

Distinct Oscillation

When I have painted a beautiful picture, I have not written down a thought. That's what they say. How simple-minded! They rob painting of all its advantages. The writer has to say almost everything to be understood. In painting, a kind of mysterious bridge is built between the soul of the figures *and that of the spectator* [. . .]. On the difference between literature and painting in terms of *the effect that a sketched out thought can produce*, in a word, on the impossibility of sketching anything in literature in such a way as to depict something for the mind.¹

◆ The difference between text and image is flagrant. The text presents significations, the image presents forms.

♣ Each one shows something: the same thing and yet a different thing. By showing, each one shows itself, and therefore also shows the other one across from it and facing it. It therefore also shows itself to it: image shows itself to text, which shows itself to image.

♥ Thus an imaged image and the word *image* show—in showing each other and showing themselves (to be)—the same thing and yet a different thing. Furthermore: the word “image” shows itself as an image whereas an imaged image shows itself the way the word *image* does. At least each of them wants to believe this, or behaves as if it did.

♠ Can a text on a text (an interpretation, a commentary) and the image of a text (the painting of a book, of a letter) be interchanged? Does the text make an image of the text it interprets? Does the image become a text on the text that it, too, interprets?

● In any case, the two show what it means to show—to manifest, to reveal, to place in view, to shed light on, to indicate, to signal, to produce. They show, and in showing, they show that there are at least two kinds of showing, heterogeneous and yet stuck to one another, collated, pressed and compressed together (like the stones in an arch), attracting and repelling one another. Each is both pleasing and repulsive to the other. Each is *monstrative* and *monstrous* to the other. A monstrum is the sign of a wonder. Image and text are each a wonder for the other.

♠ This is because they are such strangers to each other and because, at the same time, each discerns itself in the other: each one distinguishes a tinge, a vague outline of itself in the ground of the other, deep in its eye or its throat. Each one draws the other toward itself or is drawn toward it. There is always a tension. There is a drawing out [*du tirage*], a traction: in a word, a line [*un trait*]. There is an invisible, untraced line that draws out and traces on both sides, that passes between the two without passing anywhere. It draws out and traces nothing, perhaps, but this impalpable line . . .

♣ But in this tension, in spite of it or because of it, both one and the other *present* something, which is placed before our eyes. But the text can be pronounced, and therefore drawn away from every image, perhaps also every presence. In any event, it is not a question of the same eyes in each case: there are the eyes of the mind and those of the body.

♠ I hear you, I understand. Moreover, I can close my eyes and repeat, out loud or silently, what you just said. Does it follow, then, that the text pronounced excludes all images? I'm not so sure. The speaking voice has its own form, its sonorous image. See for yourself: when I say "sonorous," do you not have an image? Do you not discern a round "o"-"o"-"o" . . . ?

● Oh, oh! I see what you're saying: I see the voices that I hear! I see them so well, in fact, that the spoken text calls up, as though from out of itself, the face of its voice, the movement of its lips, the

passing glimpse of the inside of the mouth, of the tongue and the teeth, and of the whole articulatory cinema, not to mention of the overall expression of the face. The voice draws the eye. It is always a drawing and pulling: a division of space, an incision, but also a shot taken [*un trait lancé*], a drawing back and letting fly toward the other. Image and text: arrow and target for each other.

♣ You spoke of “cinema”: it is also theater, although the nature of the images or their mode of delivery is not the same.

● Certainly, they are different. At the very least in that, in their relation to the text, the theater proposes an entire body, a body that is physical and present, moving on a stage, whereas the cinema presents a body that is cut up and framed—even if it is shown in its entirety. This frame is linked to the text, even if it is not subordinated to it, or else it becomes a sort of text, an articulation.

◆ One could say, then, that the theater embodies the text above all, gives it flesh and blood, breath and posture, whereas the cinema textualizes the body, makes it signifying. And the theater demands a writing appropriate to it, a writing of gesture, posture, and breath.

◆ But it is also in this sense that cinema was initially “silent.” One spoke by way of a text written on panels inserted between the images, after or before the filmed faces pronounced the words. Often one saw these words twice: once as text, in images of writing; once in the movement of the lips, the eyes, the hands, which the actors deliberately drew out in their poses and gestures.

♠ You said it yourself: the text on the panels was, nonetheless, an image too. It was not merely the text as the meaning of the words. It was, in the successive stream of images, a kind of image, which offered a passing insight into the element of sense: into consciousness, if you like. The black ground of the screen on which the letters appeared, or else the frame surrounding them (which was often embroidered with a few foliage designs, curlicues, or arabesques), delivered sense as an image, in a view opened onto that which makes this sense: onto the subject, into the subject. A view into that obscure subject of meaning, that black sun.

♥ You mean both into the thinking subject, therefore also the speaking subject, and into the subject treated, that is, the object of

the discourse and of the action, the intentions, feelings, and agitated representations of the characters.

♠ Yes, both of these together, and each one subject to the other: the subject of sense and the sense of the subject, the whole making up the subject of the film, which is inextricably what it treats and what directs it, what gives it a perspective or a proper vision, a style or an atmosphere, a manner.

● But the manner is that of an image. It is what makes an image, including in the text. Making an image means producing a relief, a protrusion, a trait, a presence. Above all, the image gives presence. It is a manner of presence. Manner and matter of presence. It has often been said: no discourse can compete with the power of an image. (Nevertheless, discourse is not the same as text.)

♥ But what is “giving presence”? Isn’t it giving what cannot be given: what is or is not? You are present or you are not. Nothing will give you presence except your arrival, which is no one or is yourself. Come on, now, show yourself!

● Yes, yes, giving presence means giving to someone who is not there something that one cannot give him. It is the squaring of the circle, or of love, which gives something one does not have to someone who does not want it, as a psychoanalyst (which is to say, a specialist in image-texts) once said. The image gives a presence that it lacks—since it has no other presence than the unreal one of its thin, filmlike surface—and it gives it to something that, being absent, cannot receive it.

♣ The image thus gives presence to the text, if with this word *text* you understand the interlinking, the meshing and weaving together of a sense. Sense consists only in being woven or knit together. Text is textile; it is the material of sense. But sense as such has no material, no fibers or consistency, no grain or thickness. Sense “as such” consists precisely in nothing other than weaving together an “as such”: for example, I say “a flower,” and now the flower *as such*, that is, as nothing presentable, absent from every bouquet, from every garden or botanical book, begins to link “such” to “such,” relating endlessly to itself as its own sense or idea, which never has done with linking itself to itself, all the better to let loose and unwind

its parcel of silky fibers while also spinning out its sense or its indefinite metaphor.²

◆ Its metaphor or its image, you see. This image is necessary for us, and this image of images—meta-phor, trans-*port* and movement aside, displacement—in order to give presence to this sense without material, incorporeal by definition, but which is only in the weave, not in the web or cloth. But how could there be a weave without a web? The image is the web of a threadless weave. Sense requires the image in order to emerge from its meager material, its inaudibility and its invisibility. Sense requires sound, line, and figure, without which it is as abstract and fugitive as the movement of a needle through the stitches of a piece of lace. The lace of sense fails at every moment to abolish itself in the doubt of its embroidery.

♠ Notice, however, that by drawing sense out of absence, by making *absense a presense*, the image does not do away with the impalpable nature of absence. On the contrary, it is occupied solely with this im-material, and that is what it *images*: allow me to use this verb in a sense that is neither “to illustrate” nor “to imagine.” “To image” must be heard as a transitive verb whose action, however, cannot act on an object. I can illustrate a discourse by giving a concrete example, but this remains secondary in relation to the sense (at least that is how it is ordinarily understood). If, by contrast, I say that *I image* this discourse (for example, the discourse that says, “I say ‘a flower’”), this is something completely different: I present its saying with its said; therefore I say “a flower” or rather, here, I say, “I say a flower,” and the image is there, palpable as the impalpable in this saying of the saying, this movement of the needle in the stitch that already links saying to flower, but also “saying” to “speaking,” “singing,” “evoking,” and “flower” to “scent,” “petal,” “wilting,” “florete,” “flora,” or “flame”—and so many others that are *absent*. But there is doubtless no saying that is not in some way imaged. No denotation is without connotation, if you like. Connotation borders on denotation, and embroiders its borders. It is there that the image rises.

● The word *imago* designated the effigy of the absent, the dead, and, more precisely, the ancestors: the dead from whom we come, the links of the lineage in which each of us is a stitch. The *imago* hooks into the cloth. It does not repair the rip of their death: it does less and more than that. It weaves, it images absence. It does not

represent this absence, it does not evoke it, it does not symbolize it, even though all this is there too. But, essentially, it presents absence. The absent are not there, are not “in images.” But they are imaged: their absence is woven into our presence. The empty place of the absent as a place that is not empty: that is the image. A place that is not empty does not mean a place that has been filled: it means the place of the image, that is, in the end, the image as place, and a singular place for what has no place here: the place of a displacement, a metaphor—and here we are again. The image calls out: “Make way! [Place!] Make way for displacement, make way for transport!”

♣ Thus the physical body of the theater and the framed body of the cinema are modes of occupying this place. They are ways of being placed there. And, by definition, there are various modes of this placement: since the place is empty, the number of modes is indefinite, perhaps infinite. Sense as what is absent, as its own incessant absenting, does not have any single mode of existing. Only full, complete presence has a single mode: it is identical to itself. But in this way, it does not exist, it is there. Sense exists, or rather it is the movement and flight of existing: of *ex-ire*, of going outside oneself, exceeding, exiling. Sense essentially disidentifies.

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Intermezzo

*What Diderot admired in Richardson and in Greuze is, therefore, and quite precisely, what will later be sought in the cinema: “Outbursts of passion have often struck your ears; but you are very far from knowing all the secrets of their accents and their facial expressions. Each one has its own physiognomy; and all these physiognomies follow one another upon a given face without it ceasing to be the same face; and the art of the great poet and of the great painter is to show us a fleeting circumstance that had escaped our attention.” One could not better describe what we expect from the close-up. And what captivates Diderot in Joseph Vernet is the latter’s “western” style *avant la lettre*: “with infinite artfulness, to intermingle movement and rest, daylight and shadows, silence and noise.”*

The history of art sometimes plays the accordion, as it were. With his “necessary lengthiness,” Richardson first stretched out the literary

time that Greuze's instantaneous cinema would compress in his paintings (which require long descriptions nonetheless; see the Salons). In its turn, cinema, which like painting operates by means of images, will stretch them out by multiplying them in duration, as literature does with words.⁵

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♥ Would you say that the body is the image, whereas the text is the soul?

● Certainly not, if you are suggesting that the image is on one side and the text on the other—which is what happens in what is normally called “illustration.” This is an impoverished dualism, like every dualism. But, in truth, every image and every text is potentially, and respectively, text and image for itself. This potential is actualized in the gaze or in reading. I read a text and here is an image, or indeed, here is yet more text! In looking at the image, I always textualize it in some way, and in reading the text, I image it. These actualizations are innumerable: no text has its proper image, no image its proper text.

♥ But when an actualization occurs—which one could call, in either case, an *interpretation*—there is indeed soul and body, that is, form and intensity (for these are the true senses of the words *soul* and *body*). Form and intensity are intimately mingled together, however, just as the Cartesian soul is present everywhere in the body that it animates, or that animates it, as one might say. To *interpret* is precisely that: animation as embodiment, and embodiment as animation. It means configuring an intensity and intensifying a figure. *Body* and *soul* are in truth only one word, divided in two in order to show how they interpret each other in both senses at once.

♠ There is one thing that is outside interpretation, both as text and as image: namely, spirit—the self-equivalent breath, neither body nor soul, without form or intensity. Spirit becomes neither trait nor trace. It has no color, no figure, no letter, no style. Spirit has no body or soul.

♣ Image and text are therefore distinguished as soul and body: each is the limit of the other, its horizon of interpretation. The hori-

zon of the image is the text, with which it opens an indefinite power to imagine, before which the image is only a closure, a closed contour. But the horizon of the text is the image, with which it opens an indefinite power to imagine, before which the text is only an impotency, a permanent postponement of images.

♠ But in the end, or in the beginning, every horizon recedes indefinitely and is engulfed in the sea and the sun mixed together.

● But the image is not self-identical. Essentially, it is distinguished from itself. Thus we differentiate very clearly between an image and a thing that is not an image (at least so long as we do not treat the image as a thing or any thing as an image, which is always possible: the displacement is limitless). The image is, in every respect, distinction. It is distinguished from things or from living beings, it is distinguished from the imageless ground from which it is detached, and it distinguishes itself insofar as it designates itself as an image. It always says, simultaneously, “I am this, a flower,” and “I am an imaged flower, or a flower-image.” I am not, it says, the image *of* this or that, as if I were its substitute or copy, but I *image* this or that, I present its absence, that is, its sense. I image what is unimaginable in sense.

◆ Or rather, if I understand you, I present one of the possible modes of its sense, one of its possible distinctions, for example, as a physical body and a proffering of voice, as a framed body and an articulation of speech . . .

♠ And many other modes besides. It is not possible to enumerate them all. Theater and cinema are only modes in which the text is itself posited as such, giving rise, or giving place, to a delicate interval between textual presence (the sense understood, if you like) and an imaged absence (the sense concealed in the image’s ground). Only the interval between the two, in the rhythm of the spectacle, properly makes the truth of the thing: the truth of sense. It is the cadence of moments in which sense is imaged, in which it stops the image in a “freeze frame,” in an ungraspable grasping.

♥ There are other modalities in which the text is not given as such, in which it can no doubt appear, but also disappear. Then there is no text as text. The text, the weave, becomes something absent, which the image images. This happens even in the theater and in the

cinema, or at their limits, in pantomime or tableau vivant, sometimes in performance, or in the silent shot, especially if it is still or if it comprises an entire film. One is then in a situation of contagion with other modes.

♣ To tell the truth, where is there not contagion? Each mode is a mode of giving presence to an absence that threads its way in every direction, a point on the front, a point on the back, upside down or inside out, and this absence in incessant absencing puts all the modes into contact at their borders: the same unidentifiable texture circulates everywhere. The relation of image to sense is the eternal return of the same. The same sense always imaged otherwise.

◆ In the modes where no text is indicated as such—when sense does not say, “I say”—the text proceeds from the image itself. It comes out of it and returns to it, without setting down any words. This is the case with painting, photography, installation, sculpture and architecture, and, sometimes, video, performance, music, and dance. Always another step, always a step to the side: the image murmurs “*no text* [pas de texte],” and you hear “*the text step by step* [pas à pas le texte].”

● In fact, each of these modes may or may not display a text. In any case, there will be a title, a tag, even if only the negative “untitled.” Somewhere there will be an indication that here is what one calls a “work.” The minimum of discourse is the word *work*, or some other designation or deictic (a pointing finger, a pedestal) with the same function. *Work* then means not so much the product of a setting-into-work, not so much a particular piece of work, as the following indication: freeze frame here. A still image, meaning also: a still text, a fixed point and a cut of the weave in process, an immobilized needle, an eternalized movement.

◆ In that sense, look at the words found in paintings, when there are any, as in the medieval phylacteries, in inscriptions like “Et in Arcadia ego,” in the snippets from diaries and the cubists’ stenciled letters, not to mention the signatures (Caravaggio’s in dripping blood, Bellini’s on a parchment, among many others).⁴ These words make sense, their ordinary sense—“pipe” or “I am the painter”—but they do so by absencing this sense in their image: they are their own graphism, their graphite and their graffiti, its matter, its paste, its

color; they are images in the image, insisting on their absent sense, giving rise to the unheard and the unintelligible, distinct from all received sense. In “Caravaggio” we hear “ravage,” and the name resounds with blood and wounding, death and the death of sense, sense entering into death, knitting death with its needle, a withdrawn, secret sense, sacred and consecrating the image as image, that is, as an empty place, opening onto this indistinct ground in which the distinct, the absolutely distinct, detaches itself and disappears. Death to sense and sense in death: a skull images its empty thought. Upon it one writes: “Vanitas.” In close proximity to this, Pascal declares: “What vanity painting is.” But painting always paints a vanity of words.

♣ From Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* to Burroughs’s cut-ups and the various forms of “concrete poetry,” passing through the cubists or the suprematists, or from Schwitters to Hantaï, in countless places in contemporary art and in countless different ways, there has been a kind of proliferating obsession with words in painting, with the painting of words, with painted words and with writing as painting. The principle stimulus is a desire to embed words within painting, to bring out their form and material at the expense of their incorporeal value. Sense deposited right at the painting’s skin. But this skin is already brushed against [*affleure*] in language: for a French or English speaker, meaning takes on another grain in German, another texture. From one language to another, there is always a diminution of signification and an increase in sensation. The text images itself. If I say “flower,” *fleur*, *Blume*, *fior*, I do not say the same flower and yet I also do not say the flower itself (the flower “as flower”).

♠ There would thus be none that is “absent from every bouquet,” but rather each flower flourishes only in the climate of a language imaged in a way that is necessarily idiomatic and thus sonorous and visual. This paste of words, these petals stuck to the tongue, cannot be extricated—or transmitted.

♥ But the converse is equally true: there is also what might be called a stabbing desire to write in painting, to make some kind of signifier point, spurt, or spring forth in the image and outside the image. A desire for the image to speak of itself, in itself, and for itself. For it to become the body of the Word. There is an entire secret theology of transsubstantiation, a profane atheology of incarnation and communion: take and touch, devour with your eyes, this is my sense

spread before you, resuscitated as painting. Blood of sense that flows vermilion.

♠ Another atheology will say: image and text are the two holy species of a single withdrawn presence. The two aspects, the two sides or faces presented to the eye of the body and to the eye of the mind for an absence of surface, for an absent sense that has no facial value. The presentation of the absent always oscillates between the presence of a form and the presence of a sense; one always refers back to the other. Neither one, consequently, truly fixes a presence. Each one bears itself as an immobilization, in itself, of presence (here is the image, here is the text, everything is there)—and as an immediate reference in the direction of the other: here is the image, it *means* . . . ; here is the text, it *represents* . . . But who, then, is the one that is absent? Who is the one that is neither text nor image? Who is the one that would be located precisely at the intersection of this double reference, at the place where the meaning of the image encounters the meaning of the text without either one ever being the meaning of the other?

● We must avoid naming him, as you well know. I would like to use one of your words, however, and call him the “Oscillator.” This word is the diminutive form of the Latin *os*, which signifies the mouth and, by metonymy, the face. *Oscillum* thus designated a small mouth (closely related to *osculum*, kiss), as well as a small mask of Bacchus hung in the vines as a scarecrow: the movement of this face swinging in the wind produced the sense of “oscillation.” The Oscillator, then, swings between mouth and face, between speech and vision, between the emission of sense and the reception of form. But what appears to move toward an encounter does not do so at all: on the contrary, the mouth and the look are turned forward and are parallel, turned into the distance, toward an infinite perpetuation of their double and incommunicable position. Between mouth and eye, the entire face oscillates.

◆ And yet, the Oscillator does not cease to knock back and forth, to leap or to dance between the two, touching both of them. It wants to make the mask speak and it wants to give speech a mask. This happens for us now especially with video. With video, we no longer have to do with the textualized body of the cinema. Something else is involved, whose generic name is incrustation. Not only the incrustation of words in the image, but incrustation of the image itself: it is

embedded into the material of the screen, it is not placed upon it as in cinema, nor is it physically joined with a canvas as in painting. In a sense, we must not even speak any longer of a screen: video is not of the order of the screen, but of penetration. One is not a spectator but a voyeur. *Videō* means “I see,” whereas *theaō* means “I look” (and *kineō* is “I move”). “I look,” “I move,” and “I see” do not designate the postures of the presumed “spectator,” nor of the presumed “artist.” These verbs signify the work’s *doing*, its manner of doing and making, what it does to sense or how it *makes sense*. Thus, in *video*, there is absorption in vision, with a tendency toward making absent what is seen. The seer and the viewer come before the visible. The support, in fact, is not an illuminated film but light converted into punctual signals. One enters into pulverulence and into the dance of points. The image becomes particular or particulate. The text, for its part, spoken or written on the image, becomes vibratory, decomposed and recomposed into suspended and rustling waves, slightly drawn back from any spoken language. The Oscillator is imprinted somehow in the flaky and granular matter of a vision turned into itself, onto itself (not necessarily in a narcissistic way), but everywhere rubbing against seeing and rubbing the text or making a text of this rubbing. In an oscilloscopic machine, the distinction between text and image is *virtually* effaced.

♣ But it is reborn from these snowy ashes. The Oscillator is indestructible in its oscillation. That is what separates it at every moment from any resolution into one side or the other, as well as into an improbable union of the two. For the interval between sense and sense is not masked only by the Oscillator. Consider painting once again: *pingo* means above all “to embroider with threads of color,” or else “to tattoo.” This mixes weaving, incision, and delineation with tinting and coloration. The woven thread and the puddle, or the line and the covered surface. Finally, drawing and painting, both of which run through the text: the first gives more lines to read, while the second gives warmth to words. If I write “red,” why isn’t it red? Should it be? Or should it be written in green? In purple? In black? I say “a flower,” and here is the absent one arising red or white, or red and white and just as smooth and soft, flourishing or faded. But I write “a flower,” and here is the word that is traced by marking the paper with a colorless smear.

◆ And yet, the flower is somewhere. It is behind the Oscillator itself. It follows its movement and remains behind the mask with

each oscillation. But behind it there is something else, or someone, who or which is neither text nor image, who or which is in the background, and forms the ground. Let us call this one the “Distinct.” The Distinct is set apart: the distinct mark of sense, its *trait*. It is the stigma, that is, the incision that separates. It is the distinct mark of sense in two ways that are perfectly conjoined and contradictory: on the one hand, the mark by which sense is distinguished; on the other hand, the mark that is distinguished from every possible sense. On the one hand, the distinctive trait by which there is sense—this and not that, a flower or a caterpillar—but also one sense or another in the sense of sight and hearing: that which prevents one from confusing flower and caterpillar, written word and spoken word, embodied sense and incorporeal sense. On the other hand, a trait that is in retreat and drawn back from all sense. A nonsensory trait that is not embodied in any sense—neither a pencil stroke [*trait*] nor a stroke of the violin bow—but which is also not incorporeal like signification.

♣ The Distinct is in fact none of that, but it is not nothing. It is the thing itself: it is what is in the ground of things, at the heart of all things that are, and that withdraws their sense of being into the secret from which all the senses draw their sensibility. The Distinct and the Oscillator have a common cause. One supports the other, which in turn agitates the first. It is no more possible to distinguish them than to confuse them.

♣ But we must not believe that “text and image” can be replaced by “distinct and oscillator.” These two couples are not homologous. They are also chiasmic in relation to one another. Either text is distinguished in the ground of the image and this image oscillates on the former’s surface, or else the image is distinguished between the lines of the text and this text oscillates throughout. The image scintillates, and the text gives off a flat, muffled sound. The image is mute, and the text crackles with white noise. Or it is the inverse, at the same instant, in the same movement. Each one, in the end, is the distinct and the oscillator of the other. Each is the *ekphrasis* of the other while also being its illustration, its illumination. *Ekphrasis* draws a phrase from its other, just as, from its other, illumination draws a sight. A phrase image and a sight of sense.

● How does an image speak? In an image’s language; that is, in a language with no verb or substantive, a language of infinitives and

conjunctions. How does sense make something seen? As a figure and an air of sense, that is, with no aspect or frontal surface, and in concealment.

♠ The infinitive of the image and the concealment of sense: each one courts the other and flees from it. That is Illumination: Image envelops Text, which conceals itself from it; Text devours Image, which emerges from it intact. The words appear to be there only in order to portray their own silence; the drawing seems to figure nothing other than a sense buried in its absence. Text calls Image: perhaps it says nothing other than this call. Image illustrates Text: it dazzles it and us with it, and perhaps does nothing else.

♥ Thus, on both sides there is a pressure and a precipitation toward the presence of the image, the blinding brilliance and the intimate conviction, immediate certainty. One believes the image with one's eyes closed. But there is also on both sides a disquietude and a melancholy in the text and its sense: eyes wide open, one sees it sink into the night, into which one would like to follow it.

♣ Each one calls to the other: illuminate me! *Mebr Licht!*⁵ Without you I'll die! Or: you are my death but dying in you I illuminate myself. Illuminate me, illustrate me: surround me with glory, celebrate me, even delude me and de-limit me in your element!

● The relation between each one is a relation of sense: the text says the sense of the image, which says the sense of the text; it is the torturer's wheel. But at the same time, it is a relation of certainty: each one exposes to the other the assurance it lacks in not being identical to the other. Each exposed to the other and nothing between them. Image and text: this is the slit, perfect, definitive, and delicious, in which the naked truth is always recognized.

♥ *Image would therefore be to text what sense is to truth. But this equality of proportion would be perfectly reversible: image would also be to text what truth is to sense. Indeed, the image cannot lie: it is what it is and refers to nothing else. The text consists entirely in its reference to that of which it speaks. One might conclude from this that the image is a stranger to truth, is neither true nor false, or that it is nothing other than truth, the whole truth that shows itself in it each time. One might also conclude that the text is outside truth, since it always only takes us further and further into the infinity*

of sense, or that it alone is able to enunciate truth or lies concerning the subject of which it speaks. Everything depends on your notions of “truth” and “sense.” If truth is what lends itself to verification, then the image is unverifiable unless it is compared with an original, which one assumes it must resemble. But this assumption is a discourse that you will have introduced, to which the image by itself gives no legitimacy. If truth is what is revealed or manifested from itself, it is not only the image that is always true, it is truth that is, of itself, always image (being in addition and simultaneously image of itself). As for “sense,” if it consists in a reference moving from signifier to signified, it belongs only to text—where, in addition, it turns out to be indissociable from the reference of signifier to signifier and from the entire weave of a language. In this respect, an image has no sense: it is pure truth. But if sense is validity for a subject, then the image makes sense out of the fact that it shows itself: it is insofar as it has at least the sense of its arrival in coming up against and countering the gaze. In the end, as you can see, what is “image” and what is “text” depends on who is thus countered and what comes to be encountered. The encounter involves recognition and exchange, a commerce of signs and of mutual trust or mistrust. That which counters presents an obstacle and suspends the forward step. So it is at the beginning of Dante’s path, when a panther “light-footed and very fleet, covered with a spotted hide” appears before him “and did not depart from before my face.”⁶ Only a little later does Virgil appear. But countering and encountering are mixed together in everything that is ordinarily designated as “image” or as “text.” There is almost nothing, only a minute separation, between the mark of drawing and that of the grapheme, between graphism and writing: this very narrow slit which is nothing other than the incision of the mark, paraph of truth in the midst of sense but also traced sideways from sense across the true, the slit between the lips, their very contour.

◆ Through this slit, sight looks and speech writes, simultaneously, alternatively. In this way, sight looks into the mouth and speech writes into the eye. One sees the image in the other’s ground, and the other traces a text in the ground facing it. But, through this operation, the ground in each becomes abyssal. Sight loses the Distinct in the ground of the eye, and speech loses the Oscillator at the tip of the tongue. In the ground of the abyss split open—blind spot, cloven tongue or pen—the Oscillator and the Distinct glow with a common and irreconcilable incandescence.

♠ What Image shows, Text de-monstrates. It withdraws it in justifying it. What Text exposes, Image posits and deposits. What Image

configures, Text disfigures. What the latter envisages, the former faces down [*dévisage*]. What one paints, the other depicts. But precisely that, their common cause and their common thing [*chose*], oscillates distinctly between the two in a paper-thin space: recto the text, verso the image, or vice (image)–versa (text).

● It has often been said that cathedrals were Bibles in stone for the illiterate. How mistaken! They are, quite obviously, both for the literate and for the illiterate, the frozen forms and the flipside of reading, the hidden face of writing. The *Qur'an*, for its part, is writing that is imaged from and as itself, and in reading it one is immersed in the illustrious letter. The icon, by contrast, makes the Word see: it does not make it visible, but makes vision plunge into it. The statue of Buddha is Buddha, says the disciple, but the master checks him: "You talk too much!"

.....

Coda

*Of the secret Word of
tongue does not let us
ing us away. Our true words
are here. The words that do not
in the air, are here. Read
ceptible to any pronun-
the eyes. Passing over the
stretch to infinity. Touch-
no body, the clarity
Only absorbing the light
The true words that connect
sounds; we see them dis-
clearly. The words that
umbra whose meaning sparkles
iant days, neither timbre nor
the words, these words here.
but impossible to recount
is entrusted to the voice; perhaps
them a little, although un-
Silence.⁷*

*Silence, even our mother
speak, except by turn-
The words never spoken
inhabit a voice resounding
as if they were not sus-
ciation, mutely transmitted. By
taut string of gazes, they can
ing no lip, passing over
allotted to words.
of the pupils. Through the eyes.
us, never reduced to these
tinct, their forms appear
shine in the pen-
through one of those rad-
melody, which remains always
Intention to divulge them;
them in a language that
with numbers, they resemble
pronounceable, Word of*

.....

For the secret Image of . . . —there is no word for an absence of image. Perhaps the text-word? There is no word to say without an image. Which is not darkness. Nor blindness. But the unformed (rather than the formless, always somewhat deformed and therefore discernible), the inapparent, the unappearing. Without parency or patency or latency: but no image. The unimaginable that no word brings to image, not even this word unimaginable. The privative un- here is the entire image, the darkness on stage, the end of the film, the film not printed. Not a thing behind the image waiting to appear, but the reversal and underside of the image, the back of the painting without a painting on the back. Rough surface of the real. Speaking of it turns us away from it, makes it an image after all, as when a painter paints the back of a painting. It is an image that must be unimagined, that is, thought, if thought is a commotion, a syncope, and a bedazzlement. Its flash is not the image of the obscure, but the brilliance that sparks out from having knocked against it: a flash of darkness sliced away. A blow and a shout, a stupefying pain, a breath cut short, the wordless unimagined, in a bark, a wail, a groan, a sonorous uprising.