

Preface

Saul Anton, who has taken upon himself the task of translating this book—a task rendered more thankless by the necessity of tracking down the English translations of all the citations inserted in the text—has asked me how *Logodaedalus* appears to me, now, thirty years later, a work belonging in some way to my “youth” and also to the youth of a thinking preoccupied by what one could then call the relation between literature and philosophy, or, to say it more rigorously, the question of the philosophical text—or, to be more rigorous still, and thus to speak German, the question of philosophical *Darstellung*. How does thinking exhibit itself, present itself? How does the science of principles and ends take on form and embody itself in the order of language?

If this question preoccupied us then, it is because it articulated in a manner that was still relatively restrained and actually timid the more serious question of knowing just how far and how the thought of principles and ends, or rather, the thought of Being and beings as such—in short, metaphysics—can be totally consistent without also thinking—and radically—the implication of its object (let us say “being” to be brief) in its action, in this act of thinking that is nothing other than speaking. However, the act of speaking is in turn nothing but the act of writing, if *writing*—a term thus promoted to the status of a regulative idea—designates nothing but cutting a path to the nongiveness of “sense,” to this

not-yet-signified and to this not-yet-said which alone, in truth, opens language, which alone opens it *to truth*, and which knows itself from the outset to forever be unable to arrive at something like a goal, a conclusion, a Sense.

Knowing itself to be so, this act also knows itself as the very inscription of truth, truth insofar as it is its inscription: the truth that is true only as its own tracing [*tracé*], and thus not merely as its own way, as it is for Plato, Descartes, and Hegel, but more than the way, the *trace* [trace], foreign to ideas of route and destination, and fated essentially to efface itself without essence. The way, in effect, the track of *methodos*, but thought as a lost way, overgrown with grass and brambles, soon to be indiscernible from the thicket. More adventurous, in short, than even Heidegger's "ways that lead nowhere" [*Holzwege*].

This question, or this program of questioning and concern, has lost nothing of its appeal and its exigency for me. On the contrary, everything has intensified: philosophy has not ceased, in all its living and nonregressive forms, in all its courageous, impatient forms, to sharpen the point. Nothing less than the following: we are learning to take care, certainly still of "being" or of "principles" and "ends," but in order to do so, first of voices, languages, modes of address, and even of song (or of exclamation, of prayer, of fervor, or anger) *by which, in which, or better still, as which*, can arrive things such as some "being," "principles," "truth," or "reason" in general.

In a word: from one end to the other, philosophy knows itself to be called out on [*interpelée*] its *poetic* capacity, that is to say, on its ability *to create*—concepts or words, tones or even voices, modulations or timbres. In other words, this ability is addressed just as much in its musicality [*interpellée*], and the question could be formulated as follows: How do we *interpret* that which philosophy imparts [*partage*]?

We know that this questioning [*interpellation*], the seed of which is already there in Plato, but which knew after him a very long incubation, has been reactivated in a hundred ways after Kant.

It is, in certain respects, the proper mark of thought in modern history.

That is why, today, I understand even better how it is that I was so intrigued by and attracted to the very singular relation that Kant entertained with his own writing, his deprecation of his prosaic character and the hope that he nourished of seeing develop in others a poetic metamorphosis. To which was added for me the following singular motif, which sets apart the figure of Kant as a literary object: no other philosopher has found a place in so many texts of fiction or poetry.

After the publication of the book in 1976, I received from certain readers other examples of this singular destiny. I'll cite the following quote by Artaud:

Mr. Kant was a little girl who wanted to be a poet in his way and whose jealousy of beings forced him to limit himself exclusively to philosophy.¹

One can also find attestations to the opposite, like that of Walter Benjamin, who wrote in a letter dated October 22, 1917: "Kant's prose per se represents a *limes* of literary prose."² But the inversion of meaning here is only apparent: because he perceives in Kant a yet-unheard-of philosophical stake, still to come, Benjamin wishes to receive his prose—usually judged to be heavy—as if possessing artistic force, that is to say, the force of awakening, indeed of enthusiasm. Moreover, he immediately adds, "If this were not the case, would the *Critique of Pure Reason* have so shaken Kleist to the deepest parts of his being?"

Yet that is precisely what we want, too: that philosophy shake us to the most profound parts of ourselves, not by poetic flatteries, but rather by the trembling that must always produce anew the eruption of the possibility of sense, the imminence of a truth in the process of flowing forth. What Kant experienced in his desire for poetry was the tension in a joy without which truth is merely conformity, a *jouissance*—fainting and rapture [*transport*—without which reason does not make any room for the unconditioned.

The world is probably less inclined today to get excited about

the thought of a philosophical enthusiasm than it was thirty years ago. But thirty years ago, this world did not yet know itself to be “globalized,” and our exuberances remained largely those of the old children of Europe. They can today become those of mature young people who discover a new source for an ever-renewable admiration: no longer merely for the starry sky above nor only the moral law in our hearts, but a new world to be made in front of us.

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