, as though it were the construction of a fantasy, is a basket, a little space to put some dried flowers.

The student is wearing a blue jumper, and around him lie scribbled notes, and empty bookshelves, as if he took joy in not having the weight of the world's assumptions and preoccupations surrounding him. And there is also, in this small room, a taking hold in the student's secret reverie. The taking hold is both delicate and subtle, because in a mood of beautiful audacity that signals the continual return from attention to distraction, the student tries to cross the boundaries of the usual and thrust his way out through to freedom.

And the image says: if the student were to look up, he would look out of the small window, but onto what exactly? Onto the early summer morning air, onto recently returned swallows across the blue sky, onto rounded tops of green trees with new, vibrant leaves and the wispy tips of firs. The warmth of the meadow outside speaks an adventurous language, and the whole cloudless view inspires quiet contemplation. Writing and thinking are forms of enthusiasm and delight and are nothing but the way in which the student, by constantly keeping in touch with contemplation, tries to constitute a life. In the life of the student, as in any form of life, nothing less than his happiness is in question.

But the student is also waiting for something to take hold. His seated posture creates a stillness, and he is staring at a point just above his

hands. The posture is saying something about the means of sitting, but also the properly acting hand, the realm of the hand, which is also the realm of the word. In front of him are pages of typewritten words and a few photographs. He is leafing through the pages, writing comments in the margins. The page itself already turned into an image that preserves the writing, where it has a proper significance. The typewritten words conceal his handwriting and thereby a character. The words make all his thoughts look the same.

The student finds himself subjectified by the hand-to-hand struggle between his living being and language as such. In this sense he becomes a place of many subjectifications: the subject of this paragraph, or even the pen he is holding. Something takes hold whether he likes it or not. Something takes hold in spite of everything, something he is responsible for.

The photographs also wait for him to come and deliver them from their immobility. He looks at them as he would at an animal for sale, kept in a little cage, and so obviously hoping for a buyer, thanks to which they will be delivered from the shame of being treated as objects. Like the book, made of paper and ink, they lie where they are put, until the moment he shows an interest. He turns them over in his hands. Isn't it because they give the illusion that there is in them something, which, from a different angle, he might be able to see more clearly? It is as if, in addition to a surface, the photograph must also contain an interior. What this interior might be, that is what intrigues him and makes him turn an image over and over in his hands, as though looking for the entrance to a secret chamber. But there is no such entrance. He is trapped in his seated pose. The photograph remains closed and obliges him to remain outside.

A path in the woods

Finding, or making, a path in the woods, I find my way is blocked by a huge chestnut tree, the force of its fall has riven huge planks of curved wood out of its trunk that now lie on the ground in tangled lumps. Finding my path in the woods, I have left the main path, and it gets hard, I get scratched by brambles and stung by nettles, climbing through branches and up and over, jumping down, ducking under, the chestnut of course has stopped my way, and now I just pause to survey the huge forces that have torn chunks of wood out of its middle. I pick up one large plank, its end dagger sharp, and drive it into the ground. It balances, just, and so I pick up another and do the same, and another, and another, creating a circle, a woodhenge of riven planks from the fallen tree. I stand and admire my work, but I still want to see the red rhododendrons, the purple burst all around, but what drew me to this chestnut path was a memory of a white bush I saw few years ago. Unfortunately the tree has fallen right into the whiteness, and it is difficult to make out whether the bush flowered after, or before the fall. In any case, the majority of the white is safe. The red, however, already withered the day before the first of June, along with the bluebells that have closed and given way to tall green stems, but one red I do see is in the middle of a dense thicket. The path I trace goes round and round, zig-zagging back and forth, as I try to work out how to get to the red flowers, all but impossible wearing shorts with the force of so many violent, young, eager nettles.

Top of the hill

By the time we reach the top of the hill, it will probably be dark. The dog at the head of the path will pause, it will sniff the ruins of the barn and wait for me to catch up. For a moment I will contemplate the broken walls of that husk of a building, and the memory of photographing its ruins, when I was 12, when it was far less ruined, its caved-in roof, gaping windows, beams overhead, the door frames, will come back to me. Now, the terrible power of the nettles. And rabbits. A burnt-out fire. No windows or door frames, or even roof beams to suggest a barn, only fallen walls, and yet in the absence of these things its presence is still indicated.

In the distance, another ruin: a castle, which always turns red as the sun sinks to the west. Seen from the hill, there is absolute silence from the castle, not a sound, not a wisp of smoke, not a sign of a single human presence inside. And yet, around, there is life everywhere: the bleating of lambs, the hare that lives in the hedgerow now perfectly still looking at me, the badger emerging from his burrow in the old sandstone quarry, the singing of birds, the distant sounds of car tyres, a constant background hum, and the roar of planes overhead. And the wind, the wind that blows across my ears. We will set off again, beyond the ruined barn, the path continues across fields, past the oak wood, sometimes it disappears altogether, lost to the crops that grow alongside. In all these years I have trodden this path so many times, and we walk in silence, though not silent. Night is falling and we pass the apple tree on the right, the small pond, now a patch of darkness, though we can still make out, among the contours, the way. Perhaps at this point I might consider turning back, retracing our steps, but it is too late, we climb the last hill and turn back for home along the edge of the wood, the lane that leads to our door.

A beginning

1. A philosopher used to begin his seminars by saying there is no authority, the only authority is the thing itself. My approach, therefore, is not to impose a method as such, but to try to discover the authority of the thing itself in another way: the work of interpretation never exhausts itself in a method, rather shows thinking at work, a thinking that unfolds in living, in the aliveness of its own insight.

My investigation explores the possibilities of living well without rule, making thought practical rather than disembodied, investigating writing and photography which is not just judged true or false, that simply conveys knowledge or information, but explores how they might finally configure themselves in a doing that is indistinguishable from living. The investigation must work to show that the conceptual foundation of the witness in a shared culture, in this case Western culture, is historically contingent, and does not emerge from obscure, transcendent, and so ungraspable origins, but is quite simply made up. By hiding its madeupness, it is established as a source of power and legitimacy. Since the origin (*arche*) of the authority of the witness cannot by definition rest on anything but the institution of the witness itself, it is without a ground. Its authority rests on forgetting that it is made up.

The *arche* that the method tries to reach is not an archaic or primitive state. There is no *arche* without an *archaeology* in that any origin is a construction from and in the present of a past to which there is no access. This is a little bit like sleep, for which there is no (phenomenological) access. Instead glimpses can only be caught in dreams and in half-asleep, half-remembered waking moments. The archaeological method is a search for sleep through dreams, a search for the order that signals its beginning. An example of this method is the moment the living animal suddenly realises it can talk and see,

that is, the event that must have taken place at some point in the distant past, but which is not yet finished because the human being is still, today, talking and seeing. The human being is still in the middle of becoming human (and thus also always remains inhuman, animal). The human is in the process of becoming a (speaking and showing) witness, but also remains largely silent and mute. In the same way a gesture can not only be what is observed, but the lines on a face that develop when an individual is alone in a room. The method is a way of measuring up to this animal adventure that never stops taking place and which determines the humanity and inhumanity of mankind.

2. The only form of life that human beings all share is that of being human, how they face one another, appear to one another, touch each other, gesture to one another, every movement of the body, every expression of the eyes, every touch of the hands, every movement of the tongue that articulates the voice. To have a form of life is to be human, to have a culture, to have a world. And what remains when form and life coincide is language that is no longer separated from the voice (as well as the hand that is no longer separated from its own gesture, and the permanence of a look that is no longer separated from one's ownmost self).

Whether this is possible today I am no longer sure. But one thing is certain: if the witness at the end of this investigation is discovered to be nothing other than the human subject, nothing more than the living being becoming aware of itself as witnessing, then the fidelity of this living witness is not to truth but to language itself. Thus the problem of the witness, the institution that is known under the name of the witness, concerns a fundamental aspect of language and vision itself, which is that of being human. And its fidelity to language is a poetic problem.

The witness that I allude to is hidden, but its gesture is a movement that is a way of going along with the world; it does not force possibilities, does not will them into existence, nor is it an impatient making-present that constantly seeks to run away from the present moment, in which I become an impatient and distracted witness to my own life; rather, it is a witness that appears as such without being guided by action elevated to a supreme principle. Perhaps in the end it is not even a movement at all, but a look that is a suspension, a moment of standstill, a stalling in which a witness is suddenly exposed as such. It could be said that its look is completely indifferent to showing itself.

3. There is a joke which goes like this. In the middle of the din of battle a captain orders his men to attack. But as the battle is so loud, his men can't hear him. So instead of shouting he throws his hands in the air and gestures to attack. But nothing happens, the men still don't move. So the captain, in the midst of all the chaos, waves his arms and thus gestures even more violently. At which point there is a response, one hand rising from each of his puzzled men, who are all now waving back at him.

(There is another version of this joke: the captain gestures for his men to attack, at which point there is a response: one of his men says 'oh my, what beautiful hands, and with the cutest little fingers too.')

Yet when the present ceases to feel the life of its own past, then there is nothing to do but obey the empty gesture of the captain. When human beings are subjected to forces that they no longer control, when they have forgotten the very gestures that make them human, duty habituates them to obey.

The poet who tries to articulate the witness's gesture goes in another direction, another way of living and knowing, not only as a being objectively present, an impatient making-present, but one that simply looks without presupposition. His realisation is that he may not fully know what he is saying,

may only half guess in retrospect. It is a peculiar retreat from a journey already made back towards the present that is at the same time always a looking back. One might say that this is the most difficult thing to achieve.

The student wakes at four to soundless dark. The curtains are already edged with light. Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape. It stands plain as a wardrobe. And the sun shines. Study today, but first a walk. The stepping stones that the student normally uses to cross the stream at its shallowest point have been submerged by the night's rain. He nevertheless dances across, misses his footing, and ends up standing in the water with his feet soaking wet, where the small dog has been all along. What does the dog do? It 'undoes', it refuses to walk in a straight line, prefers to sit down for a while, asks to play, lingers over a scent. It is perfectly indifferent to getting its feet soaking wet. It does nothing at all except undo everything the student tries to do.

Here's the matter of the dog's touch. When it touches, it simply touches. It keeps stopping me writing. All it wants to do is play.

In such a touch there is no distance. Only the nearness of the thing encountered in its own self. In this sense what is proper is what is 'true' while touching, its gaze exclusively on the thing to be touched and not any other thing. Knowing in any other way would already be tantamount to blocking the view, as when in the touching of lips the face of the lover becomes blurred and inconsequential.

Touching in this way can be a mode of writing, a mode of showing a photograph. Such a mode offers no possibility of focusing on something, which remains indistinct, or of showing it in terms of something else. It simply in and of itself and 'as' itself presents itself, as with a kiss. My photos as seas of blurs, but the simple gesture that emerges from this expanse of movement, stilled for a moment, is a glimpse of the thing itself that shows nothing but itself as itself.

A philosopher once said something like this: the image is more substantial than matter since it is act, whereas matter is possibility.

I want to grasp my own obscurity, the student said, with dripping feet. I want to grasp what remains inside of me unexpressed and unsaid, but it always escapes me. Because my witness arises in the very moment I speak, it already registers the inability to bear witness to anything other than my living being. This is to say that at the heart of every human being is the attempt to speak, to give meaning to words, to see and give meaning to sight.

Throw away all your books! a friendly voice in his head says. Go for a walk instead! Throw the ball for the dog! Dance on the stepping stones! Only then can you trace my steps back to the shadows cast by the present on the past.

There is a black poplar tree that stands alone at the edge of a field in K—, about a hundred paces from the badger's quarry, next to marsh and a small brook. I often walk past the tree on the way to the small wood called Crackley, the name of which comes from the sound the crow makes, 'crack, crack'. Every time I walk past the tree on the footpath with the small dog never far away, I stand awhile under its branches and listen. Given a bit of wind, the noise the leaves make is like rain is falling. The sound is loud but soothing, as if the tree were murmuring to itself, calling for me to linger under its sway: Listen! it says, each of my leaves is dancing to the breeze in sheer joy. It invites me to share in the joy of its living being. The rustling of the leaves could be read as a divination.

Xenophon's Apology notes that people take the sounds of birds to be omens from the gods. Why not the rustle of leaves in the wind? Why not the rustle of language? In ancient Greece the one who feared the gods was *deisidaimon* (from '*daimones*').⁵ The gods appear to the seer through wind, rain, fire, animals, birds. The one who fears the gods as they ought to be feared is 'superstitious'. The sacred man is he who fears the gods, but is also bound to them. He remains in the profane world of human kind, but is somehow marked by his sacred status; he belongs to neither sacred nor profane world. The gesture of seeing the signs and that of speaking of them invert their relation. The mark, or sign, of his sacredness is to stand in the threshold between the sphere of the human and the god, and it is his 'practice' to see from within this threshold the sacred and to reveal it to the profane world, and thus to suggest or reveal the possibilities of the former that lie hidden in the latter.

I am in a tree. It is a black poplar and I am sitting balancing on a long branch that hangs over a small pond, which floods in the spring months. It is the beginning of April. This is the first blue-sky morning after weeks of March snow and rain. The catkins are out and bees hover near, a thrush

sings in the branches above. What am I doing in the tree? I have walked with the small dog to this pond, which is near a small apple tree somewhere in the fields near home, through miles of mud, and I find myself wondering, as planes fly overhead, and the sound of distant traffic signals the morning rush-hour, whether I am idling away the hours while real people go off to do real things, like working in an office somewhere. I say this not with envy or derision, but with a feeling of being on the outside, the margins, out of it, sitting writing this on this tree branch over a pond, full with water, under a flight path to an airport listening to the rush-hour traffic in the far distance. What am I doing? Not working? Not working does not mean inertia, as I am doing a different kind of work. The decisive question then is not “What am I doing?” but “How am I doing it?” It is not the decision, but a critique of the decision. Not a lack of certainty or direction, but a decisive indecisiveness and vacillation, a vagary. Being is less important than the being like that.

Some etymological sources trace ‘vagrant’, meaning ‘wanderer,’ to early Germanic languages as a cognate with walk. The word, also used as an adjective, generally refers to an itinerant person with no steady (or legal) employment. A similar and related term is vagabond, from the Latin gerund *vagabundus*, meaning ‘wandering.’ *Vagari*, meanwhile, is the source of ‘vagary’, a little-used noun meaning ‘aimless journey’ by way of the Italian word *vagare* (or perhaps directly from the Latin word). The plural form, ‘vagaries’, much more common, refers to unpredictability. Two other terms derived from *vagari*, one rare and the other obsolete, are the nouns ‘divagation’ (literally, ‘wander apart’) and ‘evagation’, meaning ‘the act of wandering.’ A more prominent derivation is ‘extravagant’. Interestingly, stray, meaning ‘wanderer’ as a noun (as when referring to a stray animal) and ‘wander’ as a verb (including in the sense of deviating from proper conduct), may be derived from ‘extravagant’.

I am trying to photograph, to 'capture' the reflections in the pond, which is also an exposing, in some way, of being like that, my 'not-working' as a different kind of work. Actually, what caught my eye (by 'not working') were the shadows of the branches on the muddy surface, but I only noticed those after climbing the tree. There, that was an event, the play of shadows on the surface of the pond that caught my attention, and I'd climbed the tree only because I'd heard on the radio this morning a song, the lyrics of which said 'take a risk every day.' And climbing the tree, with a camera bag, and a tripod, was a risk. Where to put my feet, in their heavy hiking boots? Which branch to trust, which to doubt? Which foothold to choose? Where to balance my tripod while I climbed? And once in the tree, how to load my heavy camera with film, how to open and close the camera bag, take a meter reading, set the exposure, without everything tumbling into the water 10 feet below. I know precisely how far away the surface of the water was because I had to measure it with a tape-measure in order to set the camera's focus, which is calibrated in feet not metres. It is at this point that I start to wonder what it is I am doing, when perhaps there are more important things I should be doing, like joining in the journeys to work. But I resist the temptation to disapprove of myself and focus on taking the picture. At that point I look beyond the shadows on the surface and see myself reflected, 20 feet away, in the pond. There I am, an image of myself, feet dangling, head peeping over the top of the branch I'm sitting on. And in the image I start to see the tree above me, 30, 40 feet away, as I'm looking down all the while. What does it mean to be sitting in a tree looking at this image, trying to take a photograph, writing about it, while balancing on a branch and altogether feeling not entirely safe or secure or even legitimate. Not even knowing if what I am doing is worth the effort, all this effort, the long walk through the mud, the heavy camera bag, the tripod, the climbing, the pond. And, as I'm using a camera that does not allow me to see its image except through a murky viewfinder that I must attach separately to the top plate, and as I

can not possibly currently see through the viewfinder without falling out of the tree, in the position I am trying to take the photograph in, which requires me to maintain balance, and strain certain muscles, and stop breathing in order to take an exposure without shaking the camera, I have to guess, hope, that the image is what I would like it to be. Which is some record of the shadows, the reflection of the tree, and perhaps a hint of my own presence. And climbing down the tree, what am I walking away with? My camera load is exactly the same, no heavier or lighter than before the exposure. And where are my thoughts? On cups of tea waiting at home, on the farmer who is firing his gun nearby, and who stopped me for acting suspiciously when carrying a camera and tripod into his fields a year or two ago. On those who own every scrap of land here, with large 'Keep Out' signs to remind you not to stray from the footpath. On the photograph I might not have got. Should I try again? I decide to take another, but this one I want to take low to the ground, looking up. I crouch over the camera, have to get my knees muddy to be able to peer through the dim viewfinder, which is only a few centimetres from the ground. At this point I hear something, turn around, to see a figure, a woman, crouching near me, stroking my dog. What are you doing? she asks. Taking a picture, I reply, then add, of the catkins, the bees, the planes overhead. She smiles and walks on. How stupid I must look, I think, crouched in the mud, looking up, taking pictures of bees and planes. Is this what real photographers take pictures of? Nevertheless, I wait, crouched, until a plane flies overhead and I get the picture I wanted.

The idea that the image testifies to something which cannot be fully grasped or comprehended except as a factual record, implies an active life, a rational faculty, as well as a 'course' or 'vocation' to be followed, a process. It is the vocation or process that can be willed into existence and then documented.

There is a short story by Karen Blixen called 'The Young Man With the Carnation'. In the story the protagonist, a writer called Charlie Despard (Despair?), wants to escape everything, the pressure of publishing a second novel, the weight of expectation, his marriage, his sense of inauthenticity. He befriends three sailors and dreams of running away to sea. "These are wise men. They know what they are talking about. It is the sailors who have been beaten and battered by the sea, and who have cursed and damned her, who are her true lovers." In escaping and finding what he thinks are more authentic beings than writers, he discovers there is no prior authenticity. Thus he makes use of his inauthenticity and finds he is really a writer. He finds the writer is the figure who brings the knowledge held in the underworld back with him to the land of the living. The writer is the one who goes into the beyond, returning from the beyond to show and speak of what he has seen.

ENDNOTES PART A

¹ These notions may also lie at the heart of other cultures, but are beyond the scope of this study, much as I would have liked to have addressed them. Later I briefly discuss the witness as it is mentioned in the oldest Hindu Dharmasutras (see part C, “The activity of the Witness”). There is also the witness in the Indian Vivarana traditions that is discussed in Bina Gupta’s *The Disinterested Witness: A Fragment of Advaita Vedānta Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998). The ‘disinterested witness’ is the witnessing of one’s witness, which Gupta suggests is embodied in statements like ‘I know I am conscious of my self-consciousness’. The problem is that the use of the word ‘consciousness’ is a modern phenomenon that needs further exploration, especially in relation to the witness and witnessing.

In relation to this, a photographer once spoke of her method. When standing in front of her subject, instead of arranging it, she said that she would ‘arrange herself’. The concept of ‘arranging one’s self’ is intriguing. Gupta’s disinterested witness, or *saskin*, rather than being seen in terms of consciousness, has similarities with the ancient Greek term *sunoida*, from *suneidenai*, something like ‘knowing-with-oneself’ or ‘I know in my heart of hearts’ (for more on this, see part D, “Matisse”). If *saskin* and *sunoida* are understood not in terms of consciousness, i.e. the human being becoming a witness as a conscious subject, but as the capability of the human being to become mindful of the unexplained or unsaid mystery inherent in itself (in its heart of hearts), then the arranging of one’s self is something like a capability that is not passive but active. This is to say that at the heart of every human being is the positive attempt to speak, to give meaning to words, to see and give meaning to sight.

² Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. by Luca D’Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009) p. 103.

³ Martin Heidegger, ‘Der Spiegel Interview with Martin Heidegger’, in *The Heidegger Reader*, ed. by Günter Figal, trans. by Jerome Veith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 313–33; pp. 326–327.

⁴ See ‘The Young Man’ on p. 54.

⁵ Menander’s *Deisidaimon* (“The Superstitious Man”) is known only from a short quote by Clement of Alexandria. See Menander, *The plays and fragments*, trans. by M.G. Balme (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 264.

Archaeology of the walk

How to think a walk? Such a thought has a digging quality peculiar to itself, which, were it put in linguistic form, lies in the transitive use of the verb "to walk." In this different mode of walking, one never walks "to" somewhere, it is not a manner of movement; instead one walks something, the dog, the field, the footpath: "I'm walking to work now" *versus* "I'm walking the dog".

Why is this difference important? Well, it is not the walking to reach somewhere that is important, rather what one does on the way.

In English you say "I'll walk the dog", but this is impossible, for example, in Spanish. You can say "*Llevo al perro a pasear*" (literally 'I'll bring the dog to a walk') but it is ungrammatical to say "*Me voy a caminar al perro*" (I'm going to walk the dog). In German one says: "*Wenn du dem Hund was Gutes tun willst, dann geh mit ihm spazieren*" (if you wish to do something good for your dog, then go with it walking — as opposed to over-feeding it, or putting a rhinestone-studded collar round its neck), or: "*Komm, laß uns spaziergehen!*" — come let us walk!

Come, and let us walk
To hear among trees,
The birds' musical talk
Resound in hills and valleys.

Happy is he who freely sings,
Like you, you airy flock,
May his voice fly as if on wings,
To the one he hopes to rock.

Happier is he who lives free,
Like you, you feathery crowd,

Does not flit between trust and fear,
Is out of danger in the clouds.
(Martin Opitz, *Der Spaziergang*, 1624-5) ¹

The call to walk at the beginning signals the phenomenon of a new prestige accorded to journeys by foot. Beginning a walk was a call and a testimony. If one wished to measure one's walking, in its immediate, passionate liveliness, then one would fare as with Penelope's veil — what was spun during the day would inexorably undo itself again at night, so that the next day it could be begun anew. Each walk was always starting from the beginning, which is walking's recklessness, beginning ever anew.

Backward glances at our footsteps in snow
(my legs are longer than yours) show
divets side by side, until single hops
Which was when the conversation stopped.

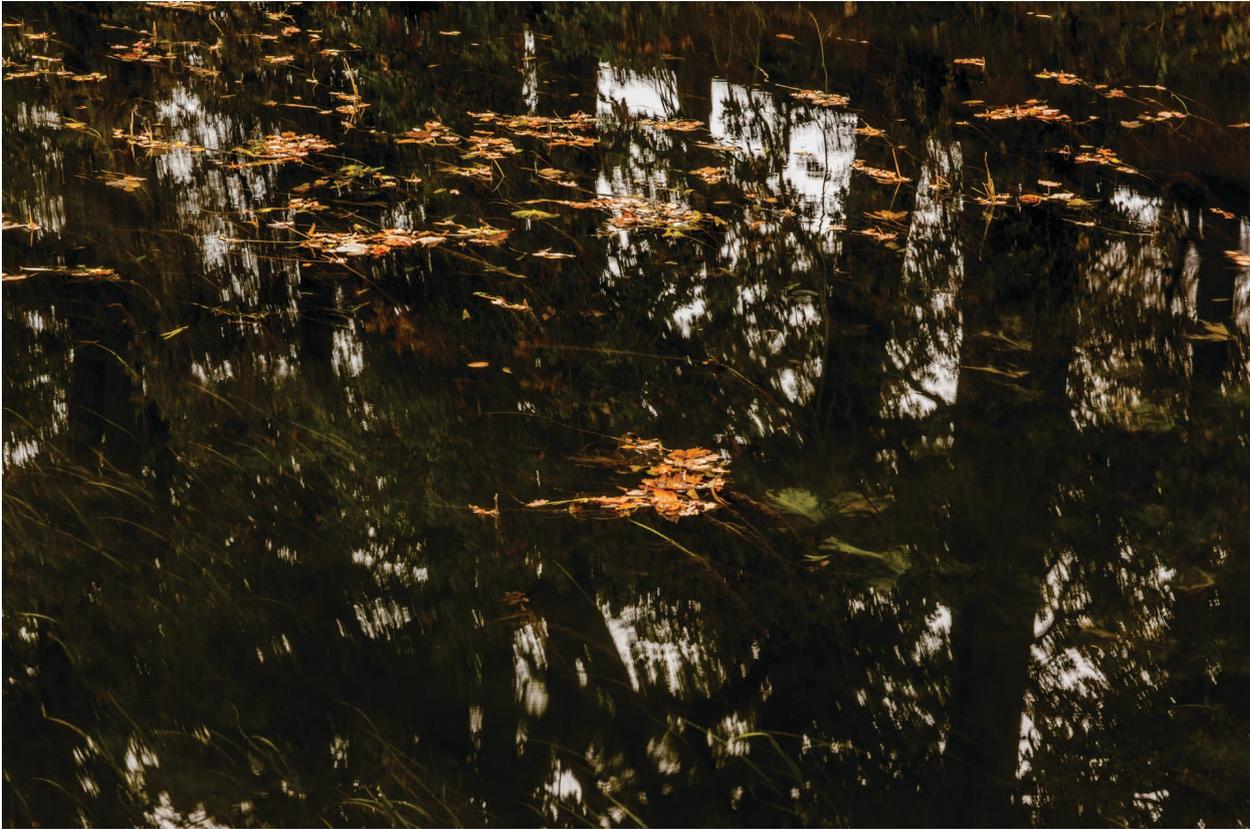
Sometimes you might stumble across this in another way. Too tired to go for a walk, you lie down on your bed as if for a nap, lying perhaps on your side for a while listening to sounds outside, the subtle shiftings of the house, the rhythmic breathing of a small dog. Your thoughts meander and weave. You might pick up the small book on the bedside table, turn a few pages, and start to read. Then you put the book down and pick up your notepad and pen and start to write. The dog, sensing something has changed, wakes up, stretches, yawns, climbs to the bottom of the bed, turns round twice, and lies down with a small sigh. Its feet start twitching, its nose quivers, it is walking in a dream.

Now I wish to focus on this experience. The first tentative steps of something. Stepping, one, two, three, I am starting to write. I write a short distance in front of me. The writing is a pure walking. I walk the foreground in one fell swoop, and I walk forward. And I walk not in isolation, I

immediately see the hedgerows, the sky, hear the squelch of the mud, and the bird song resounding through the trees. My walking is to a high degree something individual, like the small dog who follows the scent of a deer. It does not 'see' a path worn by others, it 'smells' a path made by deer. In the experience, something is given out of the immediate environment. This environment does not consist of things, objects endowed with meaning. Rather, the meaningful is what is primary, and is immediately given without any mental detours. Following the scent signifies everywhere and always.

To bring to mind again the experience of the walk as an experience of the world prior to its division into subject and object. In the walk there is something of me, but my "I" goes out completely beyond itself and resonates along with my steps. I am somehow fully along with the world. And where are my footsteps exactly? It's hard to say, but somewhere in tandem with thought.















B Ancient Greece

An ancient witness (part 1)

A 'witness' who has seen and knows speaks in court. Even from a grammatical point of view (to witness, to bear witness, to be a witness), it is not easy to understand whether the witness's words belong to it, or whether they belong to the one who has called it, or whether the witness depends on its words and receives its meaning from them. In other words, whether the decisive element is the witness and the words it speaks, or whether it is an undefined mixture of the two, or if the two elements proceed in a harmonic or conflictual relationship.

To start to unravel this, it will be necessary to travel to a place where an idea of the witness might be found. It is true that one could travel to other cultures, to other places, but in ancient Greece there was a different concept of a witness, and one that allows an archaeological investigation into its figure today.

One such place is the famous trial scene depicted on the shield of Achilles and described by 'Homer' in the *Iliad* (18.497-508). The *Iliad* describes a series of images depicted on the shield, which has been 'wrought' or 'made' (*poiei*) by its creator Hephaistos, the ancient Greek god of fire. For the ancient Greeks, the presence of a god was also a sign of how things are and who they were, though Hephaistos was something that belonged not to human psychology but to theology. By the time this scene is reached in Homer's epic, it is already presupposed that Hephaistos is creating a divine testimony. In this way, by reading the so-called shield scene there might be found what calls for a rethinking of the figure of the witness today. It is also not at all clear, in fact, if this scene in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad* is, in the modern sense, a 'document' of Homer's society in the late iron age, or a fictitious heroic age he is reconstructing in the narrative, or a religious-soteriological ceremony. Of

course, the image of the shield survives only through words. Describing the shield, Homer says that “in the aftertime, men will be astonished seeing [*eidon*] it.”

It's getting light outside the thin and frayed curtains, the student is sitting in his bed reading a small book, writing. His bedroom door is a raft of wood braced with a hinge. The aim of his reading is to discover a ground of the practices he finds in words, to ask what must be the case if they are to be possible. A small dog is facing him, lying on an old cushion. What does it look upon? Who knows!

Sitting in his bed, immobile, he takes delight in words, reads and rereads them, is now transcribing a section, making his own translation. The book's title, gently tilted in gold: *Iliad*. And the passage he is reading is on one page in the Greek, and on the facing page in English is the 1743 translation by Alexander Pope.

Transliteration into Latin script

<i>laoi d'ain agorei esan athrooi. etha de neikos</i>	497
<i>hororei duo d'andres eneikeon eineka poines</i>	498
<i>andros apophthimenou. ho men eucheto pant' apodounai</i>	499
<i>demoi piphauskon ho d'anaineto meden helesthai.</i>	500
<i>ampho d'iesthen epi histori peirar helesthai.</i>	501
<i>laoi d'amphoteroisin epepoun amphis arogoi.</i>	502
<i>kerukes d'ara laon erentuon. oi de gerontes</i>	503
<i>eiar' epi xestoi lithois hieroi eni kukloi</i>	504
<i>skeptra de kerukon en chers' echon eerophonon.</i>	505
<i>toisin epeit' eisson, amoibedis de dikazon.</i>	506
<i>keito d'ar'en messoisi duo chrusoio talanta,</i>	507
<i>toi domen hos meta toisi diken ithuntata eipoi.</i>	508

Alexander Pope's translation (1743)

497 There, in the Forum swarm a num'rous train;
498 The subject of debate, a townsman slain:
499 One pleads the fine discharg'd, which one deny'd,
500 And bade the publick and the laws decide:
501 The witness is produc'd on either hand;
502 For this, or that, the partial people stand:
503 Th'appointed heralds still the noisy bands.
504 And form a ring, with scepters in their hands;
 On seats of stone, within the sacred place,
 The rev'rend elders nodded o'er the case;
505 Alternate, each th'attesting scepter took,
506 And rising solemn, each his sentence spoke.
507 Two golden talents lay amidst, in sight,
508 The prize of him who best adjudg'd the right.

1. What the student reads in the *Iliad* are of adventures in a mythic past, knowledge of which is granted by the Muses to the poet who tells. The Muses are always there, they see everything. They are at hand, and they know all things, speaks the poet. The student digs down to search for beginnings, to return to that part of the present that he can't quite see. What remains hidden is constantly being sucked back towards this beginning, without his ever being able to reach it. His present is nothing other than this hidden element in everything that is lived. His attention to this is his hand-to-hand struggle, his form of life. To be contemporary means in this sense to return to the present that is hidden.

To read closely is to try to restore some distant unknown room, never clearly established, to the present, but that is also to resort to conjecture and intuition, almost divinatory practices. He thus reads in order to imagine different rooms. Perhaps getting older is having more and more lit rooms inside your head, and people in them, or sometimes only the rooms themselves.

In facts, then, and quickly. What he reads is of a town at peace. Two men are quarrelling in public, right in the middle of things. A dispute over blood money apparently. And a man has died. It's affecting everything, that's what they say, so everyone is gathering in the marketplace. The men explain their side of things to the onlookers, turning this way and that, hands outstretched, now in offering, now held up in refusal.

8

I'm having to explain all this fact-like, but I feel like I'm crawling, belly-like. From the bed where I'm writing this I'm surrounded by a sea of doubts and objections. Outside the room's window is a small square of grass, tussocky and freshly mown. Something knocks, cupping its hands to the glass. It brings fistfuls of words. I open the window to let it in.

2. Life and language are mixed in the everlasting divine that the poet can see. Through the 'saying' of the words that come to presence for what they can be, the epic *Iliad* becomes like a dance. The quarrelling men seem almost to be dancing their strife as they whirl around in words, in the middle of it all, and as the rhythm of the poem breezes through the open window, the figures gesture before the student's eyes in the radiance of the bright, everlasting metal of the divine shield on which they are displayed.

Everything depends on his paying close attention to the words. The words demand possibilities, they do not exhaust themselves in the search for facts and hard evidence. Taking hold of a word and turning it into a fact that is results in a distancing. Reading and the world become separate; he reads about the world and is no longer within it, language always at a distance from the singularity of living speakers and the world it supposedly names. He allows his doubts about the words to stand and spares himself the task of dispelling them in detail. Even if he were to engage in confronting them, he would still have to accomplish what is unavoidable, which is to attend closely to them. Perhaps if he paid enough attention to the words and kept on studying them, he would eventually discover that his doubts were without foundation.

The student attempts a hesitant interpretation of his own. For a translation is an interpretation and what is an interpretation? What makes a good or bad interpretation? In order to really make an interpretation, the student must suspend the law, the *oikonomia*, otherwise he cannot interpret, he just follows the current.

The student's translation

497 People in a meeting place were gathered for a quarrel of words
498 had arisen. Two men were arguing on account of a blood-price
499 for a man who had died. One was promising to pay everything,
500 telling this to the people, the other turning his back, refusing to take
anything with his hand.
501 Both were desiring a *hístor* to take the limit in hand.
502 The people of both sides shouted in applause.
503 The sacred prophets restrained supporters of each side so the men
whom age had bent
504 could sit on smooth stones in the sacred circle,
505 carrying in hand the staffs of the sacred prophets, those who sent
their loud voices abroad.
506 They then darted up, so commanding names in turn.
507 Laid down in the middle a pair of golden scales,
508 of the gods granted among them whomever commanded the right
names.

The student does not possess any easily available proof that could provide an immediate foundation for his own interpretation. He finds it difficult to read Greek words that rush into each other on the page and puzzles hard and long over words and phrases. Meaning is never exhausted: there are many ways of translating words, but only different interpretations. His translation is an interpretation, which itself as interpretation needs considering because the translation speaks in the words of his mother tongue. Knowing the English word does not guarantee an understanding of the word itself.

3. But beginning, the student does rely on one thing his dictionary tells him, that the Indo-European **ueid-* (to look, perceive, know) is the root of both the Greek word *histor* and the English word 'witness'. Why then does he not translate *histor* as witness, as Alexander Pope did, as the one who looks and knows? Why does he leave it untranslated? He considers this. He is still unsure quite what *histor* means and how it relates to the word 'witness'. Does he even know what 'witness' means? Is the *Iliad* merely to be understood as a journey through a dictionary?

In a dictionary that lacks an etymological character, words are a faithful description of the world, an attempt to fix meaning. Yet the student's dictionary, a particularly old one, shows how words correspond with unique original meanings, their *arche*, of which he cares not to lose his sight. The etymology of words shows that meaning never stops changing. It articulates possibilities of other forms of thought and life, brings to light the context in which a word emerges and the various uses that have been made of it, abstracts a word from the glaring light of the epoch (the present).

In tracing the *arche* of words he comes to realise that he does not have to accept or settle for this or that interpretation, he can challenge language. The dictionary is the paradigm of such slipperiness, where one definition opens onto another definition, ad infinitum. Since the meaning of words is ever changing and slippery, he realises that the very language he chooses establishes a particular relation with the life of which he speaks and witnesses. He could imagine, for example, a language composed entirely of the traffic news on the radio warning of current accidents on the motorways and highways, which is to say that it gives to language a particular form. And the poet's working of words is different to the putting to work of language he is accustomed to hear on the radio, in journalism, or on the news. A poet has made himself into language's

experimental ground, uses words improperly perhaps to find new ways of expression.

4. What is at stake are ideas or practices that form a way of life. The student prefers to speak of 'forms of life' because contrary to popular opinion, it is far from easy to distinguish between theory and practice. If poetic words can possibly become a means without an end, an opening to human possibilities, perhaps what can develop from this can be an important path in his digging for an *arche*.² The search for the *arche* can release a word from a singular meaning that has hardened with time and make the word in poetry strange again, as if encountered for the first time. And as the word is released, so are other worlds, other forms of life. And what of 'style'? On the one hand he thinks that it is his intention, that it becomes recognisable, that he is its master. On the other, he wonders if style is that which allows him to write in the first place? To try to establish style prior to writing presupposes that he can define it before he begins. But can he do this? It resists his search for its *arche*, and yet it stands in relation to his very being.

5. This thought is worth repeating. What can develop from 'archaeology' is the possibility of a method where a new style and thus form of life as ideas and practices can come to being. What is poetry other than the effort to neutralise the informative and communicative functions of language in order to open them to other uses, and a very use that is called poetry?

6. The student therefore finds the asterisk in front of **ueid-* curious, as well as the hyphen that follows it. The asterisk sits before the matter of language, as if in sweet sleep. It points to a system of correspondences, to a language spoken by unknown people in unknown places. It hints at a

beginning that commands the understanding of the whole and fills the gaps. It is a single star within a constellation, a making visible of what is invisible on the surface of things. The asterisk indicates the 'word' *ueid* is entirely imagined because the language it points to is completely made up by linguists. He could set a large 'X' there instead, because next to nothing is known about these 'original' languages. And the hyphen that follows *ueid* points towards a cluster of concepts to do with looking that coalesce around words separated in time and in space. Thus the hyphen always points in advance of what is yet to come.

He wonders how to even pronounce **ueid-*. It exists only as a sign without meaning, like a signature. To be sure, the Indo-European word 'means' to look, but not just any look. It is a look that always already sees into the past, present and to the future. As a look it always already arrives in the Latin *video* 'to see', and Latin *providere*, 'to foresee'. It reaches the Old English word *witena gemot*, a meeting of older men who gather to deliberate on a matter under discussion, a disputed matter, 'face to face'. Thus the 'look' might also concern the 'face' which bears upon human beings, concerns them, and is a matter for discussion. And this look arrives in words such as 'witness', and 'guide', and also the German word *wissen*, 'to know'.

The student is reading for possibilities, reaching for a place where his thinking can withdraw from the world of stuffy books, with their dusty chatter. (The paradox here is that this place is accessible only through books.) The experts have already drawn the map to the stars and worked out the quickest way to reach the light. In such a text as this, the *Iliad*, where law, magic and religion are intertwined, an orthographically drawn map cannot 'operate'. For it would always be an interpretation of the text through the lenses of religion and law today. Instead, rather than the usual translation caught in the crossfire of interpreting what is prior to religion and law through the prism of the idea of what they are today, the student simply looks.

He looks at the shining star in the night sky, which is beautiful without a map. Yet what is even more beautiful is the motion that is hidden, the way the star comes to shine brightly and the hidden motion shimmers through everything, the shine that lets every particular being, as well as the whole ensemble of beings, shine in the first place.

The student's room now is quite light, and he opens the curtains and window wide to let a breeze in, and to look at the text a little more closely. His look is not to outwit. It is more that he finds himself being led to sea, arriving by example. And that which lets itself be seen cannot be determined in the traditional sense, given a meaning that is assigned to a moment, to an object, cannot be discovered by separating and setting it apart as thing and fact.

7. No, he finds that what lets itself be seen is already always resisting meaning, doesn't quite appear, remains hidden. To read the *Iliad* closely, to be arriving as its example, is simply to look at what is most obvious, as contemplating what is obvious may bring to light something quietly nestling within the text. What gives itself can only be discovered through close reading. But it is not apparently found, rather it can only be *inapparently* discovered, and not only through a particular way of study, but as a following of clues. This always relates to what arises in the shining of all things, of *phenomena*. All coming to presence is interwoven with this hidden motion: the phenomena of things is never exhausted in thinking and saying. That which grants all beings the conditions of visibility and invisibility, the sheer 'open' that opens up for beings, begins in the question of an exemplary being.

8. The example is intelligible though it resists providing meaning. Through its singularity the whole is not revealed, rather it reveals its own possibility to resist appearing. At this very moment it is impossible to say what comes first and what follows: the asterisk that is the hint of an unlived past or the hyphen that points in advance of everything yet to come. Something provokes in it, something becomes significant. What provokes? It resists attempts to be properly investigated. It has nothing to say beyond what it lets see and be said. It is present, but also absent, like a dream already starting to fade, like the long-gone roof beams of a barn that is no longer a barn, only ruined walls. The example is nothing other than the student himself, as long as he lives in language.

9. A secret is transferred along with it, something which cannot be explained. And here is the example of the student again, firmly in the middle of things, in the midst of the matter under discussion, struggling over

interpretation, because what is exemplary goes against all expectations, goes against the law, acts for the absent rule. As soon as it becomes a generality, it loses its capability of being a singular example. It must show its belonging to the whole, so though the whole is not known, it shows its belonging to the whole and the whole can be imagined. That is why there is no longer any rule, because something is excluded through its inclusion. Thus the student is studying the passage from the *Iliad* that acquires the capability of making knowable a wider set of phenomena, not by establishing general laws, but on the contrary by considering only a particular phenomenon. What the student can then do, because this is not quite enough, is *pretend* to show a general law. The example has the power only to show something, not to say or explain. There is no theory, no general law that is valid beyond it. It is not a particular, and not a generality, but a 'movement' from particular to particular and, he finds, its movement can help throw light on the whole without remaining with the particular. The point is that the example does not define anything, it is different. Either the set can be defined, or the example can be given. So, the student holds his hands up at the examples shown, sets his sight on the text again and starts to read.

10. The passage the student is reading shows a shield that has been forged in fire by a god for the warrior Achilles, and on the shield the god has crafted many everyday scenes in everlasting copper and tin, and precious gold and silver. The 'poem' brings into words the shield, and many examples of life the god has forged on it in fire. The poet's words become both about the people in the scenes, and a telling of the god's fiery craft. The shield exists only in the words spoken, it is no use trying to find the actual shield from which the description comes, it exists only in the poem, in the realm of myth and saying.

11. The poet, of course, was given his insight from the Muses, who knew the whole while he only knew the parts. Yet today ‘witnessing’ counts as something general, something extracted from the particular. Because in doing what is today thought of as ‘study’, the student is asked to find and show his knowledge by a process of selecting from the vast archive of what has been and is spoken and written, an archive which does little more than signify the inability of today’s ‘explaining’.³

12. But the student in his room full of light is studying the words of the poet Homer. He is not reading everything that is written and selecting from it. He is trying to study only by reading the example of the words very closely.

He reads the ancient Greek aloud, transcribes the words into Latin letters to help his read. One line leaps out, which he translates.

keito d’ ar’ en messoisi duo chrusoio talanta (507)

‘laid down in the middle [*keito d’ ar’ en messoisi*]
a pair of golden scales [*duo chrusoio talanta*].

The rhythm of the words breezes through the open window, and the wind blows quite hard to be heard, and his reading, and the end of the line strides into empty space, causing him to pause. His pronunciation of the Greek spoken aloud is a mish-mash, he talks like a degenerate rhapsode, struggling to adapt the Greek sounds to his own language, his own lip and tongue, struggling to articulate his own voice.

13. The student is reading the *Iliad* and his initial translation of line 507 that interests him is: 'laid down in the middle [*keito d' ar' en messoisi*] a pair of golden scales [*duo chrusoio talanta*].'

What he finds hidden in this passage in the name of gold are *duo chrusoio talanta*, a pair of golden scales, precious gold which shines, the light of which surrounds all those present. The student finds that many have translated *talanta* as payment or prize. Yet he pays close attention to the words and using his dictionary, he discovers that *talanton* can be translated either as a unit of currency, or as a measure (a balance, a pair of scales). The value of a weight and a level balance go together. And he finds plenty of examples elsewhere in the *Iliad* where *talanta* indicate 'scales' that are to be understood not merely as an object, but as the manner in which the measure determines the human being.⁴ Whenever the scales appear, no comforting fiction intervenes, no consoling prospect of immortality. The measure is *moira*, the impersonal force that is also the measure of the human lot. The force is that which threatens to turn the human being into a corpse. This is the *dike* of mortals: the sudden invocation, as quickly rubbed out, of another world, the precarious, city of peace that threatens to turn into the city of war. And he finds that the pair of golden scales that show the threat to annihilate the human being (in a lightning bolt) are *en to meso*: they are laid down (*keito*) in the middle of it all (*en messoisi*).

14. The verb *keito*, to lay down, indicates how the scales are placed and he finds in his old dictionary that the root of *keito* is *keimai*, which expresses constant presence, the presence of that which endures.⁵ And he finds that in the middle voice *keimai* is to be understood as something being placed in the very middle of things, such that 'it stands while being stood.' The scale, having been placed, also stands in the middle. It does not effect from the outside, but is fully in the midst of things. Neither does it stand over as a rule, rather it is

itself the place of its standing. And to think on the Greek word *keimai* some more, he turns to a book on his shelf by Emile Benveniste, where the famous French linguist discusses the ‘middle voice’. He tries hard to put himself in Benveniste’s language: *c’est-à-dire en agissant, en effectuant une action, il va en être affecté lui-même: il effectue en s’affectant*. The ‘middle voice’ *strictly* indicates a verbal form that is neither active nor passive but both at once. The scales are not standing for something, as a mere object, rather their measure is immanent and in the middle of being stood. This standing grants them a certain intelligibility. Thus the scales stand in the middle, are interior to the modes and forms of life as the measure of life. The measure is not yet distinguished and set apart and separated as an object (*pragma*).⁶

15. Reaching for the *Iliad* the student again scans the scene. Once again, people in a meeting place were gathering together, for a quarrel of words had arisen. Two men were arguing on account of a blood-price for a man who had died. One was promising to pay everything, telling this to the people, the other turning his back, refusing to take anything with his hand. Both desired upon a *histor* to take the limit in hand. He reads line 501 again, *ampho d’hiesthen epi histori peirar helesthai*, which he translates as: both men desired upon a *histor* to take the limit, *peirar*, from *peras*, ‘limit’ or ‘boundary’.

16. Limit, he thinks, but not in a negative sense, which is where something stops and can go no further. Rather, *peras* as that which describes a space, outlines a contour, gives composure, stance and constancy. To call for a *histor* to take the *peras* is to call for something to appear in outline out of its opposite, *apeiron*, that which is without the *peras*, the limitless not in the sense of a lack, but in the sense of what allows all appearance, to let something loose into disorder (*peras*) so as to fetch it back into order (*apeiron*). What appears in

outline must stand against the order and flow of *apeiron* and persist out of order, whereby a being stands up and stands out from its surroundings. But then it must also disappear back into the *apeiron*. The movement of the *peras* being released and fetched back by *apeiron* is a kind of ordering or joining, while the movement into *peras* is a disordering or dis-jointing.⁷

17. The *apeiron* is also the limitless voice, as mentioned by Plato in *Philebus*, and in line 501 of the passage in the *Iliad* (*ampho d'iesthen epi histori peirar helesthai*) the two men call (*hiesthen*), which can be translated as 'utter sounds' as well as 'call', such that their voices are not (yet) making any sense. The *histor* that can take the *peras* can also render voice as articulated speech. To recognise speech in the limitless voice is to take the *peras*, while the sounds of the voice are *apeiron*, limitless, they cannot be taken. What is taken is taken in the hand (*helesthai*), thus the human being, speech, and the hand go hand-in-hand. Perhaps there is no notion of a *histor* being a subject here, rather it seems to be a force that exists in the middle of hand and word. The student considers how the *histor* arises in the movement of hand and speech in the *peras*, how the *peras* falls together with the hand and with the word. The hand indicates that the limit is to be taken alongside the desire to speak. This could be the human hand indicating that the limit be taken, or that someone rise to speak, or perhaps the hand-to-hand struggle of the human being with language itself, the struggle that is the coming to presence of the human being in language and which is its very ground.⁸ The taking place of language is the hand-to-hand struggle of the human being's coming to be human.

18. A crowd gathers, come to join the quarrel and to savour the goings-on. The human being comes to presence to stand with and amongst others. To stand with others means to take the limit right in the middle of language. And

the scene of its beginning, the measure of its being, is in the middle of things, the ground where beings gather all together, where words are spoken and human beings can dispute with each other hand-to-hand.

19. From the viewpoint of the onlooker, that which stands becomes that which represents itself outwardly. The Greeks called this appearance of the outward look its face. The face lets itself be seen, it stands facing. The human being is the only creature that seeks to take the limit, *peras*, to appropriate its appearing and being in the 'face' that presents its self to others. The human being stands face-to-face, hand-to-to-hand, in public, where debate begins and people come to speak. The matter for discussion is that which, known to everyone, concerns everybody and is therefore public. The human being comes to being in its hand and in its speaking and in its face, and in its standing. What grounds all these determinations of being is the patch of land called home, which is also known as *ousia*, meaning both ground and the homestead or estate.

The Iatmul

In his 1930s study *Naven*, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson suggested that the men of the Iatmul tribe in New Guinea sought to remember thousands of ancestral names, and, along with the names, the stories connected to them. Different clans in the tribe would challenge each other over knowing these names in open debate, asking questions over specific details, but at the same time never revealing an entire story, since to do so would put their 'possession' of the names at risk. In the debate a name would be claimed as property by two conflicting clans. The right to the name could only be demonstrated by knowing the story to which the name referred. But if the story was revealed and became known by all, the clan's relation to the name would be destroyed. A dispute would often arise between the two clans, each stating that they themselves knew the story and each trying to find out how much the other really knew.

The story itself was revealed through particular examples. A speaker would hint at one example at a time to prove his own knowledge of the story or he would challenge another to reveal his own example. In this way a dispute would involve the revealing of a particular example, and would proceed not by revealing the set of details or the whole story, but would proceed to the next example with varying degrees of secrecy. The example would always remain a particular detail. In giving the name, the men would proceed from particular to particular, the story remaining hidden. Yet in order to acquire its power a name had to show its belonging to the story. Thus 'knowing' would happen at a different level to Western 'knowing', which always seeks knowledge as the whole, moving from particular to universal. A famous philosopher once said: particulars are deficient with respect to the whole because a particular is restricted to a particular form rather than being in the middle of its possibilities.

However, with the Iatmul there is a glimpse of a different kind of knowledge that has no need of the universal; it simply moves from particular to particular. For the Iatmul the particular is not deficient with regard to the universal, but has its own power in the middle of possibilities among other particulars.

How would the Iatmul men give particular examples in the debate? The one speaking would use bundles of leaves, beating on a table with them. These leaves would be continually visible. The speaker would say, 'This leaf is so-and-so, I am not claiming that name'. What is experienced is not this or that signifying leaf, but the pure fact that one names, that language exists. Or he might say, 'this leaf is so-and-so's opinion', and throw it to the ground with contempt; or he would sweep the ground with the leaves, as if sweeping away the others' claims to names. Similarly an empty leaf packet would be used as a secret. He would hold it up asking them (scornfully) if others knew what was inside.

The Iatmul men would also offer other objects for show during debate. When the ownership of the river was in dispute, a shell necklace was hung in the middle of the ceremonial house to show the river. In dispute about a being, the being is appealed to 'at hand' and 'right now'. When certain ceremonies were to be performed this arrangement was discarded and in its place came another pattern. Gregory Bateson also suggested that the Iatmul men desired to show off their knowledge of the names. In the younger men, however, this passion for showing off was checked by the feeling that it was only appropriate for the older men.

Now it is night and raining hard, and with a flashlight I am searching for something, looking at something that I cannot see. You're sure there's something here? It would be hidden, it is always hidden. A small dog is sniffing around too, it will surely find something. Nose, gazelle, delicate fingers. The dog smells and knows its nose, is its nose. I stand in the blind spot of my dark eye; deer and dog are still and unaware, and stay that way. And no sign yet of the thing I hope to find, what belongs to me. And yet is not even odd that I do not see what belongs to me because what belongs to me is not even what I am looking for. What belongs to me is not reducible to what I am looking at. It is not a chance occurrence, but a kind of structure, an adventure that is told, a project of living that can only be seen in its traces. A knock at the window, adventure's fistful of words.

You will find no property owned by the student, no taxes paid, no will. A man of no substance, who leaves no trace in records as tenant, taxpayer, debtor or creditor. His badly lived life, his atrocious habits, his sedentariness, the stress he is under, his addictions. Not taking proper care of himself. He does not understand how the system works, does not care to understand, how to stick by the publicity machine, make it produce, how to run a career.

What to make of this, enticing a student to dance upon a wire, flushed with joy, to make an exhibition of himself, to show himself here? And from here he can reflect on how the world changes as he passes through it: rooms, the people he meets, everything leaves a mark, a signature, and he leaves a mark on everything. What shall he do in a world where the deepest black is grey, and inspiration is kept in a thermos? With all this immensity in a measured world? All he needs is a house, and the town he was born in, to live away from it and come back again.

He is sitting at the desk at which he did his homework as a small boy. His room has its sunny time (the morning) and its shady time (the afternoon). He reads in the morning light and naps in the afternoon, orientates himself according to these times. From his desk he can hear the same old sounds, birds in the garden, tyres on tarmac, the old folk walking along the road, the barking of dogs.

In the time he is studying he walks in woodlands and castles, torn between contemplation and action. And during these six years the world around him gradually takes on the attributes of make believe, where everything that happens is a spell or metamorphosis, working in fits and starts, fragmentarily.

To write he has to read books, find ideas, roll up his sleeves. For instance, he wants to cite a certain name, let's say Aristophanes, because it sounds good, at that point, to write 'like a gag in a play by Aristophanes'.

But he has never read a line of Aristophanes, doesn't know whether his gags have anything to do with what he's writing. So he rolls up his sleeves and starts reading Aristophanes' plays, all of them, and what has been written on them, and he reads that too. Just so he can write a particular sentence, 'like the gag in Aristophanes' play where...'. That's it. Three weeks have gone by for a few words.

At present he doesn't feel a great necessity to write anything longer than a note. He could write notes in his journal for the rest of his life. He writes long letters to friends however, detailing what he is thinking about, puzzling over, often without ever receiving a reply, noting that his friends no longer have time to write, those who make work, who call themselves artists prefer instead to instantly perform the process of making their work for others on public displays, so the messages they do send tend to list achievements rather than express doubt and indecision; perhaps the world is afraid to reveal anything not valued in terms of what is deemed successful. While for the ancients, the work of the hands defined the human being, today the world has a clock in its hand and measures life according to this. 'A waste of time,' people say to him. 'What are you studying for?' 'What's the point?' 'You have to make money!' Behind all this advice he finds nothing but a command. Yes, he writes to a friend, I struggle with making money, holding down a job ... why should a job need to be held down? A strange phrase, like a wrestling match. Meanwhile the world reads the latest news while eating lunch.

What if you slept ...
What if you slept
And what if
In your sleep
You dreamed
And what if
In your dream
You went to heaven
And there plucked a strange and beautiful flower
And what if
When you awoke
You had that flower in your hand
Ah, what then?

An ancient witness (part 2)

1. Under the covers, the student turns to the last three lines of the passage in the *Iliad*, which he reads by torchlight:

keito d' ar' en messoisi duo chrusoio talanta
toi domen hos meta toisi diken ithuntata eipoi

He translates:

standing itself while being stood in the very middle the golden scales
of the gods being offered, whomsoever among them all, those
commanding the right names.

He writes (in his notebook): the people all gathered together, the two men quarrelling, the older men speaking the names, the names of the gods, the names of the ancestors, giving vocative offerings to the gods, oh gods, the loud-voiced, far-seeing prophets who marshal the crowd through force of hand, quieting the din of many voices, the fire that created the scene shining out through the eyes of the people. Then among them all, *meta toisi* (his dictionary tells him) something is being given of the gods, perhaps in the speaking of certain formulae: the names of the gods, oaths tendered in offering, holding hands up to the gods, among them all: *diken ithuntata eipoi*, to those commanding *dike*, the right formulae or names. Every name a gift of the gods.

2. The image he has in mind is of older men, the sceptred men of rank, holding sacred staffs. The elders dart up in turn, so commanding the names. Perhaps the names were even sung, so that the singing of the names coincides

with the standing and the ordering and the telling of poetry. Singing in order to be better understood, a poetic-musical ordering, or *dike*, and the means for the human voice, *phone* in ancient Greek, to be heard.⁹ Both the measure of the two realms of gods and mortals and the weighing out of the names are sung, and this is *dike*. The poet's singing too, and his ordering of words (and word order), the commanding of words, echoes the ordering of *dike*.

3. To understand the phrase *diken ithuntata eipoi* better, the student turns to the word *ithuntata* in the dictionary. He finds that it comes from the Ionian Greek word *ithus*, later *euthus*, and means to walk straight toward, 'right' in the sense of 'upright', a kind of ordering, and not in the sense of a higher principle. *Euthus* is related to the Hebrew word *yashar*, and the Arabic word *yasara*, 'joy'. The Torah is called the *Sepher Hayashar*, 'The Upright Book'. The rabbis in the Talmud ask 'why is the Torah called the *Sepher Hayashar*?', and the answer: 'because it is the Book of the Upright' (*yasharim*, also 'flushed with joy'). The commanding of names is a joyful ordering, as to command is also to order in both meanings of the word. And to command one must also stand upright. On this upright ordering of names, on this remembering and commanding and singing of the right names, the whole city becomes again full of song and joy. *Dike* is the name uttered joyously in the realm of gods and mortals.

As *dike*, commanding the right names, must be sung before the sun sets, *ithuntata* comes to mean also the shortest time, the straightest route, linking it to the finitude of the day and therefore to the dark night, where *nyx* (the elder daughter of *eris*, strife) and *moira* dwell. *Dike* is the possibility that the day brings, but it always stands with *nyx*, and also *moira*: the measure of all things.

Moira is connected to life and death, and each individual life is part of a whole, just as *moira* is also part of a land, or lot. The three *Moirai* are the

goddesses of fate, past, present and future, and preside over the being of a human being, that binds being to the end. They thus spin the threads of life and death, but they are not the only ones to do so, and are related to the Muses. The Muses empower the 'poet' to see past things in a way that is denied to others, making him both seer and a soothsayer. The poet thus speaks of the human being's own coming to be in a language that calls from beyond the human.¹⁰ Where Moira has to do with life, the Muses have to do with language. The individual beneath the vault of the stars feels present there as a gift, offered and taken back by these mysterious forces.

4. What bothers the student still is *dike*. The word appeared in line 506 in the verb form *dikazon: toisin epeit' eison, amoibedis de dikazon*.

toisin epeit' eison, amoibedis de dikazon (506)

They [the elders] then dart up, so commanding names in turn.

The student translates *dikazon* as 'commanding names' and thus the line as 'the older men dart up, so commanding names in turn.' What is important, he thinks, is the standing upright so that *dike*, the names, are commanded and any other loud, disputing voices are suspended.

5. Today the command is given usually in the form of advice, suggestion, invitation, advertising. The *logos* of naming, like that of the command, is slowly overcoming and replacing the form of the proposition, the scientific and philosophical primacy of the 'what' or *ousia* (substance) of metaphysics. This means that there is a return of ancient currents of religion, magic and law that have been neglected in modern Western culture, and these institutions are secretly beginning to govern again.

And now the student sees names everywhere, a proliferation, a tidal wave of names, in advertising, online, in newspapers, interviews, on vans and lorries, on book covers. Even names in the skies above. Everywhere names are commanded, called, sung, and this naming and commanding of names is taking over his world.

What is decisive, he thinks, is the incessant putting-to-work of names, a willing into work. Just as justice was introduced into ethics to give a foundation to command, today command and action are closely bound and ethics becomes confused with the will, as something that can be willed by the individual. The significance of saying the names in the manner and form of *dike* is that they remain in circulation, remembered and repeated, yet are never put to work, never appropriated because they are inappropriable, can never be measured externally, objectively. They belong in equal measure to all those gathered. The whole of the named world, the structure of all possibilities, is prior to and exceeds any form of actuality, and its measure are the golden scales that stand interior to every measuring.

The problem for the student is how to think and write and photograph beyond putting-to-work, how to think an ethics emancipated from the concept of the will, an attempt at a *praxis* that would never stop returning writing and photography to their possibility not to be, their meaning never having to be explained.

The *daimon* never explains, never informs. Rather, it hints and suggests; it guides.

Thunder outside, and lightning. Rain falls through the open window. The curtains warp and weave in the wind. A bird lands on the ledge, seeking shelter. The one who stands upright, joyously, between gods and mortals, which is also the place of *dike*, who fears the gods as they ought to be feared is named *daimon*. *Daio*, (from *daimon*) the student finds translated as ‘to present in the sense of pointing and showing and hinting’. The *daimon* never explains, never informs, it hints, suggests, guides. The *daimon* fears the gods, but is also bound to them. It dwells in the profane world, but is marked by its sacred status, it belongs to neither profane nor sacred world. What the *daimon* shows is a significant characteristic of the gods: they give signs and point and hint and guide, i.e. they gesture rather than speak. These gestures mark the threshold between the sacred and the profane worlds.

And the student reads that in the breeze that blows through his window, in the sound of the rain outside, in the ‘fire’ of the lightning and even the bird on the ledge, the gods let themselves appear. And the gap between observer and observed, subject and world, between the one who would engage in description and that which he would attempt to describe, begins to grow indistinct. Reading for what is hidden thereby reveals it, or causes the inapparent to appear.¹¹

As the weather improves, the student likes to sit facing the sun inside the nearby ruined castle, and it is on one such sunny morning that he notices stars scratched into a wall. These five-pointed stars, he gathers by looking closely, are etched all over the sandstone, and yet they remain hidden in plain sight in the corner where he sits, unnoticed by the castle’s many visitors. It is certainly the first time he has seen them. Who scratched them? To what purpose? Were they made by children in play, with no other purpose than to be the backdrop in a made-up story? He can only guess through conjecture. The stars resist all his attempts to explain them.

6. The *histor* and *dike* reveal two distinct forces. While *dike* functions at the threshold between the sacred and the profane worlds, fetching speech (*peras*) back to the limitless voice (*apeiron*), the *histor* operates only at the limit (*peras*). The student has waded upstream far enough to find these two forces work independently and in equal measure. And the meeting point of the *histor* (the limit, *peras*) and *dike* (the name, the command, the limitless *apeiron*) is the witness, who is here the poet, as seer. And in order to function in the student's world today, the witness intertwines these two forces, so they are still distinct but never completely separated. He thinks of a photograph that has to state something as true or false, assert, perform, explain. And yet it also asks to be believed, is nothing but a command, a confidence trick. The photograph commands its viewer: 'Look!' And the same is true of writing: 'Listen!'. And in many ways today this current of command and belief, of naming, grows stronger and more powerful than the truth-statement or proposition.¹²

This *arche* (*histor* and *dike*) never ceases beginning, it never goes away. The command lies hidden, secretly, in the photograph, and in writing. The student says out loud: what shall I do? I am broke and in debt. What cannot be known for sure is what is hoped for, prayed for, believed in, commanded. This belongs to religion, magic, and law. What is known for sure (and surety) belongs to science and philosophy. These two currents cannot be separated from each other; the latter belongs to *histor*, the former to *dike*. They are distinguishable, through close study, which is what the student has been attempting, but remain inseparable, and they always work together in the fields of language and image.

While the limit (*peras*) refers to the hand-to-hand struggle between the body (life) and the apparatus that seeks to capture it, and the student is somewhere caught between the two, as is his writing and his photography, *peras* also means to pass across a boundary, from one homestead to another. In

order to resolve a dispute, a bridge has to be crossed where the two currents of *histor* and *dike* meet, and the crossing point is the witness itself.

What is at stake is the force of language itself: the form of the right name. The force of language is parallel to the force of the hand, which is to say physical force, which is also the force of the *histor*, and the many references to hands in the passage the student is reading so closely recalls the importance of this force of the hand. The force of the hand is nothing more than the maintenance of the naming, the force of the commandment. The force of the *histor* (hand) maintains the force of *dike* (command).

7. In modernity, the force is not the instrument used to realise the law, to judge, but is the proper content of the law. Law regulates the use of force, and the juridical system governs and regulates the force in the same way that grammar regulates the use of language as a system of norms. It is not the judge who enforces the law, but rather the other way round: the judge commands and the law backs the command. In order to function in modernity, the two streams have to come together. What comes to the fore in modernity is the force of the command, *dike*, yet the force of the hand (found in the *histor*) is still present but forgotten. Thus theory supposedly exists separate from action, though it still contains this element of force within itself. Writers can still be persecuted for their words. And politicians say things that are untrue and yet are excused for these things being seen as belonging to the dimension of speech.

To accept that the link between the law and physical force is not instrumental allows a better understanding of how commanding names functions. The force of the hand (*histor*) aims at the maintenance of the force of the name, *dike*, the force of language. The command (*dike*) orders physical force (*histor*), which in turn orders the command. Language cannot be

separated from physical force. The force of the word and the force of the hand form a double system.

8. The *Iliad* is arranged in a similar double system. The poet does not have to remember each individual word, but uses set forms or formulae to build his tale around. The forms, which operate as examples, can be revealed without ever revealing the whole story, so the teller simply moves from example to example. *Dike* can thus be seen as an allegory of the epic tale's function. In the end, perhaps, the function of the poet parallels the function of *dike*. *Dike* seems to correspond to a reality, but it doesn't. It is not a judgment but a mark, a signature to be read, perhaps even functions like the *daimon*, in that it serves to orientate or point in a certain direction, within a certain context, and because of that exerts a strong force. *Dike* is contained in the human being's every utterance, operates from the void of the limitless voice, fetching each articulated sound back into the void. What defines the human being is this finding of the limit, the finding of limit in voice and vision.

The student writes: I am trying to present the idea of a peculiar force of language, which is always already present. In naming, it acquires an uncanny, *daimonic* force. He pauses to think. What is at stake? Is it something that concerns life and language?

He writes: the difference between an animal and the human being is usually conceived from the perspective of a knowing that is made possible by language. But what defines the human is that it finds its limit in language. The coming to presence of the human being in the middle of everything does not happen before the word, but from the very beginning it is in language. I almost decide to risk my life in my language. *Moir*a always reminds me that I am risking my life by speaking. The scales always threaten to lighten the load. And without being in relation to what is said, there cannot be thinking. There cannot be anything outside this, since *moira* binds beings to their end. And yet, to realise all the possibilities of life and becoming human, is to recognise all the modes of being that are language, hands, faces, animals and trees, and even those that are not reducible to the human being and its meaning-making activity.

And this is perhaps why, he thinks, the human being constitutes itself as a subject of language. If the human being is a being in whose language its whole life is at stake, then the uncanny force of language is that which separates the human being from the living animal being through religion, law, and magic. These are the fields in which the force of language is ordered, and separated. The invention of language transforms the whole living being. The force of language must be understood in this way.

The student now thinks it is possible to understand the passage he is reading so closely. The ‘witness’ — here, the poet — is faithful to the religious, juridical, and magical forces, and the institutionalisation of these. The witness attempts to secure the ‘is’ in thought, but must always remain

open to these forces. It is the securing of *histor*, but it is also the attempt to be faithful to *dike*. The 'witness' is nothing other than the faithfulness to the force in which the living being acquires the capability of language and also decides to risk itself in language.

Perhaps what is called 'witness' today is not a subject at all, it is nothing other than the human being's faithfulness to language, and not, as is usually thought today, to 'truth'.¹³

The student pauses to think. What is it that permits me to identify the poet, the 'I', the present individual that speaks? Perhaps the witness can keep faithful only to language, not to the subject ('I') created by language. And faithfulness to language as such is surely to be found in poetry. Poetry is not faithfulness to a certain speech, it is faithfulness to the gesture of language itself, the witness's gesture. That is why poetry is a force with no content or substantive meaning. Poetry is always the opening of language to new possible content, the poetry of poetry, the practice of *praxis*.

Perhaps in this moment of pause, there is a suspension of the work of language, performance, technique, and here the student might even begin to show what he can do. And so in this suspension he can rest for a while and acquiesce in himself, find a moment in which to contemplate the possibility to read, write and take photographs, or not to (impossibly). And perhaps what he finds in the movement between possibility and impossibility is only his voice.

8

Slowly light strengthens, and the room appears. There appear the wardrobe and the bed, the desk for writing, the small lamp, readably. Above the desk appear two large photographs.

Phainetai moi

The word ‘appears’ is ambiguous from the beginning. On the one hand it points toward the *phenomenon*, what appears on its own, sometimes as ‘it seems, it appears to me as a likeness’, i.e. it deceives. On the other hand appearance refers to what shines and manifests in full light, the manifestation or *phainomenon* in the original sense of the Greek verb *phaino* (to appear) from *phos* (light). ‘Appearance’ is modelled on Latin *apparentia* connected with *appareo*, which means ‘to appear’, but *pareo* also means ‘come forth’ in the sense of both appear and obey. In the first case, something remains hidden in the very act of presenting itself to vision; in the second, there is absolute visibility, pure light. The interweaving of both meanings is particularly marked in Greek and German. Consider the breadth of the Greek *doxa* which refers to the appearance of what appears (‘it seems to me’), but continues to designate at the same time both mortal error, and the glory of God and its radiance (hence *orthodox*, the ‘right’ opinion, but also the ‘right’ glory). Similarly, in German *Schein* and *Scheinen* mean ‘appearance’ and ‘deceptive appearance’ respectively. *Die Sonne scheint* (the sun shines) or *Mondschein* (moonlight) is what shows itself in full radiance. *Unscheinbar* is what is hidden in appearing. To illustrate this connection, to quote a famous philosopher: *Sein west als Erscheinen* (being essences, comes to presence, as appearing. [This does not mean that appearing is something subsequent to being, something which from time to time meets up with being. Appearance is not inessential, it is part of the essence of being itself]):

We say ‘appearance’ and we know the rain and the sunshine. The sun shines «scheiden», ‘to seem’ and ‘to shine’. We say: ‘the room was feebly lighted by the glow «Schein» of a candle.’ The Alemanic dialect has the word *Scheinholz*, wood that glows in the dark. From pictures of saints we know the halo «Heiligenschein», the glowing ring

about their heads. But we also know pseudo saints ‹Scheinheilige›, those who look like saints but are not saints. We are familiar with the sham battle ‹Scheingefecht› or simulated battle. The sun, as it shines ‹scheint› seems ‹scheint› to move around the earth. The moon which shines seems, but only seems, to measure two feet in diameter, that is only an illusion ‹Schein›. Here we run into two different kinds of *Schein* and *scheinen*. But they do not simply stand side by side; no, one is a variant of the other. The sun, for example, can have the appearance ‹Schein› of moving round the earth only because it shines, i.e. glows and in glowing manifests itself, i.e. comes to light ‹zum Vorschein›. In the shining of the sun, to be sure, we at the same time experience its radiation as heat. The sun shines: it shows itself and we feel warmth. In the halo the shining of the light makes the wearer manifest ‹bringt zum Vorschein› as a saint.

On closer scrutiny we find three modes of *Schein*: 1) *Schein* as radiance and glow; 2) *Schein* and *Scheinen* as appearing ‹erscheinen›, as coming to light ‹Vor-schein›; 3) *Schein* as mere appearance, the semblance ‹Anschein› presented by something. But at the same time it becomes clear that the second mode of *Scheinen*, appearing in the sense of showing itself, pertains both to *Schein* as radiance and to *Schein* as semblance, and not as an accidental characteristic but as the ground of their possibility. The essence of appearance ‹Schein› lies in the appearing ‹Erscheinen›. It is self-showing, self-representation, standing-by, lying at hand. The long-awaited book has now appeared, i.e. it lies at hand, it is present at hand and available. When we say: the moon shines ‹scheint›, this means not only that it has a shine ‹Schein›, a certain brightness, but also: it stands in the sky, it is present, it is. The stars shine: glittering, they come to presence. Here appearance ‹Schein› means exactly the same as being. (Sappho's verse, *asteres men amphi kalan selannan* [the stars hide away their shining form around the beautiful moon when she shines full over the earth] ... and the poem by Matthias Claudius, *Ein Wiegenlied bei Mondschein zu singen* [A Lullaby to Sing by Moonlight], provide a suitable basis for reflection on being and appearance.)

The two meanings of the word ‘appearance’ cannot truly be separated, and it can often be far from easy to make a decision in favour of the one or the other: it is as though beauty always implies a semblance, as though every appearance, included a *doxa*: ‘it seems to me that man is equal to the gods’.

To look at the face of a human being is to already avoid looking at the eyes. This way of looking is how lovers can lose themselves, and it is the sign of a human being to gaze into each other's eyes. Yet, to really look into another's eyes, means to stop seeing the face. What this sight speaks is its mystery (the darkness in which the mystics say that God dwells, a speech born in the heart, mute and unnameable). According to the Gospel of St. John, a sign (*semeia*) is the hidden manifestation of the *doxa* of Christ. God commands Adam's image and his likeness represents the parting of clouds covering the mind. And then Adam stares into Eve's eyes, loving himself in her.

Looking a stranger directly in the eyes means they either they return the gaze, or they lower it in shame. (St. John also says that those who divert their gaze are not ashamed to stare into unsayable glory.) And those who stare without shame make a display of their gaze, entirely without reserve. The look of the modern subject is the look of the predatory animal: a looking that is a glaring. It lasts no more than a moment however because behind the gaze there is only darkness, a perpetual lack of vision. (Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare. In time the curtain-edges will grow light. Till then I see what's really always there.) For the short instant when the sense of surprise or shock in these gazes' touch still remains, there's an interchange that comes close to an erotic charge, thus allowing the two gazes to become a place where love can come into being. The mind blanks at the glare. For when I look at you even for a short time, it is no longer possible for me to speak, as if my tongue is broken, and immediately a subtle fire runs over my skin. I cannot see anything with my eyes, and my ears are buzzing. The look of the modern subject is the look of a predatory being that advances by attacking.

Where non-predatory animals are concerned, this moment remains hidden to them: the animal's awareness vanishes at the very same point at which it awakens; when it sees into the eyes of a human, there is nothing of

appearance there, nothing that seems. Animals are said to see, but animals do not look, and yet I have seen a horse looking at a sunset, and a small dog, catching me unawares, looking at me. Only the human being however has an interest in how the animal looks at it, only the human being has an interest in images as images and understands appearances as appearances. Only the human being has the look which faces and grasps. The basic feature of this look is not glaring, by means of which beings become objects of conquest. This look takes the coming to presence of beings on the basis of the facing look or encounter. In the encounter is a being-looked-at which reveals itself, a soft, gentle gaze rather than a fixed staring at something at hand, the look of hard representation, it is radically different to the kind of seeing that transforms into correctness.

In trying to hold on to this encounter, human beings become witnesses. Their desperate attempt to grasp and keep the look results, for human beings, in a kind of delay in every sight; stimulus and response do not coincide, and (as with the human voice) in the gap between, memory goes. For the very first time, appearance separates itself from things, and semblance severs beauty. But this small delay refers to something that is: human beings are not at hand, like the moon and the stars they are simply, wonderfully, unreachable.

But what about me? I want to grasp what remains inside of me unexpressed and unsaid. But this is my not being anything other than appearance. If I could truly see my own eye, I would not see anything at all. To dodge this way and that to catch a glimpse of what lies behind my own 'I'. Is that a tree or a man walking? I am not quite sure. I begin to tire of my unclipsable face, my I. The worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter 'I' all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a man. But he has not a bone in his body. This is why when encountering a stranger's gaze every face locks into grimace, the character the face makes when it realises that it has nothing to

hide and desperately tries to take refuge behind itself. But this pure visibility is the revelation of the face in all of its nakedness. The look shelters and hides something, but at the same time the face, lacking the look, appears only in such a way that it itself has absolutely nothing to hide. Was not speech given so that the human being might liberate things from their images, giving appearance to appearance itself, and leading it to glory? Thus, what is most desirable can reside in a single face, and wisdom tries to touch its soft cheeks. And the poet teaches that with language, already, there will have been translation. But then a child opens its eyes and sees a tree for the first time. That child seems to me to be equal to the gods. Yet it stands plain as a wardrobe, what we think we know today, when knowledge is only able to communicate the unmystified.

Wet foot

What does it mean to call a witness? What does it mean say that the concept 'witness' designates a human being who has seen and heard facts or events? Is it true that every witness determines this class? What is at stake is the word 'witness' in its signifying role, in its being named a 'witness'. It is difficult to distinguish a witness from its being-called-(witness), from its being-in-language. In other words, to grasp the concept 'witness' as such, it is already always transformed into an object. This is the paradox of 'cognitive' being. If the form by which a thing is seen and known is other than the thing itself (*peri to pragma auto*), then the thing cannot be known.

The expression 'the thing itself' (*peri to pragma auto*) first appears in Plato's seventh letter. In what appears to be a lament for the replacement of an oral tradition by the written word, Plato writes "concerning all these writers, or prospective writers, who claim to know the subjects which I seriously study, whether as hearers of mine or of other teachers, or from their own discoveries; it is impossible, in my judgement at least, that these men should understand anything...". His written Dialogues have, in this sense, little to do with what he most cared about, which is thought applied to the thing itself, thinking that is suddenly brought to birth in the soul as 'a leaping spark' through use of question and answer in speech.

Yet if the form by which a thing is seen and known is completely indistinct from the thing, it is useless for knowledge. Only a theory of ideas is able to disentangle thought from this paradox (the form or idea of a thing is the thing itself), but this means that the witness, in being-called, is unnameable: it is the being-in-language of the non-linguistic. What remains without name here is the being-named 'witness', the name 'witness' itself.

While the idea of a thing is ‘the thing itself’, the call for a ‘witness’, insofar as it calls a thing, is nothing but the thing insofar as it is named.

The thing itself is simply an object presupposed by language and by the cognitive process. Its real presupposition therefore is the subject in the etymological sense of that which lies beneath (*hupokeimenon*), i.e. that which is presupposed by, or placed beneath, the name or the *logos*. A thinking that wants to come to terms with its own ‘thing’ must come to terms with this paradox, which Plato already was occupied with. In an important passage in his seventh letter, he writes that knowledge of the thing itself lights up suddenly “after rubbing ... against the ... names [*onoma*], *logoi*, visual and other sense perceptions [*eidolon*]...” and finally the knowledge or understanding that is realised through them (*Letters*, 344b4-7). Thus knowledge (of the thing itself) is born through *logos* (language) and *eidos* (which here indicates the perceivable). The thing itself is possible only in language (*logos*) and by virtue of language, and only in vision (*eidos*) and by virtue of vision. *Onoma*, the name, in modern terms, is the semiotic; the *logos* is the semantic. The *eidos* is the perceived referent, the *pragma*. The *logos* is the way in which life is articulated in a contingent way, on the ‘already given’, that determines it and constitutes it as an historical form. The form or essence of the already given, the *eidos*, is the sheer appearance of something, and is intimately related to the *logos*. The *logos* preoccupied with the *eidos* has become, today, the *eidos* constituted by the *logos*, and the *logos* as the measure of all things.

However, reading *peri to pragma auto* (concerning the thing itself) more closely, it is apparent that *auto* serves as the designation of *eidos*. The thing itself is not, in fact, another thing, but it is the same thing itself. It is not presupposed by (placed beneath) the name or the *logos* at all, but is situated in the middle of its own knowability, i.e. in the middle of language and of vision as such. *Logos*, therefore, is unable to bring to expression this knowability and

this sameness. The very knowability of the thing which is revealed in *logos* is resisted by *logos*. Language supposes and hides the thing in the very act of speaking of it. Presupposition is the form itself of this naming: the saying on a subject (according to Aristotle's definition, the saying of 'something on something'). The implication, then, is that in speaking about that on which is being spoken (the said), there always remains something not being spoken or not said, i.e. that something gets lost in knowing about what there is to be known. How, then, is it possible to speak without presupposing, without turning what one speaks about into a subject? Since names are, for the Greeks, essentially that which is said for itself, how can *logos* say the unsayable, say what the name calls?

There is a contradiction here, a weakness of language that is being called into question. The thing itself is not a thing, it is sayability which is in question, and which in language is presupposed and forgotten. The thing itself is that of which *logos* is always losing sight. The *eidōs* is lost in language so that language may bear upon something. The task of exposing this is to help *logos* with the *eidōs*. Here the presupposing power of language touches its limit and its end. Language supposes and hides that which it brings to light in the very act of bringing it to light.

An image can restore one's footing. Here a passage that jumps momentarily before the reader's eyes in Plato's *Phaedrus* may help. The image's appearance or *eidōs*, its bringing to light, thus acts as a stepping stone in the starting point of all things, and also as a warning of the careless consigning to a written text of thoughts about the thing itself. Having been lead outside of the city walls by Phaedrus, Plato has Socrates say:

“By Hera, the resting place is beautiful, to be sure! This plane tree is especially wide-spreading and tall, and the height and shade of the

willow are altogether beautiful, and as its flowering is reaching its peak, it makes the place as sweet smelling as can be; and in addition the stream flows most gracefully under the plane tree with especially cool water, *by the guide of my foot*. It seems likely, from the maidens and other statues, to be the shrine of certain nymphs and of Achelous. And further, if you wish, how lovely and particularly sweet is the fragrant good breeze of the place! It responds with a summery and clear echo to the chorus of cicadas. And the most subtle refinement of all is the grass, because it is naturally sufficient, on a gentle slope, for someone laying down his head to be in an altogether beautiful situation. So that your work of guiding strangers, Phaedrus my friend, has been the best.”

The word Socrates uses for the indication that his foot gives of the cool water is *tekmerion*, which is a special kind of guiding sign. Here is Plato’s distinction between knowledge and opinion (*en psukhe*) and what is the perceptible object (*en somaton skhemasin*)(*Letters*, 342c6). Even more noteworthy is the disappearance of the thing itself. The cool water is replaced by the *tekmerion* of Socrates’ wet foot.

In a reflection on the sign in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes that “necessary signs are called *tekmeria*; [while] those which are not necessary have no distinguishing name. I call those necessary signs from which a logical syllogism can be constructed, wherefore such a sign is called *tekmerion*” (1357b 16-17). Here he opposes language constructed on the *necessary tekmerion* (*anagkaion tekmerion*) to language containing signs with rigour (which he terms necessary ‘nameless’ signs, or *anagkaion anonumon*). He thus calls to attention a way of speaking that proceeds by how something appears [*peri poia*] as opposed to the facts [*peri pragmatos*]. Language is necessarily objectifying, in the sense that it always already splits the thing itself (which announces itself only in language)

into a thing on which one can speak, a *pragma*, and into a *poion*, the quality or likeness which is said about it. Here Aristotle presents the process of signification in language (i.e. naming) in a way that has a relationship with Socrates' foot. He thus calls attention to the signifying power of language itself. But then Aristotle adds, perhaps to qualify the curious remark regarding signs or names that are 'nameless' (*anonumon*), that "in the old language *tekmar* and *peras* have the same meaning" i.e. the 'limit'. The namelessness of the nameless sign is placed in opposition to the *tekmar*, i.e. the *peras*. The opposite to *peras* is the *apeiron*, which Plato in *Philebus* calls the 'limitless voice.'

In *de Interpretatione*, Aristotle presents the process of linguistic signification in terms of the voice. "That which is in the voice [*phone*]," he writes, "are symbols [*sumeia*] of affections or impressions [*pathemata*] in the soul [*psukhe*] and written words are the [articulated] signs of that which is in the voice. And as with writing, so also is speech not the same for all men. But what these are primarily signs of (the affections of the souls) are the same for the whole of mankind; as are also these actual things (*pragmata*) of which those affections are representations or likenesses." (16a 3-7). This is the appearance of *grammata*, letters, signs in the voice articulated by the tongue. Thus, in this context, the *tekmar* or *peras* can be said to be the voice as a limit, i.e. in speech. If one thinks that Socrates' remark was really directed at showing the impossibility of speaking about the thing itself and, in general, what is unsayable in language, then what is presupposed is both the foot and the voice, i.e. the body or the living animal being. What is nameless is what is limitless, and the image of the babbling stream becomes an *eidōs* for when a speaker pours words on something he already knows. Here Plato, writing about what should remain unsaid in the image of Socrates standing in the stream, seems to challenge the weakness of *logos* itself. The exposition of the limit in philosophy is also the announcement of a poetic task. The unsayable thus casts a shadow

over the *tekmerion* in the manner of the poet. Between philosophy and poetry stands a wet foot.

In *de Interpretatione*, the *gramma*, the letter, as interpreter of the voice, has no need of any other interpreter. It is the last stop, beyond which no other interpretation is possible: it is its limit. The letter, which is the sign of the voice, is also its element. Likewise the *tekmar* of the wet foot is its own limit, its own element. In as much as it is an element of that of which it is the sign, the wet foot has the privileged status of self display. The *tekmar* shows itself, but only in so far as it is the wet foot, that is, as always already a thing of the past. It carries inscribed within it the ontological structure of presupposition. The *tekmar* is, therefore, the form or image itself of presupposition and nothing else. This limit occupies a central place in mysticism. Through letting go of the thing itself, the mystic is able to experience the God who is not of this world. As such, in the *tekmar*, thought makes itself immediately over into the limit, without having to measure itself against the thing itself.

By showing his wet foot, Socrates announces that he is the speaker of thought, and through thought he is the speaker of things and of being. Yet in this moment of showing over saying, language fails to communicate its and the gap between sign and meaning breaks down. In this gap where language cannot communicate meaning, the word is freed from the necessity of making meaning, such that it remains without definition, or nameless. Behind every *tekmerion* lurks the shadow of that which is without definition, the poetic word, the *eidos* of the babbling stream, the *apeiron*. And it is here that a mute, nameless witness is installed, the mere fact that the world is, the very existence of the world. This origin of the witness is installed into the very experience of language and vision itself, and to grasp this is to think of being that is independent of speech and of human beings and their meaning-making. What does not reveal itself in the word is the simple fact that life (*phusis*) itself and

the world exists. Language cannot say that the world is, only how the world is. The language one chooses establishes a particular relation with the life of which it speaks. A poet uses words, which is to say that he gives to language a particular form. This is why the limit (*peras*) must make its appearance from out of the *apeiron* only to disappear back into it. Language is experienced properly only when names are lacking, when words fail on the tip of a tongue. But only a poet can really experience language itself. Both philosophy and poetry represent a form of failure in the showing of the unsayable that constitutes their common task. To render to the thing itself its place in *logos* and at the same time to give back to *logos* its difficulty, is the poetic task of philosophy.

A poetic problem

A philosopher of antiquity repeated the belief, which was really a faith, that a poet was a witness. The poet sang of a person's fate as if he had been there himself, or heard from one who was. He was inspired not from some inner space, but by the Muses on Mount Helion. He could therefore not be criticised solely on the grounds of what was true or false. The philosopher coined a phrase for such truth-statements or propositions: *apophantic logos*, *logos* which can be true and false and is defined by its indifference to those who pronounce it. But then the philosopher speaks of another kind of *logos*, which encompasses various modes of speech that are not indifferent to the speaker. It commits him to what he says in some way, binds him to his words. His speech cannot be true or false in the sense of a law of nature. The philosopher, who is Aristotle, writes, 'I mean for instance, what is a command, a prayer, a statement, a threat, question, answer, and so on. The knowledge or ignorance of such matters brings upon the poet no censure worth serious consideration.'

Logos belongs to that mode of the living animal being that is articulated, which the Greeks comprehended as the living being that speaks (*zoon logon ekhon*). *Logos*, that which lets appear, is somehow written 'in' the movement of life itself. Aristotle considers the poet, but he also considers the witness. The witness is a poetic problem, a problem of style, or expression. "The witness's gesture is the poet's," writes one contemporary thinker. "Witnessing is a poetic experience," writes another, as if speaking always contained within it an element of action, the *praxis* of language as such. This, in some way, contaminates the habit of writing. If this is true, then *logos* already has a poetic element in itself. A poetic problem that is a problem of style. Philosophy, as is well known, started as a reflection on *logos*. Plato has Socrates saying he has to leave the study of *phusis*, of living nature, and concentrate on speech, on *logos*.

Here is the beginning of the separation of *logos* from life, *logos* as the being of the beings that live, as speaking through them. Philosophy and poetry, for example, must not be confused, as they are two opposite tensions in the field of language. But neither can they be separated. A philosopher who does not in some way have a poetic problem is not really a philosopher. And in some way the same is true for a poet. A philosopher once said that philosophy should only properly be poeticised. Philosophy is philosophy only insofar as it is also poetic. And the reverse is true. Poetry should only be properly philosophised. Poetry is poetry only insofar as it is philosophical.

But what does it mean to be living in the middle of articulation, in the middle of coming-into-appearance, living as that kind of being that now has *logos*? If only there were no external witness to my life, my life would not have to be separate from its form. It could be without clear distinction. But to witness is already to separate a form from a life and place it at the mercy of a sovereign power. What remains, however, is perhaps not the tale of the witness itself, but how the animal living being comes to be aware of itself as speaking and seeing, in the middle of language and vision. In some way the story of the witness is the story of the link between the living animal being that becomes aware that it is speaking. In some way to call for a witness is to seek to bind together the living being and language, and therefore to presuppose the signifying power of language itself.

An ancient witness (part 3)

1. What determines the life of the human being? Does the human being first come to be human in the middle of speaking with others, or does it first become human face to face with other humans and the world?

What marks the human being's being with others in the *polis* is speech, the ground of being with one another. This being with one another also forms the *oikos*, the order of the homestead, the only possible basis of the fact that the life of the human being is in speaking with others. But being with others is not unique to the human being. The living animal being already lives with others in voice. Voice is the *apeiron*, the unknowable order of the limitless void. The *dike* of mortals is not to be able to hear the voice of the god, the *apeiron*, without its being modulated in some way into human speech, *aude*. The voice that the gods assume for mortals to hear them is not *phone* but *aude*, the shape or form of human speech. The gods must modulate the limitless voice, but they must also assume a shape in order to appear to mortals.

In a famous passage of Homer's *Odyssey*, Athena, daughter [*kouren*] of Zeus, takes the form of a woman [*demas d'eikto gunaiki*] in order to make herself apparent to Odysseus, and the form is shining, radiant, brilliant [*kale te megale*]. Odysseus does not recognise the goddess at first in her shining form, so she sounds her voice [*phonesas*], addresses him [*proseuda*] with winged words [*epea pteroenta*]. First through listening, then when the intellect is illuminated, through the initiation, the initiated receives an impression of the goddess. When sight deceives, the voice is all powerful.

Odysseus replies by saying that it is hard [*argaleos*] for a knowing mortal such as himself to endure the encounter [*antiasanti*] with the goddess, to meet her face to face as such. And it is hard for him to know her for certain [*epistameno*] because she appears as all things [*auten panti eiskeis*]. To say the

goddess appears shining is a description of how she appears and how she seems: the verb *eisko*, from *eikon* means both ‘appear’ and ‘seem’. She can make herself resemble everything or anything [*panti*], but *panti* can also mean ‘everyone’, in the sense of what is proper or common to mortals: a face, two eyes, two hands, two legs, a body, etc. And *panti* can also mean ‘whole’ in that the human being belongs to the shining, the coming to presence, but is not the whole of the coming to presence, is not the coming to presence itself. Only the gods know the whole. She takes the form of a part, of seeming mortal [*demas d’eikto gunaiki*].

Odysseus’ moment of looking into the unknown, his initial lack of recognition of the goddess, is because she brings her divine look and voice into the everyday world of human beings. And Odysseus must now pay attention in order to see her in her disguised appearance, which can only be known without becoming certain [*epistameno*]. This is hard [*argaleos*]. Knowing for certain uncovers the deception of her appearance as the appearance of deception. But this does not mean that knowing deception can be substituted for appearance toward which knowing should turn. In order to make herself apparent, the goddess must first touch [*katarrezo*] his hand [*keir*], then sound her voice [*phoneo*], then address the mortal with the light, airy winged words of human beings [*epea pteroenta proseuda*]. Accordingly, there is no detail of the way she dresses or the way she walks and talks that can ever be known for certain. The goddess constitutes herself as a human being, as looking and speaking, and in the experience of looking, first of all looks herself, with brilliant eyes [*glaukopis*], and first of all as an experience of herself as looking, in the eyes of the mortal, he who witnesses [*upodegmenos*], he who is not able at first to know her [*oude su g’egnos*].

2. What is reached here is language and vision itself. Not something presupposed by knowing, but that which comes to presence within knowing, within becoming human. Appearance is based in itself, image is no longer separated from knowing; in the middle of it all: the human or mortal in the shining brilliance of the goddess's coming to presence, in words she comes to presence in the middle of an image and of words. And her taking of his hand signals a way of interacting that is a way of taking the human being into her care, into the care of the goddess.

Existing in this is an equivalence between being and living, and no other experience than becoming human. What is in question here is the realisation of a form of life, the moment of absolute indistinction in the failure to know for certain, which takes the form of the awareness of another's existence in the awareness of one's own existence, an awareness that comes through the taking of the hand, that which seizes, labours, works, combats, and brings violence; but also caresses and strokes, in love and friendship, an awareness that comes through human touch, words, and vision. Thus with the touch of a hand, work and love become indistinct.

What the encounter between the mortal and the goddess shows is something common to both love and producing. Odysseus comes to know the goddess in his recognition of her voice and words, and he in turn exists only in his name and character, the one who is artful of speech [*muthos te klopiou*], wily [*apate*], beguiling [*dolon*], unflinching [*skhetlie*], cunning [*poikilometa*], ways loved by him from the heart [*oi toi pdeothen philoi eisin; pedothen* perhaps a euphony for *paidothen*, loved by him since childhood]. Here the coming to presence of two deceptive beings in a moment of immanent appearance constantly threatens to disappear again into the void, a moment when inappearance becomes appearance, in which even means and ends, possibility and act, work and love, are indetermined.

Gods change their appearance and disguise their voice so as to appear to human beings. Homer's formula for this is *demas kai ateireia phonen* (in shape and loud voice).¹⁴ When the adjective *ateires* is applied to the voice, it refers to the god who seems like a human being. When it is applied to the appearance of bronze on a shield forged by a god, in a divine furnace, it means something like 'hard' or 'unwearing'. The adjective *ateiras* refers to the metamorphosis from divine to human, from fire to matter. Divine disguise is *demas*, the shape of the god, while *phone* is something like uttering sounds for mortals. But when gods (and animals) speak intelligibly, it is *aude* that is used, that which is characteristic of human beings and differs from voice. *Aude* is the peculiar speech of human beings.

3. On his way to investigate the fate of his companions, Odysseus meets Hermes who, after describing the transformation of Odysseus' men by Circe into pigs, gives him a root, which renders Circe's magic harmless. Hermes picks it from the ground and reveals it to Odysseus. Only after it is shown in detail does Hermes name it *molu*. It is hard for mortals to dig up *molu*. The flower is visible to all, but its *phusis* encompasses both flower and root, and only the gods know the whole. The whole is unknown to human beings and has no counterpart in their language. It suggests that the gods in both language and vision have a knowing that is fuller and richer than that of human beings. And right away there is a distance between *phusis* and *idea*. *Idea* means what is seen or visible, as the flower is the visible aspect of the *molu*. The look of a thing, its *eidos*, presents itself to the human being, stands before it. The look is that within and as which the thing comes to presence, that is what 'is'. What is offered is the current look or face of whatever the human being encounters. From the human point of view the flower is all that appears. But in *phusis* there is the emerging of the whole, and this is not synonymous with nature. It is not

just one process among others. *Phusis* is how beings first become and remain beings. *Phusis* can be experienced everywhere, in the rising of the sun, in the surging of the sea, in the growth of plants, in the birth of living beings, and finally and first of all, in the gods themselves.

Everything, including the gods, emerges from out of *phusis*, without implying that there is something behind it. Within *phusis* there is order out of *apeiron*, limitlessness. *Phusis* is not exhausted in human beings or their images or speech. The divine voice and appearance are accordingly something hearable and seeable, just as the root of *molu* can be seen, but they are manifestly not the language or vision of a human being. The world is there before any possible analysis of humans, and it must be articulated to see or say it. To articulate something, whether in thought, or in speech, or appearance, is to bear upon an unreflective experience. Moreover, articulation is not unaware of itself, and so it appears to itself, it has to be recognised. The world is given to the witness, because the witness is given to itself. The world of the human being is articulated, not constructed, and this is not only in the truth-statement. *Phusis* and *logos* are independent of human meaning-making.

What is set in view is how the world matters to living. The manner and mode in which the world is there, depends on the possibility that living can be lived. And for the human being one of the possible modes of the showing of this possibility lies in speech, and in image. For the god, it lies in the whole. Thus while voice and vision are not something special to human beings, speaking and appearance in image, form a possibility of being itself. The genuine function of both is to bring a matter to sight among others, is nothing other than the being's desire to communicate itself.

Beings like animals, humans, plants, mountains, the sun, already lie there and become present only insofar as there is a distance from being, independently, otherwise they are overlooked and disappear from the everyday

world. Independence is expressed by that which is seen, sighted. From the appearance of being the face emerges, the look of the being. Likewise, the voice is not something outside of speech, or even prior to it. The voice emerges from within speech itself, as the form of the goddess emerges in the poet's words. And thus the witness's look, its gesture, is also its face, and its gesture emerges from within living itself.

4. The witness is becoming embedded in biological information as an historical object. Ubiquitous facial and gesture recognition threatens to fix every genuine human expression in a code similar to animal language. The problem of the witness coincides with the problem of human nature, and human nature is split between *zoe* and *bios*, voice and speech, *oikos* and *polis*, root and flower. The master (*polis, bios, culture*) of human nature must grasp these divisions. The attempt to fix the division coincides with the attempt to fix human nature. First the human being has to rule and govern its own nature, which is essentially a political problem. But the assumption of life, of living, as a political task has to deal with this problem. The fate, or character of politics, of the witness, is the possibility or impossibility of such a task, to consider politics as life and as a task.

The researcher

Standing at the threshold the student experiences a division. On one hand as an intellectual subject, he is brought into being in an academic hierarchy, the discourse of science, and the necessity of the qualification, the rules of which others control. On the other hand, while researching he is dedicated simply to the desire to learn, and to his study.

Entirely absorbed in his books and his writing he has no distinct notion of his identity; he neither knows who he is nor what he is. He can feel his blood pulse as he would with a brook or a stream, if he were standing in the middle of its flow. He feels a rapturous calm in his whole being; and each time can find nothing comparable to it in all the activity of known pleasures.

He studies in a dusty basement archive, cataloguing images with a small camera in hand. He enters his work via a low door at the end of an old staircase; a rickety, cold, dark and forgotten corner of the huge archive that is far larger than he has ever explored. He has nothing in particular to do, no task which has been set, which has been the general condition for some time now. It was a matter of answering the advert and coordinating his time. 'Researcher needed for assembling of scattered photographs.' He had assumed he would need to show documents, send files, follow timetables, be registered and tracked. Yet here he is, left quite alone in the dim basement, given over to indeterminate requirements.

At first he felt lost. Someone whistling somewhere far beneath him, the metal floor beneath just an interconnected mesh of rhombi. He starts each day by pulling dusty boxes from shelves without order, each identical in every way to every other box, but he has no specific purpose in mind other than to see what lies inside. There is nothing to guide him, no necessity to catalogue contents according to certain rules. Any conditions determining his proper behaviour have not been transmitted to him. He simply opens each box and looks at the countless photographs inside in

his own time, according to his desire each day. His work is, after all, endless.

After a while among the dusty shelves, with images spread out before him, a moth flickering around the fluorescent light, he starts to sort through the contents, piled up without system or thought. He realises all the possibilities for shaping the material are here without knowing quite how to shape or what form it can take, in which any clear orientation or position is lacking, possibilities that can never be determined beforehand or even measured.

For how long will he work? Indefinitely. He begins to forget why he is here at all. And yet he always feels he knows what he is doing, even if he cannot articulate the feeling. He knows the thrust of his work can open up something new within the present and everything he finds, he considers part of a lost script that is slowly regaining its use.

Down here in the dusty basement he realises that to bury himself in the boxes, to lose himself in thought, is also a kind of study, a rhythmic sway between digging and reflecting, a playful encounter with what he finds.

He wonders if someone might, at some point, ask what he has found, as if it were a simple matter of positioning himself and strengthening his position. But so far he has not even seen another living soul, perhaps is quite alone in the world, the exception rather than the rule.

The newspaper basement

The archive occupies a small room in the basement of a famous newspaper in Paris, and contains thousands of old photographs, many of them now fading. In one dusty box are photographs from the second world war, with type attached to the rear of each, even glued across the fronts, all with filing codes from a long-forgotten system, a witnessing of the unseen hands of an army of anonymous clerks. Pencil markings and underlining identify important dates, names and places. I can likewise imagine the forgotten filing system that once ordered and mapped an archive of images waiting to be rediscovered that will provide an ontology of photographic potential.

Three women greet me on my first morning in the office, an older clerk, who introduces herself as Marion, and is clearly in a position of authority; her younger helper Manon; and a third clerk, whose name I now forget and is therefore less easy to define. Together we descend three flights of stairs to reach the archive, and under watchful eyes I hesitantly cross the threshold into a dimly lit room, and as I do so I no longer know quite where I am. The room is dusty, the furniture of an antiquated design, and all manner of files and filing systems cover every available surface. The files continue down corridors, locked behind doors, shelves and filing cabinets with enormous wheels to separate them. After the three women show me where to start, I am left alone.

Boxes of photographs of the long dead are brimming with dust, the floor is covered with it. A haze fills the air as I start to gather material, and I'm soon covered in a white shroud. The inscrutable filing system is confounding, and so I end up aimlessly wandering the shelves, picking at boxes randomly. I do not know how long I spent down there, all I remember is at some point seeing one of the women waiting for me in the doorway. *Comment ça va?* — I reply in my school French something that I know is barely comprehensible. Invited upstairs, I sit for a time with the

three women among a mountain of images. I suddenly realise they are singing, quite unconsciously, until one of them turns to me laughing, as if to say, *why not?* I have no way of knowing if they are singing in French or English, but I understand every word. They sing in complex harmonies of the past, of things that are and things yet to be. The movement they make as they scan endless piles of photographs into digital form is always a sideways and upwards gesture, almost as if they were sewing. Each photograph is then given some assigned number, nothing but numbers, never names, so that they might be found again. Some of the photographs needed repairing, and the three women do this out of the scraps of other images that are available to them. Once or twice I see them pull apart what they had pasted together, dissatisfied, rejoining fragments and pushing back and forth bits and pieces, creating new images of such perfection that they could have been taken moments ago.

The missing photograph

Imagine, if you will, a box of old photos that never sees the light of day. During the argument we had yesterday, I don't even remember who started it, or why, something small, as always, and I said that I would prove to you, I would prove by showing you *that* photo in *that* box. That was enough, in my mind at least, to secure a feeling that I was basing all that I was saying on some past event that *actually* happened. Of course, in the days and weeks to follow we both never found that photo, it was lost, but its purpose was clear: to be imagined, its existence supposed. Thinking about it now, why did I mention the missing photo? Were my words not strong enough? Risking everything, just for a moment, on that one *imagined* photograph, I made a plea for truth (for, let's face it, neither of us really knew anything). Hearing myself talk of that photo was enough, for then, to make my case seem more likely. Of course, you might have called upon me to show you the photograph, which would mean hours spent digging in dusty boxes in archives long forgotten. When I referred to the photograph, I remember, my voice could assume a more authoritative tone. How strange that I grabbed hold of the example of this photo, used its imaginary power, simply to strengthen my argument. What I say must be true, I said, because there is that photo. Where? God knows. Both a photo and God, suddenly, if I think about it now, summoned as witnesses. A witness says what is and what is true. Ergo, what I say must be true. I can prove all this to you, have faith in me, and when you see the evidence, you will easily understand that I am speaking truth. You have now heard everything that I have said, but before deciding whether to believe me or not, you should think over my words.

ENDNOTES PART B

¹ Martin Opitz, 'Der Spaziergang', in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, ed. by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano (Frankfurt am Main, 2011), my translation, p. 299

² Here is meant something similar to what Walter Benjamin in his essay *On the Criticism of Violence* called 'pure means' (*reines Mittel*), and in his previous essay *On Language in General and on the Language Of Men* 'pure language' (*reine Sprache*). Just as pure violence is a means interrupts the relationship between legitimate means and just ends, 'pure language' is a means that does not communicate anything but itself, a 'pure communicability'. 'Pure language' (the poetic word) does not communicate a more or less ciphered purpose or meaning as its very linguistic essence is freed from every end.

³ The problem of explaining (explicability) is whether it has a value in itself, or whether the value derives in some way from the 'as' structure (meaning the interpretation of an entity 'as' something for something) of the explanation. If explaining and explicability provide the criterion for what can claim to be real, the inexplicable (left over) becomes superfluous, which is to say that the mysterious always exceeds the explicable. In this way the mysterious is what remains, what is not yet incorporated within the explanation. What the explanation wills is the elimination of any remainder, so that it always aims to be free from mystery and inexplicability, to render apparent whatever is inapparent. This aporia can be resolved by merging the something-for-something so there is no gap between the explaining and what is being explained, an immanent form of critique perhaps. Here connections are not so much found outside as 'produced' within language. In other words, to 'explain immanently' is suggest a form of inapparent language where the event occurs within the word itself rather than coming from outside. The secret within mystery, then, is that in some (inapparent) way it remains still open. That is not to say that it reveals itself in yet another appearance, rather that it blends in with what is easily seen, draws attention to its inapparentness, and thus takes on a form distinct from the 'as' and the not-yet-known.

⁴ An early instance of scales is in the Homeric *Hermes' Hymn* is *dikes talanta*, where the relation between *dike* and *talanta* is more explicit. Although the idea of a prize being paid after a dispute is resolved has precedence elsewhere in the *Iliad*, the possibility in the word *talanta* is missed if it is translated simply as a fee or a prize to be paid. Homer mentions Zeus' sacred golden scales twice in book 8 (*Il.* 8.74 ff), and again in book 22: "Father Zeus stretched out his golden

scales,” (*Il.* 22.236 ff), but each time in connection with death, e.g. “on [the scales] he placed two measures of agonising death, one for the Trojans, one for the Greeks”; “Zeus decides the price in human lives with a tip of his scales” (*Il.* 19.235-6)]. In book 12 a stand-off in the battle between the Trojans and Greeks is compared to the *talanta*, scales, ‘balance’, and the working hands that give:

An honest woman who works with her hands
To bring home a meager wage for her children
Will balance a weight of wool on her scales
Until both pans are perfectly level. (*Il.* 12.455-8)

The relation between distributing one’s lot and the coming of death (*moros*), suggest *moira*. Usually *moira* is associated in Homer with death, but in the image of the woman and her children (along with the scales that measure, the working hands), there is the possibility of seeing *moira* associated with life, and the weight of wool that is to be spun at the moment of birth. If the Muses deal with the birth of poetry, *moira* is spun from birth until death. Like the *daimon* that stands by every human being from birth, *moira* seems to mark a similar movement from birth to death. The spinning wheel may symbolise this. Spinning and weaving wool were linked closely to singing, and also to sewing. Sewing [*rhaptein*] is similar in sound to singing [*rhapsodos*], the latter is also what the poet does to tell his tale. Circe in the *Odyssey* sings while weaving [10.220-3], and weaving can also tell a story, as when Aristotle mentions ‘the voice of the shuttle’ [*kerkidos phone*] in Sophocles’ *Tereus*, which refers to the scene after Philomela’s tongue is cut out, when she weaves the story of her rape by Tereus into a tapestry, and contrives to send it to her sister. [Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1454b]. (The play was ridiculed by Aristophanes, a contemporary.) Thus spinning or singing the *moira* of a person are parallel. The movement of reading and writing also resembles that of sewing: the needle approaches and withdraws, closes in and takes its distance, all the while joining. As the movement of reading and writing repeats itself, its intimacy with the living being increases.

⁵ And this is the source of the two compound expressions, the *hupokeimenon* — that which lies (*keimai*) beneath (*hupo*) — and the *antikeimenon*, that which lies before or over, on the other. And the task that fell to Western metaphysics was to transform this opposition of something considered in terms of constant presence (as *hupostasis*) and something else that resists or hinders it (as *antistasis*) into a relation of subordination of *antistasis* (that which is opposed) to *hupostasis* (that which underlies), or to put this in another way: into the domination of the *hupostasis* over *antistasis*. The use of the expression *hupokeimenos* makes it possible to know very clearly what or

rather who it is that stands at the ground or foundation, who it is that acts from below, transforming ‘things’ into matters to be dealt with and acted upon. And, *hupokeimenon* also signifies both the subject and the text, which still possess the meaning of the ‘thing’ (*pragma*) in question. This subject is something that is proposed or nominated; it enjoys stability, as if the subject, and the text, could thereby assert their own permanence, and the self, and the author of the text, in terms of this permanence. This is, of course, a contemporary reading, of submitting of *pragmata* to a grounded subject who acts. Aristotle already realised the difficulty of a *hupokeimenon* that could propose something for itself, stand alone as a ground for mastering whatever opposes it, thus conquering its opponent. He identified *hupokeimenon* and *hule*, ‘matter,’ demoting *hupokeimenon* to *hule*, a tendency that converts *antikeimena* into *hupokeimena*, into *pragmata* that are ‘at hand’ or within reach. Thus *pragma* is narrowed down and distinguished from *praxis*. *Pragma* is the matter at hand, the *pragmata* that act insofar as these present and at hand dwell within the reach of the ‘hand’. The hand reaches out for something and arrives at it. But *hupokeimenon* cannot change in and of itself; to do so requires the activity of contemplation.

⁶ The scales may also mark the poet’s own measure, the balancing of two weights analogous to the balancing of the strong metrical structure of the verse. For each line there were six metrical feet, which had to contain the balance of the metrical ictus (the first syllable of each foot) and the accent of words. The skill of the poet was in weaving the ictus and accent, often altering the order and form of words to fit the hexameter. Added to this were the regular use of stock phrases, formulae, which acted as standard measures to fit the metrical structure, often finishing off a line.

⁷ Martin Heidegger calls this movement into *peras* ‘Unfug’, which has been translated variously as ‘non-compliance’, ‘disorder’, or being ‘out of joint’, while the movement of fetching *peras* back into *apeiron* he terms *Fug*, ‘compliance’, or ‘joining’, or ‘order’, a kind of organising structure that brings all beings together. *Fug* he terms the movement back into order that joins all beings together in *dike*. Thus *dikes talanta* can be understood as the leveling of the balance. *Fug* is a word coined from *Unfug*, so as to avoid translating *dike* as ‘justice’, thus freeing justice from a metaphysical interpretation. And perhaps, though not discussed by Heidegger, *dike* as joining is also a sort of ‘sewing’. Life folds upon itself, refers backwards and forwards to itself through birth and death. And reading and writing involve a joining and a sewing movement as well, joining what is near (the reader) with what is distant (the writer). The words, like the needle, approach and withdraw, close in and take their distance, all the while joining.

As the movement repeats itself, the intimacy between reader and writer increases. The student remembers hearing stories as a child, remembers the flush of joy in them being repeated many, many times. In listening, he would become one with the story, with the events as if they were actually happening. Having heard the story before, he would already know the ending, and he would also be the one who was intently listening what was being told.

Martin Heidegger (2015), *The Beginning of Western Philosophy: Interpretation of Anaximander and Parmenides*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Published in German as Martin Heidegger (2012), [GA35] *Der Anfang der abendlandischen Philosophie, Auslegung des Anaximander und Parmenides*, ed. Peter Trawny. Vittorio Klostermann GmbH, Frankfurt am Main.

⁸ In *Droit et pré-droit en Grèce ancienne*, the philologist Louis Gernet defines pre-law (*pré-droit*) in relation to archaic law in that ‘the symbols of pre-law are essentially effective: the hand that gives or receives; the staff that asserts power or relinquishes it or confers it; the cursing speech, the gesture or posture equivalent to cursing ... everything that acts immediately and in virtue of its own *dunamis*.’

⁹ Plato, for example, wishes in *Laws* to legislate the proper purpose of songs: “the poet shall compose nothing which goes beyond the limits of what the State holds to be legal [*nomina*] and right [*dikaia*], fair [*kala*] and good; nor shall he show his compositions ... until they have first been shown to the judges appointed ... Next to these it will be most proper to sing hymns and praise to the gods, coupled with prayers; and after the gods will come prayers combined with praise to *daimons* and heroes...” (Plato, *Laws*, 801c-d). Plato, *Plato: In Twelve Volumes. 11: Laws: Books VII - XII*, trans. by Robert Gregg Bury, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ *Dike* is a concept that is notoriously difficult to define. It arranges the human being’s role in the order of the cosmos and is a part of a social order, the permanence of which is guaranteed by Gods. In the *Iliad*, *dike* concerns love, dancing and peace; but also death, war, and strife (*eris*). In peacetime *dike* is *ithuntata*, ‘upright’; in wartime it is ‘crooked’. *Dike* concerns the return to working with hands, to the order of the homestead or estate, to the patch of land that is called home, and this is the reward of both *dike* and work. In the very middle, what stands up is thus what shows itself: the *ousia* (estate) the place of the coming to stand upright of the human being. The land, the river, the sky are all named, the homestead (*oikos*) itself and every man, woman, child and dog; every utensil of the house even.

Martin Heidegger chose to translate *dike* by coining the word *Fug* from the obscure German word *Unfug*. English translators have rendered *Fug* variously as ‘joining’, ‘jointure’, ‘compliance’. The sense is of complying with a cosmic order, which is parallel to *apeiron*, the limitless. What comes to presence in the *peras* (limit) is *aus der Fuge*, and *adikia*. It is important that Heidegger sees the return to order, the *Fug*, as Being itself. *Dike* (somehow) ‘fetches’ the limit back into the limitless. The limit appears, and then disappears back into the void. Derrida, interpreting this in *Spectres of Marx* writes,

‘the present (*das Anwesende*), as present, is in *adikia*, that is, as Heidegger translates, deranged, off its hinges, out of joint (*aus der Fuge*). The present is what passes, the present comes to pass, it lingers in this transitory passage, in the coming-and-going, between what goes and what comes, in the middle of what leaves and what arrives, at the articulation between what absents itself and what presents itself. This in-between articulates conjointly the double articulation (*die Fuge*) according to which the two movements are adjoined (*gefügt*). Presence (*Anwesen*) is enjoined (*verfügt*), ordered, distributed in the two directions of absence, at the articulation of what is no longer and what is not yet. To join and enjoin.’

Dike is thus situated in the passage between the limit and limitless. What appears then between *apeiron* (voice) and the *peras* (speech) is something like *dike*. Humans speak in the middle of their coming to presence in language, between *apeiron* and *peras*, where there is the hand-to-hand struggle between the body and its capture in the limit. *Dike* operates wherever there is a struggle [*eneikon*] for words, wherever what is at stake is language itself, which is to say it concerns the human being in its very nature of becoming human. In this context *dike* is one of the possible modes of life itself.

That the human being is ‘out of joint’, *adikia*, disjointed, or just simply erring, wandering, is Heidegger’s insight in *Being & Time*, where the human being is uncanny, always projecting into the future, alongside the present, and always already there of the past. The ‘always already’ posits an essence in coming to presence: as historical beings, the human being always already stands in a tradition handed down (transmitted) to it through language.

To counter this ‘always already’, another metaphysics would have to be conceived that is not only the interpretation of presence, as Derrida suggests, but also of the origin that is ‘always already’ captured in the middle of language. The ‘always already’ is the essence of the thing that is

presupposed as what a being needs in order to be, what always already *is*. This metaphysics would entail a language that would begin to break apart its own need to name or signify, a need which divides and separates the level of names from the level of meaning. For this to happen, human beings would have to listen to language itself, what language carries with it, i.e. Being, which can never be reduced to language and meaning-making. The 'later' Heidegger, in his 'turn' towards the poetic word, tried to express this 'alternative' metaphysics poetically (for example in Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1950–1959) (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2018).

To name is to call the thing to language, to summon it in its very absence into presence. Words are like gestures that make things come to the world, and the world to things. This is the poetic possibility of language, attested to by the poet, who knows that language always walks in front of him, and he is always already caught up in its saying.

(Martin Heidegger, *The Beginning of Western Philosophy: Interpretation of Anaximander and Parmenides*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Derrida, Jacques, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt* (New York: Routledge, 2006) p. 29).

¹¹ Reading suggests some measure of preserving, passing through and surviving, to continue beyond what is explainable. Reading is a kind of gathering that is also a preserving that allows for contemplation. And what of *dike*? In commanding the names it has to do with a 'gathering' that takes place again and again.

¹² The Greek grammarians, in the beginning of the reflection on language, thought that a proposition consisted of two expressions: *onoma* (name or term, which included verbs) and *rhema* (something that is said, such as an expression or a phrase). The orator Aeschines, recalling something Demosthenes said, says "I even remember the *rhema* whereby he expressed himself, (because of the unpleasantness of both the speaker and the *onoma*): 'break away the alliance from the peace.'" (3.72). Here *rhema* refers to the expression or phrase, while *onoma* refers to the verb. The Greek reflection on language assigned a fundamental place to the disconnection between *onoma* and *logos* (speech or proposition). Name (*onoma*) is, in modern terms, the 'signifier' or 'semiotic'; *logos* is the 'signified' or 'semantic'. The event of naming (*onoma*) is distinct from the proposition (*logos*). A proposition cannot say what the name has named. Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* writes "I can only name objects... I can only speak of them. I cannot assert them" (3.221). The gap between name (*onoma*) and proposition (*logos*) the Greeks considered so important traverses language, and means that *logos* cannot say what is named by the name. Language cannot give reasons (*logoi*) in propositions. The name is what discourse cannot say but can only presuppose on the level of the semantic. Names can enter into propositions, but what is said in

propositions can be said only because of the presupposition of names. It is precisely this presupposition that makes propositions possible. Names can only be given and passed on. Insofar as names are handed down, their 'origin' is lost and is impossible to grasp through reason: their origin escapes the speaker. Their meaning must already have been explained in order to understand them. Thus, when speaking a foreign language, names must be learned as there is little or no correspondence between the names of one language and another. The (semantic) meaning of what is said, however, can still be inferred even if the (semiotic) names are not known. This 'handed-down-ness' (historicity) is the shadow of language, a shadow because reason cannot reach the origin of names and cannot master them. A proposition can only say *how* a thing is, not *what* it is. This is why, in Aristotle, the question of the foundation has the following form: "why, through what does something belong to (or is something said of) something else?; the foundation is always sought thus: why does something belong to [does something lie beneath as the principle of] something?" (*Metaphysics*, 1041a10). He identifies the structure of presupposition in language with the structure of knowledge. Separated from beings and presupposed as the foundation of *logos*, the proposition is always "saying something about something": something is always proposed of something, and it is precisely this presupposition that renders propositions possible. It is what 'always already' was knowable and known. Knowledge of this cannot be formulated in propositions, it can only be 'touched' (*thigein*) by the intellect (*nous*) and spoken in the name. Presupposing, of which something can be known and said of something, guarantees that speech has a meaning, that it is founded, and that it speaks about something (that it speaks by means of a *hupokeimenon*, what lies beneath, a presupposition). The foundation is *hupokeimenon*, subject and matter, that is, the potentiality (*dunamis*) of *logos*. All assertion [*phasis*, from *phemi*, I 'assert' or 'say'], writes Aristotle, is something-about-something and, as affirmation, is either true or false. The nature of this kind of *logos* he terms 'apophantic' (from *apophainein*, 'to show, to make known'). In *de Interpretatione* he speaks of a true statement, an affirmation, *kataphasis apophansis* (*kata*, literally, 'according to *phasis*'). Yet this is not so with thinking. Thinking is not something-about-something. (Aristotle, *De anima*, 430b26-29) It is *apophatic*, from *apo*, away, and *phasis* (to be distinguished from *apophantic* from *apophainein*). What is 'negated' in *apophatic* knowledge (*via negationis* in Latin) is *logos* as reason, and therefore knowledge in the sense of discourse based on logical reasoning. This counter-tradition of *apophasis* has run parallel to the mainstream thinking of the *logos*, often intersecting and overlapping with it. *Apophasis* in the Christian era pertained to knowledge of God obtained through negation rather than positive assertions, the attempt to describe God by speaking only of what cannot be said, a god who is not a being, who

was not and will not be. The ancient tradition of *apophasis*, or negative theology, says and unsays talk about that God, it falls speechless before a mystery. So the famous German mediaeval theologian Meister Eckhart utters apophatically: “I pray God to rid me of God,” and Augustine: “if you understand it, it isn’t God.” In deconstructing the names of God in the name of God, no name that speaks of the divine mystery ever arrives at the thing itself: God is essentially incomprehensible. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Wittgenstein Reader*, ed. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹³ Faith, *pistis*, belongs to the sphere of non-apophantic *logos*. At first sight, the notion of a proposition might be understood only in apophantic terms, as what is either true or false. Faith, however, does not articulate truth in the world. Its declaration - and its truth - are entirely subjective. It is in this context that the philosopher Alain Badiou introduces his interpretation of *pistis*, which, according to him, should be translated not as faith, but as fidelity. Fidelity is an essential element of declaring the event since it names the subject in its coming to presence. Badiou says that the human being has fidelity to an event that will decide truth. The human being keeps fidelity to an event, or to something, which is the good of the human being (Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) pp.14-15).

But how can the human being keep fidelity to truth? This can only be explained if there is something already there in the animal living being. It is different to keep fidelity to language as such, and to keep fidelity to a truth. Faithfulness to truth would be possible only if truth were somehow already there in the living animal being, and innate to living beings.

¹⁴ A formula was a stock group of words regularly used by poets under the same metrical conditions as a standard way to fit essential ideas into the hexameter structure of early Greek poetry. For this structural interpretation, see Chapter three (‘The Formula’) of Albert B. Lord’s *The Singer of Tales*, ed. by David F. Elmer, 3rd edn (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 30-67.

A whisper

I am attempting to communicate with you without my meaning becoming apparent to those around you. Let me stroke your willing ear with an elegant whisper: a whisper is a promise, a promise to only be heard by those who are near, or perhaps by just you. A whisper's promise is an echo of the crack of a twig underfoot, the swirling eddy of the wind in young wheat, the falling of a tree in the night when everyone sleeps. A hunting animal crouching in the long grass.

Birds' voices resound through the woods. They shout to each other really loudly. Do birds ever whisper? The whisper is the wind through their feathers, a bird of prey's wings passing through the air as it hunts, the last thing its prey hears. Xenophon's *Apology* notes that people take the sounds of birds to be omens from the gods. If the sounds of the birds are really whispers, do the gods whisper their omens?

Whispering is not like passing a note. For a note can always be discovered, a message to be read by all. Both whisper and note were once secret, but a whisper promises to retain its secret unless whispered again by you. Just as it is not an easy task to catch a bird that slips out of your hand, it is not possible to grasp a whisper once it has passed your lips: it hurls itself upwards, 'moving its swift wings in circles' as it flits from person to person.

A whisper can be misheard. 'Chinese Whispers' is a game where something said is passed as a whisper from ear to ear, a whisper as a breath, as light as air, misheard for air. A whisper passing from me to you generates: at each step the indiscreet word bears countless other words, endlessly multiplying the swarm of voices.

'Not every sound made by an animal is voice,' Aristotle whispered. The voiced sounds lose their specialness, take their place alongside the

unvoiced, the sounds without soul. The unvoiced sounds do not reveal the whisper: the mouth, teeth, tongue do their work as well as the breath. What is whispered does not ever refer to its being whispered, the whisper that whispers.

Standing in a gallery one morning I whisper to you. Why whisper? A hand to the mouth indicates that nobody should read my lips, like a politician keen to keep secrets aware of being looked at. Shady, conspiratorial whispering contains secrets we might all wish to know.

A buzzard's shadow alerts prey to its presence, so it tries to hide its own shadow. (Is a whisper like a shadow? Fleeting, insubstantial?) A whisper also hides its own shadow, sits between the word whispered and the meaning of what is whispered; it is neither the word nor the meaning, but a carrier, a breath impossible to precisely locate. The panting of a dog, hot breath, a manner of rising forth, the wind that whispers dandelion seeds.

There is a black poplar tree that stands alone at the edge of a field in K—, about two hundred paces from the castle. Every time I walk past with my dog, I stand awhile under its branches and listen. Given a bit of wind, the noise the leaves make is like rain falling on paper. The sound is loud but soothing, as if the tree were whispering to itself, calling me to linger and listen. Look! it says, each of my leaves is dancing in sheer celebration of the breeze. Listen! it says, the rustling of my leaves is a divination, it is the rustle of a language itself.

Certain words mimic whispering. The unvoiced /p/ sounds in the word 'poplar' mimic the sound of its leaves. The word 'poplar' whispers to itself the rustle of its whispering leaves. Other words that mimic include 'babbling,' 'lapping,' 'rustling.' When many whispers are heard together, there is a lot of noise. What takes rustling precedence are the /ts/, the /s/ and the /s/ sounds. The slithering sounds of unvoiced phonemes come to the fore. To whisssper, whisssstle, hisssss.

In the old story, king Midas was asked to judge a musical contest between Apollo and Pan. When Midas decided against Apollo, the god changed Midas' ears into those of an ass. Midas then concealed them under a turban and made his barber swear not to tell a living soul. The barber, bursting with his secret, whispered it into a hole in the ground. He filled in the hole and all was well until the next spring, when a reed sprouted from the hole and whispered to the other reeds that Midas had the ears of a donkey. These reeds in turn whispered the secret and soon the birds heard the whispers and brought it to Melampus, the seer, who could understand their language. Soon the entire kingdom knew the secret 'Midas has ass's ears'. The seer is the one who whispers and murmurs, mimicking the whispering and murmuring of the omens from the gods.

In ancient Greek, whispering is *psithurismos*, pssith-oo-riss-moss, which also meant 'slander' or 'gossip'. Sssslander. Gossssip. Whisssperingsss. Slander is perhaps more vocal than a whisper, the voiced phoneme // mimicking the ancient Greek word for slander, *katalaliai*. Slander and gossip start off with a whisper, but a whisper that is repeated louder and louder until heard by all. To sla-la-la-la-la-slander.

A whisper can only be heard by one who is near, really near. When I whisper to you we both make a promise. Otherwise you might say 'What?' out loud, introducing distance again. Whispering is a promise to reduce distance, to bring closer, into proximity, and nothing more. Whispering, as a promise, requires faith — both that the whispered words not be overheard, but that you keep my secret. The Greek god Hermes was a whisperer. According to Pausanias, at the shrine of Hermes in Pharae, you would whisper a question into the god's ear, then plug your own ears, and after leaving the shrine, unplug your ears and listen for the god's answer amongst chance words of the populus. The word 'poplar' comes from that Latin word 'populus'. The divination of the whispering leaves. (*Hermes whispers lovers' secrets.*)

When I walk in the woods, my whispering is the quiet tread of my feet, the movement of air around my body, my breath. A whisper is a language barely spoken, or a language spoken bare.

In the voice is the human concern in and for language to be heard, but in the whisper, on the other hand, the voice hides itself, it is the place of language without voice. Whispering still shows speech, still asserts something of something, each spoken syllable inseparable from the see-saw of showing and saying, the shifting between the sign and the signified, between semiotic and the semantic, a transfer which stays a mystery, yet a whisper is not something that happens in speech, it is something that happens to it.

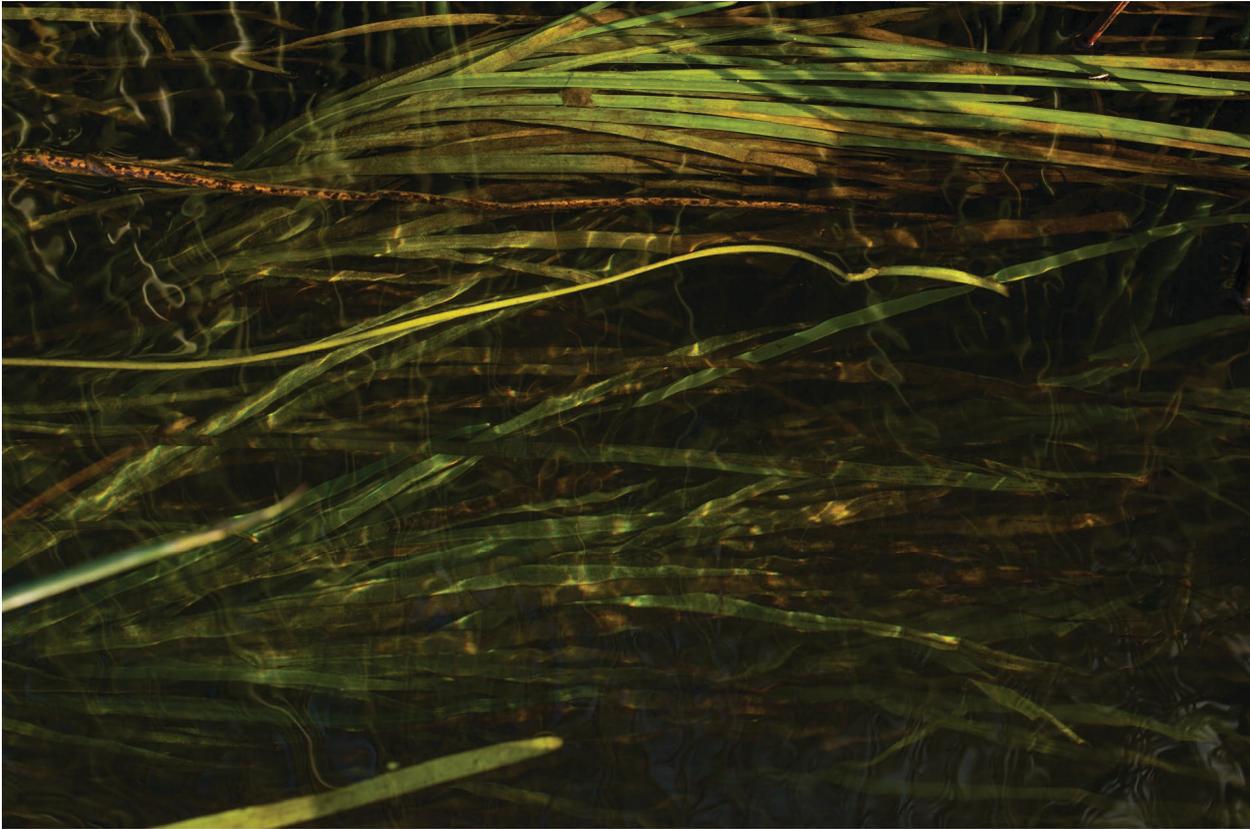
In the whisper, the voice is always already presupposed, as breath constantly threatens to evaporate rather than become captured. In the whisper words scarcely separate from bare breath. What the human being cannot know, never know, is how acutely embarrassed it is by its own voice, by the reminder that it still has a voice, like a bird of prey caught out by its own shadow. One might call this being caught out 'shame,' the shame of the human being that has forgotten its voice in language, and a whisper is only the attempt to hide this shame, the shame that refers the human being back to its own voice, where it takes its place among the rasps, the purrs, the croaks, the squeaks. The whisper is the attempt by the human being to hide its shame by trying to coincide again with the flutter of a bird's wings, a hunting animal's crouch, a floating dandelion seed, a rustle of leaves, an omen of the gods.





























C Attic Athens

The activity of witness

A witness figure appears in the speeches that survive from Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. This figure was named the *martus* and was called to the *bema* in an open-air trial attended by scores of jurors. The *bema* was a special, raised stone platform accessible by steps. There are 150-odd speeches from a dozen or so orators, at least those speeches that have survived, handed down by countless unseen hands, and the names of these orators are famous (e.g. Demosthenes, Lysias, Aeschines, Isocrates). And in the written speeches, this witness figure keeps appearing time and time again. What is curious is that while the witness is always called or named (*martus*), its words are excluded from the manuscript tradition.

Aristotle also discusses the witness in his *Art of Rhetoric*. Yet there is nothing certain about what the witness meant for the Greeks in their natural existence. The witness is called to the *bema*, but then its words are erased in the manuscript tradition of the speeches that were preserved. They resurface only in the orator's speech, as speech in speech, an uncanny inclusion-exclusion, an abolishing that is also a preserving, an appearing that is also a disappearing. What concerns me in this chapter is that the activity of the witness resided solely in the speech given by the orator, the litigant.

1. When Aristotle discusses the witness, he classes it as a *means* of persuading. For Aristotle, witnessing was a means and not an end in itself. The witness's end lay outside of itself, in the speech of the orator. What has come to be known through the manuscript tradition as Aristotle's *tekhne rhetorike* (*The Art of Rhetoric*) consists of just three books. In this *tekhne rhetorike*, the 'art of speaking', Aristotle speaks of the witness as one of five so-called *a-tekhnoi pisteis* (those not based on the 'art' of speaking). The *en-tekhnoi pisteis*, in contrast, are those based on the 'art' of rhetoric. The former are not the lack of *tekhne*, rather they always stands in relation to the *entekhnoi* (i.e. the significance of the *a-* in *atekhnoi* is not a lack as later grammarians would define it). Yet *tekhne*, for Aristotle, though it arises through the human being's production, is not 'art' as it is known today. It is a mode of knowing to apprehend what is present, the human being's relation to what is. The call that summons the witness means the witness has no other content than to be present. *Tekhne rhetorike* is concerned with bringing something into being present, the cause of which lies with the speaker.

2. The terms *entekhnoi* and *atekhnoi (pisteis)* require a more nuanced reading. A *pistis* is not so much a 'proof', the standard translation of *pistis*, but the speaking of the matter itself, which is to say that the relation between the human being and *pistis* is achieved through speech.¹ And the *atekhnoi pisteis* (besides the witness, there were also torture, oaths, laws, and contracts) have their sense as *pisteis* only insofar as they are orientated toward juridical speech.

In speaking, the witness was simply on hand for the speaker, and formed part of the body of his speech. At each moment the witness was available to be put to use. The witness was what was at hand in such a way that it was available, present, usable, 'there' in its usability, and stood in use in an everyday sense, i.e. the witness stood on the *bema* ready in use. (The witness as *atekhnos*

pistis was an oral witness, until its words were written down in the middle of the fourth century B.C. — and read not by the witness but by a clerk.) For the Greeks, the concept of witness and testimony, which modernity separates and divides, here coincided in the speech of the orator, which is to say in language, in the non-place of the voice.

In other words, the use the speaker made of the witness was not an instrumental one. Its end lay in the litigant's speech. The witness was at hand only in relation to the orator's speech.

3. *Khresasthai* (to use) is the verb form Aristotle uses for the *atechnoi pisteis*, a verb form that is in the middle voice, neither active nor passive. *Khresis* (use) is its own end. The witness in use was simply a supplement in the speaker's speech. The words of the witness therefore lay outside of itself. In other words, the activity of the witness in Attic Athens did not reside in itself, but resided solely in the speech of another. This insight concerns the mechanism by which the witness's testimony was separated from the living body of the witness. The possibility that its words were spoken by another entombs the witness's voice in another's speech as a vanishing trace.

4. The use of the witness did not reside with the witness itself, but only as part of the orator's speech that was being given. The sphere of activities that have their action outside of them is to be contrasted with those activities which like *praxis*, have their action in themselves. And in Athens, a whole class of professional speech writers developed to supply speakers with clever speeches to teach them to modulate voice and speech in order to persuade.² With this in mind, I want to propose the thought that the real activity of the witness, that which is always presupposed by the speech, however surprising this may be, was its voice.

5. In book 15 of *tekhne rhetorike* (at 1376a18ff), Aristotle distinguishes between three types of witness: the witness of the past — the poet —, the future — the seer —, and the witness in a trial. But he then made an important distinction concerning this latter witness:

The *marturiai peri tou pragmatos* are witnesses concerning a thing (*peri tou pragmatos*) whereas the *marturiai peri tou ethos* are witnesses concerning character. Witnesses [*marturiai*] partly concern ourselves [*peri tou auton*], partly our dispute [*peri tou amphiobetountos*], as to the thing itself [*peri tou pragmatos*] or character [*peri tou ethos*]; so that it is evident that one never need lack useful witnesses [*marturias kbresimes*]. For, if we have no witness as to the thing itself [*kata tou pragmatos*], neither in confirmation of our own case nor against our opponent, it will always be possible to obtain some witness as to character [*ethous*] that will establish either our own respectability or the worthlessness of our opponent. As for all the other questions relative to the witness, whether he be a friend, enemy, or neutral, of good or bad or middling reputation, and for all other differences of this kind, we must have recourse to the same topics as those from which we derive our enthymemes (*enthumemata*).

In his commentary on this passage, the Nazi theologian and biblical lexicographer Gerhard Kittel considered Aristotle's distinction between *pragmatos* and *ethos*:

On the one hand the point at issue is whether a thing is or was really so, on the other it is true and valid from the standpoint of the one who states it. Yet the distinction does not arise merely at this point. It is noted already when *martures* is used with reference to the future. For in this case the witness can be borne only by faith that this or that will happen, no matter what may be the basis of faith. The fact that the terms *martus*, *marturein*, *marturua* can embrace both meanings is of decisive importance for their further history.

The observation that Kittel makes here is that faith (*pistis*) belongs to both *peri tou pragmatos* and *peri tou ethos*.³ However, he goes on to say that with *pragmatos*, ‘the reference is to the examination of facts observable from without’, whereas in the case of *ethos* ‘personal convictions are made known,’ which presupposes either a distinction between subject and object that the Greeks did not know, or, with regard to the modern witness figure, a psychological setting where individual, interior experience comes first and is then exposed to the outside world. The transformation of the witness into this latter figure of interior experience implies that the passage to modern witness does not so much concern a singularly unchanging phenomenology of witness as its migration from one sphere to another. In this migration, what is dislocated is theology by what is called psychology. And it is to this dislocation that attention must be paid if certain figures in premodernity are to be viewed as ‘witnesses’.

6. The meaning of *pistis* also needs further consideration. The Greek word *pistis* originally meant ‘credit’, which is to say that as money it is nothing more than a promise. But this faith in credit has no substance. It cannot be owned, nor is it an action as it belongs to a different function of language, a discourse that does not describe the state of things but realises what it means. Thus the speaker, in employing the *pisteis*, realises something as a fact. What is it that gives speech the force of a fact? It is generally assumed that *peri tou pragmatos* is to stick to the facts, to eschew appeals to other factors. But it is hard to see how this ‘sticking to the facts’ could be enforced in court as there was no higher authority. The force of *tou pragma* is therefore left obscure. The speaker says something is, just like that, as if language had the power to say what it means as a fact, whereas it is based on *pistis*, as a species of

demonstration (*apodeixis*). *Pistis* is what the *tekhne* of speech is all about, a speech that sets out to demonstrate (*apodeixis rhetorik*) by presenting arguments (*enthumema*) for an audience to think about. Enthumemes are the body of *pistis*. Here the relation between words and things is taken on the basis of *pistis*, which is yet to be defined, yet realised as a fact which language enacts.

7. There is clearly less of a division between *peri tou pragmatos* and *peri tou ethos* than Kittel suggests. *Pistis* is the undercurrent of religion, magic and law, the domain of the type of *logos* Aristotle pushes to the background, the *logos* that is neither true or false, but lies hidden and inapparent, the so-called 'non-apophantic' *logos*. In *De Interpretatione* at 17a4-6, Aristotle says 'while the present investigation deals with apophantic *logos*, the others we can dismiss, since consideration of them belongs rather to the study of rhetoric and poetry.' Yet in *tekhne rhetorike* he does not deal with them, except obliquely during his discussion of the witness. Rather, the enactment of the function of the witness in *pistis* enforces a link between word and thing. The function of the *atekhnnoi pisteis* are, in some way, to bind the animal living being to language. The witness's function is to secure the link between word and thing, its function is the existence of the law in force, a signifier without a signified.

8. The call for the witness to take the *bema* transforms the living being taking the stand into a function, the juridical witness. The call implies an imperative to come-into-being, and as such it is a productive making present, a *tekhne*. The witness is put to work in the speech of the orator, so its act is not in itself. This may be why there is no record of the words witnesses spoke in the manuscript tradition. (Or, perhaps, later scribes misread the *atechnoi* in terms of a privation or a lack, and excluded them from the *tekhne* of *rhetorike*.)

9. *Atekhne* has its sense as *pistis* only as it is orientated toward the speech that is without complexity, that does not need more detailed argument, does not follow a long chain of inference, but consists of basic opinions, views that have not arisen from a theoretical treatment, but those that are cultivated in everyday life. This is perhaps why the philosopher Anaximenes can include the ‘opinion of the speaker’ as one of his *epithetoi pisteis*, his equivalent of the *atechnoi pisteis* in his own guide to rhetoric.⁴

10. Why does Aristotle include witness in the category of *atechnoi pisteis* alongside oath and law? The theologian Richard Lariviere, writing on witnessing in Hindu law, quotes from the Gautama Dharmasutra, one of the oldest Hindu Dharmasutras whose manuscripts have survived: “In disputes witnesses are the means for establishing the truth.” He goes on to quote from the Manusmṛti, another ancient legal text among the many Dharmasutras of Hinduism:

When there is a dispute between two parties, for which there are no witnesses and the truth is not evident from facts, then it should be determined by oath.

In a footnote, Lariviere writes that ‘modes of proof (i.e. the equivalent of Aristotle’s *atechnoi pisteis*) such as the oath are resorted to only when there are no human modes of proof available.’⁵ He then quotes from the *Naradasmṛti*, a collection of legal maxims relating to the topic of dharma:

Judicial investigation is said to be of two kinds, human and divine. Human proof is by means of documents and witnesses. Divine proof is said to be the balance, etc.⁶

Putting aside for the moment that 'divine proof' is said to be 'the balance', which may refer back to the 'talanta' of the *Iliad*, it is possible that, given the above passages, and if the witness is a means for establishing truth (not the sole means), then it can be suggested that the origin of the witness is the 'human mode' of the divine oath, which suggests a closeness of witness and oath in ancient cultures. If, as Aristotle suggests, soothsayers or seers are also witnesses, and as soothsayers gather omens of the gods, then the witness must in some way have a relation to the divine. The witness at hand in such a way that it was present and available in the everyday sense, and stood ready for use on the *bema*, also stood before the gods. It is possible to speculate that the call for the witness came not from the speaker, but from beyond the speaker, from the god who was invoked through calling the witness. In a sense, then, *pistis* had as much to do with the saying of words as it did with the invocation of the gods. The (human) kingdom of fact and event and the (divine) kingdom of eternal truth lay side by side.⁷

11. I have tried to show that a witness concerning *pragmata* resides outside of itself, in the speech of the orator or litigant. The sovereign element of the witness was the will of the speaker, not the witness in itself. *Peri tou pragmatos* seems to embrace sticking to the facts, an act of language that by the mere fact of its utterance, realises and produces its meaning as a fact. But what gives speech its power of producing meaning as fact?

12. What Aristotle neglects is something that the witness brings to speech, a force that it carries in its voice. This force is the point where law, magic and religion are all completely intertwined. The witness was constituted by *pistis*, and then there is *peri tou pragmatos*, sticking to the facts, what is true or false. Today witnesses are considered valuable only in establishing fact and

event, and as I hope I have made clear, it is with Aristotle's *tekhne rhetorike* that the human mode of *pistis* (as opposed to the divine mode of *pistis*, i.e. the oath) began to assume dominance. But because the witness was still being used on the basis of the older sense of *pistis*, the Greeks lost confidence in its credibility.

This older *pistis* suspends the validity of *peri tou pragmatos* and thus suspends the normal relation between life and language. When a speaker used the formula 'and to show this is the truth [*alethe*] I am speaking, I call for you these witnesses to these things', the witness takes the place of the apophantic *logos*, the truth-statement (otherwise there would be no difference between the first half and the second half of this formula). In speaking, an *alethe* should be shown in the very way that the matter is, in speaking for the matter. (*Rhet.* 1356a19-20). The relation of *pistis* to *alethes* Aristotle describes as *ek ton peri ekasta pithanon*, i.e. an *alethe* should be shown "when we establish from the means of persuasion the circumstances that speak for the matter" — an *alethe* that is not opened up through theory, but rather makes the true visible in everyday saying (*pistis* produced by the speech itself).⁸

To call the witness to the stand is enough to make visible. The witness only serves to suspend the use of language as true or false, and replace it with the non-apophantic *pistis*. If I call the witness, everything changes. The witness takes the place of language that is true or false, replaced by another mysterious relationship, which has a value in the place of the *peri tou pragmatos*. Thus perjury can be distinguished from lying as they are not identical. If I say 'yesterday I was there', and I wasn't, this is a lie. If I say 'you have to believe me when I say I was there' this is something different. The statement 'I was there' can only concern truth and falseness. But it is not correct to say the witness is true or false. What is true or false is the statement. The mechanism is that which drives the suspension of the validity of the truth-statement and replaces

it by the strange thing called the witness. The one has the force to replace the other.

And Aristotle's exclusion of this force must be criticised. The witness is perhaps only a kind of sacred sign, like the *daimon* it is an uncanny sign that points and hints, and has the power to realise what it means only in the substance of another's speech. This uncanny force is enacted in law, in religion, and in every speech. It is something that is original to language itself. The movement from life to language is not merely an act of intelligence.⁹ What is at stake is something that concerns the whole human being: its voice, its ethics, and its politics. The power that transforms is not that of some higher authority: the difference between life and language is of another order. The human being is the living being whose life is at stake in language. And this is perhaps why torture, along with the oath, is another of the *atekhnoi pisteis*. It was a well-known rule that the testimony of slaves was only admissible in court if taken under torture. Demosthenes, for example, says that "some witnesses have seemed to testify untruthfully, whereas no one subjected to torture has ever been proven to speak untruthfully" (30.37). The force of language must be understood in this way. In torture, the human being is revealed literally as the being in whose language its whole life is at stake.

This peculiar force of language was then separated from the living being by religion, law, and magic. The force of language is each time organised, separated, and built into the system in these 'spheres'. This can probably only be understood in the perspective of the living being coming to presence in language, the moment it is rendered voiceless by language so to speak, and in which the invention of language meant the transformation of the whole being. So the force is not only juridical, or religious, or magical, it is a force in the sense of the coming to presence of the human being (which is perhaps

analogous to the vital force, for the ancient Greeks, of *phusis*). In this way, *pistis* also belongs to this moment of *phusis* or being itself.

13. Now perhaps it is possible to understand why such a force acts in language. And why the human being constantly calls for a witness, why the human being engages itself in this world. The witness is really the function in which this living being acquires the capability of language, loses its voice, but also decides to risk itself in speech. The witness is just the organisation of the juridical, religious, and magical factors, simply the institutionalisation of the fact. So risking its life and losing its voice binds the human being to this force and the witness is the paradigm of that. The witness is the paradigm of the human being's decision to bind itself to its word, to gather or remember [*legere*] the moment it lost its voice [a decision implied by the close relation of Latin *legere*, to gather, and *ligere*, to bind]. And this is perhaps why the human being, as distinct from animals, has to constitute a subject of language, has to exteriorise its own 'I'. Subjectivity can only be constituted in this way, as the coming to presence of the human voice in language at the moment its voice is lost to language. The present instance of language, the moment that the being binds [*ligere*] itself to the word, is the moment that a witness needs to be called to remind the being (in language) of the voice it has lost but is always trying to find again. This is the unresolved question in language, and that is whether language is or is not the voice. There is no such thing called the human voice that can be followed in the traces of language, enabling the gathering [*legere*] and remembering of the moment it vanished into names and inscribed itself in letters. The human being gathers [*legere*] and binds [*ligere*] itself to the word with the voice it no longer has, the witness's voice that was never written.

14. The witness is the mechanism through which juridical and religious factors play, and how they organise and separate. The fields in which the force of language is each time organised and separated probably can only be understood in terms of how the invention of language meant the transformation of the whole living being. The witness is therefore really just the ethical terrain, the character, on which the living being continues to acquire the capability of language and keeps putting its life at stake in words.

The character of witness

Alongside the *pragma* that produces a witness only in the act of the orator's speech, Aristotle discusses the *marturia peri tou ethos*, the witness concerning character, which is not inferior but a parallel function to the *peri tou pragmatos*.

1. When the orator Lysias says ‘what could have been the view of my opponents in disregarding the facts of the matter [*tou men pragmatos*] and in seeking to traduce my character [*tropon*],’ he makes a similar distinction between fact and character, suggesting it was not original to Aristotle.¹⁰ But Aristotle makes a curious remark after distinguishing *pragma* and *ethos*, fact and character, in relation to the witness: ‘as for all the other questions concerning a witness,’ he writes, ‘whether he is a friend, an enemy, or neutral, of good or bad or middling reputation, and for all other differences of this kind, we must have recourse to the same topics as those from which we derive our enthumemes [*enthumemata*].’ Here Aristotle seems to be saying that the witness may also be dealt with via the topics (referring to his treatise the Topics). A contemporary, Alcidamas, also mentions the *enthumemata*:

‘The *enthumemata* in speeches are few and important, the words and expressions many and insignificant and little different from each other; and each of the *enthumemata* is displayed once, whereas with the words we are forced to use the same ones many times.’ (Alcidamas §19)

The verb *enthumeisthai* means ‘to think about something,’ and *enthumemata* are the thoughts the speaker wishes to convey, the body of *pistis* that seek to persuade, such that what is said is taken to heart, in a context where certainty is not yet had. They are simple to understand and are elements of speech that arise out of the everyday, a type of *apodeixas* (demonstration) yet differentiated in form. Perhaps they concern something else, a surprising form of *apodeixas*, which is to say that they seem to indicate or show something hidden within the speaker (rather as the *daimon* gestures to what is hidden).

2. Speaking to the *ethos* therefore concerns something other than the facts of the matter (the *pragmatos*), and belongs in some way with the character

of the witness, the witness qualified according to its character. As facts became more important in modernity, so character becomes secondary and the primacy of action came to the fore. But for the Attic orators, character (*ethos*) was still held in high regard, of no lesser importance than the *pragmatos*. Character belonged in some way to the uncanny undercurrent of religion, magic and law, and yet the witness did not possess its character, it assumed a character in the orator's speech, which is the essential thing. And Aristotle focuses on the ability of the speaker to convey (in the act of speech) the appearance of possessing character when *ethos* reappears in his *tekhne rhetorike* alongside *pathos* and *logos* as an *entechnoi pisteis*, as if character were the dark shadow that action projects. In other words, to define the human being as starting from its action already means throwing a shadow over it.

3. The famous dictum of the pre-Socratic philosopher, *ethos anthropoi daimon* can be translated as 'the character of the human being is in accordance with the *daimon*.' The *daimones* are the aspect of the gods that show themselves to mortals. They hint and indicate toward the hidden, the inapparent. The *daimon*, like character, was said to stand beside one from birth. But to think this way is to think both as separate from the human. Rather, *ethos* is also the home of the human being, what in nearness appears to it, what is its own or ownmost being. The human being's own keeps safe the adventure of what belongs to it and the human being is at home in the everyday nearness of the uncanny *daimon*.¹¹ Yet *ethos* can never seize hold of itself, can never catch up with itself, can never be willed: it is involuntary, and in this sense, the Greek orator's efforts are eternally thwarted by a character that forever evades its speech.

4. In his definition of tragedy, Aristotle says that the tragic hero assumes his character through action. Although Aristotle does not consider comedy (as his *Poetics* is incomplete), in comedy the comic here ‘acts’ precisely to imitate his character, and for that reason cannot assume his action. And a good definition of comedy would be this: in comedy there is no action. The comic character never assumes his character as being ethically relevant. That is why in comedy action collapses and takes the form of jest. There is interruption in the moment of the jest, which suddenly stops the representation of action. What appears in this interruption is representation itself. The audience becomes aware of the comedy as representation. The flow of action is stopped.

5. The jest is not transmitted to the audience in the way action is, rather it breaks the arrangement of speech. In some way the jest, like character, plays a role that escapes and cannot be expressed or contained within any fixed identity. The word ‘jest’ comes from the Latin *gerere*, to carry or bear, which also gives the word ‘gesture’. *Gest* is from the same Indo-European root that leads to the Greek word *akmata*, ‘that which holds’, and ‘actor’. The actor is the one who gestures, yet does not assume ethical responsibility for his action. He is innocent of what he does when playing a character. In terms of comedy, the comic jest interrupts the action as each character carries or bears his own gesture and the primacy of action collapses and gives place to something else, which is the character that never assumes responsibility for its action. To try to make it responsible for its action is to miss the point of the comedy. So there is something like a comic ethics, an ethics of gesture that is founded not on the guilt of the human being, as with tragedy, but on innocence, the innocence of the character that is with one from birth, and which thus belongs in some way to the home and is revealed in comedy.

6. To stay for a moment with this concept of *ethos*, character. In distinguishing two types of *pisteis*, Aristotle still retains a point of contact in *ethos*, which resurfaces on both sides of his separation. The two touch but are not in relation, and there is a void of representation as *ethos* cannot be grasped directly. Character is not separated from the living being, but dwells in its very gestures as its own, is in the living being itself, and coincides with becoming human and remaining human. But because it resurfaces on both sides of the separation, in trying to ground the witness in its character, there remains a relation. To comprehend this is to understand that at a certain point witness moved out of the sphere of activities that have their action outside of them, and within those activities, which like *praxis*, have their action in themselves. The witness no longer received its completeness in *pistis*, instead, like the theoretician, the witness now claimed mastery and ownership of its activity. And in the same way character and gesture became separated from the living being, such that the hand and the face no longer remember their own gestures.

7. Perhaps the critical moment when this transition finds its moment of possibility is with the idea that the witness resides not in *pistis* but in the mind of the witness itself, the idea that in itself it realises its witnessing. But what the witness has earned on one hand — independence — is, so to speak missing from the other. If the witness possesses in itself its action and can thus assume superiority over its own speech, *ethos* becomes in a certain sense accidental and forgotten. The witness no longer resides in its character but only in its mind. Character (gesture) turns into a remainder in some way not necessary for its witnessing activity. If character is the dark shadow that action projects onto the witness, then this is why *ethos* can also belong to the *entelekhnoi pisteis*. In the *atelekhnoi*, *ethos* does not become visible through the speech, but is in some sense already there. It cannot be accomplished by the speaker. It can only be put to

use (*khresis*). In the *entekhnoi*, *ethos* becomes visible through the manner and mode of the speech, it arises out of the speech itself. The one giving the speech is himself a *pistis* in his *ethos*, in his manner. Aristotle says that the speech must be presented in such a way, it must be maintained in such a way, that it turns the speaker into someone who has *pistis*, who thus has influence and authority in saying that the matter is so. How the audience is positioned toward the matter, which position they are in, the manner and mode of bringing those listening into position, in this there lies *pistis*, something that can speak for the matter. The modes in which the human being in the *polis* can be a listener, a juror, is a matter for another time. But character and gesture, *ethos* and *pistis*, voice and speech, are all bound together and it is not possible to unbind them without breaking apart the whole.

The witness on stage

When witness statements began to be written down sometime in the fourth century B.C., they were sealed in an earthenware pot called the *echinos* to be read out by the court clerk, the *grammateus*, who would break the seal and speak the testimony aloud.¹² The seal of the *echinos* does not seem to have any other meaning than the attempt to bind the living being to its word.¹³

1. I now wish to turn to a comedy by Aristophanes, a contemporary of Aristotle, and in particular his play of 422 B.C. *Wasps* [Spheks]. The word for the home or household, *domos*, also meant a wasp's nest, and this double meaning proves crucial to understanding the action of the play, which addresses the perceived split between the *oikos* and the *polis*. The wasp's sting, *sphakelos*, also meant by extension ruin and mess, and this is the situation, for Aristophanes, of the *polis* during the Peloponnese War of Athens with Sparta, with Athens led by General Kleon. Kleon had accused Aristophanes for slandering the *polis* in an earlier play, and Aristophanes, for his part, objected to the excessive number of informants Kleon supposedly employed to keep lookout in the city. The mood in the play is thus of being watched. There is also a proliferation of jurors and trials, and too many summonses for witnesses. In the play the elderly father Philokleon ('Friend-of-Kleon'), an innocent supporter of Kleon, is addicted to jury service, while his son Bdelukleon ('Kleon-hater') tries to wean him away from public trials and to return him to being the head of the *oikos* (household). Thus there is already a distinction being made between the head of the *polis*, the *politikon*, and the head of the estate, the *oikonomikon*. The short scene I want to read with you features Philokleon, Bdelukleon, and a Kategoros (Accuser).

Philokleon: Once upon a time in Sybaris a woman broke an *echinos*. [He hits Kategoros with the *echinos*.]

Kategoros: Did anyone see that? I call for a witness! [*taut' ego marturomai*]

Philokleon: And so the *echinos* pays the price for associating with the call for witnesses [*epi-marturomai*]. Then the Sybarite said [spoken in a high-pitched voice, i.e. in the supposedly effeminate Sybarite dialect]: 'By Kore [*ai vai tan koran*], if you'd forgotten this business of calling for witnesses [*marturian*] and had been quick and bought bandages instead [*epi-desmon*], it would have been better [*pleionazo*, literally 'it would have had more than one meaning']'.

Kategoros: Go on, be rude, until the magistrate calls your case!

Bdelukleon [addressing his father]: For Demeter's sake, you shan't stay here [in the *polis*] any longer.

Philokleon: What are you doing?

Bdelukleon: What am I doing? I'm bearing [*phero*] you back into the house [*eiso*] in case any more accusers [*kleteres*] run dry [*epileipsousi*] (of witnesses) in summoning you [*kaloumenous*] (i.e., soon there won't be enough witnesses for all the people calling them).

Philokleon invokes the goddess Kore, while Bdelukleon invokes Demeter, her mother. Here is a presentation of the divine-human relationship, each mediated by the characters' participation in the life of the city: in comedy, human beings make the life of the gods their own. The call to bear Kleon-lovers back to the *oikos* is not to separate the *oikos* from the *polis*, rather under the guidance of Demeter, the *oikos* proves fundamental to the *polis*. The saying 'take care of the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves' is a similar sentiment. Thus it is contestable whether the art of the household [*oikonomia*] was really so different to the art of the *polis* [*tekhne politike*].

2. Why did Aristophanes call for a return to the home? Already there is a hint that with the ever-expanding contemporary demand for witnesses, with the proliferation of guides to public speaking, the *technoi logoi*, and with the war-mongering of General Kleon, the home has been forgotten. For the playwright, the assault of *tekhne* (against *dike* perhaps) is the forgetting of *oikos*. When Philokleon forgets about his household, the household reveals itself as such. In other words, his relation to the *oikos* manifests itself through his addiction to the *polis*, and the home becomes alien to him. His addiction to *tekhne* undermines his ability to be near to what concerns him most, as *oikonomikon*. *Tekhne* serves only to present beings as objects for use. But to

seek to understand how the human being lives in his character is to understand his conduct in the middle of his own home, which is to situate the human being in relation to beings as a whole, not as the measure of other beings, as a juror or as a witness, but in the possibility of the uncanny character or *ethos* in the journey from life to death that begins and ends in the home.

3. There are a number of clues to Aristophanes' position. The smashing of the *echinos* by the Sybarite woman (that is repeated by Philokleon in jest) is the first. The Sybarites were reputed to have a love of luxury, playboy ways, and a supposed effeminacy. The *echinos* is the symbol of the Athenian *polis*. Philokleon jokes that to bring bandages to fix the *echinos* would do more good than call for witnesses. The bandage, symbol of the war, would fix the *echinos* and restore the *polis*. But the double meaning indicated by the verb *pleionazo* suggests that the bandage is also a fetter that threatens to smother Athens.

Another clue is Philokleon's invocation of the goddess Kore. After Hades abducts Kore, her mother Demeter wanders the earth, mourning her loss and depriving the earth of her fertility. The Eleusinian myth of Demeter has a comic jest. While the goddess wanders grief-stricken, she is offered a drink of *kykeon*, the drink of the Eleusinian Mysteries, by a woman named Baubo. Demeter refuses and so Baubo raises her skirt and displays her genitals, revealing the face of her child Iacchus. The goddess bursts out laughing and accepts the drink. The fable resists knowledge, it is slippery and its meaning changes when it is explained like this, just as when explaining the gag of the smashing of the *echinos*. But it is clear that Demeter sees something that makes her laugh. And it is in commemoration of this profane moment that the Eleusinian participants repeated the formula 'I have drunk the *kykeon*' which signalled the return from their sacred fast to the profane world.

Eventually, Kore is released from the Underworld for a part of the year, thus appeasing Demeter. Kore is thus forced to wander between life and death, the threshold between the reproductive, private life of relation (*zoe*) of the *oikos* that never quite fulfils itself in the public life [*bios*] of the *polis*. But Kore also represents the possibility of a new form of life, a new Athens so to speak. When Demeter finds Kore, she is initiated into life. Only then can life be returned to its possibility. But it is only through Demeter, the ground of the *oikos*, that this can be achieved. Kore, who exists without a fixed place, which is the current state of Athens according to Aristophanes, is also the force of the pure possibility of a peaceful Athens that will be free of tyranny, and where the playwright's word restores *dike* and thus the household.

4. In the Underworld, those who drank from the river Lethe also forgot their earthly life. The tension between *lethe*, forgetting, and *a-lethe* parallels the tension between those in the *polis* who have forgotten *oikos*. To invoke Demeter, as Bdelukleon does, is to dwell on what lies close and think on what is closest, on that which concerns the here and now, on this patch of land that is called home. The home (perhaps better, the bedroom) is the place of the possibility of new life. The thinking of a *polis* that forgets to pay attention to *oikos* is the kind of thinking that seeks to summon witnesses at every opportunity, the sort of 'calculating' thinking that simply races from one witness to the next and accuses people without thought, the kind of thinking where magistrates drag everyone to court is the kind of thinking that propels tyrants to the rank of General, and that has created the strife, the constant quarrelling in Athens.

5. What is needed is both *oikos* and *polis*, neither pure *lethe* or pure *aletheia*, but a balance of both. Calculating thinking, which a much later poet

will call ‘consequitive reasoning’, gives no thought or place to the possible, to the hidden or inapparent. It is the kind of thinking that is confined to predetermined goals, the *polis* as constant call to action, given that it is a modality of life reckoning only with what is useful, efficient, and productive.

6. When youthful Bdelukleon ‘bears’ [*phero*] the elderly Philokleon back into the house, the ground of Demeter, the call is made for ‘bearing’ witness not in the calculative sense of the *polis*, but in the sense of *zoe*, ‘bearing life’ in the reproductive sense, attentive to all the possibilities of life in the *polis*. Bdelukleon bears his father back into the home by saying Athens will run dry of witnesses. What perhaps threatens to run dry is not only the well of witness, but also the drink of the Mysteries, *kykeon*, made with wine and grated cheese and hidden ingredients, drunk at the climax of the Mysteries to profane the sacred fast, and over which Kore was the presiding figure. The ritual formulae pronounced by the witnesses of the Mysteries were limited, and, like naming the goddess Kore, and calling the witness, purely vocative moments that are not the same as propositions or truth-statements (so-called apophantic *logos*). Pronouncing the formula (‘I have drunk the *kykeon*’), invoking the goddess (‘by Kore’), or simply calling the witness (‘please step up’), do not say something about something, rather they simply call and name what they perform. The performative nature of the formulae lies in how it relates to the apophantic function of *logos* as the non-apophantic, and to understand its force is to change in some way the modern conception of a difference between theory and practice, that speech is somehow neutral with respect to practice. But language is never neutral, is never just apophantic, it always carries within itself a performative function, an element of action. What *tekhne* does is to separate and then forget this performative function, this element of action in speech, which parallels the forgetting of the *oikos*. But in the Mysteries there

was a type of activity that was the ability to articulate the unknown, and which was essential to being human.

7. As such *aletheia* is not the polar opposite of *lethe*, but contains in it what is forgotten and mysterious. The gags of breaking the *echinos*, the lifting of the skirt, which is to say gestures of the unexpected and therefore unknown, point toward the remembering of this possibility, the vital force of Kore. If the witness is to be understood not solely in terms of a response to the call to action but in terms of a gesture that interrupts, then the witness's gesture does not mean to call what is at hand for use, by means of which it is made an object to be appropriated, rather it means to expose the witness in its own being as a living being. And just as the playwright shows there is nothing uncannier than the human being in the jest, in the breaking of the action, which parallels the breaking end of a line, or an image that interrupts the flow of vision and says 'look at this!', which is something like the vocative call, the witness's gesture is also the poet's.

8. This points to more than just plays on words. Those who participated in the Mysteries, those who witnessed the cult, were said to have a complete life. *Telein* means 'initiate' while *ateleis* is to lack this quality. In Book X of his description of Greece, Pausanias describes the frescoes by the Thasian artist Polygnotus, which are situated in the Lesche at Delphi, Lesche being a 'place of talk'. In the image the *Ateleis* carry water in broken pitchers:

The women ... are carrying water in broken pitchers; one is depicted as in the bloom of youth, the other already advanced in years. There is no separate inscription on either woman, but there is one common to the pair, which states that they are of the number of the uninitiated. There is also in the painting a jar, an old man, with a boy and two women. One of these is young ... the other is

beside the old man and of a like age to his. The others are carrying water, but you will guess that the old woman's water-jar is broken. All that remains of the water in the sherd she is pouring out again into the jar. We inferred that these people too were of those who had held of no account the rites at Eleusis. For the Greeks of an earlier period looked upon the Mysteries as being of much higher than all the other religious acts as gods are higher than heroes.

Polygnotus' frescoes would have been familiar to Aristophanes and his audience. They were painted not only at Delphi, but also at the entrance to the Acropolis at the very heart of the *polis*.

9. In Aristophanes' play *Wasps*, this connection to the Mysteries is made apparent immediately prior to the scene of Philokleon and his accuser, when kitchen utensils are called as witnesses. Bdelykleon, uttering the formula for calling a witness to the *bema* says:

My dear sir [*o daimonie*, the vocative form of address], please hear my witnesses [*akouson o daimonie mou ton marturon*]. Come up Cheese-grater [*tyroknesti*] and speak up! [*anabethi tyroknesti kai lekhn mega*].

The calling of the *daimon* in the passage in the vocative case points to something that cannot be said in language. The *daimon* is the gesture of not being able to figure something out in speech, the case of calling itself. The Cheese-grater must 'speak up' though it cannot speak, a jest or gag. The Cheese-grater is the household utensil (*pragma*, and Aristophanes plays with this word's double-meaning) that is used to grate cheese into the *kykeon*. This is what *daimon* points towards, something much more originary, the *pragma*, which is the word for the thing itself. When Aristophanes has Bdelykleon say *o daimonie*, what is summoned is not a witness, but the uncanny force (*daimon*)

in language, a force that operates yet is otherwise inaccessible, an experience of language as having happened yet standing in relation to apophantic *logos*.

10. The case of the *daimon* is in the call of *o daimonie*, which is the case of the vocative. But to know the vocativity of language, to know the *daimon*, is difficult. To call is to bring the *daimon* into the *polis*, into public discourse and politically qualified life. To call the *daimon* into this social way of life as what is communicable and sayable is to recognise it in the world of the everyday, such as the kitchen utensil, which at the same time is the gag that reveals the everyday, familiar world as unfamiliar.

The vocative is the original form of the name, and the call and the name are united in the vocative. It is impossible to call without naming, to call a being is to call it into a form or way of life. A being can be called by whistling, for example, but to name is in speech. There is thus the level of names, and the level of speech. But it is impossible to grasp meaning by only paying attention to names. To grasp the meaning of an utterance is to come to know it, whereas a name must be explained and learned: there is no transition between one level and the other, and a hiatus divides them. Thus, the vocative precedes knowing. Like the *daimon*, it lies in the unknown.

For example, the Sybarite is the name of the woman that sets up the gag in *Wasps* of the breaking of the *echinos*, but the meaning of ‘Sybarite’ cannot be learned from the name alone. A Sybarite is at once a resident of Sybaris, in Italy, but also one said to be used to luxury, i.e. someone who can afford to break the *echinos*. What is comical about the episode is not only the breaking of the *echinos* on the level of the play’s action that mirrors its breaking in the story, but the effeminate, Sybarite dialect that Philokleon assumes in order to mock his accuser. And the broken *echinos* parallels the broken pitcher borne by the *ateiras*. Thus the written witness of fact literally leaks out of the jar that has

been sealed in order to bind the living being to its word. When Bdelukleon bears Philokleon back into the house, he bears this image of the broken *echinos*. Just as *zoe* (simple life) and *oikos* (*home*) are excluded from the *polis*, an exclusion upon which the *polis* is founded, it is only on the presupposition of *zoe* that political life can be defined and so although the *oikos* is supplanted by the *polis*, it is also to be found in the *polis*.¹⁴ Likewise, what remains of the witness of facts in the broken *echinos*, the poets found.

11. The vocative belongs to neither name nor meaning, it is outside language and it neutralises the distinction between calling and speaking. In this way it parallels the hiatus between *zoe* and *bios*, which parallels the hiatus between *oikos* and *polis*. And what emerges from the hiatus is both the unknowable voice, and the unknown *daimon*. And the significant character of the *daimon* is that it is unspeakable and speechless, and yet it still gestures. A pre-Socratic philosopher noted this as well: ‘The Lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither speaks nor conceals, but hints.’ What is really at stake is what emerges in the gap between language and speech produced by the speaker, the speaking subject. What emerges in the vocative, in the call, is the voice in calling. In calling, a name is called, but it has no meaning, no semantic content. Perhaps all that remains is the voice behind the call. Calling is the voice that calls.

κ

As if a small dog were barking and suddenly realised it were barking,
or a fish realised the beating of its gills were poetry.

A poet-witness

You could imagine, for example, a language composed entirely of battlefield commands, or consisting solely of traffic news on the radio warning of current accidents. The very language chosen establishes a particular relation with life. Poets found words, which is to say that they give to language a particular form. But the poet's working of words is different to the putting to work of language in journalism, academia, and the law. The poet's contemplation of living is not a willing into words, but a waiting for the world to happen, a close reading perhaps, that lets be words and connections.

The model of the poet-witness seems to me to be a practice rather than a principle. And in this practice possible terrains get drawn out, in which there are always figures of a subject brushing against its own downfall, even in the everyday. It's a difficult terrain to hold: those most attentive to everything offering a terrain of this kind are always wandering and erring, stumbling along, tripping over a paving stone perhaps, sliding down a grassy slope, falling into a ditch.

A tree

I would love to die and come back as a tree, whispers my mother. She whispers it most days.

What is it about trees that she loves? To believe in coming back as a tree does not mean accepting dogmas or doctrines as true. Rather, it is like remaining faithful to an emotion once felt as a child.

The long-gone cherry tree in my mother's front garden I would climb when small with its large supporting branch I could sit hidden from view by all, surrounded by leaves. The monkey-puzzle I planted age seven with my father, which now outlives him and will probably outlive me. The two plum trees in the back that I never knew were plum trees until they suddenly bore fruit last summer, and my mother swore that they had always done so. The verdant *greenness* of new leaves in May. Listening to the rustle of leaves in the wind at the edge of a field, standing underneath a poplar's broad branches and thick trunk. The red rhododendrons, the purple, the white. The fallen chesnut tree whose riven planks form a wood henge.¹⁵

All these moments bring the same unbearable loss, linked with an irresistible charm. Is living like this in the delicious attention of being, in exquisite proximity to something whose name we do not know, is this the same as love? In trees - in all their forms, the downy birch, the common beach, the cherry, the crab apple, the dogwood, the elder, the hawthorne, the juniper, the black poplar, the purging buckthorn, but also the conifers and the hornbeams, in all their subspecies, and the noble oak, which grow at the front of the small wood where I walk every day. The tree, the tree. I understand my mother's wish now. In the trees are all those she has loved. For the trees, and in the trees, and as the trees she lives and will live.

Becoming bee

I am standing at another threshold. This time, buzzing fills the air. My ears are full of it, but I daren't get too near, so I stand apart, the air thick with bee dartings. The frequency is not uniform, it changes pitch up and down: wings beat air, beat bee. I have no name, says the bee, and when you name me, you look at some other me and turn away from me. My being is bee's being. In the passage between bee and me lies a terrain where anything can happen.

When bees buzz, convention says that this buzz is between 200 and 250 kilohertz. If bees are agitated, the frequency rises, for example if the hive is threatened. The frequency of the buzz rises as the bees prepare to defend it, and the experienced beekeeper knows when to quietly replace the lid to the hive and back slowly away. There is therefore a frequency kept in readiness, which serves to maintain the hive, the hive machine, and ensure its functioning. Perhaps this can be compared to a wakefulness, a mechanism of movement, a performance in relation to an event sufficiently intense. If into this everyday tension a strangeness appears, the hive is prepared and then sings with one this intensity.

Between 200 and 250 kilohertz there is nothing to be heard but a sensation, a force, whatever you want to call it, the single bee that tracks the frequency of the many also tracks the development of the whole so that it imitates the whole. It is a complex development.

On their way past the Sirens, Odysseus calls to his men: we may beat death yet, row harder, beat the sea white with your oars. The Sirens sing honeyed sound from their lips, yet bees' wax stuffed in the men's ears safeguards their passage through the event. Likewise, bees sing together in rhythm like the oars of the ship through water. The oars beat the waves

to the rhythm of the poet's words, the bees beat the air to produce the frequency of the buzz. It is something that persists and reveals itself; there is a sort of movement from the possibility of increasing rhythm to the actual increased rhythm as the men escape the Sirens. And with the bees there is the possibility of increasing the frequency, a state of readiness for flight. But it is not really a rhythm in itself, it lights up a rhythm in myself, that is, I am led to think their buzzings are a complex system.

I might be led to think that the one is a cause of the other, so that the increasing frequency of the buzzing is the effect of my approaching the hive. But I wonder if what I find is simply the awareness of the grasping of two rhythms, the bees and mine (as with the poet and listener). As I approach the hive there is a response, in rhythm. There is an exchange produced, not either by the bees, or by me, and the how and the why of this exchange is the real secret. There is a state of increased oscillation. Once I move to their song a certain order is regained.

But how does a bee experience this? Suddenly I am stung on the arm. And then I see the single bee that is stinging and we dance. The rhythm cannot stop for my ears are full of beeswax and yet I am dancing to the rhythm of this bee. It takes time to recover after my mind settles down; there is a wound. Then the change must be absorbed by the shaken hive and become a mode of its being. This is something like the voice inscribing itself into language.

I end with an analogy: in the buzz, there is nothing but silence, nothing but the movement of air, and the event of words. For my ears are still stuffed with wax.

The limit

Once upon the time, I'm told, the voice wrote itself into language. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, for example, Socrates discusses written words, which, like images, he considers to have an aloof silence. Someone speaks and yet no one is speaking. To fathom the bottom of this voicelessness is to realise that there is no bottom, only a limitless abyss that is called the world, which is the unsayable and the unsaid. Language is not my voice, and moreover in language the voice is no longer. Language can only take place in the non-place of the voice. The voice is non-positional in that it is not part of language. Which means that, concerning the voice, language has nothing to say.

One might add that writing cannot capture a voice, its unspoken aspect. It can describe it, but in so doing it pushes aside, into the margins so to speak, the living voice, the living breath, the living body. Because human beings are alienated from their own proper being in language, which is to say that the human being holds itself in the proper (the voice) and the improper (language) at the same time, the unresolved question is whether language is or is not a voice. One thing is certain: this proper being cannot be recovered.

If the sayable is the word, the unsayable is what is pure existence, the fact that the world is. Not what is hidden behind the world, so to speak, but the very existence of the world itself. What does not reveal itself in the world, what is hardest to see, is what is nearest: the simple fact that the world exists. The statements of language that say *how* the world is cannot show *that* the world is. The movement is from that of an expression in language to that of an expression of the existence of language (the *how* to the *that*). But how can the existence of language, the fact that language is, bear witness independently of statements uttered in language?

And it is here that Plato's poetic thought — that I've mentioned in a previous section 'Wet Foot' — resurfaces. At the beginning of the *Phaedrus*, after wading across a small stream, Plato has Socrates say that "by the guide of my foot" the water is especially cool. The word he uses for this gesture is the Greek word *tekmerion*, which Aristotle later says (of the word *tekmar*) is equivalent "in the old language" to the *peras* or 'limit'. If, as Plato suggests in the *Philebus*, the voice is the limitless (*apeiron*) then the *tekmar* (*peras*) indicates a limit, which is nothing other than human speech as such. The only adequate expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, although it is not a statement in language, is the indication of the limit, of language itself. If, as analogy, the stream is the limitless babble of the voice, then what appears in the limit is language: being that can be understood is language itself. There is no proper term that the *tekmar* is called upon to replace. What is at stake, then, is not an experience of an object or a thing, but the very experience of language itself. And this thought has a poetic moment that belongs to Plato. What is experienced in Socrates' gesture is the existence of language. And this can only be a poetic thought.

The poetic moment defines the mode through which both the philosopher and the poet respond, in either philosophy or poetry, to their respective task. Both philosophy and poetry represent a form of failure, an erring and wandering, in the exposing of the unsayable that constitutes their common and proper task. But the wandering is an integral part of the task itself, because only a poet can really experience it.

A famous philosopher perhaps has this in mind when he writes that the proper experience of language occurs when words are on the tip of the tongue, but somehow fail to show themselves. And a writer has a similar experience which he describes in his diaries in 1911 as "the smooth floors of the cathedrals at the tip of our tongues."¹⁶ When words fail to form on tips of tongues, the

tongue's limit, the limit of language shows itself. And what is interesting to the ancient Greek is the limit. This is the philosopher's failure in poetry and the poet's failure in philosophy. Once I risk defining my living being in words, I always struggle to recover my own language again, which is perhaps why another poet could write, in a letter to a friend in 1801, that 'the use free of one's own is the hardest thing'.¹⁷ What is one's own is what is proper to me, the movement which leads to being properly myself. What is proper to me is what is also placed before my eyes, the fact of being looked at, concerned by, and deeply touched. It is the permanence of a look (which to the ancient Greek is nothing other than *moira*).

The proper is what takes hold of me before anything else, before any attempt to 'will' or exercise or influence it. It is not even necessarily what is being looked at, as it is more like a structure than a happening. It is perhaps hardest to see 'one's own' because what is properly my own is also what is nearest and easiest to overlook. That is to say, what is my own is never reducible to what is being looked at, but at the same time, it would be hard to look at anything if there were not also something that was my own and that was not being looking at. And perhaps the problem is that my own is never completely absorbed in language, that my own is both unsayable in language (because it is other than my 'I') together with the sense of its not being knowable otherwise. This is why the famous philosopher can say "you know my limit, I don't."

Yet the living being that has a voice never quite disappears in language. The proper restores to being that which makes it into something other than an object to be grasped by a subject in language. The difficulty in thinking concerning my own stems in part from the fact that it resists any thoughts of a subject. As soon as I says 'I', which is to make myself a subject in language,

subject to language, my own is already fleeing out of reach. The fleeting rustle, the current or flow that is felt through words, is my own voice.

And in the gap that opens between everything I can be and everything that is said or written down, between my living being, life, and what is shown, what appears (or not) as a word captures 'me' somehow and reduces 'me' to a 'what' and a subject. In this sense, language is what is common to the proper, a longed-for property of what it is to be human: to desire to speak is to desire to own a particular silent and aloof image of myself. To desire to speak about another being means to desire to own the other's voiceless image.

When I try to grasp the unsayable, the proper, I actually try and fail to grasp language, to find the 'right' words, to seize language's intentionality. Intentionality pushes my being to communicate itself, is the desire to gather and remember present things and also their absence, to preserve my own being. At the same time, the failure to grasp language itself and vision itself prompts me to keep trying to grasp them.

12. It is a hard separation to take, seeing oneself in words and in image, and although language and vision and life are separated, they are never so completely. They are separated and yet kept in relation to their separation. What keeps them in relation? This is the *arche*, the risking of one's own, one's self in language. There is a force in language that is, in some way, grounded in the act of language itself. And this goes together with the idea that the witness is, first of all, a linguistic phenomenon. To risk its nature in language binds the living being in some way to the force in language and the paradigm of that is the witness. And in some way human society is linked to the living being's 'decision' to bind its own life to language.

13. Here a witness must be called. It can be that the original aim of the witness was to ground the link between word and things, to ground the voice in language. Not that the witness was only created for those liars who were produced as such by the witness itself, but that the real goal, the real end of the institution known under the name of witness concerns a fundamental aspect of language itself, that of being human.

In the darkest hours of the night, which are not so dark with the glow of the town's lights in the background, there is the student's half-remembered, desperate attempt to sleep. His dream: an eagle flying through the air to tell a queen it had killed 20 birds. Then the phone by his bed rings, as if from a distant place, buzzing into waking, and a voice is transmitted that is tinny and distorted, a tiny gap in the line that is not just patchy reception. What an uncanny tool he has in hand. It exteriorises this voice from its body, sends this voice flying through the air thousands of miles in an instant. A clumsy tongue in his ear begins to articulate sounds, and then talk. As he sits straighter, the talk grows louder.

While listening, he looks at the photograph above his desk. If only he could go back to the moment he took it, he thinks he would change it. He puts the phone down, is done with transmission for now.

Unable to get back to sleep, he turns again to study, now reading an Attic comedy, now reading an Attic speech. He imagines standing at the *bema*, the speakers' platform in Attic Athens, addressing a large crowd seated in orderly fashion, yet those listening are buzzing like bees or wasps, asking about character, *ethos*. The speaker calls a witness forward, his loud voice has been doing all the talking up to now, saying his case, what a great man he is in speech.

κ

That language ever anticipates the voice, that the undoing of the voice in language has no end, this is the problem. How one resolves this is called ethics.

At the *bema*

Standing at the *bema*, the speaker's platform, in front of the large crowd, seated in orderly fashion, yet buzzing like bees, I am called forward. The litigant's loud voice has been doing all the talking. He has been defending himself, saying what a great man he is. Nothing is being said here about what all this talking means. I am supposed to case a fact, but all this talking only commands, prays, makes a wish. The word, even when lying, always tells the truth. I have a small voice, but it does not matter. True is to be distinguished from truth, because the latter can be proven, but what I say cannot. I am called to tell of a memory, but this does not really concern the reality of an event in my story. This is not what I meant, I will never be able to say it. What must I abandon of myself in order to stand here? It is no place for me to stand. In this non-place I lose my voice.

Did I mean what I said? I nod. In this gesture is the start of something, what I must abandon in order to enter language, well, that is something at least. And my gesture is the poet's gesture, the thinking into the word, you cannot appropriate my gesture without entering into the proper hearing of what has come to language. The task involves appreciating moments which give themselves to expression in words. It is not my vocation to do more. I am here to be here, to be of use, to be at hand. I am not objective, I am the litigant's authority, his justification, his reasoning. My witness's experience as a witness, the poet's experience as a poet. I am the one who appropriates the crossing from the foreign to the home, the witness's sojourn.

The existence of the day in question as articulated by me is significant because it illustrates the extraordinary quality of certain days and times. Something was witnessed, a primordial disclosure, which now receives some voice, a commemoration of an event in the past. I shall

content myself with considerations of another kind, considerations that remain closer to a poetic telling, I start with my lived experience and move outward, rather than working, as many do, with my mind and body split and working backwards. Those who also take pleasure in such questions may try to figure out which is easier: to be trained in the secure apparatus of truth and to continue working within it, or to listen to the truth of the heart and to simply say it.

Yet it is not even an event I am here to speak of, I am here simply to be here, as material for the speech of the litigant, to be the point, the issue, the matter at hand, available, present, usable, my here character, standing here ready to be used.

The *bema* is a platform, a step, a moment. As I step up to the *bema*, I step up to public life, cross a threshold into law. Measure my speech not according to truth, but according to public life, crossing a footbridge heavy with golden dreams, weighty, full of promises, interpret my words outside of any standard point of reference. As I step up to the *bema* I vanish within my appearing, just as dreams do, the dream as the most extreme absencing, the witness likewise the appearing of a passing away, an evanescent but nonetheless illuminating appearance from a hidden source. Everything the litigant says must be formulated on the basis of how I present and show myself.

I presence in the manner of a shadow, the witness the dream of shadows, in that the dreamlike concerns the becoming real of the possible in the becoming ideal of the actual. The shadow's dream is the fading presence of that which is faded, that which is constantly vanishing. The litigant uses me as if my gestures had happened to him. I can appear and be real only when others see me, judge me, remember me. The litigant's life needs me here. His freedom depends on my appearing, in the different arguments he can construct concerning me. There is a straightforward correspondence between what I say and what happened, of course there is, but it is likely I was persuaded to agree with the litigant anyway, and

what I say cannot be tested except that I swore my special oaths while standing upon cut pieces of a boar, a ram, and a bull. There will always be a gap, however, between the reality of what happened and how it is represented. There is every reason not to take me at my word.

14. His talk, first of all, is to say 'I know what I say is true.' He never sounds uncomfortable with what he says, even when lying. The result of all his commanding is the witness, and he does with it as he wishes. His words, even when lying, tell me so. The witness, on the other hand, has no voice. No matter. It is called to speak, but never able to truly voice itself. Some fish are said to have a human voice, like in the Achelous, but it only seems to be. Rather, they are making a sound with their gills.¹⁸

15. The witness is called to stand. He is called like a kitchen utensil, a cheese-grater, a cup or measure, an old, broken pot that leaks, that lacks, a fishy utensil, salmoned to witness. (And just imagine these utensils played by mute actors. The corpses of the Persian dead also without voice, mangled by fish named speechless.) But then he imagines the words by dreaming.

Yet it is now an event of calling the student wants to write about, simply the matter at hand. Cup his words not according to truth, but to the measure of others, cross the castle's footbridge heavy with golden dreams and full of promises. Lulling breezes. The witness stands up, disappears within its appearing, just as dreams do. The witness, the appearing of a passing away, an illuminating appearance from a hidden source within the speaker's speech. Everything the witness does is grounded in this. The witness as the fading presence that appears yet constantly threatens to disappear. It presences in the manner of a shadow, a dream of shadows, in that the speaker uses it as if its voice belonged to him. The witness appears only in his eyes. The speaker hangs his speech on its appearance so there seems a straightforward correspondence between what it says and the things of which he speaks, and what the witness says cannot be tested in any way, for there was no cross-examination in Attic Athens. The only evidence was a wet foot.

On 23 August, walking round the outside of the red castle on my morning walk with the small dog, I decide to cross the small footbridge and sit in the small coffee shop inside. I whistle to the dog and it follows me across. The whistle a command as long as it is obeyed. I find it pleasant to sit quietly in the cafe in front of the old stables before the tourists start to arrive. The huge early keep, orientated north-south, east-west, squats squarely opposite, and the later, separate, living quarters to the left are where kings and queens once slept and dreamed, their bed chambers orientated to the rising and setting sun, far above the kitchens and cool underground storerooms, the guardrooms with slits and loopholes for windows. All now lie in ruin. The grass, however, is neatly trimmed to please the majority of visitors, the kind who come not so much to sit and linger over coffee as walk purposefully with headphones and audio guide, afterwards encouraged to buy plastic swords and shields made in China from the gift shop, or to join some mediaeval-themed activity.

I have been here five or six times already this summer, with my resident's free pass, and often sit alone in the early morning. Generally the tourists are white Europeans, but now and again I find myself among South Asian or Middle Eastern visitors, a chorus of languages. None ever sit at my table, or sit for long, much less stop to write. A matter of space perhaps. To visit is to wander the ruins. They appear briefly and then vanish again back into the car park. Only once, a man at a neighbouring table pulls a thick sheaf of papers out of a manila envelope, sits for a while, then leaves in hurry, forgetting the envelope.

I hold my coffee cup. Some coffee remains at the bottom. A waitress picks up the discarded envelope, puts it in the bin. High above, the sun tries to force its way through a cloud, grey filled with water.

In his dream, the student saw an eagle flying to speak to the queen. It was a matter of feathers, winged words, but in what airy space did the bird fly, did the dream take place? He thinks, matter is something like space, an extension in space, but what does it mean to say the eagle was in space, in my dream, matter perceived in a dream? He thinks he heard the eagle talk, but eagles do not speak, surely, they screech. He thinks that matter allows something to be in something, in space. The eagle in the air in his dream, like the speech in the screech of its voice. He imagines this while walking back home around the castle walls, outside the castle proper.

κ

His phone rings again, the voice of a friend calling to keep in touch. The voice in the phone but with an absence. She calls his name. Just as the calling of the image ('Look!) is an interruption of looking, the calling of his name is an interruption of speech.

Perhaps the witness screeches differently to the speaker, interrupts the speaker's speech with his voice. Perhaps whereas the speaker provokes, attacks, skewers, disturbs, pleads, suffers, the witness's voice calms, soothes, is a rest and a blessed relief from proceedings. When the witness is called to the *bema* in Attic Athens, the water clock is stopped and the speaker can catch a breath. Calling the witness signals a break from speaking, an interruption that releases the speaker from having to speak.

Something I saw yesterday: a small child underneath a bridge said to its mother “it’s noisy”. The mother agreed, but there they both were, with a train crossing overhead. For the child, the noise had no source. Stop the noise! Dead in its tracks! Noise cancelling headphones would do the trick, the way they transmit noise in order to cancel it.

(How to write silence, and how to write breath? The breath of the bellows forges the shield, the breath through the pipe creates music, the impact of breath on the windpipe produces voice. How to write the whisper of the wind through leaves?)

16. Language is consigned to transmission, it is exteriorised from the body. The question is how it comes to mean. The Western tradition loves to divide voice from speech, the inarticulated voice (i.e. not of articulate speech) is the animal voice, while the articulated human voice brings forth words that reason (*logos*).¹⁹ The voice directs attention away from itself toward that which is spoken about. The human voice is the articulated, writable voice, the animal voice that can be written (just as the whistle, the hiss, the sigh, are articulate, non-writeable voices).

17. How to distinguish the human being from the animal being? How does the separation take place? It took place in the attempt by ancient grammarians (and continues today with linguistics, and the collocation of human language into 'big data' sets) to construct and fix a relation between voice and speech, which is to say between life and language, nature and culture. This coincided (and still coincides) with the attempt to fix human life, to rule and govern human nature.²⁰ The separation of animal and human being, nature and culture, is achieved when language is seen as the articulation of the animal voice. And the relation of voice (*phone*) and language (*logos*) remains essentially a political problem, of the *polis*. It is a problem that must be present in every human discourse.²¹

18. The separation that continues today must be stopped like a train dead in its tracks. And what results is the voice. The voice operates between calling and speech, language and utterance, word and meaning. To call a witness is not to give it a meaning; there is only the voice that calls. But it is an impossible task to ground language in the voice, to ground culture in nature. The speech receives its words from somewhere else entirely, just as the poet's words came from the Muses. The problem has more to do with the coming to presence of the human being.

On Monday I go swimming in the river with the dog. I drive as close to the river as I can, look at people inside their cars, those who no longer feel they are visible in public. Approaching the riverbank on foot I pause to watch a heron fly away. There is no one in sight, only some distant homes. I think that the heron in the air must make a movement similar to the one I make in the water. What it means to be in water, covered by water.

I untie my shoes. There is a knot in the right one. How did that happen? One shoe on, one shoe off. I take a photograph of the water, staring all the while at the reflections scattering across the surface, arresting the movement in a single image. What is at stake is written, photographed. The *praxis* of language is writing. The *praxis* of vision: the photograph.

I manage to untie the tricky knot and a quick look round to see if anybody is watching. There is no one, but all the same I duck under cover of the reeds, take off my clothes, and throw in the ball. The dog jumps in. The clothes safely hidden, I jump in after the dog. What came before and what came after? A big knot. I dive under the water, flicking my feet together like a fish. I know that if the clothes are lost, or if I am seen dressing, I will remain forever trapped in the river, barely. Salmon a witness! Make a noise with fishy gills. Until the day, thanks to an encounter with a queen, the bird-killer is able to talk again.

Now I turn on my back in the water, relax my arms, kick my feet out. Water makes me think of more water. When baptised, all sins are washed away, and the self can start again wiped clean. Born again. I feel like a new self, I think. In the water.

On the phone, the voice of the student's friend is speaking in his ear:

Speech presupposes the voice, right? That relationship is really, really interesting, for what it did not only to the voice but also to speech. So what you have there, although you have a presupposition, I don't think ... you see we have in modern culture, and particularly in ideas of biography, that the voice and speech are exactly the same thing. Time and time again you find they are not the same thing. You also find the idea of voice is not what I own. So, I think speech can presuppose this voice, but this voice has a non-place, it is not owned by the witness of facts. So when you go farther on and you talk about the poet's witness, that really comes forward.

That smashes into our modern idea of ownership of self and of will. Because if you talk about the next bit, which I love: 'The real activity of the witness did not reside, however surprising this may be, in the witness as a person, but in the voice.' What you have is this voice that is strangely liberated from the person. And then obviously it becomes a style, and from that I suppose we basically get our barristers who give their pontification through the mouth of the witness. And then it becomes the poet. So that was the point, for me, I leapt on that. I thought it was a really pivotal thing in the writing.

8

The small dog comes in from the garden, jumps onto the student's lap, wants to know what's up, panting hot breath, tail wagging, dirty paws resting on the writing on the open page of his journal, two muddy paw prints left behind. He puts the phone down and begins to write all over the paw prints, what else can he do?

The voice of the witness

1. *Ta en te phone*, says Aristotle, in the much commented passage in *de Interpretatione (peri hermeneias)* in the second book of *The Organon*, where he speaks of the relation between things [*pragmata*], images [*pathemata*], and voice [*phone*]. In this passage Aristotle is concerned with the articulation of the voice in human speech. *Ta en te phone*, he writes, ‘there is something in the voice’, literally ‘what is in the voice’. What is in the voice is a symbol [*sumbola*] of what is in the living body [*psukhe*]. What is written is a *sumbola* of what is in the voice, *ta en te phone*, *ta en te psukhe*. Aristotle locates *logos* in *phone*. But in order to do this, he needs some things and some images. The words *ta en te phone ... ta en te psukhe ... ta en te phone* resound in my head. I beat out the rhythm on the desk. *Ta en te phone ... ta en te psukhe ... ta en te phone*.

2. The affections of *psukhe* (living body) are *pathemata* (images), impressions, resemblances of *pragmata* (things). There is *phone* (voice), there are the affections of *psukhe* (living body), which are the *pathemata* (images) of *pragmata* (things). The letter impresses on the *phone* as it impresses on the *psukhe*, so *phone* is characteristic of what has *psukhe* in it. *Phone* is the sound produced by a creature possessing *psukhe* and so inanimate things never have *phone*.

3. Nothing without a *psukhe* (living body) utters *phone* (voice). To have a voice is a distinctive type of being, namely being that is living. *Phone* is the impact of inbreathed air against the windpipe, *arteria*, drawn into hot lungs (hot breath, you see) and the region surrounding the heart, and it is articulated by the tongue and lips. That which causes impact must have *psukhe* and some kind of fantasy [*phantasia*]. Language is the articulation of sounds by the

instrument of the tongue. No lung, no *tongue*, no voice, no *logos*. No *psukhe*, no *phone*. *Phone* generated in the *psukhe*, in those parts of the body near the heart, and with fantasy, for *phone* is a sound that means [*logos de esti phone semantike*] only with some *phantasia*. On the basis of *phantasia* the sound of the voice is designated. In meaningful speech something comes to light in *phantasia* (recalling the root *pha-* which is related to *phos*, light, and *phainomenon*, the phenomenon), which is to say that something shows itself. This something appears in *pathemata* (images), a general seeing. What comes to light is the taking place of language. The voice is something that comes to light (in the manner of *phantasia*) and has to do with the coming to presence of the human being. The coming to presence of the human being shapes the seeing of things, and language is a mode of being that determines the very being of the human being. What is at stake here is a bringing together of language and vision, speaking and seeing, word and image, *logos* and *phainomenon*.

4. Language is the articulation of the voice through the instrument of the tongue. This is what makes language ‘mean’ (*semantike*). The peculiar structure of human language is made by the tongue that articulates the letters [*grammata*]. It is only through the *grammata* that the voice becomes language. By means of writing, the *praxis* of language, the voice can be fixed and analysed.

5. And the orators, the student thinks, already take writing for granted (though he finds some, like Socrates, are suspicious). The shift was the beginning of an art of speaking (*tekhne rhetorike*) and speech was already the art of writing (*tekhne grammatike*). It is meaningful that the *tekhne rhetorike* already presupposes writing. For the ancient grammarian, the letter (*gramma*) is always already there in the voice (*ta en te phone*). With writing the voice is

transformed. There is the original and there is its written existence, which becomes fixed. When writing began and grammar was introduced into language by the grammarians, it changed everything. Now the witness's speech was written down, sealed in a jar (*echinos*) to be read out loud in the trial by the clerk (*grammateus*).

κ

Foot in water, wet, water in stream. Ball in grass, hidden and indistinct, dog sniffs it out. How can something be in something else? Strictly water is not in a stream, a stream is a body of water (he is told). Poetically it is a different matter? ²²

6. But the problem lies in relating *phone* and *logos*. Strictly speech is not *in* the voice, for how could it be? The grammarians tried to force the *gramma* into the voice. But where in the voice exactly? And Aristotle's 'vague' *phantasia* only puts word and image next to each other, like the dog's paw prints on the student's page.

Every discovery ever made in any *tekhne* results from finding a limit (*peras*) in the unlimited (*apeiron*). To recognise *gramma* in the voice is to seize the *peras*, while the sounds of the voice are *apeiron*, limitless, in that they cannot be grasped. When the limit of things becomes indistinct, which happens at night, darkness falls. In darkness, *logos* loses its *phanai* (sayability), the speaking that lets shine and lets appear, and voice loses the substantiality and individuality of letters, becoming a flow of sound.²³

Without letters there is only a limitless sound, as when one listens to an unfamiliar language. In the flow of oral speech, composition and speaking coincide. It is not easy to presuppose composing from speaking. To speak out loud is to compose at the same time. For example, Homer used a set of formulae around which he would spin his epic tale, as a dancer has a set of steps around which he moves. Author and executor at the same time, the 'poet' always improvising.

The appearance of the *tekhne* of the orator, the presupposition of writing, abandons voice. (The recognition of *gramma* in the voice was not a good thing for Plato, it did not lead to writing, but to *ideas*. Truth did not reside in language but somewhere else, eternal and unchanging.) Not to comply with limitlessness is to persist in letters. To comply is (as with *dike*, which is the process of 'joining' with the *apeiron*) to return to limitlessness. *Dike* is the return to the limitless. But when voice is erased, *dike* remains suspended in transit, so to speak, and becomes judgement. And knowledge then is judgement seen as a modification of it.

I sit in the castle cafe, waiting for the rain to stop, but it refuses and at 12 p.m. I think I will just have to get wet. The dog is clammy, its body pushes into me as we walk back outside, round the castle walls. Several times it stops to sniff something unseen under its nose. It busies itself with the things that are the objects of its immediate concern. Its entire surrounding world is not walled off but is a portion of the world itself. This world of nature is the background from which difference stands out. This distinction articulates its world. I notice that when I throw the ball for the dog, how other dogs try to join in the game of chase right until a dog grasps the ball between its teeth, and the other dogs lose interest. There is a ball in play, and then it is claimed. Once the ball is claimed, fixed, the game stops.

10. *Gramma* doesn't take place in the voice, it is always already in progress, thus the articulation of the voice is continuously taking place. It is not possible to grasp chronologically when this took place, or when the transformation of voice to speech occurred, but in Attic Athens there was a shift to the *gramma* that paralleled a transformation in the *oikos*. (In *Politics* Aristotle describes the *oikos* as the smallest division and the first form of society which existed, and he defines it as a community of husband and wife, of master and slaves.²⁴) The witness appears on the *bema* at the same time the *polis* is being founded and the *oikos* is being transformed. It is with the appearance of *grammata*, writing, that both the *polis* and the *bema* are established. The *polis* is founded as the witness takes the stand. As it takes the stand its appearance coincides with a change in the status of the *oikos*, and of the voice. Around the same time, written testimony began to be put in earthenware jars, and sealed. Having found itself speaking, that is, having found language always already ahead of itself, the human being wanted to become wise about this speech. Language only as an object through writing.

11. In calling for a witness there is a more originary call. The more originary call names the gods. To heed this more originary call requires something other than truth-statements, a more originary force of language. This more originary force no longer speaks 'about' something. It no longer asserts, which is to say it no longer wills. It seeks instead words which bear witness to being. No more action! What is the case or thing of this 'originary force'? The particular 'force' consists in the capacity of language to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority. The 'pure' force of language is its simple reference to something. The structure of language, its original 'force', has the form of a command in which name and thing are indistinguishable (yet must,

nevertheless, be decided on). The enigma of the originary force of language is also found in an ancient formulation, in a fragment by Pindar.

12. Here is the text of Pindar's fragment 169 reconstructed and translated by William H. Race:

The Law [*nomos*], commander [*basileus*, King] of all,
Of mortals [*thanaton*] and immortals [*athanaton*],
Guides [*tekmairomai*] them with a sovereign hand [*hypertatai kheiri*]
As it justifies [*agei dikaion*] the utmost violence [*to Biaiotaton*].²⁵

The command of the *nomos* comes by means of violence. In the command (King) the two principles that the Greeks called *bia* (the force of the hand) and *dike* (the force of the command) come together. The force of the King comes from the force of the hand, and vice versa.²⁶ The King is the force that, 'with the strongest hand,' achieves the coincidence of these opposites (in this sense the enigma of the originary force of language is the coincidence of opposites). And the King is what makes them indistinct from each other. The sense of the *arche* or origin of the force, that is always already present, is the originary coming to presence of the human being itself into the middle of language and the middle of appearance, the hand-to-hand struggle of the living being and its capture in language and vision. The word (and the eye and the hand) simply coincide in this coming to presence of the human being.

13. This coming to presence is the so-called vital force that the Greeks called *phusis*, the principle that makes both plants and animals come to presence, i.e. generate and grow.²⁷ And perhaps the witness is nothing more than the human being's awareness of its continual and ongoing coming to presence. In German, for example, the word for witness, *Zeuge*, comes from the

word to procreate or reproduce, *zeugen*. Thus the German translation of the famous phrase from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* book 12, '*der Mensch zeugt den Menschen*' [*anthropos anthropon genna* (1070b)] can be translated either as 'man reproduces man' or 'man witnesses man'. The distinction between *Zeuge* and *zeugen* (which exists in English perhaps in 'witness' and 'bear witness', where 'bear' means to carry in the sense of 'bear fruit') becomes indistinct in the gap between potential and the actual, which together are the capacity for witnessing in language and vision that humans possess and animals lack. What distinguishes the human being from the animal being is the awareness that it is in the middle of speaking and seeing. As Aristotle writes, "he who sees senses that he is seeing, he who hears senses that he is hearing, he who walks senses that he is walking." The continual coming-to-sense of the human being in the middle of language and vision is a historical production and (self-aware) witnessing which can be assigned neither to the human nor to the animal. And to lose this perception of the self is death (see Appendice 'I heard a fly buzz as I died').

14. What is at stake is that the witness on the *bema* is captured as the subject of its own witnessing. It is captured both by the force of the King (the command, the call to the *bema*) and the force of the hand. The call to witness condemns the human being to crawl belly-like from *bema* to *bema*, to perform as the object of its own coming to presence, forced to re-enact on the *bema* the capturing of the coming to presence of the human being in language. The figure of the witness is, in this sense, simply the exteriorisation of this originary force that connects the human being to its language in an object (this is the paradox) and which exhausts itself in biographical facts and events. The witness is the supreme affirmation of the will that first wills itself. And yet before the call, the witness is always already a vital force that has no object other than living itself. Living here is a possibility that has no object other than itself. It is an absolute immanence that nevertheless moves and lives. It is, so to speak, a pure passion affecting only itself.²⁸ Pure passion, perpetually returning, cannot be retained in the memory. Its eternal return is its passion, and between composing and executing, poet and verse, there is no gap and the word instantly dies as it is spoken. This remembering that remembers nothing is the strongest of all memories. The creativity of the 'poet' dissolves every content in the continuous effort (appearing and disappearing again) to say or not say.

15. What is at stake is living itself. This is the possibility of a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something like a witness on the *bema*. A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which, in its way of living, and, in its living, is a mode of living. A mode is not a 'what' but a 'how'. The problem is no longer 'what' I am, but 'how' I am what I am. The 'what' of life is only its modes, its own 'how'. It is not separate from its modes. Between my life and my mode of being there is no difference (i.e. between Being and being) because my mode of

living (i.e. form of life) is at once the coincidence (the falling together) of identity and difference. I am my single ways of living, never simply biographical facts and events, never simply but always and above all possibilities of life. It is not a question of imagining a better form of life, an elsewhere outside forms of life, rather what coincides completely with living a life is its possibilities. When *logos* no longer signifies 'knowledge,' and truth-statements, that is, the interpretation of speech and of human language as knowledge, as reason, as language and grammar, without the force in *zoon logon echon* that metaphysics inscribes in the voice, I am to be found talking without needing to give a reason, without the necessity to assert myself in language, and *logos* is returned to simply signifying speech. Once metaphysics defined knowledge as giving reason, as knowing how to speak, and how to speak correctly corresponding to the rules of grammar, then a language was formed in which it is not possible to err.²⁹

16. Words are on the tip of my tongue. I cannot name the thing upon which I would immediately like to put my finger. At this moment the content of language, the meaning of words, is rendered silent, and language is shown as such. The last think I want is to distance my words from thought. But it is only possible to safeguard saying through the disappearance of difference and identity. The self born again as *tabula rasa* in relation both to matter and to the form of its production discovers no content in the self. No other identity than a perpetual appearing out of the *apeiron* and no other ground than the incomprehensible *bema*. The tragedy of human life, then, is that it cannot see, show, and speak at the same time. But it is precisely here that hope can be found. Once it defines knowledge as giving reason, as a knowing how to speak, metaphysics offers the same possibility of a language (knowledge) that can

come to be placed in question. Metaphysics tries to join knowledge and speech, language and speech, through *logos*, and it is in this difference between knowledge and speech that it attempts to suture, that hope for the possibility of an alternative (metaphysics) can be found. In the move to find distance from action, from the will, from the subject who always acts, without pretending that any of these are abolished, or that it is even possible to move past them, is not what can be known but not said (metaphysics) but, rather, what can be said but not known, the excess of speech over language. In this latter 'not knowing' or 'unknowing' speech comes not from some logical property of language, but is born in the darkness of the inner being, which is to say, in the witness. The unknowability of the witness, of speech, is the moment when words fail to come to the tongue, to the light, and this moment is when language is truly experienced. But precisely this uncertain stumbling around between light and darkness is when the King is witnessed in the room.

17. Aristotle tried to define how the human being achieves language through the *gramma*. But his other achievement was to establish the living being and language. By locating speech in voice, language as articulation of the human voice, Aristotle made a connection between the living being and language, nature and culture. What is now at stake in language is nature and culture, *oikos* and *polis*, *phusis* and *logos*, *zoe* (life in general, i.e. the simple fact of living common to all living beings) and *bios* (the mode or way of life that is politically qualified by free men). In the classical world simple *zoe* as such is excluded from the *polis*, and remains confined - as reproductive life - to the sphere of the *oikos*, the 'home'.³⁰ Through *gramma* the articulation of nature and culture (animal and human being) is achieved. For Aristotle, the *bios politikos* was a form of association in which free and equal citizens met in public through action (*praxis*) and speech.

18. The problem of the relation between the living being and the political subject (for Aristotle the human being is the living animal with the additional capacity for political existence) coincides with the emergence of the witness on the *bema*. The witness on the *bema* marks the threshold where the relation between the living being and *logos* is realised. The living being has *logos* only by taking away and conserving its own voice in it, even as it dwells in the *polis* by letting its own *zoe* be excluded within it.

19. The question 'in what way does the living being have language?' coincides exactly with the question 'in what way does *zoe* dwell in the *polis*?' The only way for Aristotle was to place language 'in' the voice, *ta en te phone*, *ta en te psukhe*, *ta en te phone* (in the voice, in the living being, in the voice). The only way to establish a relation between nature and culture is by placing the *gramma* (the letter that is written) somehow 'in' the living voice (*ta en te*

phone), not separated from it, but 'in' the living being. But it is an impossible task to ground language in the voice, i.e. to ground culture in nature, *bios* (the speaking being) in *zoe* (the biological body). It is not a natural occurrence, but an historical production. 'Articulation' then is the fundamental term here. The articulation of life and language, voice and speech, is not natural, it is an historical achievement and coincides with becoming human and remaining human. It is happening right now, as the human being and language are fundamentally inseparable.³¹ The problem of the voice, then, is the distinction between on the one hand the living animal voice, close to its surrounding environment, its proper dwelling place, and on the other hand human speech. Speech founds the possibilities of the human being's modes of being at the price of dislodging it from its proper dwelling place, a 'home'. The animal is at home, but not in a world of meaning. Meanwhile, the human being forms a world that is full of meaning and its meaning-making, i.e. is communicable and sayable, but where it cannot ever be truly at home. This is a political problem, not a biological one. The *polis* is therefore an uncanny place, and alienated from its own simple life and voice (which is incommunicable and mute, or unsayable) the coming to presence of the human being 'always already' leads to a scission between the human being and its living world, which exiles the human being from the 'paradise' of the simple fact of living. The problem of the voice thus coincides with the problem of the witness and with human nature. Human nature is split because the voice is split from speech and this split takes place in the witness, now divided. The call to place a witness on the *bema* coincides with the attempt to fix human nature in the voice-speech relation, the relation in which voice and speech are separated but are attempted to be joined together again in the figure of the witness. The human being now has to rule and govern its own nature.

20. No longer is *dike* 'apeiron', but *dike* becomes judgement and the *bema* begins to become a synonym for the seat of judgement. The witness then, on the stand as the mouth-piece of lawyers, is turned into an object to be summoned in the judgement of fact and event.

21. It could be pointed out that philosophy has not thought speech in terms of the voice at all. In the same way it has never really thought the witness. In thinking the human being as *zoon logon ekhon* (living being with speech, i.e. among living beings, only the human being has language), philosophy has forgotten both the human and the animal, reducing the living being to *logos* and the animal to the human. What is neglected in this forgetting requires careful consideration, especially the forgetting of mystery, of *phusis* (nature) itself.³²

22. *Phusis* unfolds in living beings and in the stars and in the gods, but also in stones, trees, streams and thunderstorms, in the *polis* and in the *oikos*, in the bustling city and in the quiet wooded path. Yet *phusis* can never be found somewhere as simply one more thing. *Phusis* flows through everything and is not reducible to meaning, or to intelligibility. Thus it is possible for different interpretations to occur, and yet every interpretation, even those that would like to take themselves to be the whole story, are always interpretations. Where the line breaks, where meaning ends, the nothing begins. And from the abyss ('ever-emerging' *phusis* is always already 'ever-withdrawing') a new and different meaning emerges.³³

A berry of joy falls unripe
Now my joy-tree is breaking
Breaks in the storm my slowly grown
Tree of joy.
Most lovely in my inapparent
Landscape, you that made me carrier
to the inapparent *daimon*.³⁴

ENDNOTES PART C

¹“Aristotle provides a partitioning of the *pisteis*: (1) *atekhnoi* (2) *entekhnoi* (1355b35). First, we will consider the *pisteis entekhnoi*, that which speaks for a matter that we can have at our disposal, what we ourselves can accomplish by ourselves. We ourselves have the possibility of being something that speaks for a matter. For such a speaking-being to be a *pistis* means that we become, in ourselves, *pisteis* as *entekhnoi*, accomplished by ourselves. *Pisteis atekhnoi*, what speaks for a matter, what cannot be brought about on account of us, but rather is there already, which we, therefore, can put to use — “witnessing,” “torturing,” “documenting” (1355b37). These *pisteis* are discussed in Book 1, Chapter 15. There, we find five in all: *nomoi*, *martures*, *basanoi*, *sumthekai* (“agreements”), *horkos* (1375q24) — in connection with a definite type of discourse, in speaking about what is *dikaion*, in juridical proceedings. These *pisteis* are ways of speaking for a matter that is at issue (in such a proceeding), which lies before us. In contrast to these, there are the *pisteis entekhnoi*. Of these ways of speaking-for-something that can be imparted through discourse itself... These determinations must be presented more precisely. Aristotle says that *logos* must be in such a way, discourse must be maintained in such a way, ‘that it turns the speaker into someone who is trustworthy,’ who thus has influence in saying that the matter is such and such, that it is so (1356a4). And Aristotle says explicitly that through the discourse itself, through the manner and mode in which the one who discourses himself speaks, *ethos* must become visible, *pistis* must arise out of discourse itself. If we have firm views, then ‘we trust all the more quickly, and to a greater extent, the decent human beings who make a good impression.’ One’s comportment, how one behaves oneself, is the ‘most excellent’ *pistis*, the most excellent way for the one discoursing to speak for a matter (1356a13).” Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. by Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) pp. 81-2.

²This ‘sophistry’ is ridiculed by Aristophanes in his play *Wasps*, where the elderly juror Philokleon delivers a speech about his role as juror (a speech that is being written down by his son Bdelukleon):

I just listen to the speakers letting forth every manner of voice (*pasas phonas hienton*) in order to get [themselves] off. Tell me, what kind of wheedling can’t a juror hear in there? Some bewail their poverty and exaggerate their plight ... Others tell us stories or a

funny fable; others crack jokes to make me laugh and put me in a good mood. And if these means don't persuade me, they drag in their little children by the hand up to the *bema*, girls and boys, who hang their heads together and bleat in unison. (562-571).

In his play *Knights*, Aristophanes has the poet Magnus cited as able to represent 'every kind of sound' (*pasas d'humina phonas*), singing, flapping wings, speaking Lydian (both the music and the ancient language of Lydia, the Lydian name for the priests at Delphi, and possibly also meaning the Greek loan-word 'tyrant'), as well as buzzing like a gall-fly (522).

³ Aphophantic *logos*, from *apophainein*, to show, to make known, from *phaino*, to shine or appear, in turn from *phos* (light). In contrast, things which belong to a kind of knowing that is neither true or false is a mode of knowing termed 'non-apophantic', i.e. what is not made known, what does not shine or is inapparent.

⁴ The similarity of the *atechnoi pisteis* to the *epithetoi pisteis* of Anaximenes suggests a common source. David Mirhady 'Non-Technical Pisteis in Aristotle and Anaximenes', *The American Journal of Philology*, 112.1 (1991) pp. 5-28; p. 5.

⁵ Richard W. Lariviere, 'Witnesses as the Basis for All Other Modes of Proof in Hindu Law', *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, 51 (1987), pp. 60-70; p. 62 fn 1.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

⁷ In the trial that unfolded before Pilate, two kinds of *bemata* seem to confront each other: the human and the divine. When Pilate rose to pronounce the sentence, he sat on the (human) *bema*: "Pilate led Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement" (John 19:13). Also, "while he was sitting on the *bema*" (this is, when he was exercising his function as judge), "his wife sent word to him" (Matthew 27:19). The *bema* became (under the Romans) this term for the function of the judge, the seat or platform on which he sat. The seat of judgment then began to take on the meaning of 'tribunal', e.g. "the Jews made a united attack against Paul and brought him before the tribunal (*eis to bema*)" (Acts 18:12). It was, however, also used to refer to the Last Judgment, i.e. the divine *bema*: "All of us must appear before the *bema* of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10) and "we will all stand before the *bema* of God" (Romans 14:10).

⁸ The relation between *pistis* and the adjective *pithanon* is determined by the root verb *peitho*, 'I convince' or 'I obey'. *Pistis* therefore parallels the command. If the command is obeyed, there is a force. If the *pistis* is obeyed, there is a force.

⁹ Aristotle, in preparation for the definition of movement, refers to 'being-there-present' and 'being-able-to-be-there', the modes of encountering the world as present and able to be. This

reveals beings as such, which in themselves are always in a ‘from... to...,’ appearing and so not-looking-thus, being-absent of something. See Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, pp. 263-4.

¹⁰ Lysias 9.1. In Lysias, *Lysias*, trans. by W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1930)

¹¹ This sense of a hidden *daimon* in everyday life is, in some way, parallel to one’s own, one’s voice, *ethos*, the proper, and to *moira*. Plato’s character Socrates in *Apology* mentions that his divine sign, the *to daimonion semeion*, “it is a sort of voice (*phone tis gignomene*) that comes to me, and when it comes it always holds me back from what I am thinking of doing, but never urges me forward” (*Apology* 31d2-4). This phenomenon proves difficult to square (like the guide [*tekmerion*] of Socrates’ wet foot at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*) with the Socrates who commits himself to the *logos* of rational argument. Later in the *Phaedrus*, after chastising Phaedrus’ speech for its *atekhnos thaumasios*, or ‘astounding lack of art’, Socrates again mentions the voice of his *daimon*: “when I was about to cross the stream, the *daimon* and the sign [*semeion*] that often comes into presence as my own [*to daimonion te kai to eiothos semeion* (*eiothos* is related to *ethos*, and can be translated as the character that is properly one’s own, which Socrates hears as a voice)] came to presence — it always holds me back from something I am about to do — and I seemed to hear a voice [*phone*], which forbade my going away before quitting myself of my oath [*aphosiosomai*, from *aphosion*], as if I had stumbled [*hemartekota*, from *hamartano*, also to wander or err] across the divine. I really am, then, a seer [*mantis*], though not a very serious one, but just like those who are inferior at letters [*ta grammata phauloi*, also said of animals], I am just sufficient for myself alone.” (Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. by Harold North Fowler (Harvard University Press, 1914) 242b-c [translation amended].)

Curiously in this last passage the uncanny [*daimon*], the seer [*mantis*], which Aristotle calls a witness, and wandering [*hamartano*] are brought together. *Hamartano* was translated by later Christian scholars as sin, but it meant originally to wander, to miss a target or to stumble, an involuntary error. Christian theology constructed from this neutral concept the concept of sin. The idea became that of human beings erring in their relationship with God in a way that is, so to speak, necessary and not that of a sinful will. Socrates’ point appears to be that he does not need writing, and that like those who are poor at writing (and the animal) [the *ta grammata*, literally ‘what is written’] his voice (his ownmost character) is enough by itself (see also note 15 on Dorothy Parker’s character Mr. Wheelock). Thus the unintentional, the voice, and the *atekhnos* (in the *atekhnos thaumasios*) are in this passage joined (see also Aristotle’s *Poetics* ch. 16).

For discussion of *ta grammata*, see Michael Gagarin’s ‘Letters of the Law: Written Texts in Archaic Greek Law’, in *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece*, ed. by Harvey Yunis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 59-77.

¹² Michael Gagarin puts the date at 375 B.C. See *Writing Greek Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 189.

¹³ “The witness seals its bond to the cause that it defends in the testimony, in the devotion, in the zeal of the one who calls or summons it” — Paul Ricœur, ‘The Hermeneutics of Testimony’, in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis Seymour Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) pp. 119–54; p. 129.

This sealing was physically enacted in the Attic court. After witness statements were no longer oral but written down, *gegrammenos*, they had to be submitted with other *atechnoi pisteis* in advance and sealed in the *echinos*.

“A gloss of Hesychius (*horkoi: desmoi sphragidos*) defines oaths as ‘bonds of the seal’ (or sealing, if one prefers the reading *sphragideis*). In the same sense in fragment 115 of Empedocles one speaks of an ‘eternal decree of the gods, sealed with great oaths’ (*plateessi katesphregismenon horkois*). The seal that is in question here can only be the one that links the speaker to his speech and, at the same time, words to reality” — Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath*, trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 34 [translation amended]

Aristotle at 1375b12 writes ‘but if what is written [in the *echinos*] is on the side of the case [*pragma*], then [the oath] which is sworn ‘to my best judgment [*gnome te ariste*]’ [by the juror] means not deciding [*dikazein*] counter to the law [*nomos*], but rather if [what he said was] spoken in ignorance [*agnosese ti legei*] of the law, he should not perjure [*epiorkei*].’

The gist of this is that if what is unwritten (*agrathois*) conflicts with the written, then the oath [*horkos*] is protection against committing perjury. If you disagree with the law, or are ignorant of it, you do not commit perjury [*epiorkos*]. The written (*gegrammenois*) does not (always) perform its function (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1375b), and accordingly the better man makes use of [*khresthai*, 1375b8-9] the unwritten and not written, and observes and obeys (*emmenein*) what has been proclaimed, which is to say firstly not to trust solely in the written, and secondly to *make use* of the *written* and *unwritten* through judgment (cursed is everyone, says the Apostle Paul, who does not observe and obey [*emmenei*] all the things written in the book of the law). At 1375b7 of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes: *dikaion estin alethes ti kai sumtheron: dike* is uncovered and gathered together. The argument can be understood only if it is situated in the context of the

mutual belonging, in a juridical and not only religious sense, of law and curse. At heart here is the distinction drawn between ignorance and knowledge: an act is only culpable if intentional; in the ignorant saying of the law, the unintentional (*hamartema*) is an error. Thus the unintentional and the *atekhnice* are joined (see also Aristotle's *Poetics* Ch. 16).

¹⁴ W. L. Newman: "The household cannot be natural and the state other than natural: what holds of the former must hold of the latter: if the household is natural, *a fortiori* the state is so, for it is the completion of the household." W. L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [1887]), pp. 29–30.

¹⁵ In Dorothy Parker's short story *Such a Pretty Little Picture*, the story's narrator makes the following observation about the character Mr. Wheelock: "Mr. Wheelock nodded and turned back to his clipping—and his thoughts. They were thoughts that had occupied much of his leisure lately. After dinner, when Adelaide was sewing or arguing with the maid, he found himself letting his magazine fall face downward on his knee, while he rolled the same idea round and round in his mind. He had got so that he looked forward, through the day, to losing himself in it. He had rather welcomed the hedge-clipping; you can clip and think at the same time."

'He had got so that', sounding somewhat homely, is an interesting phrase with a certain playfulness with tense (past-, future-, possibility of future perfect tense, etc.). The phrase points to Mr. Wheelock's potential to lose himself fully in rolling an idea around in his mind, i.e. to lose himself in thought, the special presence-absence to himself that is glimpsed in fleeting moments when we are alone. Mr. Wheelock is now always looking forward to the opportunity to think. But what of this strange phrase "to lose himself in it?" Here is the sense that something is taking place, that something is being desired and loved by the one to whom it happens. The narrator alludes to Mr. Wheelock's joy as he anticipates this experience of deepest intimacy with himself. The phrase 'he had got so that' grasps a potentiality: losing oneself cannot possibly be willed, it is both a potential to lose oneself and also a potential to not lose oneself, at which point one either does not lose oneself, or one does lose oneself in thought. In other words, what is at stake is the very possibility for thought itself. The ownmost intimacy with oneself that one achieves in thinking is something like an intensity because it can in no way be mastered. The moment one loses oneself "in it" is the moment lets go of any desire to master "it". This is the mode of being that is thinking, the presence of what is not action and Mr. Wheelock is defined most of all by his capability (or not) to regulate access to his own intimacy with himself, the thrust towards losing himself "in it" and the regulation of that thrust. But how does one 'lose' one's self? (It is similar in a way to the famous photographer who suggests she 'arranges' her self rather than arranging her subject.) It

suggests not a process of ‘self-making,’ but a process whereby one is able to unburden oneself of one’s ‘self’ in a way that is intimately connected to, and dependent on, the potential for thinking. This is not opposite to the joy one finds in any control one exerts over losing oneself, but is entirely coincident with the joy one finds in losing oneself, in the selective control of access to one’s self. A tension thus arises from the dialectic between the thrust to lose oneself, and the control that is needed to do so. One’s potentiality, or not, for thinking is therefore coincident with, in constituting, or not, one’s subjectivity, the potentiality of one’s privacy. For when Mr. Wheelock loses himself in thought, he no longer has to observe his wife Adelaide sewing or arguing with the maid, he no longer has to worry about providing enough money to pay off the house, or about giving his wife a son. In this erring and wandering, he can fantasise about walking away for good. Here is the potential not so much to lose oneself in thought, but to err entirely. Thus the potential for thinking and erring coincide. And where else to find this erring if not in silent individual contemplation, the alone-time of thought? Modernity is therefore the coincidence of these two desires: the thrust to to be a subject, to expose oneself publicly, and the urge to lose oneself again in what is properly one’s own, to arrange what is properly one’s ownmost rather than be subjected, or become a subject at all.

¹⁶ Franz Kafka, ‘Travel Diaries: Trip to Friedland and Reichenberg, January–February, 1911’, in *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1914-1923*, ed. by Max Brod, trans. by Martin Greenberg, 2 vols (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949), 2, pp. 237–43.

¹⁷ The poet, Friedrich Hölderlin, later writes:

‘After many convulsions and movements of my soul, I needed to settle myself for a while, and so I am now living in my home town. The more I study the nature of our native land, the more powerfully I am gripped by it. These are the things that make me glad: the thunderstorm, not only in its highest manifestation but as a prospect, power and shape, in the other forms taken by the skies; how light works, shaping national character as a principle and as a manner of fate, making something sacred to us, the way it moves as it comes and goes; the characteristics of the woods and the coming together in one place of different natural characters, so that all the sacred places on earth are as one; the philosophical light around my window... Write to me soon. I need your pure tones. A spirit shared among friends, thoughts which come into being through conversations and letters, we artists need these things. Otherwise we have nobody for ourselves, unless there is a person who belongs to the sacred image that we form.’ (Friedrich Hölderlin to Casimir Böhlendorf, 1802, in Walter Benjamin, *Deutsche Menschen: eine Folge von Briefen*

(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006). English Translation: Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Letter to Casimir Böhlendorf', trans. by Ernest Schonfield.)

¹⁸ "Many animals—e.g., those which are bloodless, and of animals which have blood, fish—have no voice. And this is quite reasonable, since sound is a kind of movement of the air. The fish, such as those in the Akhelous, which are said to have a voice, only make a sound with their gills, or with some other such part. Voice, then, is a sound made by a living animal, and that not with any part of it indiscriminately. But, since sound only occurs when something strikes something else in a certain medium, and this medium is the air, it is natural that only those things should have voice which admit the air." Aristotle, 420b12. *On the soul*, trans. by W. S. Hett (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957) p. 117.

In *The History of Animals* Aristotle writes (535b14-27) that: "Fish, though voiceless (because they have no lung, windpipe, or pharynx) emit certain noises and squeaks—this is what is called their "voice," e.g., the *gurnard* and the *khromis* (these fishes make a sort of grunting noise), and the *kapros* which is found in the Akhelous, and the *chalkeus* and the cuckoo-fish: the *chalkeus* makes a kind of whistling noise, and the other a noise like the cuckoo—whence its name. In all these what appears to be the voice is caused in some of them by rubbing their gills (which are spiny), in others by internal parts round their stomach, for every one of them has *pneuma* inside it, and by rubbing and causing movement with this they produce their sounds. Some of the Selachia seem to squeak. But to say that these creatures emit a voice is incorrect; it should be called a sound." (Aristotle, *History of animals: books IV - VI*, trans. by A. L. Peck (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970) p. 77.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben: "And since it had expelled its language out of itself, the human being had to learn to transmit it - unlike other animals - exosomatically, from mother to son so that over the course of generations its language was divided babelically, and progressively changed according to the time and the place. And, having separated its language from itself in order to entrust it to a historical tradition, for the human being speaking life and language, nature and history were divided and, at the same time, they articulated with one another." Able to observe language separated from the body in writing, the ancient grammarians began to study and tried to place it back in the body: "language, which had been expelled to the outside, was reinscribed into the voice through phonemes, letters and syllables; the analysis of language coincided with the articulation of the voice (the *phone enarthros*, the articulated [*articolazione*] voice of the human being opposed to the inarticulate [*inarticolata*] voice of the animal)." *Che Cos'è La Filosofia?* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016) p. 27 [my translation]. Thus the separation of human being (as *zoon*

logon ekhon) and living animal being is made through articulation, though the articulated human voice constantly threatens to return to the inarticulate animal voice. The term 'articulation' is fundamental here as the articulation of life and language (the separation of *phone* and *logos*) is an historical achievement.

²⁰ "The primate who would become *homo sapiens* was always already endowed - like all animals - with a language, certainly different, but perhaps not too dissimilar from what we know. What has happened is that the primate of the genus *homo* at a certain point ... has become aware of having a language, that is, it has separated it from itself and exteriorised it outside itself as an object, and then begin to consider it, analyse it, and elaborate it in an incessant process - in which philosophy, grammar, logic, psychology, computer science have followed one another with various vicissitudes - a process which perhaps has not yet been completed." (*Che Cos'è La Filosofia?*, p. 27, my translation, my emphasis). The process that has not yet been accomplished coincides with the ongoing event of what Agamben terms 'anthropogenesis', the coming to presence of the human being.

²¹ In fact, this event, that is, the *arche* that constitutes humans as speaking beings, is always already present. This is not a 'digging down' back to the origin where once upon a time the voice was lost. Neither is it properly the past that is in question. Rather, it is the ongoing process of coming to presence that is important. Archaeology can open access to this process only by going back to a point when it began to be covered over by the tradition that still obscures it. In the case of the voice and speech, the tradition is the one the ancient grammarians began, when they sought (unsuccessfully) to place *gramma* in the voice. Coming to presence, the *arche* of archaeology, becomes accessible and present only when the archaeological 'dig' fulfils its 'work'. The dig does not return to a past utopia, but tries to reveal a means by which human life can be lived in its possibilities. This requires that the 'unlived' moments in life, which lie within every present yet remain inapparent due to their very nearness, can be discovered. These unlived moments have really always been contemporaneous to the present. Once the inapparent is recognised, the present can be accessed as if for the first time. Archaeology as method refuses to grasp the taking place of language through a subject, a transcendental 'I', and instead poses the question of how something like a subject and a witness correspond to statements and the taking place of language itself. If a proposition can be called statement, it is because the position of a subject can be assigned to it. Thus the paradox between a past found, even created, by the present and a present founded on the past can be revealed, allowing the archaeologist to suspend his or her own involvement in the separation between the origin and current examples. In the clash of the two there will be a point

where they cancel each other out, and in the resulting place, for example, the voice emerges. One might say, then, that voice is the matter of language, and that the taking place of language is to find this matter. If something is there, it materialises. And then archaeology can try to find where it materialises. Agamben develops this method from Michel Foucault.

In an interview, Agamben said the following: “What you discover when you do archaeological research, is that you cannot separate fields. You cannot say: ‘I am doing political research so I am only reading political texts’, or, ‘I am doing philosophical research, I am reading only philosophical texts,’ or, ‘I am doing theological research. I am reading only theological texts.’ This is the great curse of the university today. These ‘faux-specialisms’. If you seriously do archaeological research, you come back into the past and all of a sudden it is like you are on a train: you follow political binaries and there is an exchange that pushes you into theological binaries, or into legal binaries, or into philosophical binaries. And you cannot get away from that, you cannot avoid it. And yet it is rare, however, because philosophers write books about philosophers, jurists write about jurists, theologians about theologians, and that is a disaster. True archaeological research should be able to follow these exchanges, these moments when all of a sudden you find yourself obligated, since an idea that you once thought was political, you now see comes from theology, or vice versa, or a theological idea you see comes from politics. In practice, in research, there is often interesting research but it rests within a binary frame, and that is not enough to allow you to understand. Because to understand certain codes in a problem, you must go to another field.” Interview in 2011 by Άκη Γαβριηλίδη [Akes Gavrielides] for the Greek public TV channel ET3. *Giorgio Agamben on Biopolitics*, 2011 <<https://youtu.be/skJueZ52948>> [accessed 20 June 2019]. See also Giorgio Agamben’s essay ‘Philosophical Archaeology’, in *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. by Luca D’Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), pp. 81–111.

²² Socrates says in *Phaedrus* that his wet foot is a guide to [*tekmerasthai*, from *tekmerion*] the cool water of the stream (I discuss this in the sections titled ‘Wet Foot’ [pp. 115-121] and ‘The Limit’ [pp. 188-191]). At the beginning of *Phaedrus* this perhaps points the way of the dialogue: philosophical discussion can only begin by the philosopher getting his foot wet. The written philosophical text is only the epilogue to the actual activity of philosophising, getting a wet foot. Similarly, the poet experiences that only the word makes a thing appear as the thing it is, and thus lets it be present. The function of both philosophy and poetry is not the communication of thought from one into the mind of another, but the provocation that encourages thinking on the part of the

listener or reader, and wholly depends on awakening an interest in them. Perhaps it is the text's task to teach how to get one's foot wet?

Phaedrus: "Good timing, it seems, that I happened to be barefoot; you, of course, always are. So it's very easy for us to go along the little brook, getting our feet wet—and not unpleasant, especially at this season of the year and hour of the day..."

Socrates: "...the stream flows most gracefully under the plane tree with especially cool water, as my foot says [*hoste ge to podi tekmerasthai*]. It seems likely, from the figurines and other statues, to be the shrine of certain nymphs of Akhelous." (229a; 230b-c)

Socrates' use of *tekmerion* here is important. The word *tekmerion* is described by Aristotle as a kind of *semeion* (sign). A *semeion* points or hints towards something. *Tekmerion* gives knowledge, but not through reasoned fact. The *tekmerion* is a demonstration that is stronger than *apodeixis*, demonstration through showing. (Socrates says "and our *apodeixis* will not be believed [*apistos*] by the clever [*deinois*], but will be believed [*piste*] by the wise [*sophois*]" (245c).) The wise look deeper to what is worthy of *pistis* in the showing, and do not obsess with clever reasoning or argument (*deinois*) the word which Socrates uses to characterise the sophists. It is something akin to Samuel Johnson's kicking a large stone and saying "I refute it thus" in order to dismiss outright (rather than enter into arguments against) Bishop Berkeley's idealism (there are no material objects, only ideas in minds). The point is, perhaps, that Socrates establishes a difference between the *sophos*, the one who believes in myths, and has *pistis*, faith, and the *deinos* as the one who is *apistos*, who therefore understands nothing of myths and tries to explain them away through argument. The *deinos sophistes* are clever arguers, though the noun *sophistes* still corresponds to *sophos*, the wise. One might expect to find a more distinct association of the term *sophistes* with teachers of the art of rhetoric. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Theseus says that, having devised so many fine things and arts (*tekhnas*), humans have still not been able to teach sense (*phronein didaskein*) to the senseless. The notion of the *deinos sophistes* is evoked because his son Hippolytus replies "an extraordinary sophist [*deinon sophisten*] this, he is able to teach fools to show sense' (917-22).

The *sophistai* includes idlers and layabouts such as poets, musicians, diviners and seers, doctors, and those who teach the 'art' of rhetoric. Aristophanes' *Clouds*:

Because you aren't aware that these goddesses sustain and nourish a whole host of *sophistai*, diviners from Thuri, professors of the medical art, long-haired do-nothings with onyx signet-rings; and composers of convoluted songs for dithyrambic choruses, men of airy quackery, they maintain in idleness doing nothing, because they poeticise about the clouds (Aristophanes, *Clouds*, trans. by A. Sommerstein (1982), pp. 332-5).

Later Strepsiades promises that Pheidippides will become a 'skilled sophist' (*sophisten dexion*, 1111) under his instruction, and then Strepsiades, after defeating the creditors, is called a *sophistes* by the Chorus (1309). Teaching the skill of rhetoric is implied here. This may be an early example of the negative sense that *sophistai* was to take on.

Socrates' remark then about his foot and cool water needing no 'sophisticated' argument can be placed in the context of teaching sophistry in rhetoric. In *Phaedrus* he argues against 'hacks' and 'empirics' (268a-269c), i.e. those 'hack' rhetoricians who focus on the *tekhnē* of speaking, who are deficient. They cannot determine the proper application of their (limited) knowledge and are thus ignorant of "the right occasions for speaking and for keeping quiet" (271d7-272b5). Socrates also proposes a distinction between the quack doctor and the physician - the quack knows only symptoms and the effects of certain remedies, as an analogy between the dilettante and the 'proper' rhetor: the dilettante uses only a limited portfolio of techniques (268a-c, 270b-d; 267c7ff.). Aristophanes incidentally in *Clouds* makes fun of Socrates, and, along with Plato and Xenophon, is one of three writers (and witnesses) who actually knew him.

²³ Likewise, the witness loses his words to the darkness of the inside of the *echinos*. Letters become concealed in the darkness until the *grammateus* opens the jar and reads the words of the witness.

²⁴ Emile Benveniste explores the historical-linguistic use of the word *oikos* in his discussion of 'home' in *Indo-European Language and Society*, pp. 252-4:

“Two important transformations have come about:

“1) The break-up of the *Grossfamilie* into separate families. The ancient period was characterised by the *Grossfamilie* in which, after marriage, all the sons continued to live together, bringing up their own families, while sometimes even the daughters brought their husbands. At this stage, there was no individual property; the whole family domain was an undivided property. We cannot properly speak of inheritance because the *Grossfamilie* itself remained the proprietor, and its rights over its possessions never lapsed. Then the *Grossfamilie* broke up. For economic

reasons, the sons left at an early age. The *Grossfamilie* was divided up into much smaller units when the descendants in their turn went off to found new homes.

“2) The second transformation was the establishment of the Achaean warriors in a *polis*, a common township. The old social divisions founded on genealogical line of descent were progressively replaced by groupings determined by a common habitat. This habitat is no longer the privilege of those with a common origin. It was chance or war which brought together those who lived in it.

“In *Politics* the ultimate unit Aristotle describes as the *oikos* (the Romans would say *domus*); for him it is the smallest division and the first form of society which existed, and he defines it as a community of husband and wife, of master and slaves: this is the notion of the Roman *familia*. After this, Aristotle posited a progress upwards to the village (*kome*) and the city (*polis*). Today we see things differently; such a reconstruction, which starts from a social cell and proceeds by successive accretions, is false. What existed from the start was the society as a whole and not the family, then the clan, then the city. Society from its origin was divided into units which it comprised. The families are necessarily grouped within a unit, and so on. But Aristotle makes into a universal phenomenon and a philosophic necessity what was represented in his own society: he makes an absolute of a particular social state of affairs.

“It is this great process of transformation which is reflected in the vocabulary: like *domos*, the term *oikos* from then on became a word for a habitat. Soon *oikos* took the place of the ancient **dem-* (house) and so came to mean ‘house’ as building. The change which came about in society produced: 1) the new reference of the terms to the material sphere; 2) the ‘hierarchical’ transfer of the term to the place of another: the sense of **dem-* passed to *oikos* in Greek; hence the locative *oikoi*, etc., which corresponds to Lat. *domi*, etc. and signifies ‘at my home,’ ‘at your home.’

“The old genealogical words become emptied of their institutional and social meanings and become a terminology of territorial divisions. Each language proceeds to a new adaptation of its terminology and languages are not Indo-European in the same way. In other words, the category of meaning in which the word for ‘house’ finds its Indo-European value determines its other aspects. Latin is Indo-European in its fidelity to ancient usage, to the vocabulary of institutions. Greek is Indo-European in the persistence of the primitive model, around which it organised a new series of terms. The opposition which Latin usage has established from the beginning between *domi* (at home) and *foris* (outside) could not have been foreseen, and which contrasts two terms that are not by nature antithetical, because one is the word for ‘house’ and the

other the word for ‘door’ (*fores*). Here a new notion came into play with lexical consequences, that of ‘door.’”

²⁵ Hesiod in *Works and Days* also invokes *bia* and *dike* :

O Perseus, keep these things in mind and
forget *biaia* when you attend to *dike*.

To men, Zeus gave this *nomos*:

what is proper to the fish, the wild beasts, and the winged birds is to devour each other,
since there is no *dike* between them.

But to men Zeus gave *dike*, which is much better.

²⁶ Perhaps it is the gathering of potential pain that ‘forces’ the witness to obey the call to the *bema*. A life condemned to drag itself around, belly-like, from *bema* to *bema*, against which calls to witness such a life become unbearable. Giorgio Agamben, for example, distinguishes between force [*forza*], and power or potency [*potere*] and potential [*potenza*] (and act [*atto*]): “there are everywhere - even within us - forces [*forze*] that compel [*costringono*] potential [*potenza*] to linger in itself. Power [*potere*] is founded on these forces [*forze*]: it is the isolation of potential [*potenza*] from its act [*atto*], the organisation of potential [*potenza*]. Gathering its pain, power [*potere*] bases its authority on this: it leaves the pleasure of men literally unfinished.” Giorgio Agamben, *Idea Della Prosa* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1985) pp. 45-6, my translation and emphasis.

²⁷ The idea of the originary force is that language always orders, or commands (i.e. ‘names’). And within this naming, action [the force of the hand] operates. The imperative has its origin in the force of the hand. No magic is required — it is simply calling and naming (in the appropriate ritual) and expecting a response. The force of language is therefore the effectiveness (or not) of the calling, which is to say that even if force only boils down to the fact that it presents an alternative between obeying and disobeying, the force always operates between the enactment of language and its potentiality (of possibility). The call for a witness just reveals this ‘originary force’ of language behind it, that is, the force that lies behind the witness is the force of language itself. Obeying the call, the witness (in its being named) reveals the relation between the possibility of language and its enactment in the call for the witness to come up to the *bema*.

²⁸ This is the sense of Friedrich Nietzsche’s notion of ‘eternal return’.

²⁹ In Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, the imposition of reasoned speech (*logos*) upon the animal voice (*phone*) converts the ‘biological animal’ (*zoon*) into the ‘biological animal equipped with

speech' (*zoon logon ekhon*), i.e. the Greek citizen of the *polis*. This then accounts, in Aristotle's thinking, for the superiority of human beings over animals, and of Greek speakers over other human beings ('barbarians').

³⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a, 26-35.

³¹ As a conjecture, perhaps the primate already had language, and at a certain moment became aware of living language, and also of its vision. It then separated language and vision from its living body and turned them into a tool, consigned them to transmission (in speech and in cave painting). The primate began to transform, observing its language and vision over thousands of years. This is still in progress, the transformation of language and vision, even as they are transmitted across space by satellite and downloaded through the internet.

³² Every being, Aristotle says of *phusis*, is always on the way to itself (i.e. is its own source of motion, as opposed to *tekhne* which always requires a source of motion outside itself). *Phusis* is the emerging-arising of life in itself. A recurring motif in Martin Heidegger's later work is the retrieval of the meaning of this ancient Greek term. The following passage by Heidegger plays on the many forms of the verb *gehen*, to go.

"*Phusis* as arising [*Aufgehen* - the verb *aufgehen* has many meanings such as to emerge, to rise, to bear fruit, to come up, to swell] can be observed everywhere, e.g. in goings on of the heavens [*Vorgängen des Himmels*] (the rising [*Aufgang*] of the sun), in the rolling of the sea, in the growth of plants, in the 'coming forth' [*Hervorgehen*] of human being and animal from the womb. But *phusis*, the emerging 'King' [*das aufgehende Walten*], is not synonymous with these activities [*Vorgängen*, i.e. not just one process among many] which today we still regard as part of 'nature'... *Phusis* is B/being itself, by virtue of which beings become and stay observable.

"The Greeks did not learn what *phusis* is through natural activities [*Naturvorgängen*], rather it was the other way round: through a fundamental 'poetic-thinking' [*dichtend-denkenden*] experience of being that they discovered what they had to call *phusis*. It was this discovery that enabled them to gain a glimpse into nature in the narrower sense. Hence *phusis* originally meant heaven as well as earth, the stone as well as the plant, the animal as well as the human being [*den Menschen*], and it encompassed human history [*Menschengeschichte*] as a work of humans and the gods [*Menschen- und Götterwerk*]; and ultimately and first of all, it meant the gods themselves under Destiny [*Geschick*]. *Phusis* means the emerging King [*aufgehende Walten*] and its enduring realm [*durchwaltete Währen*]. This power of emerging and enduring command [*aufgehend verweilenden Walten*] includes 'becoming' as well as 'being' in the narrower sense of solid persistence. *Phusis* is coming to stand [*das Ent-stehen*] out of the hidden [*aus dem Verborgenen*],

whereby the hidden is first brought to stand [*so erst in den Stand bringen*].” Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Gesamtausgabe, 40 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983) pp. 16-17, my translation.

³³ The witness **is** to be understood not in terms of numbers, big data, planning, performance targets, but as the living experience of things as they come to presence and meet me, as they fill my senses, and the wonder and surprise and joy that this calls forth, the movement of all things made and found, all beings as they come to presence and linger a while in appearance, but also disappear again. And the ever-withdrawing is also to forget, the *lethe* in *aletheia* that keeps me doubting and unknowing, and humble in my telling others what is (but never in imagining what can be).

³⁴ Raine Maria Rilke, ‘Lament’, my translation.

Liar, liar, your pants on fire.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

Cross your heart and hope to die, never tell another lie.

Liar Liar

When I was a child, we said these words to one another. *Sticks and stones*, but if I chant words, your words, your lies cannot affect me.

The chant. We *chanted* because...? I'm not sure why. The words of others had a power, I saw this, but then they were just words, and I chanted these words back to hold your words at bay. *Cross my heart and hope to die*, my promise, I promise, your promise, you promise? Yes, and on pain of death, though none of us really believed that.

The trust between you and I. Our bond. The chanting of rhymes to secure this.

What else is there beyond? Violence?

The children chant: a verbal, not physical act. By chanting I abandon myself to your trust in me, my trust in you, or I curse you, and through that gain protection (from the possibility of violence). The object of the chant is, in every case, to stick to what I say, or what you say, conformity between your words and actions, and mine.

Do I still chant now I am an adult? No longer a wanting to chant, unless I murmur along with others, in a chant divinised, associated with God and Church. But in the sense of that personal contract with someone, I don't think I have chanted since a child. When did I stop? Why? What would happen if you continued to lie, or if you continued to physically hurt me, or you broke your promise not to? Did it matter? Of course, but also forgotten. All forgotten now. Did we simply, then, as adults, forget the power of our childhood chants? The force of those words sung to each other, with one another?

We chanted, we sang songs together, we shared our tunes, melodies, we sang not once but repeatedly, in sing-song, in incantation, in

charms and spells. Oh we sang to each other of past and prophesy, in skipping-rope rhymes and clapping games.

To sing in the middle of talk, a ritual, commits you to a definite type of behaviour. It implies that you agree, that we have a treaty of sorts, an agreement that the chant carries a power. It also implies that chanting is recognised as such, and that there is responsibility involved: to respect the force that the chant creates.

What is this force? Liar, liar, could be a kind of punishment in advance for the possibility that what you say might be a lie, that you may be lying. It does not create the impunity of lying, but rather marks a threshold where language, by means of the chant, enters into the sphere of religion and law.

The chant is a deterrent against the misuse of language, to ward it off. This is despite the impression that the chant “words will never hurt me” (or “names shall never harm me,” another version) seems to imply the opposite. But in the chanting of the words, a chanting that is intended to ward off, the essence of the chant appears to be weak in that it is an unspoken conditional: “if you carry on calling me names, I shall simply chant more.”

It is here where the chant seems to lose its specific identity and become confused. It is not entirely clear how the chant works, if it works at all, and if and how the chant is to be enforced.

What is decisive is that the chant is something different to a simple assertion. I am not asserting “sticks and stones *will* break my bones,” I am speaking a formula: “sticks and stones *may* break my bones” in the sense I might also say “bless you” (“God blesses you”) if you sneeze. It is in the subjunctive tense, a possibility that a god will bless if I speak these words, and likewise the possibility that you will stop speaking if I say the ‘right’ words. It is not a word in particular either, but the saying of these particular words together.

One might call this kind of saying by chanting 'just speech,' which consists, in short, of saying not what is to be done for a 'balance' between you and I to be established or restored, but the saying *is* balance being restored. It cannot be attested or verified in any way except by saying, which is to say by being performed. There is a clear formula that must be followed. The set words must be chanted. The formula tells the other that he or she must stop doing something, i.e. stop calling me names, or stop lying to me. The chant makes it very clear that I am performing this balance, that is, this is the form I have chosen to settle this imbalance, to nullify conflict. It is entirely set up as a confrontation between you and I, there is no judge to say: "This is how things should be." The chant designates the balancing. The chant itself takes on exactly the same form as the struggle between us. "Do you have the balls to swear to me that you did not lie? Are you able to do that? Do you have the guts to reply to the force of my words, which are my attempt to force you to swear not to call me names?"

How is one to speak of the strange and powerful force that accompanies the chant? It requires somebody to utter it, a voice, and it must be spoken as a formula.

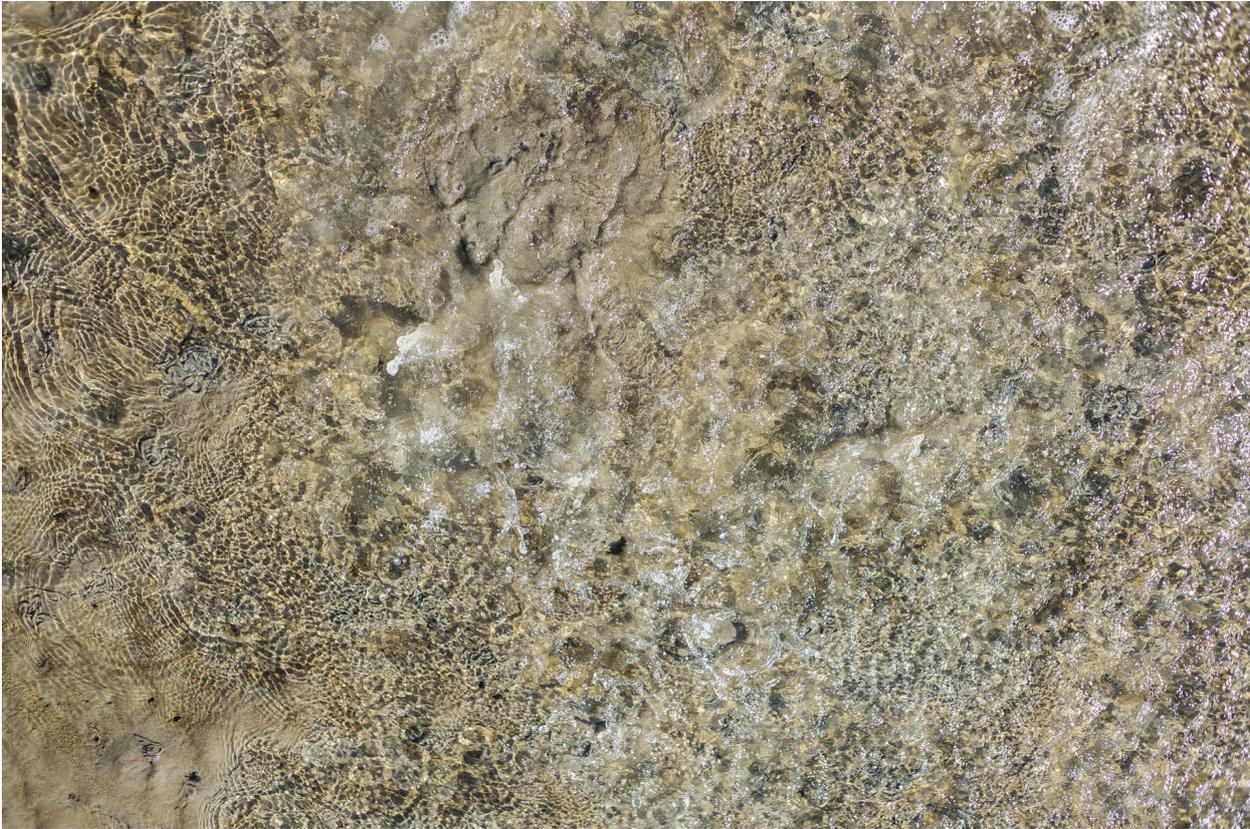
I don't chant with others, but neither do I chant alone. Of central importance is the recitation of a common text, known to all.

*Mable, Mable,
Set the table,
Don't forget the salt,
Vinegar,
Mustard,
Pepper!*

To chant is to project my voice out into an imagined place where words cannot hurt, to use my voice to cancel the possibility of hurt. The more force I project in the chant, the less words mean, thus I confirm the capacity of my voice to make the world mine. My voice goes beyond me, my chanting voice is the voice that goes beyond itself, and it gives voice to a calling of names that is created by the chant itself, a calling through chanting.

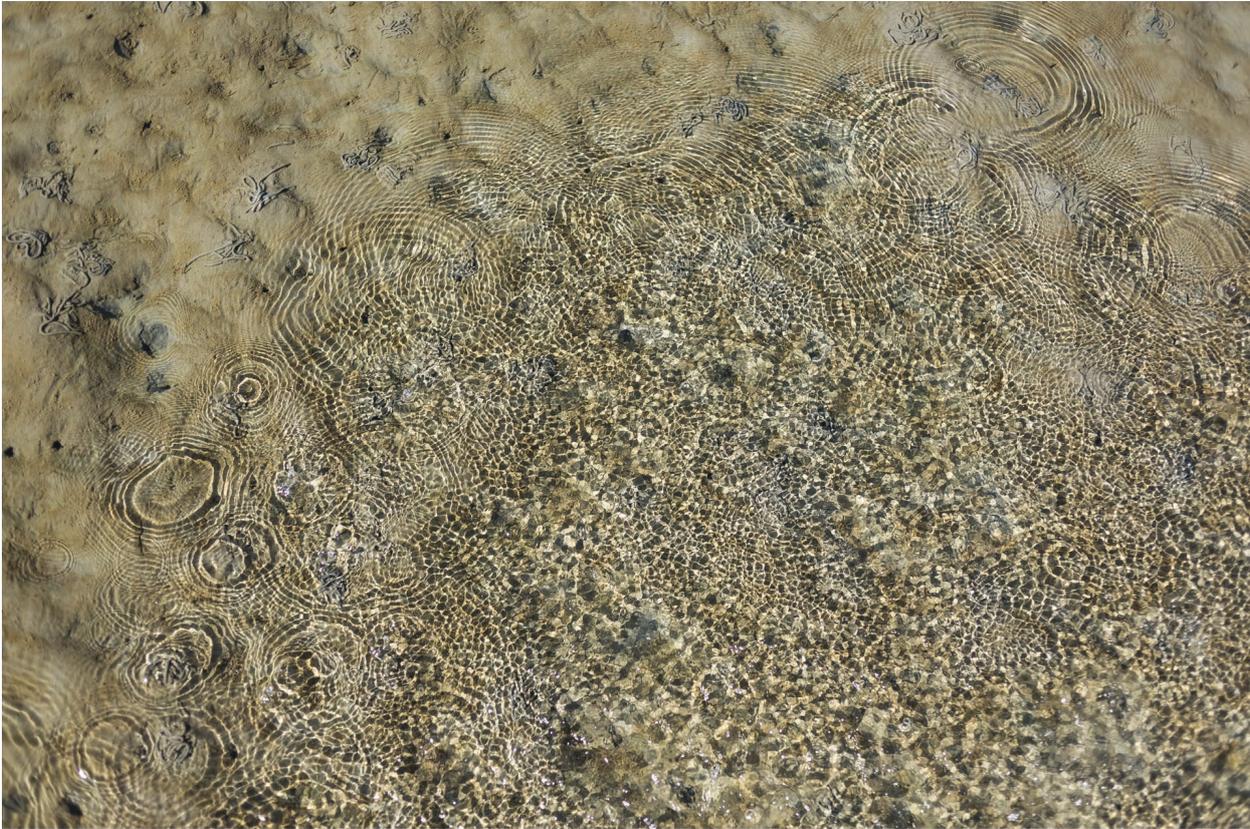
To chant is to appeal, signifying a call that appeals in such a way that what is said is a commitment to a given word that secures its arrival. Let me return to the chant and thus pay attention to the way in which the chant asks something of you, but also of us both. The chant's success will be more lasting the more directly I can get you to listen. Not just pretend to listen, but listen in such a way that you can no longer want to call me names, or to lie. And why? Why should you stop wanting to? Because your ears have been opened by the chant and you now can hear what is in accord with us both. Only then can the chant be said to have worked.

Something therefore coincides with the chant and is accomplished and exhausted together with it. It is not the giving of a guarantee, although something like it has taken place when you stop wanting to lie or call me names. In the utterance of the chant something else is given that causes you to pause and stop wanting to call me names. Something is given not only by language itself, in the act of speech, but in the voice. The chant shows the possibility of the human voice, and this concerns us both.











D A modern witness

A witness in gusto

I would like to invite you now to travel to London to the first half of the nineteenth century. Here, in the open countryside of Hampstead, the poet John Keats is writing a letter to his friend Richard Woodhouse on the subject of poetical character:

As to the poetical Character itself it is not itself - it has no self - it is everything and nothing - *It has no character* - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in *gusto*, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the chameleon Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body - The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute - the poet has none; no identity - he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. *If then he has no self; and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more?* Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature - how can it, when I have no nature?

The idea familiar to the Greeks of contemplation as joy and enthusiasm is the poetical character that 'lives in *gusto*' the joyous state that is also a capability, a negative one, but a capability nonetheless. A year earlier Keats had written the following to his two brothers:

... at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries,

doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.

For Keats, mystery, being capable of remaining content with not knowing or only half knowing, was essential to the activity of the poet. Again character is the ‘dark side of things’, but his use of the word mystery did not point to hidden teaching, or a secret doctrine. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, mystery, *musterion*, was a special practice composed of action, gesture and word. The practice was itself the event and the adventure. The Greek language gives an example of this meaning: the word *muo* means ‘I have my eyes closed’ or ‘I have my mouth closed’ in everyday situations, but ‘I see in a special way’ or ‘I say in a special way’ in ritual. Hence also *muthos*, ‘story’, as this word had at an earlier stage the meaning of ‘special’ speech. To put this differently: in what way can something that is mysterious exist? It exists especially.

And starting from this concept of especial existence, I would like to propose the hypothesis that between mystery and the witness is something more than a simple analogy. Hand in hand with the activity of the poet that Keats describes as giving him no self, no identity, no ‘nature’, is the idea of a special existence that belongs to the witness, and which removes the living human being from any social meaning. The poet Keats describes has no subjectivity, he is completely deprived of subjectivity, reduced to nothing, but this is precisely the right condition for his poetry, by which read all art. The poet-witness coincides with his own specialness; he no longer relies on his character, as he no longer has a self or an identity to ground it. He is everything and nothing.

What comes to light is very interesting, and it is something like a conflict. What emerges suggests there is a privation that claims to present itself as a special activity, the actuality of the possibility of the witness to remain in

mystery. There is nothing like the supreme witness that is realised through a subject. Rather, the poet-witness is not the one who has the power or the faculty that one day through an act of will decides to witness. He is not the transcendent owner of an ability to act or produce. Rather, he is a living being who, in the use and only in the use of his body in the world around him, experiences himself and constitutes himself as a 'form of life'. He is nothing but the way in which the anonymous being called witness tries to constitute his life as a form of life, in which, as any form of life, nothing less than his joy is in question. And just as human life can only come to life by ending the category of life, the poet's poetic-thinking never comes to an end.

I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning — and yet it must be. Can it be that the Greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his Goal without putting aside numerous objections? However it may be, O for the life [call] of Sensations rather than Thoughts!

There is a current that is counter to the witness of modernity, a type of activity that the poet-witness produces that belongs to a strong tradition, a tradition that tries to go in another direction to 'consequitive reasoning', but that can also be found, for example, in mystic discourse. The example of Keats is good because it is linked to the possibility of creating something, not only by what Keats calls 'consequitive reason', but the part of articulating a contemplation without knowledge, a force that is but does not act, a state of detachment in relation to action. The poet's contemplation is not a willing of the world into action, but the positive capability that is also to be a witness.

This capability tries to stop the separation of the world into 'meaningful' representations on one hand, and 'ephemeral' sensations on the other. Thus to prefer to live in doubt and uncertainty, which is to say in a state of detachment in relation to practice, a state that values sensations that lie at the margins of

consequitive reasoning, is to attempt to grasp that which mystifies and empties out meaning, that which denies the easy communication of a given meaning, in other words to deny the belief that consequitive reasoning (which puts aside objections and doubts) and only consequitive reasoning offers any sensible understanding at all.

Emptiness

Only when I encounter a certain emptiness in myself can I ever photograph. It is not just empty - I don't even have a good reason to be here. Only I end up looking and I do not know what is happening and because I do not know what is happening I have lost any authority to speak or show. I have reached a point of bearing witness that is not a burden to carry but is light and productive. No longer do I have something to say, it is that I am here and I am flooded with the feeling that I am less than nothing here. I do not understand. My mind is blank. I have reached a point of incomprehension and indifference (that one might call boredom if it were not such a pejorative) yet it is mingled with the excitement of possibility. Each time I am tempted to grasp what I am doing through my understanding, each time I try to explain to myself what I am doing, each time I want my photograph to demonstrate something, to communicate some kind of message or information, it should be a defeat. Instead it is about my meticulous attention, the matter of reworking and revising the photograph, of detailing it to the point of eroding its rank and power to represent. In renouncing its power I revoke my own status as subject.

Place Saint Sulpice

I am sitting on a gloomy afternoon in a cold backroom of the Fontaine St-Sulpice café on the Place Saint Sulpice. It is a sad room, as I said, rather cold, occupied by a quintet of bridge players. I install myself at a table. I eat a pair of sausages and drink a glass of Bourgueil. There is one window. There is a slight change in the light. An Englishman enters the room and orders a coffee. His coat as long as he. The light is beginning to fade, even if this is barely noticeable. The wind dispels the rain that has accumulated on the café awning: waves of water.

I am sitting in the Café de la Mairie, a little toward the back in relation to the terrace. An 86 goes by. A 70 goes by, full. Lights turn on in the café. Outside the dusk is at its height. Outside I can barely make out the faces. Colours blend. A darkness that is rarely lit. Yellow patches. Reddish glows. The bells of Saint-Sulpice have stopped ringing. Night. Winter. A man carrying carpets. I can barely see the church, my short-sightedness; on the other hand I see almost the entire café (and myself writing) reflected in the windowpanes. It is still raining. I am drinking a Vittel water, whereas yesterday I drank a coffee. How does that change things? I am sitting in the Tabac Saint-Sulpice. There is a fine drizzle. Has the Fontaine St-Sulpice Special changed (it was fresh cod yesterday)? I'm too far away to make out what's written.

I have been sitting here for five minutes. Unsatisfied curiosity. What did I come here to find? My memory is floating. What difference between the writer who writes the work on the first attempt and another who manages something only after several aborted attempts? One has no need of practice, the other practices incessantly.

The café is almost empty. More people are walking in the Saint-Sulpice / Rue de Rennes direction than in the Rue de Rennes / Saint-Sulpice direction.

A man wants to enter the café but he tries pulling the door instead of pushing. It is you. A ghostliness.

My memory though is weak and hazy. But I strip you of all your possibilities. Will you have dinner? You look at me as if I am attacking your freedom. You have Work, of course.

A conflict. My time devoted to you, whom I love, my time to think about you, to be affected by you, at times overwhelmed by you.

It is my role to expose you, that part of you that is the private you, which coincides in the backroom of the café with the public you, the one in my writing.

Two fantasies: One, I have a desk somewhere to write on, a place to go to. Two, the fantasy of working intensely, Work without interruption. I remember reading Heidegger's 1922 daily schedule, at his hut in Todtnauberg: sitting down at 7am to work until 12pm, lunch and a short nap, working again 2pm to 6.30pm, then a walk. Writing to his wife of this intensity of Work: "it is like being a student again." I try to copy his routine. Work without interruption. A way to find writing that protects without being a trap.

The backroom, a retreat, on a gloomy afternoon. No problem of noise. No comfort either, it is an ascetic place. You speak of the past. An icy wind on the Place Saint-Sulpice, you were on your way to the Lycée Montaigne, you say, whereas now you don't get cold on the Place Saint-Sulpice anymore.

You take your leave. "I'm sorry, I have to go." I am not convinced. The Work exists, only for it to be frittered away.

You, elsewhere, you who lives without all this Work.

I, the witness, who consider myself to be I, the one who is writing, the one who is in the process of writing, of waiting for you.

A quick change between Saint-Germain-des-Prés and the Place Saint-Sulpice a few metres away is a change that is as difficult as changing key. Or, to put it another way, to disappear but still be close: because all it takes to feel one is somewhere else entirely is to go and have coffee at the bar of a café in another neighbourhood.

And yet we are both full of the promise of our friendship, and I too tell you how I had strolled across Saint-Sulpice to meet you, and I confide that I would like to have a place to work here. And then you tell me about the priests of Saint-Sulpice, a story that begins to reverberate with the warmth of our friendship. Whenever I cross the square, you say, even though the wind cuts through me in the winter; and when the priests come out of the church I feel that the storm will catch in their cassocks and sweep them into the air. In order to grasp the key to this neighbourhood, and especially the square, which stands at its heart, you have to have seen this black throng coming and going with your own eyes, pausing and surging to and fro in the *quartier* and merging noiselessly with the sheer silence of the many bookshops. We pause to listen for the silence.

We are occasional friends, you and I, seeing one friend at a time, dispersing them out, so that a tension arises when we meet. This kind of friendship is by definition intermittent and no-one without pedantry can determine its optimal, or even its minimal frequency. The intermittent friend is not one who keeps a friendship intermittently, but one who only intermittently takes up the friendship. A friend who definitely renounces, and by this not only stops, but denies, ever having not been a friend. What defines a friend is less the constancy of the friend than the constancy of the friendship. One does not stop having been a friend if one stops being one. To be a friend, do I have to keep up a friendship with you without interruption? Surely, then, that is Work as well?

It is a 'backroom-without-warmth' in a certain café on the Place Saint Sulpice, so that the backroom is not the thing I most remember, nor even the café itself, but the feeling of coldness (it is not, specifically

coldness, but a lack of warmth); nonetheless this feeling is further qualified by the backroom circumstance of our meeting.

By the time of our meeting you have already ‘turned the page’, you have moved on and yet still to disappear entirely, you answer me ‘with a few evasive words’, yet you are still listening, silently, to me ‘with patience’.

Perhaps it is not you yourself, reading my text, which I have, I must say, read too (and too keenly), perhaps it is not you sitting here at all, though this text ‘remains for me’ connected to our meeting on that day, and it remains for me inseparable from your immanent, as yet to happen, disappearance and from what, very personally, I feel about it.

Perhaps I should say this with more doubt.

When you read my words, we are still to meet.

But we will meet, and reading my text, I know that you are very much here, a silent witness to my writing. But of course, it is I who is the witness.

This morning, walking towards the café on the Place Saint Sulpice, I reflected on two things. Firstly, that this is an adventure, coming to meet you. Just as I am capable of thinking alone, and have sufficiently separated in order to connect with you, it follows that I must sufficiently connect with you in order that I might separate again. Just as my writing does not exist without you, you don’t exist without my writing.

It would no doubt be accurate to say I scribble a few phrases here that you listen to with patience, having on your part, so it seems to me, deliberating on my theme, on whether to keep reading or not; but, as I noted, you have already turned the page.

I will try to articulate my feeling a little better now than I did on that day in the backroom-without-warmth of a café on the Place Saint Sulpice.

How long did this take me to write? My paragraphs are shortened. I write intermittently, never religiously, though often asking myself if I should.

Your disappearance is a myopic mystery.

Fortune is sometimes gloomy, and who decides what comes? It is significant that the only relationship that I have not broken is the one I have with you. In the last, gloomy backroom of the café where we meet, sits my need to write.

Constrained by that need, contained in this room, which is why you are always so non-committal perhaps, any play we had is silenced and stilled, our joy is caught, though we each thought we appeared more free than the other, we seemed freer together.

Yes I know, it's not logical, I am like that. But this is not faithful. Sometimes I begin, I write, and then very quickly I let go. And yet, later on, I begin again. Each time I begin, I stop because I hesitate to continue.

Suppose I left in order the totality of the written signs of my successive attempts? One might call that something. I begin and stop again not because I am (provisionally) interrupting myself, but because I (definitely) renounce doing it any longer. And so I deny (perhaps legitimately) ever having been a writer.

I wait for you. I desire to meet you and then, especially after having satisfied my desire, I can then think it is wrong or simply say that this desire was not a reason. Likewise, when I write. It is not nothing, to meet you there.

In short, I am less the one who writes, than I am the one who believes in its virtue. I could go further, too far, no doubt, and define writing not as an activity but as something that consists in not doubting the virtue of writing. I would therefore be writing without necessarily practicing and perhaps without ever practicing.

My uncertainty, my insoluble doubt, is to the value of what I am always writing. The writing as Work. What I doubt is the value of my possible writing as a Work. And what reinforces my doubt is my rereading of my aborted attempts to write it.

Of course, my memory is hazy and weak. I feel very intensely, and painfully, the lack of what I have seen and heard, and the absolute lack of

details, which would only interest myself, by the way, personal testimonies, proofs of my existence.

The necessity of writing only reveals itself too late, for I did not take the care to write down everything. Perhaps, ironically, those who remember the most take the care to record everything all the more keenly. Writing for them is thus a fixing of the day. Perhaps it is just a habit.

As far as I remember it is on this point that I try, on this gloomy afternoon, to shake my uncertainty of pursuing my theme. It is a beneficial exercise to write and a necessity. A gloomy necessity, you reply. You might say: I see nothing but the power which ties up more closely the bond between me and you, between us and fate.

Which means, my need to write ties me to you. But keeping writing is a condition, a necessity, for my existence. There is chance and love, and the desire to write is love, when, momentarily, the need to write is evaded, and the writing impulse makes the world disappear.

Witness my placing into this writing my image of you. The question I ask myself is 'who are you?' You exist in my mind not as a document, nor as an instrument, you are not to be reported in the coded language of Reporting, an unbearable practice that sends your image back to me, like a mirror, the pale image of my writing, my retrospective uneasiness about what I have written, my nausea, based on my sense of my writing's anti-value; this is so dissuasive that I ask myself why I remain fascinated with it, why you remain vivid for me. This image of you as a Work.

At first I feel pleasure in rewriting this writing. This is Thursday afternoon, I am already rewriting this, I really wrote this three years ago, when it was easier to write. I remember writing it, propped up in bed, in one go. There was no need to suffer to make it better, to find something to say. The matter of writing was there, right away.

Then I read it out aloud, again and again I try to gauge the rhythm of it, to turn it into a performance, and I even performed it on a stage. Could I read it out loud to others? This is a hypocritical question, because I did so,

though what I read out loud back then is becoming more obscure now under all this rewriting. Perhaps the question to ask now is: can I continue to read this writing out loud? I can only read it out loud now by rewriting it to death, beyond fatigue, like an almost impossible text at the end of which it is possible that this writing will no longer resemble my writing at all. This almost impossible and rewritten-to-death writing is no longer writing exactly, though it no doubt keeps its essential matter, but a kind of non-writing. Let me dream of an uninterrupted and perfect writing. Let me go back to where I started, and reread it, rewrite it. I rewrite to know if I should write, which is to ask: can I make writing out of this?

You won't answer this, you are being evasive. My attempt to question this, the resulting attempt to 'articulate my feeling' when I realise you have 'turned the page' already, you told me, as you said, you told me I have quite exhausted the subject now with the writing itself. With your disappearance I begin to lose my way. My writing is becoming exhausting: exhausting for me to write, exhausting for me to read, and through writing I am exhausting what it is I am writing about. No... there is still potential, not everything is covered ... yet.

Didn't Georges Perec spend three days on Place Saint Sulpice, exhausting everything he witnessed in writing, thus exhausting his witnessing? Sitting in Saint-Sulpice square, watching everything, writing everything. But, of course, I think you knew this—that is why I chose this place to meet.

His central concern was variation. So I play with his words, tease out a particular style, using his text as a model to find a way into writing, a particular commitment to his particularity that I can share with you, Perec as the mentor-despite-himself. There is a central question to be coaxed out, flushed from its hiding place.

What is that question?

The question asked in that backroom of a café on Place Saint Sulpice: have I ever written anything at all? How can I be the witness of

anything at all with all this weight dragging me down? Sometimes, I begin, very quickly I let go—and yet, later on, I begin again.

Now it is Thursday evening, and though I thought this morning nothing more can be done with these words, my need to write something to you approached this thought—and, maintaining contact with this thought, even as I came back from it to what was possible to say, today, I realised that not everything could be said, just as Perec realised when trying to write down everything he observed. When drinking a Vittel water instead of a coffee changed everything.

How cold is the backroom of the café on Place Saint Sulpice, when when we sit down together, the last time we meet before you disappear.

Do we huddle closer together because we seek each other's warmth?

My devotion, my loyalty, to you, my words in that café with respect to you could have destroyed or illuminated you. Your more or less mute resistance to me, your quick mouth-deep smile and evasive answers, give it up, you say, and you turn your head, as one who wants to be alone with their laughter, the terror that rose up in me when I betrayed my incomprehension, my distance, my appalling state of distance.

To write all this, is to write in order to preserve distance? There is someone who will answer this. There is someone who will see what happened, and there is someone who sees what will happen. There is also someone who wills it to happen.

I am older now, the sceptical amateur, trying to pare down my writing, my preconceptions, as much possible, to find a different shape for my writing.

In my self-aware guilelessness I listen, patiently, but do not intervene, I stay silent, evasive, I, trying to find a form for my feeling, can only mutter and mumble, 'what for?' Of course, the writing is taking shape. Mmmmmm. Mutter, mystery, myopic, mystic.

With my mouth closed, I have become a mystery. My mouth is closed. So I am all secret. But to the initiate, the 'mmmmmm' is like a prohibition: in order to write I must first close my eyes and mouth. So I am mute, though not quite, because there still sounds a voice in my head, the voice of my friend. I write then in order to 'articulate my feeling a little better', to articulate my friend, but in order to write I must first close my mouth.

My voice: present yet effaced, muted, dumb.

There is also our friendship, yours and mine, through the writing, the time of the writing, and our friendship, faithful, as you are to me, my friend, to follow me this far. There is, among all this writing, still time for friendship.

How convenient, this chronology of events that I write, to articulate my feeling a little better. Two or three things that mattered, and that still matter, happened to me some time ago. That much I know. I can only write a suspect scenario, illustrate it with a few hazardous images.

I think about that afternoon in order to begin to write, as beginning writing is testimony to a complete remembering that pervades everything to do with being here. To think about you, to consider you, to be affected by you. There is a gaping hole created by your 'disappearance', but this disappearance has been necessary for my writing, a disappearance which also opens my writing up to the world. But this point is precisely what I am deliberating. Having closed my eyes and reached beyond my body, I am ready to receive. I want to see you, I open my eyes. But just as I start seeing you, to try to disassociate my writing from closed-mouth mysteries and rediscover the supremacy of sight, I don a ceremonial robe, and in imitation of ancient rites I reveal sacred things to you.

You sit absolutely without words. My writing, for the moment, obscures. But through my writing I find you, there you are. It finds you at the same time as it says 'there you are not' (for you, as I have said, have already disappeared). My writing takes the place of you in order to speak to you. It steps in the way of you and me. What distance to cover, this gap

between you and I. But what if writing, then, is the speech of absence (my disappeared friend). I am very particular: “this text remains”. It is inseparable from our imminent disappearance. My writing attests to the existence of you and it brings us together.

You have to consider whether I am who I say I am (your friend?), and whether I have the authority to write of you. *mu-ein*, in ancient Greek, means “I see, or I speak in a special way.” So I write a (special) image of you.

You are here to read, thank you for coming this far, you sit in silence: imposed (by whom?). You will eventually assert yourself, assertion through silence, thus there is an initiation, through silence, as you read my words, and then the assertion of your power through silence grows stronger, but there is always a journey to be made together. I could end by suggesting that writing is the very happening of you and me, our friendship rings like the bells across Saint-Sulpice.

8

(A confession. I have never been to Place Saint-Sulpice, so what I write is a mixture of events witnessed and described by Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, and George Perec.)

The Kaiserpanorama

Beginning a tale is a sort of witnessing to a complete remembering. Here, at the start of this story sits an old, bearded attendant at a fading sidestreet show, and he is turning the pages of a recent copy of *Illustrated World*. A small lamp, readably, is attached to the wall. The man's eyes stray from image to image as he slowly turns the pages, creating a movement, a wave into which his gaze dives and resurfaces. Intermittently he also turns the handle of an old Ariston organette, which rotates a large, notched disk, and what is being let play sounds something like *Boulangier Marche*. Or perhaps a Czech waltz.

What does the attendant turn with his hand? With what is he employed, this illustrated man, what does he have precisely in his hand? The old man turns the handle of the Ariston, and turns the paper pages of the *Illustrated World*. The old man is a turner of the Ariston organette, a turner of paper, and he thus sets out the whole furnishing of the room, the apparatus itself, that is being turned by him as his work, is always (only) occupied with the turning, that is, with the turning from the not-yet to the already there. In his turning the present appears. Everything that is restful is a stilled turning and the vision of this present is yielded not by what is restful, but by the restless turning. Restlessness is the present.

And right in the middle of the room stands a large polygonal machine. The movement of the Ariston is mirrored in the circular movement of this machine. Ding, clunk, click. And on one of the 24 stools that circumvent the large machine sit two women, facing inwards, their gazes fixed to stereoscope glasses that reveal panoramic images within. The images

present what is restful. And yet the movement of the machine is constant restlessness.

Ding, clunk, click. The sound of the machine as it turns. A Czech waltz in the background. The old man turning the Ariston.

A young man enters. His name is Franz Kafka. How to describe this man? Snow-clad boots. A heavy camera. Dark, felt cap. Over six-feet tall, elegantly dressed in a long overcoat. The way he carefully closes the door, his embarrassment and shyness in front of the elderly man. Reading the opening times (10 to 10), he gives a quick, furtive glance at the two ladies. It is as if he had spent his entire life wondering what was in here, and then curiously, walking past on some quite different errand, he passes this place.

Ding, clunk, click.

With big winter boots, he now has a familiar sense that he knows the place well, and, sitting down, barely touching the carpet with the tips of his toes, he feels naked. Peering through the eyeglasses, seeing a panorama as if for the first time, he realises he had no idea what the world looked like, and now suddenly sees it for the first time. People like wax dolls, their feet glued to the pavement. Tombstones, a lady dragging her dress over a low staircase opening a door part way, looking backward all the while. A family, in the foreground a boy reading, one hand at his brow; a boy on the right bending an unstrung bow. Statue of a hero, his clothes fluttering in enthusiastic neglect about his body.

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

He's thinking, what can I really do?

And what could I do too, if I knew?

Here sits a Nobody, right on cue!

Afterwards, wearily climbing the steep path home, the young man longs to retire to his room and sit at the window to write. But as he walks,

a ghostly shadow follows him. This shadow is not my companion, he thinks, it castles restlessly up to the top of the hill. However, there is in it a kind of remembering that travels with me restfully. And if I should peek inside the machine, as if spellbound by the magic, then into this living witnessing I cannot hope to imprint myself, especially not with my heavy camera. I can only do so on these pages. That I did. I have no intentions. I am here, I do not know more and I cannot do more. When I realise I will have to bend back on myself, the illusion ends abruptly. I do not need to examine my own motives.

I tell you what I'm going to do.

They tell me what they're going to do.

Here's what my words will do.

And now the machine (ding, clunk, click) reserves for him its most special look. In his mind he approaches it tactically, as a blueprint for possible fictions of his own. The machine not as a novel, but as a pause.

In a moment of surprise, the young man looks back to the beginning of the story. To his horror he reads that a man enters, steps into the frame so to speak, and sits rather delicately upon one of the seats. Once you accept the beginning, all else follows logically. Here an elderly attendant sits turning the pages of a volume of *Illustrierte Welt* at a little table lighted by a lamp. The young man now sees that the older man has been, in fact, waiting all along, his eyes flitting uneasily to and fro. And that all the while, turning uneasily between restfulness and restlessness, a state of restfulness would seem to be the more important to him. And as he looks closer, looks at the attendant in his grey coat and with his long, thin grey beard, he decides that it is better to linger for a while. The cinema communicates all the restlessness of its motion, he thinks. Why can't they combine the cinema and stereoscope in this way? The old man turns the Ariston handle and bids him sit down at one of the stools.

For a moment the young man forgets how the machine works, and is afraid he has to go from chair to chair. Everything is turning in circles here. Dizziness overcomes him. He is plunged into desperation. What a curious mixture of politeness and cartoon antics.

Scrap-iron market. Blouse, broad-rimmed hat. Cremona. Brescia, Verona. What is proper to a place is contained in the way that each gathers, casts, and attunes the people there in their postures. The smooth floors of the cathedrals at the tips of our tongues. And in his writing he just turns and turns without thought. In order to proceed in a straight line, it would have to become a picture of the world and substitute itself for it.

If he tries to think about this he must take a step back. Now it is already difficult enough to look for what is missing. For this reason, he shall choose another way. To his surprise the young man finds he is already losing control in the possibilities that the moment defines.

He writes: why is there no joining together of the cinema and the panorama machine? Like the endless turning of the Ariston, cinema offers no pause, gives no support for thought. Turning the Ariston is enthrallment with an untiring and-so-on and-so-on. Turning only blindly tires itself out, turns itself so far that it might one day turn itself too far.

The old man lets the Ariston play for a while. What is at stake is whether I shall be a witness who watches for the triumph of the restfulness over the noise of the restlessness as the principle for all thought. What is at stake is whether or not the power of restlessness will submit itself to the appeal for rest. And yet the restfulness must turn, otherwise all he has is tombstones and corpses. There must be a *joining*, but there must also be 'a while', that is a 'restfulness' and a time for reflection and writing. For a while, at least, a recounting or translating, a handing back of reality. Ding, clunk, click.

For the writer whose writing conveys the representational thought, the distance between writing (or listening to tales) and seeing images is greater than the distance between seeing images and the seeing of reality. Must he abandon thinking in favour of the madness of incessant turning? Or does not something remain still, more and more dazzling and worthy of being thought, so that he finds the joining, a path upon which his writing may be capable of corresponding, instead of remaining bewitched by the incessant turning. Only at the riverside where the town is distant and the houses are concealed by trees does he ever feel at one with this restlessness.

The gesture of the witness

After watching a short documentary of himself, the painter Henri Matisse spoke of a moment when he was shown drawing. 'Before my pencil ever touched the paper,' he said of this, 'my hand made a strange journey of its own. I never realised before that I did this. I suddenly felt as if I were shown naked – that everyone could see this – it made me feel deeply embarrassed. You must understand, this was not hesitation. I was unconsciously establishing the relationship between the subject I was about to draw and the size of my paper.' Matisse, in watching the captured footage, suddenly becomes conscious of his hand's gesture, and feels deep shame.

Matisse is aware of having done something wrong and shameful. The division that separates his hand from its immediate relationship with itself induces this shame. But what happened? His hand wandered. It erred. The witnessing of this erring, the break or interruption of this immediate relationship, induces shame. And this is something like the living animal becoming aware of itself in the middle of language and of vision. Today there appears not a single instance in which the human being is not a witness to itself like this in some way. The human being which at the very beginning let itself become accused by its own language and its own appearance, is now contaminated by them in terms of shame. Shame asks nothing better than to exist outside of him. He is inside it; it is inside him; there is no longer either outside or inside. It is the kind of shame that makes him not able to look another in the eye or face.

Such is the initial phenomenon produced whenever the student begins to look at a photograph he has taken, or even when he begins to write. He feels shame. There is no better reason to write than the shame of being human. The one who writes is not the individual, but language (and the impossibility of

speaking that comes to speech). In the face of this intimate extraneousness implicit in the act of writing, he feels shame. His hope, however, lies at this precise moment, when he sees, surging out of the object he has before him, a quantity of significations which his mind grasps, and he realises that what he is regarding is no longer just an object. This is the only way of casting off his shame.

In ancient Greece, the term *sunoida* (from *suneidenai*, something like 'knowing-with-oneself' or 'I know in my heart of hearts') contained the word *oida*, present perfect, 'I have seen, I know' (as *eidenai* is 'to see and to know'). *Sunoida* was linked to bad feelings, and to shame, as when Aristophanes writes 'I know in my heart of hearts of many terrible things', in his play *The Poet and the Women*, and Xenophon writes in *Anabasis* 'I don't want to go to him, especially feeling ashamed because I know in my heart of hearts that I have proved false to him'. The Attic orator Isocrates writes in a letter 'Never hope to conceal any shameful thing you have done. For even if you do conceal it from others, you still know in your heart of hearts.'

The supreme ambition of the law is to produce, in the living witness, the absolute separation between the intimacy the living being has with itself (its 'heart of hearts') and the speaking being, the witness of oneself who does not correspond to the captured figure, the one that turns a gesture into shame. Here lies a more originary sense of the witness. As soon as the student writes, there is a movement, a from himself toward himself toward language, or a from his seeing toward showing, that is at the same time a looking back at what has happened. A witness only becomes visible in terms of the structures from which it emerges. This movement from itself toward that, which at the same time is a looking back can be found in the gesture of Matisse's hand, a movement between a thrust and a hesitation, a movement that can only be identified as a doing that is also an undoing. Only in this complicated

movement, in this knowing-with-oneself in distancing oneself from oneself, can anything like a self be constituted. This movement is also the no-man's land between a process of identity and non-identity. One could say that the writer, or the poet, or the artist, must decide between creating or resisting, walking or stopping, writing or pausing, and that this decision is made not consciously, but with the body. Between thrust and hesitation must be a place empty of all expectation and presupposition, that exists only if it not relapse into a process of a subject caught in a framework of a strategy or a tactic. In this case, the subject always brushes against its own shame, whether tripping over a paving stone, sliding down a slope, or falling into a ditch. There is only one place left today for this feeling: the innermost self. Yet shame, the disjunction between the living being and the speaking being, is precisely the condition of witness. This concerns the very boundary between thinking and living. What is the witness, what could it be? It seems to be a nothing, an imagined substance, an undecidable medium that stands between language and being. The student is the one most attentive to everything offering an experience of this kind. And it is in shame that this experience is found, and it is in shame that the student begins to write and to photograph, never fully knowing what it is he wants to say.

Shame

I can make someone turn round and feel looked at. A man is walking along the street opposite my window, and I think I recognise him, here I am sitting in my upstairs window. I stare hard, is it the person that I know, at least, I know him a little, should I open the window and shout 'here I am?'. But what is his name? For the moment, as I struggle to remember the name of the person I think I know, he remains nameless. As I concentrate on his face, he turns, looking for something, someone. Is he looking for the someone who is looking at him? In that moment of turning he is answering a call, a summons that is not subject to analysis by science, for how could one measure that summons? In that moment of turning he is becoming a subject, aware of himself as a subject, and he is beginning to wonder who is looking at him. And as he turns, the turn enacts this feeling, as if all the possibilities of who this man is are whittled down to just two: either someone is looking at him, or he is imagining it. And as I look at him, I wonder if this is the man I know, or whether I just think I know him. In the moment where I am struggling to remember his name and debating whether to reveal my presence, my self, to him, here I am sitting upstairs at my window, I also feel shame: the separation of myself from me, the one sitting at the window lost in thought, to the one who will call out to him with my voice, 'hi, here I am, there you are.' Drawing attention to myself in this way, breaking the silence of this quiet street, the shame of realising it is me who is doing the calling, the revealing - what will he think of me? Will others hear my call to this man whom I barely know, a casual acquaintance I meet once a week at my swimming pool where we see each other in our barest nakedness, and here I am worried about revealing myself from my upstairs window, because if I don't call out I will remain an anonymous stranger, we will not have to say

hello to each other in the pool changing rooms while we are naked and we will be swallowed into the days and nights of our different lives. But as this man walking in the street turns, puzzled to feel as if someone is looking at him, still aware that there might be someone, he decides to ignore it, turns back to the day ahead, and continues walking along the street. The time in which this all happened a heartbeat.

I have observed this happen before, and others speak of it, it doesn't happen when we will it to happen, but when we find ourselves unwittingly staring at someone, not seeking them, but looking at them absent-mindedly and yet intently, our whole being totally caught up in the identification, absorbed, as it were, in the process of summoning a living being. How can it be that one can make another being turn round? Is it because we are in their peripheral vision, is it the instinct of millions of years of evolution that tells us that we are being stalked, preyed upon, watched? Or is it, as I like to believe, while knowing that it cannot be true, yet hoping that it is indeed the case, that there is some sort of telepathy at work between two living beings, and with the right conditions, and the right angle of thought, a thought that is fully absorbed in itself, as if light-waves were reflecting from a lens at an acute angle, yes, if these things line up at precisely the right moment, there can exist a moment where we become nailed to one another, where an alignment of forces we have no knowledge of and no control over leap across the gulf of self-hood and cause a man in the street to turn round to look for the presence of another living being. And there I am at my window realising that something has happened, an unknowable something, something wonderful, a mode of communication that seems telepathic, is not 'measurable', is communication by means other than the known (*tele-pathy* is a touching at a distance). So I wonder whether there aren't other non-measures, equally mysterious, which we cannot know. A 'touching' of another's shame, for example? This touching would not be anything understood in virtue of an

immediate bodily awareness (gesture, posture, facial expression, tone of voice). Perhaps it would be nothing at all.

Sitting writing with a clock on the wall, surrounded by books, the student suddenly stands up from his rather cramped posture, and says (to no-one in particular) that he wants to give it all up, throw in the towel so to speak, and go for a walk instead. Once outside among the birds and the trees and the grass, alongside the meandering river (lucky him!), listening to the murmur of water over reeds, standing or sitting, or even lying down in a private reverie away from the beaten path, he finds his fingers start thinking even without realising. Or rather, by walking, by getting caught in his own adventure, he finds that he has discovered another kind of adventure altogether, a thinking that suddenly takes over and yet is intimately linked to the rhythm of walking, to the birds singing, to the gentle rustle of leaves in the trees. And, from this unique perspective, he holds a pen in his hands, his paper resting on his knees, and starts to write. What lies in his hand is neither a dream, nor something fetched from a distance. Simply, he finds that beginning writing is testimony to a complete remembering.

I

I

It is beginning. There is a large 'I' centred on a blank page. A plaque on the wall commands 'Silence' in large black letters. From the outside door, secretly and cautiously, I come in. It is night and the room is twilight, the fluorescent lights dimmed for sleepers. I sit on the bed where the storyteller lies, immobile. He welcomes me. To the left is a single window that looks like a photograph, a view from up high, already framed, but I remain silent, and from my position all that can be seen is a single patch of colourless sky. As the light shines in, I can see the dust dancing in the air, settling on the pages as I read them. Into the silence the narrator starts to hum a tune of a resigned and penetrating melancholy, but perhaps I only remember it so because of the time and the place that I heard it.¹

I realise this is a hospital, although I did not notice before, and between the storyteller's fingers is a needleful of thread, a button being sewn to a shirt. Perhaps this is a dream, the storyteller says, I often dream even as I am thinking, while doing the most everyday things I just drift off. In any case, this is a search for my own 'I'. I invented your 'I' too, you know. If I wish, I can demand every single one of you back. Each of you. How is it I can see myself in my 'I'? Or, if not myself, then my own precursor. And as I look closer, I notice the badly-buttoned shirt he is sewing has a radiant sheen, like a beetle's shell. With every change one starts a new life, he says.

What is an object in appearance?.

What never shows itself? The thing in itself.

What shows itself in appearance itself? The example.

In *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, Goethe, after a lengthy discussion on morphology by way of various particular examples, either describing the teeth of a deer, which are small, for eating grass, or a polar

bear's powerful front set of teeth, considers the elephant, the tusks of which appear to be set in the skull, but are really part of the upper jaw, which one only knows, writes Goethe, not from appearance (*Erscheinung*), but if one applies a general law (*das Gesetz*).

Because this is where the genius of analogy shall stand by our side as a guardian angel, states Goethe, so that "we will not fail to recognise one single, doubtful case in the 'proven-through-many-examples' truth, but to bestow on the general law its due honour, too, where the appearance may not show itself to us." ²

Thus something must be available in order to be perceived, and if it is not, we shall know from the universal law determined through many, well-tried examples that it is probably true. Thus the *Erscheinung* is, properly speaking, something that is hidden, secret, or not immediately given in what is seen at first, which Goethe describes as the 'doubtful' *zweifelhaften* case, where *zweifelhaft*, doubt, is derived from *zwei*, two, *falten*, to fold, or crease, and *behaftet*, trapped or contained. In other words, a dichotomy of two terms. Analogy is the *Schutzengel*, or guardian angel, that stands alongside, in the movement from the particular to the particular. It is a creature that accompanies like a silent partner, that links the analogy with the example. What a peculiar form of knowledge that does not join the universal and the particular, but dwells on the plane of the latter.³ The name for this type of knowledge, which Goethe calls the *Schutzengel*, calls into question the opposition between the particular and the general, the usual procedures of knowing, and presents a singularity instead. The domain is not logic but analogy ... And the *analogon* it produces is neither particular nor general.⁴

On closer inspection, I notice that the black frame of the window of this hospital room contrasts with the whiteness of the wall, and the sheen of the shirt being sewn. You are staring at me, the storyteller speaks, visiting hours are long over, and do not forget the elephant. I was staring, I realised, my mouth half open, as if looking at a photograph. *As if*. I realise I

am speaking in terms of the figure. I am immediately aware of the function of the parts, for the figure stands in relation to the whole organisation to which the part belongs and therefore also to the outside world, from which the complete organised being must be regarded as a part. The tusks of an elephant really belong to its upper jaw, you see, says the storyteller, they are not part of its skull, as they first appear to be. You know, by applying the law to the single doubtful case we see if it really holds up. In this sense, you can go safely to work. But I cannot stress too sharply the equivocation that allows you to use the word 'sheen' both of the experience in which my shirt's appearing consists, in which the shirt seems to present itself to you, a form of intuition perhaps, and of the shirt which appears to have a sheen. As soon as you take account of how little of the shirt which appears is to be found in the experience of its appearing, the illusion disappears.

He sings something that sounds like: *die Dingerscheinung, das Erlebnis, ist nicht das erscheinende Ding.*⁵ *Wir werden es ja erleben.* You know the German verb *erleben*, he says, to live in the present, to learn something by witnessing. There is always something hidden in this present that escapes us. Thus we can live everyday without reflecting upon what we are living, because its meaning always needs interpreting. But it is wrong to believe that anyone else should be able to see the sheen as it appears if you and I cannot see it. It is absurd to consider it deriving from something that is separate and its hidden cause.⁶

Conclusion

(A witness across the floor)

And so the student sits down to write the conclusion. It is much easier, he thinks, to think while walking rather than while sitting. He spends many days trying to write, and each time he sits down, he writes a different conclusion. And he feels a slough of despond. How on earth to conclude? He sits between piles of books by his favourite thinkers and writers. And he realises that much of what they spoke to him are in the words that he writes and has written. A friendly voice tells him he should play the game and cite passages word for word. But, he thinks, where does one thought end and another begin? How to separate the matter of thinking? He can cite passages, show plainly and clearly in his work what is and what is not his own. Or he can consider that his debt is to follow ways of thinking, not works. And further, he finds it curious that writing must make its debt clear, while his photographs have no such requirement.

The writing that makes its debt clear must be sincere, formal, referenced. It creates a persona, one that is authoritative. It wears the robes required of the courtroom, its character, like the lawyer's, must be calm and measured, politely dressed. It must be persuasive, yet not reveal its strategy until the conclusion and with a rhetorical flourish, drawing everything together while pretending that was not the game. And just as in the courtroom, the argument must demonstrate through explanation. (In the detective drama, the sleuth must explain at the end exactly how the crime was committed, and who did it.) Citations are produced, straightforwardly evidential, as with the *atechnoi pisteis* in the speech of the Attic orator. If the argument is deductive, it goes from the general to the particular. If it is inductive, the movement goes from the particular to the general. And there is always a subtle shifting in the direction of the deductive process, something that works and produces something. The conclusion, in a way, requires that the student try to produce an effect on

truth in the writing. The writing exists in the way it operates on truth. And yet, the force that binds the word to truth, and the function that is meant to have an effect on truth, is left unexamined. And maybe subjectivity is weakened by this, in that here there is something strange that cannot be articulated deductively.

Here he thinks of walking with his dog. What is constantly thwarted is his attempt to walk in a straight line, as the dog interrupts and obfuscates every straight line with an invitation to play. In the morning dew, if he looks back at his tracks, he finds they form giant, swirling, looping figures across the grass. The tracks pursue the game that was played (with a ball), which becomes a kind of dance. He decides, what is important is not to conclude, but simply, in his despondency, to take the right turn. There are always benefits to looking back along the way one has come.

He begins to cut up the different conclusions he has written with scissors, placing the many fragments on the floor. As the fragments grow in number, they begin to intermingle. The dog runs to warn off the postman, and scatters them, digging claws into strips of paper in its frenzy. The breeze through the window, despite his best efforts, manages to blow some against others. As he struggles to rearrange them in a logical and consistent order, they refuse and settle in a chaotic mix. A few photographs that he has taken, also laid on the floor, now peep through the snippets, disrupting the flow, marking one border of the space between the writing and the image. Where, then, to place these images alongside all this writing? They appear to surface and withdraw back into the sea of cuttings at random, without connection, showing nothing but themselves, abandoning any demand that the relation be immediately understandable. In fact, just as the photographs call for a relinquishing of the words, the words call for release from the photographs.

And he thinks, surely here, somewhere, is a consonance between the fragments, the photographs, and that of thinking and wandering. It is not so much a gathering of writings and photographs, rather something

like a wandering, even a wandering that could easily lose its way. Rather than a deductive, end-focused, and eventually conclusive mode of progression (via a logical and cumulative analysis), what is laid out before him, on the carpet in the middle of the room, is something akin to the very turn of thinking itself. Thinking is the wandering that occurs and which errs when one is at a loss for words. Such a thinking is definable by precisely the same structure as that of the poem, for which he means all works of art, and therefore there is something like a poem-thought, or poetical-thinking. That is, here lies a medium for thinking.

In such a model the laying out of the strips always begins with conventional, rule-based constraint. In laying them out, he seeks an order, and presupposes its development and cessation. But as he progresses, and the day lengthens, his ordering goes forward and looks back, flows and interrupts the flow. The breeze that blows across the tiny pieces of paper disperses lines of thought, the disruption by canine paws explodes any attempt towards a straight line through a different rhythm. Perhaps a different knowledge entirely. First he tries to force his thinking into a constraining line, and then he realises that he must begin again, the line is lost, just as when memory loses a thought's thread.

He finds that the process of ordering never comes to an end. And yet it must end, however, simply for something to come into existence. Each evening he leaves the fragments on the floor for the next morning, keen to resume and to find a straight line with a fresh mind. But just as human life can only come to life by ending the category of life, the restructuring never comes to an end. Each morning he folds the order of the fragments back on itself, and in on itself. In the same manner he never really begins, always starting in the midst of things, in the middle of his habits, in the centre of the room, with the dog at high alert, the postman already close to the door, and the wind blowing outside. And though he has to end, because he has to somehow finish his research, he finds he is unable to end. Each morning the fragments show themselves in different

ways and he can do nothing else than rethink them in a perpetually adventurous poetic-thinking. Such work calls for an emptying of self for the sake of utter absorption in the work.

And he realises, rather than define a problem, and then seeking to solve it conclusively, which is in his case the problem of writing a coherent thesis, poetic thinking is always already within the problem. By the same gesture, poetic thinking seems to move towards a conclusion, and then suddenly, and surprisingly, and at the same time, turns back on itself and away from conclusivity. His thinking turns and sways rather than advances. The snippets in front of him are nothing other than his response to the requirement to conclude his thinking, and take on their own particular form of thinking, and yet he finds that laid out on the floor, the result is something like a possibility in which a particular method is sensed rather than deduced according to consecutive reasoning, and changes radically from day to day. Each configuration, unless captured, becomes a one-time event, a situation that occurs only due to the procedure of this way of working.

Such a thinking exists across the floor in space, but also in the hours and days it takes to do and undo itself, which follows a different rhythm. The floor requires him to lay out the fragments in a certain way, and reveals this form's dependency on space, while the sequence and ordering of the snippets and their constant interruption and improvisation occurs in time. And yet the cross-over between threads and fragments, and the dog's invitation to play, along with the rhythm of the breeze through the window, is like the rhythm of thinking itself, where categories such as beginning and ending, inside and out, particular and whole, subject and object, thought and language, philosophy and poetry, are put on hold. He is briefly, momentarily, held by that which possesses him, in this place, in this room, but he cannot take hold of it.

The task he follows is thus analogous to language and vision as such. He is constantly dispossessed of the very thing which takes hold of him,

and he turns from thinking about his conclusion to the turn of concluding as thinking. He writes and turns, reads and turns, photographs and turns, as a plough turns in a field. Each snippet begins to form a line of thought in itself, the different lines of writing take on the character of a poem, and for now, at least, but not for all time, it is the turn of the verse. The student is a witness to the moment he finds itself in language and vision, remembers that he speaks and sees, while at the same time he is always turning, distracted, towards the small dog. This is a double movement, a retreat from his past back toward the present, a looking toward that which is (at the same time) always a looking back.

ENDNOTES PART D

¹ The Rhapsode is the one who recites the epic poem. The Rhapsode, inspired by the muses, daughters of Zeus and Memory (*Mnemosune*), the spinners of thread, is a seer, whereas the omniscience of the muses is based on the fact that they are always there: they see everything. “You are at hand, and you know all things,” says the poet in Homer’s *Iliad* (2.485). When Odysseus addresses the bard, he praises him: I respect you, Demodocus, more than any man alive— / surely the muse has taught you, Zeus’s daughter, / or god Apollo himself. How true to life, / all too true ... you sing the Achaeans’ fate, / all they did and suffered, all they soldiered through, / as if you were there yourself [*autos pareōn* (αὐτὸς παρεὼν)] or heard from one who was [*akousas* (κούσας)]. (Homer’s *Odyssey*, 8.546–51)

² “Denn hier ist es, wo uns der Genius der Analogie als Schutzengel zur Seite stehen möge, damit wir eine an vielen Beispielen erprobte Wahrheit nicht in einem einzigen zweifelhaften Fall verkennen, sondern auch da dem Gesetz gebührende Ehre erweisen, wo es sich uns in der Erscheinung entziehen möchte.” Johann Wolfgang Goethe, ‘Morphologie: Principes de Philosophie Zoologique’, in *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften: Erster Teil*, Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden, Band XIII, 2 vols. (München: Beck, 1981), I, pp. 53–250 (p. 240). My translation. The modal verb *mögen* in the first line (*zur Seite stehen möge*) can also express a command – I’ve translated it as ‘shall’ to emphasise the importance of analogy here. This usage is formal and rather old-fashioned [Martin Durrell and A. E Hammer, *Hammer’s German Grammar and Usage* (Chicago: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 16.2 (g) (iii), p. 327.]. *Analogie* is used here by Goethe to indicate the relationship between particular examples, i.e. the move from the particular to the particular.

³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. by Luca D’Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), p. 19.

⁴ *ibid.* p. 19.

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen Zweite Band Erster Teil: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, ed. by Ursula Panzer, 1984, Investigation 5, §2, p. 359.

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (The Hague; Boston; Hingham, MA, USA: M. Nijhoff; Distributors for the U.S. and Canada, Kluwer Boston, 1980), §43, §52.

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

Emily Dickinson













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E Appendices

What is fundamental is rooms
Kafka and Keats
Keats describes entering a room, where he is exposed
Kafka experiences shame in the KP
And in Matisse's shame
But the Greek experience was in the open, agora, the important thing
was the ground of the agora
Aristophanes' Bdoulekleon carries Philokleon back into the house
More and more we have decided the witness is the room, and was the
outside
Analogous to sleep

It's a bit like the room of the student: the identity of the student
is as much the identity of the room he writes in, the practices and
habits that make it up and make him, the many possessions (wardrobe,
desk, window) and events (dog's wet-nosed touch) it gives room (and
possibility) to.

Or the basement and the researcher: she's so caught up in the
archive that she gets lost in the dustiness of it all, the
possibilities become dusty, fusty.

I use these examples not randomly, but in order to bring forth
certain features that suggest a current that is counter to the
witness of modernity, a type of activity that the poet or artist
produces, a strong tradition that tries to go in another direction,
but that can also be found, for example, in mystic discourse. The

requires both creativity and a poet who recognises that the room is
not an empty space to be filled with his words, but is already laden
with presuppositions, qualities, objects, ways of living.

Kaiserpanorama is a machine or an artifice designed to produce the
recognition of the human. What interests Kafka is the functioning of
this machine. It is an optical machine consisting of a series of
faces in which the man, looking at himself, sees his own image
already always deformed. Kaiserpanorama is a device that has in some
way the ability to capture, orient, determine, the gestures, of
living beings. It marks and decides the life of the living. They are
what makes the human intelligible. do not present a proper
"content", but simply constitute a positioning. they determine the
modes in which humans become paradigms according to their
positioning. They have a stability.

This 'technical' production lies in being assembled,
tacked together, prepared for sending, understood as statements which
accurately describe a state of affairs (so-called 'apophantic' statements),
statements which fit properly into a system taken as a whole.

Thus the machine needs to be unworked in such a way that the
relation ceases to be and is instead let be.

To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of the
witness will therefore mean no longer to seek new - more effective
or more authentic - articulations, but rather to show the central
emptiness, the hiatus that-within man-separates man and witness, and
to risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the
suspension.

~~But~~, The Kaiserpanorama is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human that should take place in it is only the place of an incessantly updated decision, in which restlessness and restfulness are always dis-located again and move.

division between restlessness and restfulness, which is to say between stillness and movement, indicates precisely this: the messianic objective of a stopping of all towards that safe and unsavable life with which the open ends.

It is why the Greeks speak of 'saving what appears', to have sight for what is essential. He who can look in such a way is 'saved' in the relation of being to the human being. Only those who save what shows itself as what shows itself, and those who speak to save that which withdraws itself into hiddenness, those who understand the innocence of language, grasp the true sense of this lack of identity and may, in the adventure of being, learn to die. If the we blank at the glare, we will be lost always. This is a special way of being.

There is a making sense of appearances. Appearance is not the whole picture. There is a limit to what appears.

When Odysseus recognises Athena and she mocks his inability to see her, he replies that for a knowing mortal such as himself, recognising her was hard.

It happens on a different register to the apparent, which is what makes it difficult to see. In speaking neither of subject nor object, nor the self or that which is seemingly the self, it speaks only of sensations, freed from the closure of subjectivity. Otherwise what is witnessed is already identified within the conceptual categories of the conscious individual subject, and a world that forces the subject into certain positions. The writing of the poet is already caught in the identity of being a poet, and a certain poetic tradition the photograph in the identity of being a photographer, and in a tradition of photography that the photographer is in. The only thing to do is to erase, clean, flatten, shred, negate, annihilate.

It is here, like with Keats's moment of self-annihilation, that all the categories by which the world is understood are called ^{into doubt} ~~into~~ ~~in~~ ~~order~~ ~~to~~ ~~pause~~ ~~at~~ ~~mystery~~ as familiar as it is unexplained.

to remain in doubt, indecision, vacillation; to hesitate, but also to realise all the possibilities of life and becoming human, all the modes of being that are language, faces, animals and trees, and those that are not reducible to the human being and its meaning-making activity.

Subjectivity is no longer situated in relation to truth, and then into knowledge, but is located in the errors, the goings astray of human life, and therefore in ethical practices of the self. No ethical subject can be constituted without erring.

This gesture is not limited to the realm of theory but concerns the very boundary between thinking and being, which is to say it concerns the human being and its living body.

A flush of shame, perhaps? This touching is not anything that can be known as such, it is an immediate bodily awareness. Perhaps it is nothing at all.

.. A form of life that exists at the moment there is a sense of presence without language.

This is to say that at the heart of every human is the attempt to cover this up by giving meaning to words, to explain existence. The witness in its original sense, and not merely the sense that it has acquired in law, where it is mixed with ideas of justice and truth, the very experience of language, and in order to grasp this what is needed is a form of life that is independent of all experience.

attest independently of propositions uttered in language?

What is then to experience in the "in fortunio" constitutive of thought and poetry (in the philosopher's poetry failure and the poet's thinking failure) is language itself. Experience, that is, not of language, but of language as such, of its taking place in the silence of meaningful propositions.

If we now call ~~experience~~ this experience that is made not with objects or with meaningful things, but with language itself, we can then say that for every poet and every thinker we give such an *experience* ~~through which he responds to his task.~~ *through which he responds to his task.*

It is at this point that Keat's passing thought appears capable of, and not negatively, leaving aside not just philosophy but the Western perspective itself.

~~This limiting of the witness within the human constitutes~~ a gesture that sets the limits, and the categories within which the world can be at all comprehensible.

Rather, the poet is a living being who, in the use and only in the use of its body in the world around it, experiences itself and constitutes itself as a 'form of life', not in order to show that it has something that it thinks it lacks, but rather that it does not need something that we it lacks at all. It is nothing but the way in which the anonymous living being tries to constitute its life as a form of life, in which, as any form of life, nothing less than its joy is in question.

From our perspective, subjectivity is a 'form of life', but perhaps a form of life is a line of erring, ~~errancy~~, ~~wandering~~ / error.

both philosophy and poetry represent a form of failure in the exposition of the inexpressible that constitutes their common task. but it is only a poet who can really experience it.

erring in the sense of moving without knowing where, going wrong, going astray.

After watching a short documentary of himself filmed by Francois Campaux in 1946, the painter Henri Matisse said that there was a passage showing him drawing. "Before my pencil ever touched the paper," he said of this slowed-down motion, "my hand made a strange journey of its own. I never realised before that I did this. I suddenly felt as if I were shown naked – that everyone could see this – it made me feel deeply embarrassed. You must understand, this was not hesitation. I was unconsciously establishing the relationship between the subject I was about to draw and the size of my paper." In the estranged gesture, from a certain moment on, what takes place is a kind of revelation – it is no longer me, I no longer know what I'm doing. In it I see myself as if for the first time.

when something appears, it cannot be fully grasped, the whole cannot be seen
it is in some way deceptive

What mobilises 'poets' by interpellating them to be creative, also calls upon them to submit to believing in uncertainty and doubt.

. As
the hand traces its way across the page, its wandering determines the finding. This puts us on the side of a poetic production against a kind of accuracy found in other kinds of production, an accuracy that takes possession and arranges 'accurately' thinking, so that thinking is made into something that makes and arranges itself.

The decision that here is to be made I do not make myself. I am only involved in it, though necessarily.

What I want to imagine is the gesture of the hand as it moves across the page, the gesture of the hand that writes. The gesture is, in this sense, has precisely nothing to say because what it shows is the being of human beings. However, because this is not something that could be said in words, it is the showing of the human being being-in-words itself, the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure out in words. So not being able to figure out in words becomes void of meaning. Into this void comes the poet.

we do the experience of language properly only where we lack the names, where the words break on our lips. What is that unspeakable?

The moment when language fails to communicate life is the moment when language breaks down, when the gap between sound and meaning is revealed. In this gap where language cannot communicate meaning, the word is freed from the necessity of making meaning, such that it remains without definition. ~~The witness therefore~~

If the witness itself is beyond language, then it can be asserted as a correspondence to the movement of life, analogous to being, so that the witness in its own sense gives itself (not just a cognitive "knowledge", but in the mode of silence, truth, faith, hope, imagination, expectation, possibility) as a mode of being, and (2) the witness is given as a gift (not merely made available). If the witness is a giving it is in the sense of the witness who acts less than testifies.

There is something about this strange remnant, the possibility that is not able to be captured or contained, that takes place at a threshold (of the animal and the human) that banishes the human being from a staging of truth, legality, and justice.

It is necessary to remain, as it were, in this double movement of subjugation and letting go, between thrust and hesitation. Obviously, it is difficult terrain to find and hold. It would have to be identified though, because this would be the terrain of politics.

This is to be found in the possibility of a form of life where one can learn to recognise one's location as a subject, by exposing one's living relationship with the past insofar as it allows one access to the present.

What would be a practice that would not be a process of subjugation but, to the contrary, would end up only at a letting go, a practice that finds its identity only in a letting go of the self?

Etymology of the word ‘witness’

There is an early and common verb in English *iwis*, *iwite* (Old English *gewitan*, to look at, to know) which meant, from the idea of looking at the place you intend to go to: to go away, to depart, and by extension, to die.

Iwis and *iwite* were often written as two words, *i wis*; *i wite*. From all this rose certain confusions. *I wis* meant ‘certain’, and there is therefore a relation between the verb ‘to wit’, which it became, and the certainty (of knowing), which led to the curious passive phrase ‘let wit’: to reveal, to show, in the sense that knowing is letting something reveal or show itself, or appear.¹ However, *i wis* was also taken as a verb, ‘I know’, so that Shakespeare has York in *Henry VI* say “And if I wist, he did — but let it rest,” which later editors rendered as “And if I wish...”, though the original form can only ever be supposed — as it now lost: “And if I wis...” — And if I were certain...

A parallel development from the Old English, the verb *wite*, meaning ‘to know, to look,’ developed the sense ‘to take care, to guard, to preserve.’ Hence also *witne*, to testify (used until the 15th century) and ‘witness’ (Old English *gewitnes*, *witnes*), which first meant ‘knowing, understanding, evidently, plainly,’ but also ‘to preserve.’ Thus when Chaucer says, “in this wise more clerely and more witesfully” (*Boethius*, 1374), he means: evidently, plainly, while the word ‘wise’ means ‘way’ rather than the modern sense of ‘wise.’ Stephen Hawes, in his long allegorical poem ‘Pastime of Pleasure,’ completed in 1506, listed the five wits as capacities that are to be distinguished from the five senses: these were common wit, imagination, fantasy, judgment, and memory,² which explains Shakespeare’s sonnet 141 where ‘wits’ and ‘senses’ are also distinguished: ‘But my five wits nor my five senses can dissuade one foolish heart’ —.³ Already there is a cluster of concepts to do with knowing, remembering, showing.

The role of the witness is here divided into two functions. One is metaphysical (to do with being), the other material (to do, broadly, with signs).⁴ But witnessing is an undecidable medium that stands between the two. It is here a perplexing difficulty is found: always caught at a threshold between these two places (being and matter), the witness is situated in that ultimate moment in which human existence is still its world. At the dawn of language, like the dream, it is already no longer its own world. In the turn to language, the witness is now constituted according to a set of rules, such as knowing, remembering, showing.

Epilogue

There is an apple tree that stands alone at the edge of a field in K— near the castle. On the other side are wheat fields, the hedgerow impenetrable, the small dog however manages to poke his head through only to disappear in chase of a hare. One autumn I walked past the tree only to notice that it was bearing fruit. Look!, it seemed to say, each of my apples is here in sheer celebration of life.

On the walk back, I find myself singing a tune. It starts simply ('sing, sing, sing') but it is rousing and catchy. I'm not sure when I started singing, but I am suddenly aware that I am. It is not a tune I know, and this fills me with pleasure. It has no other purpose than to accompany our walk. When I finally reach the bottom of the hollow, a flock of sparrows rises chattering from a large bush and the tune is forgotten. Behind the bush is a footpath that leads from the marsh over the long-forgotten, mediaeval park boundary, across the old parish border, with its line of ancient trees, and past the former woods of the royal hunt and chase, where deer still roam. The lane that ends where I'm standing is called Purlieu, which means boundary in old French, while the lane that starts on the other side of the wood is called Chase.

The castle stands in silence. It makes no noise. It is a thing to be looked at, in ruined splendour, admired and marvelled from afar. Sometimes I go inside its walls for a morning coffee with the small dog, and we sit outside the cafe in front of the old stable, watching the tourists and school parties begin to arrive. It is hard not to think of the past when one sits next to a building built in the 1500s, still carrying the hoof marks of its former role.

The badger that lives in the small, abandoned sandstone quarry next door, one hundred paces off, comes out from his set towards dusk. One

evening I hide and watch him emerge. The first thing he does is stick his head out and sniff the air, nose quivering. This takes a while, and if he feels safe, he then takes a few more tentative steps outside. When I see him, the twilight blends with his mottled coat, and all that are now visible are the white patches. After scurrying around the entrance, twisting and turning and scuffling, he disappears into the undergrowth.

It is September and the apple tree's fruit hang red, and while not overly juicy, are full of flavour that beats any shop-bought variety. I wonder how long the tree has grown here, and what sort of apples it bears. Watching it blossom in early May and bear fruit in late summer brings me joy. The tree is an accident, stuck between fields of crops, yet it does not have to prove itself or live up to its name. Some years it bears no fruit at all. It has nothing behind it because everything is still in front of it. It is not grown for a purpose, it shows without proving, gives without regulating, solicits without commanding, signifies without indicating.

From a bench I watch a large combine harvester cutting rye. Clouds of dust fill the air. The harvester cuts the crop as quickly and efficiently as possible, in straight lines. Perhaps this is why I am drawn to the apple tree. Here are apples that are unpicked, unsorted, unpolished. In other words there is an ordering in the fields that is channelling my attitude to the tree in the hedgerow. This defines my thinking, giving structure to a certain understanding of the world, and at the same time limits my thinking to this means of understanding.

And yet the apple tree also reveals something if I attend closely enough to it (a philological study perhaps). The apple tree shows me another possibility of being. Rather than seeing the apple as a resource, and that relationship is how I understand and grasp myself, I leap across the ditch to choose one to pick and eat, and work out a way to get one from the highest branches, in competition, so to speak, with the wasps and the birds. And perhaps too, this small tree sandwiched between the footpath and fields is not representative of some prior time of freely

picking fruit from the abundance of nature, but there still remains something in it, forgotten, that reveals how I can think the world, and whether there might be new meanings in it.

Surrounded by such vivid possibilities, why shouldn't I imagine a figure that leaps into the present to confront me, a remnant of the past for those who look closely enough? And perhaps the bigger question, the decisive one, is to ask why there exists such a distinction between the crops and the apple tree in the first place? To discard interpretation as such, the tree is not something to be explained, a theory formed in advance by the structure of understanding, rather perhaps all the world is, is something decided in a pure encounter. The tree is not definable through what it supposedly represents, but what it shows is a force itself, the force of its bearing fruit.

Another way of putting this. The dog sees no distinction between the field, the trees in the wood, the quarry, or the castle. For the dog, they are all spaces in which to run and chase and play, and feel joy.

END NOTES PART E

¹ Recognition of this connection is important for two related reasons. First, it can help to suggest certain normative concerns I shall pick up on later. Second, I hope to ‘reveal’ a potential philosophical parallel between forms of experience and phenomenology and an extending of phenomenology’s conflict with subjectivity that Martin Heidegger develops. Michel Foucault defines archaeology as the grasping of phenomena at the level of their moment of arising and pure being-there. See the English translation of his 1954 introduction, ‘Dream, Imagination and Existence’, originally included in Michel Foucault, (*Dits et Écrits*, Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

² The poem tells the tale of Graunde Amoure’s courtship of La Belle Pucelle. The English antiquary Anthony à Wood reports that when the text was first printed ‘it [was] adorned with Wooden Cuts to make the reader understand the story the better and printed in an old English Character.’ In preparation for his love quest, Amoure receives instruction in the Seven Liberal Arts at the Tower of Doctrine. Chief among the Arts is rhetoric, and Amoure learns (from Dame Rhetoric) that he must master the five parts of this discipline: invention, disposition, elocution, pronunciation and memorative (of or relating to memory). He is told that ‘retentive memory . . . must ever aggregate / All matters thought.’ In the poem’s extended discussion about memory, it describes how an orator or poet can use a ‘memorial art’ of images to recall and deliver his speech in ‘due order, manner, and reason.’ See the introduction to Stephen Hawes’s ‘The Pastime of Pleasure’ in *The Memory Arts in Renaissance England: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by William E. Engel, Rory Loughnane, and Grant Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 39-41. Here, an almost unconscious state of remembering becomes a specific experience - not, however, in anticipation of death, as with Daedalus and Icarus, but rather in an experience of birth, the creating of poetry.

³ Joseph T. Shipley, ‘Wit’, *Dictionary of Early English* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955).

⁴ Martin Heidegger, of course, wanted to do away with metaphysics altogether in order to get back to Being, which he supposed we have all forgotten.

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The Ballad of Miss Adventure

Listen my friend and you shall have read
a strange story of old that can be sung or said,
the tale of Miss Adventure, who, they say
told the very best stories of the day.

I'll recount this tale for you now,
for the story to come I'll make this vow,
I'll relate a tale that I know to be true,
I promise in words you'll not mistake my view.

In every place great crowds Miss Adventure drew,
and all there marvelled to see her anew.
Because of her hope, she gave them delight,
they found joy in this madam's sight.

Her stories of Fate, Luck and Chance
Necessity and Love, enthralled all in their dance.
To keep so many words in her memory sharp,
she would sing to the rhymes along with her harp.

Adventure's eyes shone blue, her figure was fit,
she spun her tales and people loved it.
If you can hear her lai, lay about for a while,
she shall sing more often than she smiles.

'Open up! I knock with words. Let me in.'
So she would say at each place and begin.
For years she travelled thus knocking on doors,
wherever she went, no-one got bored.

Nearby lived a boy, on a small hill
up by the castle, turn right at the mill.
He was a student of parts
learnéd in writing and in the arts.

A hapless boy who would often compose
unfinished sequences in photos and prose.
On the edge of town, he wasn't a success
no firm outline, pushed down, landless.

Ill tither, ill thriver, all his money spent
Losing all, and more, paying too much rent
Above all he rejected conformity
He loathed being tied down by authority.

His ambition was the pure means of his sweats
a world to which his poems bore witness.
Word-fishing rhymes, trying to define
figures in words and pictures combined.

This photo-smith longed for Adventure,
more than anything wanting her to enter.
Adventure! the very word was like a bell
That tolled him he could not earn very well.

One dusk he was walking along the castle's track
when he sensed something behind his back
As he turned round he saw near the wood
in a copse of oaks a shadow stood.

Was it a dogger, in the shadows dim?
No, a white-footed badger, staring at him
Now the boy didn't know where to go
Could it be dangerous? He just didn't know.

Is this how Adventure begins? he thought.
And to his surprise, the sett dweller talked.
'Start writing,' the nocturnal messenger began.
'Miss Adventure will be 'wi' you soon as she can.'

'Brock,' said the boy, 'of your kind I've heard told,
you're the wise keepers of stories in this wold.
'You live deep underground, and come
to the surface when stories are to be found.'

The boy bade him good night and then walked away.
You see, it was a luck bringer he'd heard say.
Back up to his house he went, this astonished writer
And started writing a wonderful adventure.

As the evening air grew dark and still
Adventure came to the house on the hill.
'Fair, kind and true' was engraved on the boards
of the gate she knocked on with her fists of words.

'So it's you, is it, Miss Adventure, you look so old.'
'May I come in, I am getting cold.
This is such a small space to get into!
D'you have a light? I'll tell marvels to you!'

'If you can spare any words, please do tell
me your tales, give me photos as well.'
'This,' said Adventure, 'you must plot,
'Cos it's you I demand, I do diddly-squat.'

Now Miss Adventure did not know a single letter,
though she demanded the boy meet her.
With gentle words she redeemed time idly spent
And gave his pen and camera skill and argument.

So the boy wrote down all that she said
in a flowing script so that it might be read,
and then he adorned the book
with photos that beautified its look.

And then the book was published brand new,
his photos there to testify the truth.
Finally finished, he sought a shop
But none would buy it, they thought it rot.

But watching him at work right there,
Miss Adventure's heart did despair.
'You try to be what you are not and not what you are
Against your becoming I should prepare.

'I found you in the darkest night
With open door I asked you for a light.
Marking my words, you wrote all that you heard.
I lent you my mark and you found your words.'

'Oh! How now, though I gave you all I possess,
The solution is this, you must find your witness.
You see fine fellow, adventure is in yourself,
you cannot find her outside, or on a bookshelf.

Your own writing is the limit of your thought
Adventure is not a thing to be bought.
It just happens, and now I must make haste
So that you'll discover how adventure takes place.'

Down to the marsh at supper-time
she crept like someone intent on crime.
She found bauson-faced badgers as if in a story,
Digging up flotsam in the castle's quarry.

These night runners drew round her, moths to a lamp,
her underground helpers of the marshy damp.
They knew her history off by heart,
could sense Adventure's person from part.

'Silent helpers,' she cried, 'digging hereby,
no firm place in the world have I.
Adventure is all I know how to do
for pity's sake, let me spin some with you.

'My stories have been told many times.
My wit sharpened in pointed rhymes,
To a Brock she asked 'what d'you do here?'
'I digs up fortunes,' he said, 'five hunder' a year.'

'I like the wark there's lotsa pickin's to be had,
My signs an' your wrinkles are of the same thread.'
The creatures shadow what fate might weave
And dig up what they from fortune receive.

Straight away Adventure started spinnin'
her many threads she did begin
so eager was she to do her best
that the badgers were really impressed.

'Help me!' cried Miss Adventure, 'I beg of you
to dig with me while I spin anew,
oh black shadows at the feet of things,
burrowing back down to your secret being.'

It was a perfect match: Adventure spun fate,
Her helpers dug flotsam until it grew late.
She span and they dug till they all sank to the ground
their bodies asweat and their heads in a swound.

Amazed by her, the badger now
climbs from his hole and wipes his brow,
'Thank ye, Miss Adventure,' he said and smiled,
'look at all the jetsam I's a piled.'

From then on at the twilight hours
Miss Adventure went to pay them her devoirs
till our boy to himself said 'Now where
does Adventure go to each evening air?'

And so next night when Adventure crept
away, he followed her path to the sett.
There he found her spinning with the digging squad,
this, he thought, is all really odd.

It may be nothing, I believe it is,
but you, reader, should know of this.
Back to the house he went with reverent mien
and wrote up for you this marvellous scene.

Then he thought: 'I'll say no word
to Adventure of what I have seen and heard.
I'll go tomorrow and watch her spin
and then I can decide what will have been.'

Next day behind an oak tree he hid,
finding example in all that Adventure did.
Deeply absorbed, and under pressure,
he got stuck for words, and tried to second-guess her.

The tighter the rope Adventure for him laid,
the more effort to write that he made.
But seeing her spin her wonders of fate and hope,
he got vertigo at the edge of the slope.

And then at the top of the quarry over he flipped
Down into the depths this figure he slipped
With one last twist, down, down he dropped
And lay as dead, as if his heart had stopped.

Then out of the shadows, white and black as coal
came the helpers to seize this poor soul.
'We really don't want no fuss.
For every Miss Adventure starts with us.'

But reader, I know, it must be said
we cannot go on if our narrator is dead.
Adventure just happens with a tale
and this can't in any circumstance fail.

Miss Adventure shooed the badgers away,
with her words she kept them at bay.
And our boy she carried aloft
singing with a voice sweet and soft.

'Tis well this poor writer died in his youth,
I swear on the bible that this is the truth.'
What remains are the writer's words
which linger in the air a while to be heard.

You see, this story now gets interesting,
our boy did not know what he was witnessing.
His Adventure just happened as I have told you,
And near the end she sang : 'Adieu ! adieu !'

He opened his eyes, he was not dead.
I'm called Julian, he sat up and said.
I have a name now, so hear my adventure
For it all begins in the witness's gesture.

