Of ~~Mishaps~~ Miracles

ANDREW PAYNE

"God writes straight with crooked lines."
Proverbial

From Mishaps to Miracles

Errata reveal that interval, decisive as it is infinitesimal, in which our acts, at the very moment of being actualized, part company with our intentions. They register the lapses in our ego-driven attention to the world, marking the syncopation of conscious and unconscious experience thanks to which chance gets a chance. But who or what gives what chance gets? And how do the mortal agents of these acts receive this aleatory largesse, as blessing or as curse? Producing a kind of detour or deviation at the origin, these last two questions lead away from a theory of errata, of mishaps and mistakes, and toward a theory of the miracle.

Like our mishaps, miracles rend the fabric of familiar experience. But in the case of the miracle this rending owes to an event that was not merely unforeseen, but unforeseeable, since the necessity to which it corresponds is of a different order than those that produce reliability in our world, and which are therefore the proper objects of human foresight. Here foresight does not fail; it encounters a superior jurisdiction. What is perhaps remarkable is that this encounter, so traumatic to the ego's self-assurance, should be thought to have soteriological implications. In his posthumously published *Der Speigel* interview of 1966, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger remarked that "only a God could save us now." He might have added "from ourselves." For if, as the saying goes, God's revenge is to give us what we think we want, His mercy may be thought to consist in saving us from what we imagine to be our bliss, in standing between us and the life-petrifying powers of a Midas touch. This idea of a providential agency that saves us from ourselves is the essence of comedy, where the schemes and plots that would actualize our ego-driven agendas are consistently undone to redemptive effect.

Makin' Time: Vorlust *and the Miracle*

I have suggested that the miracle implies a *detournement* of the ego's expectations, if not precisely of its desire, one whose effect is to retract the veil of complacency that habit drapes over our relations with the world. In the interest of illuminating the temporality peculiar to this effect, let me advance a comparison that may appear, on its face, an unlikely one, a comparison of that eclipse of the ego's aims we have just identified with the time of the miracle and the frustration of those same aims implicit in the psychoanalytic concept of *Vorlust*, a term that strictly speaking means foreplay but that in the writings of Jacques Lacan becomes associated with the full gamut of instinctual renunciations covered by the term sublimation. At stake in this comparison would be the difference between the time of our projects (in which, according to the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious, our merely instrumental aims are complicated by a desire that confuses our wishes with those of an intrapsychic Other) and a time that suspends the project, a time in which the

trajectory from intention to act is not merely diverted, but entirely set aside. In the spirit of deviation or delay that the first term in this pairing implies, I will linger rather patiently with the psychoanalytic theory of *Vorlust* before cashing out its unforseen implications for our major theme, the time of the miracle.

It is Freud who in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* first poses the question of foreplay [*Vorlust*] as a technique by which the subject 'times' its relationship to pleasure by placing the satisfaction that is pleasure's goal at a near distance. In the context of a discussion of the deviations to which the sexual aim is susceptible, he remarks: "The normal sexual aim is regarded as being the union of the genitals in the act known as copulation, which leads to a release of the sexual tension and a temporary extinction of the sexual instinct—a satisfaction analogous to the sating of hunger. But ... there are certain intermediate relations to the sexual object, such as touching and looking at it, which lie on the roads towards copulation and are recognized as being preliminary sexual aims. On the one hand those activities are themselves accompanied by pleasure, on the other hand they intensify the excitation, which should persist until the definite sexual aim is attained."[1] Freud's concern, in this passage at least, is with the relationship between the pleasures arising from deferral of the sexual aim and those "perversions" that result when a subject's unconscious history leaves it disinclined to pursue these aims with a vigor favouring the species interest. Excepting such pathological instances, the time of *Vorlust* is for Freud a brief interlude on the way to coitus, an interlude dominated less by the mood of frustration than by what we can only imagine as delicious anticipation of a familiar pleasure.

It is Freud's heterodoxical disciple, Jacques Lacan, who first underlines the element of frustration implicit in these voluptuous preliminaries—that element so suggestive for our own consideration of the time of the miracle. In a chapter of his *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* entitled "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis," he remarks: "It is only insofar as the pleasure of desiring, or, more precisely, the pleasure of experiencing unpleasure, is sustained that we can speak of the sexual valorization of the preliminary stages of the act of love."[2] So central is this element of unpleasure to the economization of desire characteristic of *Vorlust* that it compels Lacan to affirm that "the paradox ... of foreplay is precisely that it persists in opposition to the purposes of the pleasure principle." This sublime admixture of pleasure and frustration is a condition for what Lacan then refers to as "the ethical function of eroticism."[3] This function would consist in introducing the possibility that the second order pleasure resulting from employment of these techniques of self-denial might represent not merely a deferral of the sexual aims (insofar as they work in conformity with the ends of the pleasure principle) but their replacement by another order of satisfaction altogether, one that concerns the return, at a distance, of something Lacan calls *jouissance*.

By *jouissance* we may take Lacan to mean that self-annihilating *ecstasis* of which Giordano Bruno spoke when, in his *Heroic Frenzies*, he remarked: "Acteons are very

rare who have the good luck to look upon Diana naked, to fall so much in love ... that they are changed from hunters into game. For the final goal of this science of hunting is to come upon the rare and wild beast who transforms the hunter into the object of his hunt."[4] In fact, without ever mentioning Bruno, Lacan echoes the Nolan's illeist gloss on Ovid's myth in the seminar immediately preceding the *Ethics*, his sixth. In the context of a discussion in which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is described as the "very image" of an unconscious law according to which the subject is "merely the reverse side of a message that is not even its own," he remarks: "The final act, in which Hamlet puts the full weight of his life on the line, as the price of being able to accomplish his action—this act that he activates and undergoes, has something in it of the moment at the end of the hunt when everyone moves in for the kill. At the moment when his act reaches completion, he is also the deer brought to bay by Diana."[5] In order to understand what is at stake in Lacan's version of this *amor fati*, we need to appreciate that for him before anything else the term *jouissance* indicates the state of oceanic bliss obtaining between infant and Mother prior to the former's insertion in an imaginary/symbolic matrix, a state that then becomes, on the other side of that insertion, the impossible object of unconscious fantasy. For Lacan the fatal dimension in this arrangement consists in the fact that, were *jouissance*, on the other side of the subject's imaginary/symbolic incorporation, ever to slip from the order of unconscious fantasy into the order of lived reality, the result would prove no less lethal than in the deadly game described by Bruno. For the primitive encounter with the Other that *jouissance* implies involves nothing less than the dissolution of the subject's capacity for auto-affection, such capacity having been swallowed, Jonah like, by the desire of the (M)Other. Lacan uses the phrase "desire of the Mother" [*désir de la mere*] in an almost neologistic sense, allowing the ambivalence of the genitive to suggest the transgression of the boundary separating infant and mother. In his seventeenth seminar, *L'envers de la psychoanalyse*, he stresses the cannibalistic implications of this trangression. As he puts it: "Her [the mother's] desire is not something you can bear easily, as if it were a matter of indifference to you. It also leads to problems. The mother is a big crocodile, and you find yourself in her mouth. You never know what may set her off suddenly, making those jaws clamp down. That is the mother's desire."[6]

If this were not bad enough, the catastrophe that *jouissance* portends has a dialectical obverse, for should something of this slippage fail to occur, that is, should the infant succeed entirely in eluding the "clamping jaws" of the mother's *jouissance*, then the subject that this infant must come to be will find itself condemned to a life bereft of that relation to others we call love. Our dealings with *jouissance* therefore imply a kind of Sophie's Choice: our being—which is always, for Lacan, the being of the *jouissance* that is our primitive link to the (M)Other—or our meaning. It is in response to this false choice that sublimation, with that admixture of pleasure and frustration it implies, acquires both its efficacy and

interest. For, according to Lacan, sublimation affords the subject means by which to at once enjoy its unconscious Thing and to survive that enjoyment—albeit on this condition: that it only ever enjoy the Thing *as lost*. Let us look a little more closely at how all this works, so as then to shed light on its implications for any thinking of the time of the miracle.

In the section of "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis" immediately following the one in which he invokes *Vorlust* as the primitive schema for sublimation, Lacan goes on to suggest that this basic schema finds a more culturally complex expression in the products of artists and poets. The psychic motivations generative of these products are, according to Lacan, at play long before the distinction between egoic and erotic aims has become a meaningful one. He then offers as illustrations of the illeistic "work" at stake in such sublimation both the development of anamorphic technique in early modern painting and the literary and social codes that emerge with the poetry of the *troubars* and their *Minnesanger* and *Stilnovist* successors.

Even judged by Lacanian standards, the discussion of anamorphosis is both cryptic and tendentious.[7] I will not engage its various enigmas here. Suffice it for our purposes to note that anamorphic technique represents for Lacan the operation of a certain mirror function, albeit one distinct from the function described in his lecture on "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I" (1949), where the mirror serves as support for imaginary *meconnaisance*. Says Lacan: "The mirror may on occasion imply the mechanisms of narcissism, and especially the dimunition of destruction or aggression that we will encounter subsequently. But it also fulfils another role, that of limit. It is that which cannot be crossed. And the only organization in which it can be thought to participate is that of the inaccessibility of the object."[8]

Lacan goes on to associate two motifs from the literature of courtly love with this "limit" that insures "the inaccessibility of the object." The first is that of the *lauzengier*, the jealous rival who is among the narrative devices that serve to delay the hero's access to his amorous goal. The second motif, which Lacan gleans from the poetry of Guillaume de Poitiers, is that of the *Senhal* or secret name shared between amorous intimates. It too is linked to an effect of frustration or delay, albeit in a more complicated way, since the sufferer submits voluntarily to the ascetic regimen that the sharing of this name implies. As Lacan explains, the bearer of this secret name assumes the status of an intermediary who by turns permits and bars access to the object of the lover's desire, so that "an artificial and cunning organization of the signifier… lays down … the meaning we must attribute to the negotiation of the detour in the psychic economy."[9] This "meaning," which is none other than the meaning of sublimation itself, concerns not merely the "commerce" between pleasure and reality principles, but more crucially the isolation of the *Ding* that is the impossible object of *jouissance*, a Thing whose genesis first Freud and then Lacan associate with the problem of the *Nebenmensch* or neighbour:

> What is for us much more important than the reference to the neighbour, who is supposedly the Lady whom Guillaume de Poitiers occasionally played naughty games with, is the relationship between the expression just referred to and the one that Freud uses in connection with the first establishment of the Thing, with its psychological genesis, namely the *Nebenmensch*. And he designated thereby the very place that from the point of view of the development of Christianity, was to be occupied by the apotheosis of the neighbour.[10]

It is in the context of describing these two tropes of courtly love, *lauzengier* and *senhal*, that Lacan first invokes the Freudian theory of *Vorlust*, remarking that: "The techniques involved in courtly love ... are techniques of holding back, of suspension, of *amor interruptus*."[11] As we have observed, it is by means of this "valorization of the preliminary stages of the act of love" that the subject learns to enjoy its frustration, making of it the paradoxical object of its aim. This lesson then comes to provide the basis for the whole spectrum of cultural undertakings (art, religion, politics) that psychoanalysis associates with the term sublimation. Having said that, Freud and Lacan theorize this second order enjoyment in quite distinct ways. In order to see how Lacan transforms the orthodox Freudian view concerning sublimation, it is important to appreciate the difference between his own interpretation of frustration (*Versagung*) and Freud's.

Freud uses the term *Versagung* in his "Types of Onset of Neurosis" (1912), where it is described as the most general precondition of neurosis. In Freud's case, this frustration is thought to find its typical cause in merely external factors:

> The most obvious, the most easily discoverable and the most intelligible precipitating cause of an onset of neurosis is to be seen in the external factor which may be described in general terms as frustration [*Versagung*]. The subject was healthy so long as his need for love was satisfied by a real object in the external world; he becomes neurotic as soon as this object is withdrawn from him without a substitute taking its place.[12]

Lacan, on the other hand, drawing on the etymology of the term, links it to a "refusal" that results not from the lack of a real object, but rather from the relationship that the subject assumes with itself as a subject of desire. Something about the desire of the subject, which is its dependency on the signifier, constrains it to reject or refuse itself: "It is apparent that this *Versagung*, which is untranslatable, is possible only in the sense of a *sagen*, understood not simply as an act of communication but as the emergence as such of the signifier insofar as it allows the subject to refuse itself."[13]

This refusal corresponds to the Sophie's Choice described above. Either the subject must refuse the passage of its being into the order of significance—at the expense of its sanity—or it must accept that passage—at the expense of its enjoyment. The first instance, which corresponds to the Lacanian understanding

of psychosis, consists in a refusal of the self-refusal at stake in *Versagung*, a rejection of the Father's Phallic Word as an acceptable substitute for the Desire of the Mother. The second instance, which corresponds to the Lacanian understanding of neurosis, consists in accepting, however partially or imperfectly, the Phallic substitute, and thereby refusing or betraying the self whose earliest desire is not for the Phallus but for the desire of the Mother. With some qualifications, we could perhaps articulate this opposition in the terms favoured by Hegel in his "Introduction" to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (an articulation Lacan indeed seems to invite in certain of his writings): the first instance corresponds to that of the Master who does not defer enjoyment in symbolic labour but who, risking death, immediately enjoys; the second corresponds to that of the bondsman who, at once averting the risk of death and eschewing the promise of immediate enjoyment, goes to work on behalf of the Master.[14]

The frustration at stake in sublimation conforms to neither of these alternatives. The artist, the poet, the refined lover—none of these types can be said to betray its enjoyment through the choice of a substitute object. Nor can they be thought to betray their desire through a refusal of this substitute. Rather, they are distinguished by a practice that obliterates the distinction between desire and enjoyment, frustration and fulfillment, real thing and symbolic substitute, the point of such a practice being to insure that the subject will be "deprived of something real." As Giorgio Agamben, drawing obvious inspiration from Lacan's discussion of courtly love, remarks:

> ... a discourse that is aware that to hold "tenaciously to what is dead exacts the greatest effort" and that eschews "the magic power that transforms the negative into being" must necessarily guarantee the unappropriability of its object. This discourse behaves with respect to its object neither as the master who simply negates it in the act of enjoyment nor like the slave who works with it and transforms it in the deferral of desire: its operation is, rather, that of a refined love, a love that at once enjoys and defers, negates and affirms, accepts and repels; and whose reality is the unreality of the word "*qu'amas l'aura/e chatz la lebre ab lo bou/e nadi contra suberna*" [that heaps up the breeze/and hunts the hare and ox/ and swims against the tide].[15]

This middle way that sublimation charts between psychosis and neurosis, has for Lacan a fundamental bearing on the question of whether there can or cannot be an ethics of psychoanalysis. For, madness aside, sublimation is the only means by which the subject can communicate with the impossible Thing of its desire, fealty to this Thing being the sole imperative in Lacan's psychoanalytic ethics.[16]

On the basis of the above discussion, Lacan's contribution to the psychoanalytic theory of *Vorlust* may be thought to be twofold. First, he reveals that an element of frustration vitiates the pleasure that Freud associates with *Vorlust*. Second, he reads the subject's capacity to actively sublimate this frustration, transforming it into a

second order pleasure, as testament to both an ability and a need on the part of desiring subjects to keep faith, via the intercession of some artificial contrivance, with an order of experience more primitive than the experience of self-affection, an order encapsulated in Arthur Rimbaud's gnomic assertion that I is another.[17] From this follows both Lacan's insistence that the origin of these sublimatory acts lies in a region anterior to the ego aims and his insistence on their refractory relation to the demands of the pleasure principle.

Now according to a paradox that arguably describes the very law of genius, with its attendant eureka effects, this fealty to pre-egoic experience associated with the sublimations of love and art implies a derailment of our capacity to translate intentions into acts, a derailment for which poet and lover must, herein lies the paradox, make methodical provisions. The spirit of this method is captured in Picasso's quip, quoted by the artist's family doctor, none other than Lacan, to the effect that the artist does not seek, he finds—but the epiphanic implications of this finding are perhaps more vividly conveyed by the contemporary theologian Jean-Luc Marion when he remarks:

> Like Christ, the painter ... gives himself without ever knowing if he will lose himself or be saved .... The whole mastery consists in ultimately letting the unseen event burst into the visible by surprise, unpredictably. The instant when the unseen appears ... coincides precisely with its complete emancipation from its guardian, its coach, its smuggler—the painter. If the painting were to remain obedient to its painter ... it would immediately lose its glory as the one miraculously saved from the unseen.[18]

It is apparently at the margins of self-possession, in a region where the stable lineaments of both our motor coordinated corporeal imago and our reflective mastery over our thoughts and fantasies begin to tremble—it is apparently in just that zone of mystical indetermination that we encounter the Thing that both the refined lover's caress and the painter's gesture pursue.

It is interesting in this light to observe that while Lacan's near contemporary, the phenomenological philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, does not speak of *Vorlust*, he does describe the amorous caress, and when he does so he situates it in that same infantile domain of anonymous experience as Lacan situates his *jouissance*. Says Levinas:

> The carress aims neither at a person or a thing. It loses itself in a being that dissipates as though into an impersonal dream without will and even without resistance, a passivity, an already animal or infantile anonymity, already entirely at death ... The tender designates a way, the way of remaining in the no-man's between being and not-yet-being. A way that does not even signal itself as a signification, that in no way shines forth, that is extinguished and swoons, essential frailty of the beloved produced as vulnerable and as mortal.[19]

Notwithstanding their common reference to an experience earlier than that of auto-affection, however, the stratagems of Lacan's amorous "player" ought not to be confused with that self-annihilating tenderness Levinas associates with the lover's caress. This difference may serve, moreover, as a synecdoche of the larger differences separating Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis from the ethical preoccupations of Levinas. For the thought of the former has, in the end, a pragmatic thrust. It undertakes to identify those stratagems that the subject has employed heretofore in its negotiations with the Other and to replace them with new stratagems capable of transforming unconscious suffering into self-knowledge, if not invariably happiness. Another way of saying this is to say that in Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis the analyst's obsession with the Other is checked by art, a healing art that, by transferring and thereby transforming those identifications which cause the subject suffering, releases that subject to new affective possibilities. The wager implicit in every such art is that self-loss, provided that it is not total, may prove the preliminary to a higher state of self-mastery. That is to say that the subject surrenders its will to forces whose alterity it thematizes as Other, but with a confidence that, in conformity with the precepts that determined its initial calculations, this outlay will be returned with interest.[20] It is precisely this mastery that the ethical philosophy of Levinas would want to contest, not so as to deny the need for worldly self-assertion, but rather so as to acknowledge that an experience of absolute passivity before the Other is both the origin of and condition for such assertion, an acknowledgement he then sees as an essential preliminary to any judgment concerning the ethical legitimacy and appropriate limits of our actions. Hence, for Levinas, if there is to be ethics at all, it must imply a vector of incident that irreparably pierces that vicious relay in which self-loss and self-mastery perform their interminable chiasmus. Enter the time of the miracle.[21]

It would seem that, at the end of the day, for Lacan as for Freud, *Vorlust* offers a lesson in civics, conferring on us the socially essential knowledge that sublimated satisfactions, though relatively reliable, take time to prepare, while at the same time assuring us that the admittedly uncomfortable interim is not without psychic rewards. The miracle would communicate a much more unruly truth, much more difficult to operationalize in our practical conduct. For with its appearance we encounter the radical withdrawal of that *cursus naturae solitus* on whose credit alone the ego is able to economize its relationship to enjoyment. But there is more, for not only does the miracle teach us that the natural or expected course of things is at every moment subject to suspension, that tomorrow, should God will it, two plus two may equal turd, not only this, it also teaches that only this radical annihilation of ontological guarantees can give chance a chance and so save us from our egos, offering us something better than the objects of our pleasure, something at once soteriological and catastrophic. In the time of the miracle our expectations and associated desires are not gratified, they are outstripped. We are not sated, we are bedazzled, and this bedazzlement does violence to our sense of self-assurance.

The "golden-mouthed" saint, John Chrysostom, fourth-century deacon of the church at Antioch, alludes to this violence of the epiphanic experience when he describes "the *blow* of astonishment" that accompanied his supernatural vision of God's providential economy [*Oikonomia*].[22] In a similar vein, in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* [V. III.100], Paulina calls on her pseudo-miracle to "*Strike* all who look upon with marvel."[23]

Simultaneously drawing on and laying aside this ego-annihilating force to which both Chrysostrum and Shakespeare allude, the *Vor* of *Vorlust* suggests that there are adequate preliminaries to the attainment of satisfaction, preliminaries that may be performed either in the perfunctory manner recommended by Freud, or with a view to their ever more exquisite attenuation, as in the Gallic *mode* advocated by both Guillaume de Poitiers and Jacques Lacan. In either case, it is a matter of making ready for the arrival of that enjoyment that links us to the Other. In the case of the miracle, which has its genesis not in my will but the Will of this Other, there is no making ready but only ever the event of astonished surrender to what arrives, and with it, exposure to the Other's inscrutable designs on our desire.

Speaking of this exposure, Levinas' friend, Maurice Blanchot, having only just invoked Simone Weil's claim that "there is no grandeur except in gentleness," goes on to identify this gentleness with a radical abandonment of art or technique, even and especially that technique associated with the practice of psychoanalysis.

> *Macht* is the means, the machine, the functioning of the possible. The delirious and desiring machine tries, in vain, to make dysfunction function. In vain, for un-power is not delirious; it has always departed from the groove, and is always already derailed; it belongs to the outside ... The disaster always holds mastery at a distance. I wish (for example) for a psychoanalyst to whom a sign would come, from the disaster.[24]

"From the disaster," perhaps, but from a disaster whose other face is the miracle. Here it is worth noting that it is precisely in their recourse to art or technique—in this case an art of sorcery—that Moses and Aaron betray the miracle that God had called on them to perform by the waters of Meribah. In the biblical passage in which this betrayal is recounted (*Book of Numbers*, chapter 20), we are told that Moses, having been instructed by God to perform the miracle of drawing water from a stone by merely verbal means, proceeds to buttress his recitation of the prescribed verbal formula with the gesture of smiting the stone with his staff, a gesture apparently intended to convey magical potency. As Eric Santner observes, Franz Rosenzwieg could be thought to clarify the nature of this betrayal when, in his *Star of Redemption*, he distinguishes between prophecy (which he equates with genuine attestation of the miracle) and the magical arts. Says Rosenzwieg:

> The magician turns on the world in active intervention. ... He attacks God's providence and seeks by audacity, guile, or coercion to extort from it what is unforeseen and unforeseeable

> by it, what is willed by his own will. The prophet, on the other hand, unveils, as he foresees it, what is willed by providence. What would be sorcery in the hands of the magician becomes portent in the mouth of the prophet. And by pronouncing the portent, the prophet proves the dominion of providence which the magician denies. He proves it, for how would it be possible to foresee the future if it were not "provided"? And therefore it is incumbent to outdo the heathen miracle, to supplant its spell, which carries out the command of man's own might, with the portent that demonstrates God's providence.[25]

At the beginning of "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis," Lacan calls on the work of art to "operate its miracle once more," a miracle he places in opposition to the reigning norms of politics and systematic thought. However, *pace* Lacan, Levinas, Blanchot, and Rosenzwieg all give us grounds for resisting any facile association of the work of art with that un-working peculiar to both the disaster and the miracle. Such resistance is apparent in Levinas' question concerning whether that "disinterestedness" Kant identifies as the "ethical condition" of the aesthetic is not "immediately compromised by the joys of the beautiful, which engross and alienate the generosity that has made these joys possible."[26] Moreover, the wedge that this question threatens to drive between aesthetic and ethical orders is reinforced by the distinction, pervasive in Levinas' work, between the figure (as plastic form) and the Face (as expressive *informe*). As Francois Poirié observes, for Levinas an ethical violence is implicit in every attempt to "transform faces into objective and plastic forms, into visible but defaced figures."[27] Levinas' cautions are provocative, but perhaps they should be leavened with the iconological perspective of another contemporary French philosopher and theologian, Jean-Luc Marion. Translating the Levinasian distinction between figure and face into a distinction between idol and icon, Marion insists on the original and from any human perspective insuperable imbrication of these apparently antithetical terms. For him, figure and face, idol and icon represent distinct modalities of a single event in which the invisible invades the order of the visible. It is from the perspective of this invasion that we must understand the analogy that Marion, in the passage cited earlier, draws between the unforeseen event that the authentic act of painting represents and the parousial event of Christic *kenosis*.

If the work of art makes possible for Marion that unforeseen event in which the invisible encroaches on the visible, lifting our gaze from the figure to the Face, then the miracle, whose paradigm is for Marion the Eucharistic gift of Christic incarnation, represents the event in which a possibility in excess of what is possible from the standpoint of "sufficient reason" nevertheless exerts a certain pressure on the course of ordinate events. On this view, the work of art, with that redemption of unredeemed experience that it promises, inclines toward the time of the miracle, without ever entirely coinciding with it. But perhaps we should leave the final word to an artist, one of the greatest of the century that has just passed. In what

amounts to a kind of *ars poetica*, Robert Musil describes this eternally imminent intersection of divine will and human art in the following terms:

> One might define the meaning of the possible as the faculty of thinking all that *might be* just as much as what is.... The implications of such a creative disposition are huge.... The possible consists of much more than the dreams of neurasthenics; it also involves the still dormant plans of God. A possible event or truth is not just the real event of truth minus the "reality"; rather it signals something very divine, a flame, a burning, a will to construct a utopia which, far from fearing reality, treats it as simply a perpetual task and invention. The earth is not so spent, after all, and never has it seemed so fascinating.[28]

Here the human "will to construct" opens onto "something very divine, a flame, a burning"; here our "perpetual task and invention" approaches asymptotically "the still dormant plans of God"; here art and technique call out to the miracle as the time of the Other's arrival.

Of Miracles and Modernity

In the same section of *The Star of Redemption* quoted above, "On the Possibility of Experiencing the Miracle," Rosenzwieg observes the barely veiled hostility shown by modern theology to the concept of the miracle, an hostility that for Rosenzwieg indicates the extent to which the discipline has been penetrated by an ethos of secularism:

> If miracle really is the favorite child of belief, then its father has been neglecting his paternal duties for some time. For at least a hundred years the child has been nothing but a source

> of embarrassment for the nurse which he had ordered for it—to theology. She would gladly be rid of it if only a degree of consideration for the father had not forbidden it during his lifetime. But time solves all problems. The old man cannot live forever. And thereupon the nurse will know what she must do with this poor little worm that can neither live nor die under its own power; she has already made preparations.[29]

According to Rosenzweig the withering of this once majestic theologeme to a "poor little worm" is in no small part a function of modernity's incapacity to appreciate the fundamentally semiotic status of the event "miracle" names. As he puts it: "The miracle is substantially a sign" [*Das Wunder ist wesenlin Zeichen*]. Modernity's indifference to this semiotic dimension of miraculous intervention is attested for Rosenzweig by its fixation on the sense of miracle as natural anomaly, at the expense of any attention to its reference to a promise first placed in the mouths of prophets: "For the consciousness of erstwhile humanity miracle was based on its having been predicted, not on its deviation from the course of nature as that had been fixed by natural law."[30]

Rosenzweig's observations concerning the fate of the miracle under conditions of modernity seem irrefutable. However, we should perhaps hesitate before drawing the conclusion that the concept of miracle, having lost its semiotic credentials, has relinquished altogether its hold on the modern imagination. On the contrary, a more careful scrutiny of the history of this concept reveals it—albeit in its new guise as deviation from the lawful course of nature—to be intimately linked to the founding gestures of intellectual modernity. Here a contrasting background may serve to bring modernity's relationship to the time of the miracle into bolder relief.

Questions concerning the miracle were relatively foreign to the Greek world view. Greek natural theology was deeply biased in favour of what, in the existing order of things, tends toward invariance. Excepting a few Atomist renegades, from Parmenides to Plotinus the monstrosity, the accident, the exception—and so by implication the miracle—are less objects of study than of scandal, as much to be explained away as to be explained. Aristotle's philosophy of nature may serve as a case in point. Whereas for us the term physics arguably means nothing other than the rigorous study of contingent events, for Aristotle physics was the discovery of a necessity that is at once intellectual—it concerns the formal essences and species—and material—it concerns the binding together of distinct concrete things within a spatial plenum as well as the combining of distinct events within a temporal continuum. On Aristotle's thinking the concept of divinity is therefore at its most epistemologically potent when acting along the channels of this necessity, through rather than upon the stuff of its creation.[31] If Aristotle places great emphasis on teleology in both his physics and his metaphysics, it is because it represents for him the science by which the action of God's Will is identified with those processes through which the cosmos pursues its own perfection, an

identification that militates against any promotion of natural anomalies or exceptions to the status of signs of Divine Providence. Hence, notwithstanding the epistemological dignity that Aristotle was willing to confer on miracle's affective corollary, the experience of wonder, there is really no place for miracles in his philosophy—God, by all means, but not miracles.

If the question of effects that are in abeyance of their causes, special effects as they are called in the movie business, comes in for much more serious treatment in the Middle Ages than in antiquity, the ontological groundwork for this treatment was already laid with the criticisms of Greek immanentism that issued from all three monotheisms. Both the Qur'an and the Torah reserve for God alone the constancy that Aristotle saw in all natural kinds. In these texts, nature's light is commanded into being by God's creative word. It is from the perspective of this theological voluntarism that we must interpret the passage from the Qur'an (28:88; cf. 55:27) that reads: "All things perish except his Face," and which glossators rendered as "all things but God are contingent; only He is a Necessary Being."[32] On this account, the species are not eternal, still less the diurnal cycles, the elevation of the heavens, or the separation of the elements. All these are the *ex nihilo*—and therefore, from every naturalist perspective, arbitrary—creations of an Absolute Will.

The implications of this theological voluntarism really start to reveal themselves in the eleventh century, in response to the then recent vogue of employing logic in theological discussion. Gregory VII's ally, Petrus Damiani, engaged in vigorous debate over whether God could restore maidenhead *post ruinam*. A little later, Maimonides conveys what was more or less party line when he avers that: "He (God) has the power to change it [nature] completely, or to add or subtract the one or the other nature from its nature ... but his Wisdom decreed to actualize every creature as it is actualized ... and not to change its nature."[33]

By the second half of the thirteenth century, however, these arguments, under pressure of Scholastic theology's more complete absorption of Aristotelian logic, were showing signs of strain. A signal event was the set of Condemnations authored by the Bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, in 1277. These concerned the restrictions on God's Absolute Will and Power that sometimes ensued from the theological employment of Aristotelian novelties. The Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas, mindful of the dangers to which Tempier points, followed an already well-established line of thought in distinguishing between God's Absolute Power [*Potentia Dei Absoluta*], which he conceived as being limited only by the law of logical non-contradiction, and God's Ordinate Power [*Potentia Dei Ordinata*], meaning God's power insofar as it consents to being brought into conformity with the laws of physical mechanism.[34] In coordinating the two, Aquinas gives us a variation on Maimonides' argument that while God can do anything, His wisdom instructs Him to sustain His creation in conformity with the laws that have governed heretofore.[35] In the end, Leibniz says much the same with his principle of sufficient reason.

What concerned those philosophers who, like Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, contested Aquinas' conception of the relationship between God's Absolute and Ordinate Powers, was the implication that God's power could be in any way inordinate. Scotus argues that the terms "absolute" and "ordinate" signify not distinct powers, but distinct aspects of a same power. He further argues that the extension of the former is greater than that of the latter only in those instances where power is restricted. In the case of absolute power, the extension of both aspects coincide. Scotus employs a juristic analogy to make his point. If I, the mere subject of an Emperor, should steal a horse, then my act, though possible, is inordinate. Not so in the case of the Emperor Himself, who *a priori* cannot be a horse thief, or indeed any kind of thief, since what belongs to his subjects belongs to them only by reason of having first belonged, if only virtually, to Him. What is new in this is less the link between divine and mundane power than the shift from an organic to a covenantal, and so legalistic, conception of that link. The voluntarist conception of both heavenly and mundane powers that this covenantal interpretation of the relation between *Potentia Absoluta* and *Potentia Ordinata* signals, and which is only amplified in Ockham's treatment of this same relation, exercises a significant influence on political theory from the end of the fourteenth century to the end of the seventeenth. In the twentieth century, it survives in Carl Schmitt's theory of the role of the exception in the establishment of legal norms, a role that Schmitt explicitly compares to the role played by the miracle in Christian eschatology.[36]

As for Ockham, he follows Scotus in affirming that when applied to God the terms ordinate and absolute should not be understood as signifying distinct powers but rather related aspects of a same power. The first question of his famous "Sixth Quodlibet" begins: "I claim that God is able to do certain things by his ordained power and certain things by his absolute power. This distinction should not be understood to mean that in God there are really two powers, one of which is ordained and the other of which is absolute. For with respect to things outside himself there is in God a single power, which in every way is God himself."[37] However, Ockham pushes further than do either Aquinas or Scotus God's capacity to act in ways that contradict the laws of physical, if not logical, possibility. If Scotus acknowledges God's capacity to act in contravention of the *communis cursus naturae*, Ockham turns that contravention into a normative state of affairs and with that gesture evacuates the mediating orders of essences and intelligible species thanks to which the cognition of singulars was, in Aquinas as in Aristotle, linked to concrete singulars. With Ockham, therefore, cognition ceases to be an adequation, via the mediation of sensible and intelligible species, of the intellect to the form of existing things (*adequatio rei ad intellectum*). Rather, objects are now seen to cause in us, efficiently rather than formally, the intuitive notions (*notitia intuitiva*) that then serve as terms of propositions. Hence forms are reduced to either qualities or relations between singulars. God creates only really existing things, with reality here being determined as irreducibility to any mediating complex of formal relations.

The litmus test for such irreducibility is according to Ockham a thing's capacity to exist in the absence of any other really existing thing. From this comes his principle of annihilation, which he states in Question Six of his "Sixth Quodlibet" as follows "every absolute thing that is distinct in place and subject from another absolute thing can by God's power exist when that other absolute thing is destroyed."[38] This method of isolating a thing through hypothetical destruction of its intelligible and sensible contexts was necessary to insure the world's contingency, thereby releasing God from any but a voluntary conformity to nature's laws. The effect of this evacuation of secondary causes was to place a new emphasis on the exception to the natural course of affairs, with the result that the miracle becomes the very type of creation. As Blumenberg puts it in his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*:

> Ockham may say explicitly that he asserts only *supernaturaliter loquendo* [supernaturally speaking] the possibility of the miracle of the production of ideas without objects, of the *cognitio intuitiva* [observational knowledge] of a non-existent object ... but nevertheless the important thing is not this exceptionalness, without which Christian Scholasticism simply could not have got along with its theological presuppositions, but rather the systematic penetration of such theses and considerations. It is only from this point of view that it becomes possible to characterize nominalism as the system of breaches of system, as the shift of interest and accent onto the miracle, the paradigmatic reduction of the bindingness of nature. It is not the power that can give rise to the world but the power that can give rise to something other than this world that occupies the speculative interest.[39]

The epistemological primacy that Ockham gives to direct intuition of concrete singular things, and the ensuing collapse of the complex network of secondary causes, fundamentally alters the conception of God's Absolute Power. The test case for that power now becomes God's capacity to produce an intuitive cognition in the absence of any extra mental object that might be thought to have caused it efficiently. This is the problem of the *notitia intuitiva de rebus non existentibus* that Ockham introduces in Question Six.[40] What is novel here is not the emphasis on the immediacy of first causes; that is already to be found in Scotus. The novelty here rather consists in recognizing that this efficiency might forgo not merely the mediating order of secondary causes, but also the mediacy of concrete singulars, so as thereby to work directly on the subject's passive intellect. Henceforth God becomes a Grand Illusionist—the potential author of phantasms and spectral delusions having no correspondence to objects in the world. Ockham places only one limit on the extension of this capacity to annihilate the world's reliability through immediate causation of an intuitive cognition. God may replace any other cause; He cannot replace Himself.

Another nominalist, Jean de Mirecourt, clearly sensed the dangers to both epistemological and moral autonomy Ockham's *notitia intuitiva de rebus non existentibus*

implies. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, he objects that were God able to produce in His subject acts of perception resulting in error, He could also cause this subject to hate not only his neighbour but God Himself. To this Ockham responds with his own vindication of moral autonomy in the face of the exorbitant control over human experience he has awarded his voluntarist deity: God can create all manner of appearances without corresponding objects. What he cannot do, alongside replacing Himself, is to compel His subject to takes these appearances as the basis of actions for which that subject could then be held responsible.

With such considerations we are here very close to the *genius malignus* of Descartes' "Second Meditation," that radically unreliable deity for whom not even mathematical truths are binding (two plus two may, should God will it, equal five). What Descartes does, which makes all the difference, is to take Ockham's limit case for God's capacity to forgo the mediation of those secondary causes that produce reliability in the world and transform that special case into a normative state of epistemological affairs. Whereas for Scotus purely intuitive cognition is still reserved for the *visio beatifica* of angels or of future life, for Descartes, who develops the voluntarist implications already implicit in Ockham's proto-phenomenological interpretation of the immediacy of God's power to its effects, intuitive cognition in the absence of any correlative object in the extended world becomes an everyday affair. Hence, whereas Ockham's principle of annihilation remains a merely negative principle, capable of describing what a thing is not, in Descartes it becomes a method for positive construction, a method whose founding gesture is the hypothesis of radical doubt that Descartes articulates in his "Second Meditation" and thanks to which he arrives at the certainty of his cogito. What opens the way to this constructive transformation of Ockham's negative principle is a changed conception of what an intuition is. Descartes no longer conceives of intuitive cognition as owing to the presence of extra-mental things; rather, for him, intuitive cognition is the immediate apprehension of concepts and images that are immanent in and spontaneously produced by the structure of cognition itself. It is well known what a momentous influence this transformation had upon the epistemological commitments of modernity. Less well known—or, at any rate, less frequently remembered—is the fact that this transformation involves generalizing to all of experience that same relation of cause to effect that both Scotus and Ockham had associated with the miraculous event in their respective explorations of the limits of God's power.

How have the epistemological developments we have just traced through the thoughts of Scotus, Ockham, and Descartes influenced the conception of the relationship between knowledge and experience in twentieth and post-twentieth century thought? And to what extent has the event structure associated with the time of the miracle continued to be conceived as a dimension of that relationship? To be sure, a place to begin to formulate a response to these questions is phenomenology. The first significant figure in this philosophical movement, Edmund Husserl,

explicitly conceives of its founding gesture as a repetition of that suspension [*epoche*] of worldly relations to which Descartes subjects his *cogito* in the Second Meditation. More precisely, what Husserl borrows from Descartes' application of Ockham's "principle of annihilation" to the *res cogitans* is the reversal according to which substance and subject are identified this side of the whole constellation of relationships that comprise worldliness. Hence, in the first of his *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl remarks: "Following Descartes, we make the great reversal that, if made in the right manner, leads to transcendental subjectivity; the turn to the *ego cogito* as the ultimate and apodictically certain basis for judgments, the basis on which any radical philosophy must be grounded."[41]

Having established this affinity with the Cartesian legacy, Husserl goes on to criticize Descartes for not fully undertaking this "reversal," an undertaking that involves, on Husserl's view, radically distinguishing the transcendental subjectivity that emerges from this suspension of worldly relations from any association with empirical individuals, or even, indeed, from the general concept of the psychological individual:

> The Ego, with his ego-life, who necessarily remains for me, by virtue of such *epoche*, is not a piece of the world; and if he says, "I exist, *ego cogito*," that no longer signifies, "I, this man, exist." ... The psychic life that psychology talks about has in fact always been, and still is, meant as psychic life in the world ... But phenomenological *epoche* ... inhibits acceptance of the Objective world as existent, and thereby excludes this world completely from the field of judgment ... The Objective world, the world that exists for me, that always has and always will exist for me, the only world that can ever exist for me, this world, with all its Objects, derives its whole sense and its existential status ... from me as a Transcendental Ego, the ego who comes to the fore only with the transcendental-phenomenological *epoche*.[42]

This version of the *epoche*, which follows Descartes' in applying "the principle of annihilation" to the thing that thinks, so as to release it from its worldly relations, represents the first in the five steps that comprise Husserl's phenomenological method. The other four are the "reduction" (in which attention is turned back to the things revealed in the intentional life of consciousness); the "free variation" (in which attention to the entire spectrum of approaches to the object, actual or virtual, real or imaginary, reveals the invariant structure of the object); the "intuition" of the essence corresponding to this invariant structure (as a meaning immanent to the structure of consciousness); and the "description" (by which these intuited essences are oriented toward the *telos* of Absolute Reason).

If Husserl's method of experiential bracketing, reduction, variation, intuition, and description implies a suspension of the dogmatic commitments associated with institutionalized religion (since these commitments transgress the intentional framework that defines transcendental subjectivity), it is nevertheless also the case

both that Husserl likens the change of perspective ignited by his *epoche* to a "religious conversion" and that he identifies the *telos* toward which this conversion inclines as God, a God he then understands in Kantian fashion, that is, as the ontological vanishing point, situated at infinity, toward which the various lines of intentional consciousness advance: "In myself, passing through the other selves with whom I find myself tied, all the ways lead to the same pole, God, who transcends both man and the world."[43]

At least part of the interest of Husserl's musings on the relationship between the methodological commitments of phenomenology and religious faith would be the constitutive role that both give to an intrapsychical Other in guaranteeing the intentional framework in which human beings operate. It would then be a question of how, if at all, this role figures in the preservation of that absolute or unrestricted possibility that becomes the ideal Object for consciousness on the other side of the bracketing of worldly relations, an exorbitant possibility whose origins we have already observed in Ockham's proto-phenomenological extension of the evacuation of secondary causes.

In recent history, at least two thinkers, Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida, have attempted to tease out the theological strands of Husserl's thought so as to weave them into contemporary philosophical perspectives. In both cases, they settle on Husserl's treatment of "intuition" as the locus for their respective re-castings of the phenomenological project. In both cases as well, the problem they settle on is one which Husserl himself was to take up in his later writings, the problem of the passive synthesis. Interestingly, however, Marion and Derrida arrive at symmetrically opposed criticisms of Husserl's treatment of this problem. What is important for present purposes is that these symmetrical criticisms both converge upon that event structure I have been designating with the term "miracle." In the case of Marion, this event structure is implicit in the appeal to a "saturated phenomenon," one which Marion describes as an effect in abeyance of any natural cause. As for Derrida, the time of the miracle is implicit in his messianic conception of the future as the possibility of the impossible, the unforeseen arrival of an eventuality conceived as something other than merely an empirical modification of the present. With that in mind, let us examine their respective responses to the Husserlian legacy in turn.

Marion draws fundamental inspiration not only from Husserl's phenomenology, but also from its Heideggerian critique. However, like Levinas before him, Marion is critical of what he describes as the primacy given to the egological perspective not only in Husserl's account of the Transcendental Ego, but even still in Heidegger's existential recasting of that Ego as *Dasein* (and this notwithstanding Heidegger's avowed ambition to restore the worldliness of the Transcendental Ego through a reversal of the priority that Husserl follows Descartes in awarding to *cogito* over *sum* in the formula *cogito ergo sum*). Whereas in Levinas the criticism of this dimension of phenomenological thinking leads in the direction of an ethics of

the Other in which the Transcendental Ego's 'I am" is already heard as "Here I am," the dative response to an anterior command, in the case of Marion, this criticism leads in the direction of a renewal of the phenomenological project in which the *epoche* would be applied not to the ego, either as the "I" of knowledge or of experience, but rather to the phenomenon itself, whose giveness is set free not merely from any metaphysical teleology of cause and effect, but even indeed from any consciousness for which it may be thought to appear. Marion's phenomenology of "giveness" treats phenomena neither as effects to be traced back to initiating causes, nor as objects of the intentional acts of a Transcendental Ego. Rather phenomena are for Marion pure effects, in a word—though Marion does not use this word—miracles: "The temporal privilege of the effect—it alone arises to and in the present, gives *itself*—implies that all knowledge begins by the event of the effect; for without the effect, there would be neither meaning nor necessity to inquiring after any cause whatsoever."[44]

Marion refers to this pure giveness of the thing, prior to any subject to or for whom it would be given, as apparition, a form of manifestation ontologically more primitive than what appears atomized by the human perceptual apparatus:

> What is at issue in phenomenology is no longer exactly what subjectivity apperceives by one or the other of its perceptive tools, but what apparition—through, despite, indeed *without* them—gives of itself and as the thing itself. The distinction between seeing, listening, and feeling (but also tasting and smelling) become decisive only when perception is glued to a decidedly subjective determination of its role, as what filters, interprets, and deforms the appearance of the apparition.[45]

Taking up a theme that was to emerge most explicitly in Husserl's later work, that of the passive synthesis, Marion insists that the ego's relationship to this apparition is, *pace* both Descartes and Kant, receptive rather than constructive:

> In contrast to the Carteisan and Kantian method, the phenomenological method, even when it constitutes phenomena, is limited to letting them manifest *themselves*. Constituting does not equal constructing or synthesizing, but rather giving-a-meaning, or more exactly, recognizing the meaning that the phenomenon itself gives from itself and to itself. Phenomenological method therefore claims to deploy a turn, which goes not simply from proving to showing, but from showing in the way that an ego makes an object evident to letting an apparition in an appearance show itself: a method that turns against itself and consists in this reversal itself—counter-method.[46]

Like Marion's, Derrida's approach to the problem of passive synthesis in Husserl's writings concerns the implications of such a synthesis for the claims of auto-constitution Husserl makes on behalf of the Transcendental Ego. Behind or before the forms of self-presence this constitution implies, Derrida glimpses an anonymous

experience whose anteriority to every egological initiative serves to polarize the constituting and constituted moments whose unity the Transcendental Ego putatively effects.

Beginning with his M.A. dissertation, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* (1953), Derrida's approach to Husserlian phenomenology was focused on the difficulties that ensue from this auto-divergence at the origin. In the second chapter of that work, Derrida offers an exegesis of the account of the Transcendental Ego's self-constitution to be found in the fourth of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. We begin to appreciate how global the stakes of this account are when we consider Husserl's remark that the phenomenology relating to the Transcendental Ego's self-constitution coincides with "the whole of phenomenology." Derrida's exegesis of this account begins by posing the question of how Husserl's claims on behalf of transcendental self-constitution are to be squared with his earlier insistence on the *a priori*, and therefore super-personal, status of philosophical knowledge. Derrida was by no means the first to pose this question. Before him, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Trân Duc Thao, Jean Cavailles, even Michel Foucault, had each in their different ways questioned Husserl's articulation of the relationship between transcendental and empirical aspects of the ego. What distinguishes Derrida from these other readers of Husserl is the fact that this question is in his case the source not of a break with, but rather a radical fealty to the transcendental impulse in Husserl's genetic phenomenology. So radical is this fealty that it prompts Derrida to place in question those moments when Husserl himself seems to concede to the empirico-existential objections of his critics. Here in this early text, as in the later work, Husserl's account of the genesis of the ideal objects of geometrical science serves as an important locus for Derrida's attempted clarification and extension of the transcendental impulse in Husserl's phenomenology. Referring to Husserl's still too empirical derivation of the geometrical object from pre- or proto-geometrical forms of intuition, Derrida argues that "the transcendental intentional analysis subsides into a surprising interpretation the poverty of which holds together in a somewhat derisory fashion all the inadequacies of a bold hypothesis of explanation, a muddled probablism," one whose effect is, on his argument, "to lock us in the domain of a purely empirical facticity, one that one wished precisely to suspend." But not only does Husserl on Derrida's account lapse into the very empiricism it is his intention to overcome, this empiricism is guided by an illegitimately instrumental rationale. For, as Derrida puts it: "Every detail in this curious account describes a peculiarly technical genesis."[47]

In this early work, Derrida's aim in pointing to these technico-empirical qualifications of Husserl's transcendental claims is not to counter them, be it in the existential manner of Heidegger or in the dialectical-materialist manner of Tran Duc Thao. Nor, at this early stage, is the ambition to deconstruct Husserl, as it would be in later texts. Here Derrida's ambition is rather to clarify Husserl's

most powerful insights by subjecting their transcendental ambitions to an operation of dialectical clarification and correction. Hence his insistence that "every reproach addressed to Husserlian essentialism in the name of an empirical or existential originarity or some anterior moment of genesis, in order to have sense, would imply an already constituted eidetic," an insistence that then authorizes him to assert that "a dialectical philosophy [represents] the sole possible philosophy of genesis," since "the sense of genesis is produced by a sense whose genesis is only accessible in its being, possible in its apparition, if one starts from the originality of sense." Hence, in Derrida's approach to Husserl (which anticipates his later approach to Hegel): "All the criticisms addressed to Husserl (those, notably, of Heidegger and of Trân Duc Thao, very different from each other, by the way) tend to a radical reversal which, though this is not seen, presupposes the set of problems defined and resolved by Husserl."[48]

Here, already, we can see the signal feature of Derrida's later engagement with philosophical tradition—the attempt to break radically with this tradition coincides with a certain hyperbolic fealty to its constitutive gestures, as if, by following the implications of these gestures to the very end, one might cause them to rebel against their sources. In *The Problem of Genesis*, this means taking the claims of the transcendental to the point where they place in question the metaphysics of presence that determines both the Transcendental Ego and its Ideal Objects:

> The originary and constituting present is thus absolute only in its continuity with a "non-present" that is at once constituted before it, through it, and in it. The originary synthesis is precisely one of constituted and constituting, of the present and the non-present, of oiriginary temporality and objective temporality. The temporality of immanent lived experience must be the absolute beginning of the appearance of time, but it appears to itself precisely as absolute beginning thanks to a "retention"; it inaugurates only in tradition; it creates only because it has a historical heritage. It seems then illegitimate to exclude right from the start of reflection any temporal; transcendence and any constituted unity of time. The act of exclusion cannot be pure; it is originally retentional.[49]

In the study of Husserl that follows *The Problem of Genesis, Introduction to "The Origin of Geometry,"* Derrida takes this question of "an originary and constituting present" coincident with a "non-present ... constituted before, through, and in it," as a question of writing, more precisely of *arche*-writing, of an mnemo-technical medium older than, always already constituted within, the "originary and constituting present." This mnemo-technical medium would represent a tertiary form of memory insinuated between the primary and secondary forms (retention and recollection respectively) whose difference on Husserl's account articulates the division between the living present and the accomplished past, between perception and memory.

Husserl is not unaware of this tertiary memory, which he calls image consciousness (*Bildswusstsein*). However, he opposes it to both retention and recollection,

arguing that it has no role to play in the constitution of temporal objects, neither in the retentional maintenance of the living present nor in the recollection of defunct moments in the past stream of consciousness. Now what interests Derrida about Husserl's "Origin of Geometry" is that it constitutes a lapse in this commitment to separating memory, in both its primary and secondary forms, from *Bildswusstsein*. For in this text, Husserl recognizes, however grudgingly and imperfectly, the essential role played by a certain kind of image, the graphic trace, in constituting the transcendence of those idealities that serve as the proper objects of geometrical science. On this account it is the consignment of sense to an inanimate trace that allows the retentional finitude of the "protogeometrician" to be exceeded in the direction of a collective tradition in pursuit of an infinite task of reason, a task the name of whose terminus is, as was observed above, God. This is to say that writing, heretofore conceived as an inessential adjunct to sense, is reconceived as an essential condition for the forms of ideality associated with geometrical science, and, indeed, for ideality in general.

Before the beginning that says "I," anterior to every egological initiative, sense will therefore already have emerged from the *arche*-inscriptional apparatus that Derrida associates with the term "tradition," a term which he employs to signify not this or that historically determinate tradition, but the structure of traditionality in general and as such. Preempting the *ego cogito*'s auto-affecting acts, this apparatus could be said to resurrect that monstrous offspring of late Scholastic speculation on God's miraculous powers, the deceiving genius of Descartes' "Second Meditation"—but with this difference: the subversion of epistemological and moral autonomy for which this genius represents a limit-case is here attributed to a de-personalized linguistic field. Clarifying the implications of his concept of *arche*-writing for that questioning of epistemological origins implicit in both Cartesian and Husserlian variations on the sceptical *epoche*, Derrida remarks:

> In connection with the general signification of the *epoche*, Jean Hyppolite invokes the possibility of a "subjectless transcendental field," one in which "the conditions of subjectivity would appear and where the subject would be constituted starting from the transcendental field." Writing, as the place of absolutely ideal objectivities and therefore of absolute Objectivity, certainly constitutes such a transcendental field. And likewise, to be sure, transcendental subjectivity can be fully announced and appear on the basis of this field or its possibility. Thus a transcendental field is one of the conditions of transcendental subjectivity.[50]

In his later writings, Derrida relates this *arche*-inscriptional interruption of egological origins not merely to a technical exigency constitutive of transcendence, but also to a faith or credit commitment to which seizes the speaking subject in a past earlier than and constitutive of every form of egological commitment. Here the problem of the passive synthesis, of an intuition earlier than the Transcendental

Ego's auto-affecting acts, is linked to a "transcendental machine of address" the immemoriality of whose operation on the subject's mnemo-perceptual faculties carries an implication that *to be* is always already *to inherit*, that is, to be subject to their faith or credit that binds us to the Other:

> Presupposed, at the origin of every address, come from the other at his address, the wager of some sworn promise cannot not, taking God immediately as witness, have already so to speak engendered God quasi-mechanically. *A priori* inevitable, God's *ex machina* descent could be seen to put on stage a transcendental machine of address. One would thus have begun by retrospectively laying down the right of absolute antecedence of a One who is not yet born. Taking God as witness, even when he is not named (as in the pledge of the most secular engagement), an oath cannot not produce, invoke or convoke God as already-there, unengendered and unengenderable.... And absent at its place. Everything begins with the presence of this absence. The unengendered thus engendered—this is the empty place.[51]

We have seen that both Marion and Derrida follow Husserl in working through the implications of Descartes application of Ockham's "principle of annihilation" to his *cogito*, with the result that they too are apt to generalize to all of experience epistemological conditions that Ockham, like Scotus before him, viewed as germane exclusively to those events where God elects to suspend the *communis cursus naturae*. Perhaps Walter Benjamin is right not merely politically, but epistemologically when he remarks that under conditions of modernity the exception is the rule.

Now in Marion's case this generalization of the exceptional circumstance results in a qualification of the priority that Husserl gives to the ego in favour of the "giveness" of a "saturated phenomenon" This phenomenon represents, on Marion's account, not an object, but an event, one whose incidence entails a reversal or suspension of the teleological priority of causes over effects. As Marion insists, viewed from the phenomenological priority awarded to giveness, the teleologically constituted conditions its constituting origin not retrospectively, but "in the beginning." For his part, Derrida does not so much contest Marion's insistence on the singularity of this event as he demands that this insistence be read in tandem with a countervailing insistence on an iteration that would structure the singular *ab origine*. In the absence of the tension produced by this repetition at the origin, neither the attestation of what has been nor the promise of what is to come would be possible:

> I promise truth and ask the other to believe the other that I am, there where I am the only one able to bear witness and where the order of proof or of intuition will never be reducible to or homogeneous with the elementary trust <*fiduciarité*>, the 'good faith' that is promised or demanded. The latter, to be sure, is never pure of all iterability nor of

> all technics, and hence of all calculability. For it promises its repetition from the very first instant. It is involved <*engagé*> in every address of the other. From the first instant it is co-extensive with this other and thus conditions every 'social bond', every questioning, all knowledge, performativity and every tele-technoscientific performance, including those of its forms that are most synthetic, artificial, prosthetic, calculable. The act of faith demanded in bearing witness exceeds, through its structure, all intuition and all proof, all knowledge. ('I swear that I am telling the truth, not necessarily the "objective truth," but the truth of what I believe to be the truth, I am telling you this truth, believe me, believe what I believe, there, where you will never be able to see nor know the irreplaceable yet universalizable, exemplary place from which I speak to you; perhaps my testimony is false, but I am sincere and in good faith, it is not false <as> testimony') .... Even the slightest testimony concerning the most plausible, ordinary or everyday thing cannot do otherwise: it must appeal to faith as would a miracle. The experience of disenchantment, however indubitable it is, is only one modality of this miraculous experience, the reactive and passing effect, in each of its historical determinations, of the testimonially miraculous. That one should be called upon to believe in testimony as in a miracle or 'extraordinary story'—this is what inscribes itself without hesitation in the very concept of bearing witness. And one should not be amazed to see examples of 'miracles' invading all the problematics of testimony, whether they are classical or not, critical or not. *Pure attestation*, if there is such a thing, pertains to the experience of faith and of the miracle. Implied in every 'social bond', however ordinary, it also renders itself indispensable to Science no less than to Philosophy and to Religion.[52]

In an era that has witnessed, in the very midst of that post-historical eternity of Sundays promised by the global extension of capitalist economics and techno-scientific rationality, a massive recrudescence of religiously sponsored malignity; in an era in which the time of the other's arrival appears always already absorbed into the now global extension of a spatial matrix: the grid, the network, the web; in an era in which "faith" is manufactured through the deployment of media designed for the precipitation of mass hypnosis and where "credit" has come to signify little more than a strategy for the unrestricted extension of appetites relating to a second order animality; in such an era, which has arguably been arriving forever, Marion's and Derrida's respective meditations on the time of the miracle assume a measure of interest, perhaps even urgency. At all events, they permit us to suspect—a suspicion at once delirious and sobering—that the detritus of anthropological self-assertion that now litters our planet, transforming it from a world into a heap, that these signs and traces of a collective desire gone awry are nothing but, to recall Lacan's words once more, "the reverse side of a message that is not even our own."

NOTES

1 Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on Sexuality [1905]," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953) 149-50. At a later point in this same work, Freud hints at the connection between *Vorlust* and sublimation that Lacan will bring out, observing how the fore-pleasure at stake in the amorous gaze already moves the instincts in the direction of those sublimations associated with the work of art. This involves, among other things, the erotic valorization of the body image as a whole.
2 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 152.
3 *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 152.
4 Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, trans. Paul Eugene Memmo, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 64.
5 The portions of the seminar relating to Hamlet were published under the title of "Le désir et son interprétation" in three consecutive issues of *Ornicar?* (24-26). The last of these installments, from which the passage quoted above has been taken, was translated by James Hulbert as "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet" in *Yale French Studies* 55/56, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, 12: 12-52. Lacan also invokes the myth in "The Freudian Thing," *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006) and there he does make explicit reference to Bruno. In a preface to Frank Wedekind's *L' Éveil du printemps* (Gallimard, 1974), subsequently reprinted in *Ornicar?*, n. 39, Winter 1986-87, 5-7, Lacan invokes the myth again, asking: "How can we know whether the Father himself, the eternal father of all, is only a name among others for white Diana, she who ... loses her way in the darkness of time?".
6 Jacques Lacan, *L'envers de la psychoanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 129.
7 Lacan treats the topic of anamorphosis to a more extended discussion in "Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*," *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998). For a more conventional guide to anamorphosis, see Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphoses, ou Thaumaturgus Opticus* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984).
8 *Ethics*, 141.
9 *Ethics*, 152.
10 *Ethics*, 37. According to Lacan, Freud must be credited with uncovering the scandalous nature of this "apotheosis of the neighbour." These claims have their source in Freud's discussion of the *Nebenmensch* complex in the section on "Remembering and Judging" [17] in his "Project for a Scientific Psychology," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological works of Freud*, vol. 1, 331-32. There Freud writes: "and so the complex of the fellow human being [*Nebenmensch*] falls apart into two components, one which makes an impression [*imponiert*] by its constant structure [*Konstantes Gefüge*], and stays together as Thing [*Ding*], while the other is understood by memory work." Elaborating on these remarks, Lacan notes that the dimension of the *Nebenmensch* illuminated by "memory work" corresponds to the other person (A) insofar as this other reduces to an object with determinate predicates (A1, A2, A3...). The enunciation of those predicates corresponds in Lacan's telling to the process of metonymic association. This associative process is in turn linked to the pleasure principle, i.e. that dimension of the subject's desire that acts in accordance with its egoic well-being [*eudaimonia*]. On the other hand, the dimension of the *Nebenmensch* complex represented by "the persistence of *das Ding*" relates to that part of the other person that eludes inclusion in this set of metonymically associated predicates. If, as we have seen, the neighbour defined by his predicates is linked to the pleasure principle, this same neighbour when separated from these predicates is linked to the death drive, more especially to that obscene surcharge of pleasure/pain we have seen to be associated with it, *jouissance*. The ethics of this *jouissance* therefore work against the grain of the logic that determines the subject's relationship to those predications that give to its desire the semblance of a determinate object-cause. The near one, that neighbour whom Christ commanded us to love, is according to Lacan the most alien Thing.
11 *Ethics*, 152.
12 Sigmund Freud, "Types of Onset of Neurosis," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), Vol. XII, 231.
13 Jacques Lacan, 1960-61, *Le Séminaire. Livre VIII. Le Transfert*, ed. J.-A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 378.
14 For a discussion of Lacan's psychoanalytic gloss on Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, trans, Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 221.
15 Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Literature*, trans. Ronald Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xviii. The concluding citation is from Arnaut Daniel's canso, "*En cest sonet coind, e leri,*" vv. 43-45.

16 *Ethics*, 150.
17 The theory of this contrivance is the theory of *objet a*. It represents a non-instrumental theory of prosthesis where the detachable organ—whose anatomical exemplars are the penis and the breast—serves, prior to every instrumental appropriation, as support for an event of self-partition on whose basis alone the subject is capable of incorporating itself imaginarily. The incorporation demands that the subject at once identify with and separate his corporeal image from this detachable object. Hence for Lacan the subject's self-partition represents an essential preliminary to its parturition.
18 Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford, California: Stanford University press, 2004), 28, 32.
19 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague, Netherlands: M. Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 259.
20 The work of Matthew Barney, with its thematics of self-transcendence through the death-driven disciplines associated with hyperbolic performance, represents the persistence of this dialectic of self-loss and self-mastery in contemporary art practice. That dialectic is somatized in the overriding trope of Barney's "performance art," which is the breaking down of muscle tissue as athletic propaedeutic to that same muscle's hypertrophic development. For a Lacanian reading of the persistence and global implications of this trope in Barney's work, see Nancy Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," ed. Nancy Spector, *The Cremaster Cycle* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002), 2-91.
21 While it is true that Levinas associates the miracle with religious infantilism, it is nevertheless also the case that he describes ethical responsibility as a form of receptivity to what he calls "the miracle of the trace," this trace being the enigmatic manifestation of what cannot appear except as the residuum of a transcendence that retreats or withdraws from the order of the visible.
22 John Chryosostom, *On the Providence of God*, II.6.
23 William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale: The Arden Edition of the Collected Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. J. H. P. Pafford (London: Metheun & Co. Ltd., 1963).
24 Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 8-9.
25 Franz Rosenzwieg, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 95. The passage is quoted in Eric Santner, "Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzwieg, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbour," in *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 84.
26 Emmanuel Levinas and Françoise Armengaud, "On Obliteration: Discussing Sancho Sosno," *Art & Text* 33, Winter 1989, 34.
27 Francois Poirié, *Emmanuel Levinas: Qui êtes-vous* (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1987), 94.
28 Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkens (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995).
29 Franz Rosenzwieg, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 93.
30 *Star of Redemption*, 94.
31 The proscriptions against narrative improbability in Aristotle's *Poetics* probably deserve to be read in relation to this preference for immanent causes. It is interesting to contrast those proscriptions, central to the development of classical poetics, with Hegel's claim that Romanticism gives preference to "the unforeseen surprises of the ever new and complicated developments of plot, the maze of intrigue, [and] the contingency of events." *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, vol. IV, trans. F. D.B. Osmaston (New York: Hacker Books), 312-13.
32 Emil Fackenheim, "The Possibility of the Universe," in A. Hymen, *Essays in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Philosophy: Studies from the American Academy for Jewish Research* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977), 48.
33 Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 346.
34 Alexander of Hales, in his *Summa Theologica* [p.1 inq. 1 tr. 4 q. III.c4, 1:236], seems to have been the first to employ these phrases in combination. However, in his *Lectura super primum et secundum*, Gregory of Rimini, observes that it correlates to Origen's earlier opposition of *agere per potentiam* and *agere per iustitiam*.
35 Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia* q. 3 a.17.
36 In the English context especially, volantarist arguments of this type were typically countered by a dialectical obverse, so that monarchical fiat is thought to be circumscribed by an immemorial compact between ruler and subject. Thanks to this compact, miraculous or quasi-miraculous intervention is brought into conformity with the more predictable praxes associated with customary use. The authority

associated with such "use" is the fly that Shakespeare's York drops into the absolutist ointment prepared by Richard II's flatterers, when he says to Richard on behalf of Bollingbroke: "Takes Hereford's rights, and take from Time/ His charters and his customary rights." [Richard II, 1:195-96]. This dialectical obverse to the voluntarist imperative has a distinguished provenance, extending back at least as far as Manegold of Lauterbach.

37 William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, vols. 1-7, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 491.

38 *Quodlibetal Questions*, 506.

39 Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert Wallace (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983), 189.

40 *Quodlibetal Questions*, 506.

41 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: an Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 18.

42 *Cartesian Meditations*, 26.

43 Edmund Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (Essays and Lectures), Husserliana*, XXVII, ed. Nenon H.R. Sepp (The Hague, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 234.

44 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Giveness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 165.

45 *Being Given*, 8.

46 *Being Given*, 9.

47 Jacques Derrida, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, trans. Marian Hobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 138.

48 *The Problem of Genesis*, 138.

49 *The Problem of Genesis*, 138.

50 *Introduction*, 86. Derrida is here referring to remarks made by Jean Hypolitte in response to a paper given by Father H.L. Van Breda.

51 Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limit of Mere Reason," trans. Sam Weber in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). The title of this essay alludes to both Hegel's *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H.S. Harris (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1977) and Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. George di Giovanni (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

52 "Faith and Knowledge," 63-64.