

Author's Preface

These texts have accompanied, in some fashion, the works I have published over the last ten years.¹ But they have also been dissociated from those works, separated, *distracted*. This is marked in their *formation*, whether one understands with this word the movement that engenders by giving form or the figure that gathers up a mobile multiplicity: configuration in displacement. A formation must move forward but also advance in a group. According to some explicit or tacit law, it is required to space itself out without getting too dispersed. If one were to make of this law a theory, the formation of these writings would proceed like a *distracted theory*.

Law of a discontinuous theory or discreet appearance of the series, these texts, then, follow one another, link up or correspond to one another, despite the evident difference of their motifs and themes, the distance that separates the places, moments, circumstances.

And the names, especially the names, proper names. Each of the essays appears in fact to be devoted, destined, or even singularly dedicated to someone, very often to the friend, man or woman, close or distant, living or not, known or unknown. It is sometimes but not always a poet or a thinker, the philosopher or the writer. It is sometimes but not always the one who *puts things on stage* in the worlds that are called politics, the theater, psychoanalysis, architecture. Certain texts seem to bear witness better than others to this quasi-epistolary situation. "Letter to a Japanese Friend," "Envoi," "Telepathy," "Plato's Letter" or "Seven Missives," for example, might have stood in the place of the title

or the preface, thanks to the play of some metonymy. I made another choice. By disrupting the chronological order only once, I thought that "Psyche: Invention of the Other" might better play this role. At the halfway point (1983), a certain *psyche* [which is also what the French call a "cheval glass," that is, a full-length, free-standing mirror] seems to pivot on its axis so as to reflect in its way the texts that preceded it and those that followed. By the same token, a mobile mirror feigns to gather the book together: in any case in what resembles it, its image or phantasm. This remains, after all—technique of the simulacrum—always the proper function of a preface.

Simulacrum and specularity. It is a matter here of speculating on a mirror and on the disconcerting logic of what is blithely called narcissism. There is some complacent self-satisfaction, already, in the gesture that consists in *publishing*. Simply in publishing. This first complacency is elementary; no denial could erase it. What then should be said of the gesture that gathers up previous writings, whether or not they are unpublished?² Without denying this additional exhibition, let us say that it also makes up the object of this book. But the mirror named *psyche* does not figure an object like any other. Nor is the gesture that *gets caught* wanting to show the mirror just one gesture among others. Whether or not it is granted this right, whether or not it makes of the right a duty, it has no choice but to watch itself showing while listening to itself speak. Is that possible?

And why *expose* oneself to this risk? To the other each time addressed, the question also becomes a demand. In its most general and most implicit form, it could be translated in several words, thus: What is an invention? And what does invention signify when it must be *of the other*? The invention *of* the other would imply that the other remains still *me*, *in me*, *of me*, at best, *for me* (projection, assimilation, interiorization, introjection, analogic appresentation, at best, phenomenality)? Or else that my invention of the other remains the invention of me by the other who finds me, discovers me, institutes or constitutes me? By coming from her (or him), the invention of the other would then return to him (or her).

Is there a choice between these modalities? The other without me, beyond me, in me, in the impossible experience of the gift and of mourning, in the impossible condition of experience, is that not still something else?

The gift, mourning, the *psyche*, are they *thinkable* beyond all psychologism? And what, then, does thinking mean?

If the question *corresponds*, if it corresponds always to some demand come from the other, then it lets itself already be preceded by a strange affirmation. To watch over this affirmation, perhaps it is necessary first of all to *transport oneself/surrender oneself* to what comes before the question [*Pour veiller sur elle, peut-être faut-il se rendre à la veille de la question*].

—*Translated by Peggy Kamuf*