

Method of Meditation

If man didn't sometimes *sovereignly* close his eyes,
he would end up no longer seeing
what is worth being looked at.

—René Char, *Leaves of Hypnos*

Foreword

My ambition in the following pages is the most remote ever known.

However worthy of interest a political task might be—or anything else etched in such bold ideas—in such moments, I think, I judge, imbued with the sense of my limits: the humility of a comical character, indifference to oneself, the happy negation of sloth liberates me from hesitation): I am aware of nothing intended by man, by a man who reduces himself by giving in to some subordinate operation (some operation that differs from that which arrests me, from a *sovereign operation*).

I imagine that I would weaken the affirmation of my fate were I to explain myself further. And I would willingly limit this foreword to these few words, but I believe the moment has come to dissipate, if it's possible, the misunderstandings created by the disorder of my books, when they touch on the subjects discussed below.

■

I situate my efforts beyond but alongside Surrealism.

A daring, defiant demand manifests itself under the name Surrealism. It was confused, it's true, often letting loose the prey for the shadow. The present confusion, general settling (today, which is the least

demanding?) sometimes appears preferable to me. Nevertheless, Surrealist ambitions persisting, I don't think I could say exactly what I just said. And, anyway, I am astonished by today's revelations: with rare exceptions, I see neither intellectual consciousness, nor temerity, nor desire, nor force around me. Still, I am able to speak only with exasperation.¹

II

My method is at the antipodes of "Yoga."

In principle, a method of meditation would have to address the teachings of yoga (Hindu concentration exercises).

It would be pleasant if some manual existed, stripping the yogis' methods of their moral or metaphysical beliefs. These methods, moreover, could be simplified.

Prolonged calm, deep breathing, as in sleep, like an enchanting dance, slow concentration, irony, thoughts toward the void, a skillful juggling of the spirit on meditational themes, the sky, the earth, and the subject successively collapse, this could be the object of teaching. Removed from this discipline, such a description would help us attain the "ecstasy of the yogis."

In action, the value is appreciable in that it isn't the shortest means of escaping to the "sphere of activity" (if you prefer the real world).

But this is exactly why it is the best *means*. On the subject of yoga, the question is rigorously posed: if resorting to means defines the sphere of activity, how can we ruin this sphere, when from the onset we speak of means? Yoga is nothing if not this ruin.

III

My reflections are founded on a "privileged" experience; nevertheless, "to go the furthest possible" has no meaning once one has recognized the primacy of a "continuum."

By continuum, I mean the continuous surroundings of the human group, opposed to a rudimentary representation of indivisible and decidedly separated individuals.²

Among the criticisms made of *Inner Experience*, that which gives "torture" an exclusively individual meaning reveals the limit, in relation to the *continuum*, of the *individuals* that have made this criticism. There is a point in the *continuum* wherein the trial of "torture" is inevitable, not only undeniable, but, situated at the extreme limit, this point defines the human being (the *continuum*).

IV

Nothing separates me from man in general; I take the totality of what is upon myself.

The common exclusion of the worst (folly, vice, indolence . . .) seems to me to denote servility. The *servile* intelligence serves folly, but folly is *sovereign*: I can change nothing with it.

V

The essential is inavowable.

What is not servile is inavowable: a reason to laugh, to . . . : ecstasy is the same. What is not useful must hide itself (under a mask). Addressing himself to the crowd, a dying criminal was the first to formulate this *commandment*: "Never confess."

VI

The apparent laxity of rigor expresses only a greater rigor, to which one had to respond in the first place.

This principle must be inverted again.

The rigor apparently affirmed here and there is only the effect of a profound laxity, of the abandonment of something essential that is, in any case, the SOVEREIGNTY OF BEING.

Part I

Contestation

The idea of silence (the inaccessible) is disarming!

I am unable to speak of an absence of meaning without giving it a meaning it doesn't have.

The silence was broken, when I said . . .

Some "lama sabachthani" always ends the story, betrays our inability to keep our mouth shut. I must give meaning to that which lacks meaning. In the end, being is offered to us as impossible!

This immense folly, this arrogant childishness, this boorish futility of laughter, and the entirety of an ignorance frozen in servile mania returns to me from every side with an identical response: *impossible!* Man, the being that is here, is in every sense the impossible incarnated. He is the inadmissible and admits only, tolerates only that which makes him deeper: inadmissible, intolerable! Lost in a maze of aberrations, of deafness, of horrors, eager for tortures (eyes, fingernails

ripped out), endlessly thrown into the satisfying contemplation of an absence.

Whether one dares to hope for escape, amending this, cursing that, denouncing, condemning, decapitating, or excommunicating, depriving (it seems) of value (of meaning) that which others . . . , one engages some new platitude, new ferocity, new hypocritical bewilderment.

But how (I ask everyone) could I renounce your folly? When I know that, without it, I would not be! What would I be—what the rocks or the wind are—if I was not an accomplice to your errors?

I am a cry of joy!

This isn't a mistake, it isn't horror that fans my flames.

I think the way a girl removes her dress.

At the extremity of her movement, thought is shameless, even obscene.

Under no circumstances is an excessive conflagration contrary to the murderer, to the usurer, to the teacher. It forsakes neither the lost girl nor the "man of the world." It completes the movement of foolishness, of insipid jest, of cowardice.

Meditation I

An important person, I demand an audience.

With a kick in the behind, the minister leaves me in a huff.

Enraptured, I enter the waiting room: the kick transports me, marries me, penetrates me; it opens within me like a rose.

Meditation II

I find a glistening worm between two graves.

In the night, I place it in my hand.

The worm looks at me, penetrates even my shame.

And we lose one another in its gleam: we commingle, one with the other in the light.

The wonder-struck worm laughs at me and at the dead and I marvel equally, laughing at being divined by a worm and by the dead.

Meditation III

The sun enters my room.

It has a thin neck of flowers. Its head resembles the skull of a bird.

It grabs a button on my jacket.

Strangely, I take hold of button on my shorts.

And we look at each other like children:

"I take you,

you take me,

by the beard.

First . . ."

Every problem is in a certain sense a problem of the use of time.

This implies the preliminary question:

—What do I have to do (what must I do or what is in my interest to do or do I desire to do) here (in this world where I have my human and personal nature) and now?

Writing, I wanted to touch the depth of these problems. And having given myself this occupation, *I fell asleep.*

My response expressed the day's fatigue. But this image remains faithful to my view of the world. This profoundly expresses the nature of the being in the operation of knowledge: the being cannot be indifferent that an inclination counters the desire to know.

If it is being striving to reach its limits, philosophy must first resolve a primary problem in the person of the philosopher: Is this occupation (this striving to attain one's limits) urgent? For me? For humanity in general?

The fact that it isn't for a large number of people is usually attributed to *primum vivere* (that is, "to eat"), on the one hand; on the other hand, to some insufficiency on the part of those who have the time for philosophy (not intelligent enough, weak character).

If philosophy is only one science among many, only with a different domain, the urge is to consider it a *subordinate* task, where the

AA

calculation of inconveniences and of advantages is brought back to judgments foreign to the problem at stake. But if it is knowledge with no other end than itself, the calculations brought back to other ends deprive the operation of its exceptional character (emasculate it, align it with minor activities, and willfully restrict it from knowing). From this: the professorial tradition of philosophy and the accumulation of materials that in no way resemble the sovereign operation. And not only do these kinds of work not lead to this operation, they turn away from it (blind, prevent knowing its urgency).

The criticism Hegel addressed to Schelling (in the preface of the *Phenomenology*) is no less annoying. The preliminary work of this operation isn't within the capacities of an unprepared intelligence (as Hegel says: likewise it would be senseless, if one were not a cobbler, for one to make a shoe). This work, in its mode of application, nevertheless inhibits the sovereign operation (a being going the furthest that it can). Specifically, this sovereign character demands our refusal to submit this operation to preliminary conditions. The operation takes place only if urgency appears: if it appears, it is no longer time to begin works in which the essence is subordinated to ends exterior to oneself, which are not ends in themselves.

Scientific work is more than servile, crippled. The needs to which it responds are foreign to knowledge. They are:

1. The curiosity of those who do crossword puzzles: a discovery fails to provoke interest, the search for truth supposes a "pleasure of not knowing" (Claude Bernard):³ scientific truths fundamentally only have value when *new*; we measure the novelty of old discoveries after centuries;
2. The needs of the collector (to accumulate and organize curiosities);
3. Love of work, intense output;
4. The taste for a rigorous honesty;
5. The worries of an academic (career, honor, money).

At its origin, often enough, a desire for sovereign knowledge, to go as far as one can go, a desire so quickly born, nullifies itself, by accepting subordinate tasks. The disinterested type—independent of application—and the persistent use of empty words make the exchange. Science is practiced by men in whom the desire to know is dead.

For now, I am not trying to define the *sovereign operation*. It is possible that I have spoken of it without even knowing it. And if necessary I would admit that speaking of it as I did is childish (it indicates an inability to gauge my possible effort). It nevertheless remains for me, having imagined it, to reveal to myself the lure of subordinate operations.

Now I have to start over:

Servility ordinarily specifies its limits: to contribute to the advancement of mathematical sciences, or of others . . . From limit to limit, one happens to pose, at the summit, some sovereign operation. And I add: the path that leads toward this summit is not the subservient operation. One must choose: one is unable to subordinate oneself to some ulterior result and "to be sovereignly" at the same time. (Because "to be sovereignly" means "not being able to wait.") Although an authentic sovereignty demands that they have been as complete as possible, I am unable to escape from subordinate operations. At the summit of intelligence there is an impasse where the "immediate sovereignty of the being" decidedly seems to alienate itself: a region of sovereign folly, of sleep.

Beyond a certain point, foolishness is inescapable. My intelligence offers me the comfort of stupidity (a calm certainty). The idea is breathtaking. Still, it suffices to be indifferent: begin a friendship with odious chattering, with silences, with terror, with whims. A friendship that you cannot imagine. Nothing seems more foolish to me than the sovereign contempt for others to which my position condemns me. My sense that I am losing myself in a void opens illumination to lightness "without form and without mode." I would gladly define ecstasy: feeling gay but anguished—from my immeasurable stupidity.

I no longer sustain this poignant emotion, this light as if airy intoxication, linked to excessive tensions.

My feelings already enclose me as in a tomb and yet, above me, I imagine a song similar to the modulation of light, from cloud to cloud, the afternoon, in the unbearable expanse of the skies . . .

How can I avoid the intimate, never-ending, horror of being? . . . This heart crying a thousand tender joys, how can I fail to open it to the void?

My joy extends an ungraspable game to infinity. But I know the night is falling. Black tapestries fall on all sides.

Long, sad death, smothered silence of a tomb, under a living, wormy grass, underlines this sense of airy lightness, this gaiety lost to the height of stars.

And nothing . . .

I WALK WITH THE HELP OF FEET, I PHILOSOPHIZE WITH THE HELP OF FOOLS. EVEN WITH THE HELP OF PHILOSOPHERS.

I incarnated the ungraspable.

If I lead being to the extreme limit of reflection, to its misunderstanding of itself, like the infinite, starry expanse of the night, I FALL ASLEEP.

And the IMPOSSIBLE is there. (I am IT.)

How could I fail to recognize philosophers from all eras whose never-ending cries (powerlessness) say to me: YOU ARE THE IMPOSSIBLE?

How could I lack, who better than I, an adoration for these voices echoing the misunderstandings that men have of themselves and of the world in the infinite silent expanse?

Sleep of reason! . . . and, as Goya said: THE SLEEP OF REASON CREATES MONSTERS.

The essential is the aberration. The biggest comedy . . .

What is the worst aberration?

That which we ignore, gravely holding out for wisdom?

That from which, when we see it, we know there is no escape?

From extreme knowledge to vulgar understanding—generally the most divided—the difference is nonexistent. In Hegel, our understanding of the world is one of the first things we understand (the *first understanding to occur*, not Hegel himself, decides the key question for him, touching on the difference between madness and reason: “absolute knowledge,” on this point, confirms the vulgar notion, is founded on it, is one form of it). Vulgar understanding is in us like another *tis-*

sue! The human being is made not only of visible tissues (bony, muscular, skin), but of a tissue of understanding, more or less extensive, appreciably the same in each of us, found equally in all adults.

Works preparatory to philosophy are (negative) criticisms or growths of tissue.

In a sense, the condition in which *I would see* would be on leaving, on emerging, from “tissue.”

And without doubt I must say immediately: this condition on which *I would see* would be dying.

At no moment will I have the possibility of *seeing it!*

The philosophers that one opposes to me are just so many ways of weaving within the fabric of the tissue, stupidity is the only contribution that agrees with me. Rigorous stupidity (linking them to this series of ruptures that undo the mirage in which activity encloses us, making us laugh ceaselessly) is the window through which *I would see*, if it was, from the start, the sleep (death) of intelligence (of the apparatus of vision).

The sphere of known elements wherein our activity inscribes itself is only the product of our intelligence.

A car, a man enters a village: I *see* neither one nor the other, but the tissue woven by an activity of which I am a part. Here where I imagine *seeing* “what is,” I *see* the *links subordinating* the activity that is there. I do not see: I am in a tissue of consciousness, reduced to itself, to its servitude, the freedom (the sovereignty and the primary nonsubordination) of what is.

This world of objects that transcend me (in the emptiness within me) encloses me in its sphere of transcendence, encloses me in some way in my exteriority, weaving a network of *exteriority* within me. In this way, my own actions annihilate me, opening a void within me, a void *to which I am subordinated*. Nevertheless, I survive this alteration by binding ties of immanence (returning me to indefinite immanence, which admits superiority nowhere):

1. *Erotically*. I see a woman, I draw her out, strip her from the sphere of objects linked to activity—*obscaena* are immanence itself, we are generally absorbed, integrated in the sphere of objects, but with genitalia, we still hold on to an undefined immanence (as if with an indestructible, hideous, hidden root); (otherwise genitalia, erotic connections, it’s true,

are perishable: no matter to whom we bind them, common activity tends to substitute those objects that are subordinated to us for erotic connections . . .).

2. *Comically*. We are carried in the stream of hilarity: laughter is the effect of a rupture in the link of transcendent connections; these comic links with our equals, continually broken and continually retied, are the most fragile, the least heavy.

3. *Bonds of kinship*. We are connected to our parents by our birth, and bound thereafter to our children.

4. *Sacred bonds*. Uniting ourselves with the fundamental immanence of a whole of which we are a part; beyond that, as in each relation of immanence, indefinite immanence (the limitations of the group define the hybrid character of the ensemble that is united by the bonds of immanence); as with finite objects, these ensembles have the possibility of transcendence (the community transcends its members, God, the soul of the faithful, thus introducing new voids in the interior of the domain of activity); they substitute themselves for pure activity, they subordinate themselves to the chain of objects, they propose themselves as an end, but, conceived in the transcendent mode of the objective world of activity, in the long run, no longer differing from this world, these ensembles are its sumptuous doubles.

5. *Romantically*. Touching on the love of nature (of savage nature, hostile, foreign to man); the exaltation of eroticism from the heart, the cult of poetry, of poetic laceration; giving value to fiction to the detriment of the *order of things*, of the official and real world.

The domination of activity is accomplished more than corrupted by the domination of the state, this "empty block," introducing into the inert conscience a dominant share of stark elements (transcendent, of another nature, colorless).

In myself, the state opens a sad and dominant void that, truly, gives me a polluted disposition.

Activity dominates us (and likewise the state) in making acceptable—possible—that which would be *impossible* without it (if no one worked, if we had neither police nor laws . . .). The domination of activity is the domination of the *possible*, is the domination of a sad void, a decay in the sphere of objects.

To subordinate ourselves to the POSSIBLE is to let ourselves banish stars, winds, and volcanoes from the sovereign world.

God subordinates himself to the POSSIBLE, diverts chance, renounces the choice to exceed limits. The star exceeds divine intelligence. The tiger has the silent and lost grandeur that God lacks. Man is genuflection . . .

Fear extends the shadow of God over the world like a Catholic school uniform over a perverse adolescent girl's nudity.

Whatever fever carries it, the love of God announces: (1) an aspiration to the state of an object (to transcendence, to definitive immutability); (2) the idea of the superiority of such a state. The order of things asked of God not arbitrarily but essentially is SUBMITTED to the principle of the POSSIBLE: The IMPOSSIBLE is no longer my disadvantage, it is my crime.

One says of the content of the word God that it exceeds the limits of thought—but no! It admits a point, a definition, limits. This narrow aspect is even more striking: God condemns the shame of the child (if the guardian angel sees him in the wardrobe); he condemns the limitless right to silliness and to infinite, discordant laughter, which, since it is neither God nor matter, nor the identity of God and matter—since it is unbearable and yet there, impossible—screaming! impossible—to the point of wanting to die!

We alleviate the empty character of the transcendent world through sacrifice. Through the destruction of a vitally important object (the alteration of which, resulting from an utilitarian use, was painfully felt), we shatter the limit of the *possible* in one moment: The *impossible* was, at this point, liberated by a crime, stripped, unveiled.

Earlier, I said: "My own actions annihilate me, opening a void within me, a void *to which I am subordinated*. Nevertheless, I survive this alteration by binding ties of immanence . . . 1. *Erotically* . . . ; 2. *Comically* . . . ; 3. *Bonds of kinship* . . . ; 4. *Sacred bonds* . . . ; 5. *Romantically*. . . ." I have shown nothing except the necessity of forming these connections, "to shatter the limit of the *possible* in one

moment." A bond of immanence demands a preliminary laceration from the transcendent system of activity: such as stripping someone bare, childbirth, putting to death . . . (In the realm of comedy, a joke reveals the impossible at the heart of the possible. In principle, the romantic impulse erects laceration, not without vain ostentation.)

•

At the limit of silence, to speak in the heavy dissolution of thought, lightly slipping into sleep—without sadness, without irony, without surprise—responding softly to the demand of the night, already brings not the absence but the disorder of these processes.

Often enough, sufficient leisure is left for me to order my thought, in obedience to the rules. But today I express this movement: "Sleep invades me . . .": It is more difficult! In other words, I arrive at the sovereign operation, wherein thought accepts no subordinate object and, losing itself in a sovereign object, annihilates the demand for thought within itself.

If my book means, "you, the most intelligent man, this new Hegel . . . (or any other), are nonetheless the most stupid, narrow, and nailed to the 'possible' by inertia . . ." (how can I conceal that, generally, existence seems under water to me, subsumed in stupidity—in error? That is its condition; this is the condition of consciousness, at the limit of the laughter that denounces it . . .): I don't mean that I . . . "You are more intelligent, but I anesthetize my intelligence in order to relieve myself of yours."

Reassured: "Humanity aspires to stupidity . . . more than to philosophy (a baby leaves us enraptured)."

•

I don't worry about myself: I would love to count on the other (the distribution of being in numerous individuals has little importance).

But I have known no interrogation more tiring than mine.

On all sides, I perceive, as the fruit of labor, a naive freeing of power connected to the capabilities of man exerting his intelligence!

With a puerile carelessness, we grant *possibility* to existence (the possible nature) that everything contradicts in the end: this is the result, this is the postulate of labor. When I am laughing or having an orgasm, the *impossible* is before me. I am happy but every thing is *impossible*.

The simple truth:

Servile activity is *possible* (on the condition of remaining enslaved, subordinate—to other men, to principles, or even to the necessity of production—human existence has a *possibility* in front of itself).

But sovereign existence is in no way, for even an instant, separated from the *impossible*; I will live *sovereignly* only at the *heights of the impossible* and what does this book mean if not:

LEAVE THE POSSIBLE TO THOSE WHO LOVE IT.

In spite of everything, my life was also an immense chore. In paying this price, I got to know a, to my taste, sufficient share of human *possibility* (which today allows me to say: "the *possible*, yes, I bowed my head!"). Nevertheless, what gave me the power to write was having, sometimes, loved *doing nothing* even more.

I see hardly anything in idleness (rather, I imagine I have an excess of vitality). At thirteen years old (?), however, I asked a fellow student who was the laziest in their studies? It was me. But out of the whole school? Me again. In those days, I made my life difficult, *by failing to write under dictation*. The teacher's first words docilely took form under my pen. I remember my childhood notebook: I quickly limited myself to doodling (I had to maintain the semblance of writing). I was unable to do the homework for the coming day because I had not listened to the text: under redoubled punishment, I lived for a long time as the martyr of indifference.

What is an accomplishment if it isn't granted in a privileged experience? It is a moment of silliness in the end.

And the master himself, *if he so commands*, is subordinate to his own orders: sleep and laughter, at the summit, mocking him, detach themselves, forgetting. So much anguish in indifference? But whom can one believe? Do these words announce the raptures of ecstasy?

. . . some words! They exhaust me without respite: nevertheless, I will go to the source of the miserable possibility of words.

There I want to find that which reintroduces—in a point—the sovereign silence that interrupts articulated language.

Part II Decisive Position

Principles

1. If I wish it, *to laugh* is to think, but this is a sovereign moment.

2. To say that in laughing I open the depth of worlds is a gratuitous affirmation. The worlds' open depths have no *meaning* in themselves. But for this reason I can bring other objects of thought into contact with these depths.

3. In common knowledge (which philosophy surpasses, but to which it is connected), every object of thought corresponds to a solid. This point of departure is such that no other is conceivable: knowledge proceeds from the solid, poised as the known, which one assimilates, so that one may know that which is still unknown.

4. Every operation returns thought to the position of a subordinate solid. Not only through its particular end but through the method followed: the solid object is an object that one can make and use: *is known as what one can make and use* (or what we assimilate, so as to know it, to that which we can make and use).

Good sense returns the world to the sphere of activity.

5. Returning to an attitude (long affirmed), I will now say:

- that I haven't received (accepted) a subordinated world that wanted me subordinated;
- that I saw the revelations brought by a burst of laughter as being the essence of things, to which I freely assented;
- that I made no distinction between laughing at a thing and possessing the truth; that I imagined seeing no object at which I didn't laugh;⁴
- that it wasn't only comic themes, but the existence of "what is" in general, and myself in particular, that made me laugh;

—that my laugh engaged me, thoroughly delighted me, and had no limit;

—that I already had a vague awareness of the overturning I brought about; I thought that, having explained laughter, I would know the meaning of man and the universe, that having left laughter, on the contrary, unexplained, knowledge avoided the essential;

—but all of this with authority.

6. Today I add:

—I do not *see* the object that does not make me laugh but only its relation to the sphere of activity (the relation of this object to a solid—to what we are able to make and use);

—likewise, common knowledge returns objects to solidity, in the moment of their subordinate activity: I am able to return them to the sovereign moment when I laugh.

7. To return objects of thought to sovereign moments supposes a sovereign operation, different from laughter and, generally, from all common effusion. This is the operation in which thought stops the movement that subordinates it, and laughing—or, abandoning itself to some other sovereign effusion—identifies itself with the rupture of those bonds that subordinated it.

8. The sovereign operation is arbitrary and although its effects legitimated it from the point of view of subordinate operations, it is indifferent to the judgment of this point of view.

9. Descartes's "I think" is connected, in spite of everything, to our consciousness of not being subordinate, but:

- this consciousness is unable to exist at the point of departure of objective knowledge;
- Descartes understood that, in its developed—and *subordinated*—form, beyond the "I think," thought has no basis in itself, but only in the manipulation of solids;
- the relation of objects to thought free of chains is a point of arrival, before which a multitude of operations developed without thought ever having any other "object" than a

subordinated one (in principle, the idea of freedom designates the ability to choose between two or several subordinations).

10. In a sovereign operation, not only is thought sovereign (as it is if we laugh) but its object is sovereign, and recognized as such, independently of its insertion in the useful order: what is, is subordinate to nothing, and, revealing itself as such, makes us laugh, and so on . . .

11. The sovereign operation, had it been possible only once, science returning objects of thought to sovereign moments⁵ remains possible (does not present any insoluble difficulties).

It encounters some obstacles nevertheless:

—Not only does the sovereign operation not subordinate itself to anything, it is indifferent to the effects that might result; if, after the fact, I want to attempt the reduction of subordinated thought to sovereign thought, I am able to do it, but the authentically sovereign has no cure, at every moment it disposes of me in another way (this is what I said in the first part);

—The voluntary subordination of operations of subordinate thought to the sovereign moment, although it does not introduce any particular presupposition (like a theology or a philosophy)—but only the arbitrarily chosen position of a moment of being (to which one will be able to relate, or *not to relate*, objects of thought)

—No longer allows thought to proceed haphazardly as science commonly does, advancing only where it can and, for lack of means, placidly leaving decisive problems to be resolved. *From the beginning* I had to operate in a global way, *from the beginning* to succeed in propositions chosen for a reason other than the possibility of establishing them. An approximation, even an error, was apparently better than nothing (I was able to return to this point through what followed, in any case, I couldn't free a void): the description I had to make could only have carried the ensemble of the tableau. This method proceeded from the authenticity of my process, this authenticity imposed itself, and if I may describe an outward aspect of it, to speak of it, I could not *prove* it through considerations that only a subordinate mind would know to introduce.

12. Some consequences of such usage of thought proceed in another way from the possibility of a misunderstanding: knowledge relating objects to the sovereign moment in the end risks being confounded with this moment itself.

This knowledge that one could call free (but that I prefer to call neutral) is *the use of a function detached (free) from the servitude that is its principle: the function related the unknown to the known (to the solid), whereas dating it from the moment when it detaches itself, it relates the known to the unknown.*

13. What I've just said seems to oppose itself to the fact that without a sketch, at least, of neutral knowledge, a sovereign operation could not be represented. I may, if I so desire, have an attitude, a sovereign manner, but if *I think—when a man cannot distinguish himself from his thought*—in principle, I take the subordinate character of common operations of thought into consideration. Sovereign thought (without which basic sovereign moments finally insert themselves in the order of things) wants a conscious coincidence of a sovereign moment and an operation of thought. But if some movement, some first attempt at neutral knowledge, *begins* a sovereign operation, the possible developments of this new mode of knowledge are distinct.

The sovereign operation *engages* these developments: they are the residue of a trace left in the memory and of the subsistence of these functions, but, insofar as it takes place, it is indifferent to and *mocks* this residue.⁶

The Sovereign Operation

14. Essentially, neutral knowledge, within the common domain, overturns the movement of thought. In a sense, it is also a new domain, but this is a secondary aspect (this new domain might just as well, without making a difference, allow nothing to appear that might differentiate it from other domains). The movement that founds the sovereign operation is also founded on it. But above all (any effort, at any hour, appears as vain to me, *like works to a Calvinist*), this operation is the end, *it is the path of an experience.*

15. In the first place, this discipline is a *method of meditation*. Its *teaching* is closer to the teachings of the yogis than to that of the professors. The smallest, inexact image of a sovereign operation is the ecstasy of the saints.

16. In order to describe it better, I would like to situate it in an ensemble of apparently sovereign behaviors. Other than ecstasy, these are:

- intoxication;
- erotic effusion;
- laughter;
- sacrificial effusion;⁷
- poetic effusion.⁸

17. This descriptive effort tends to specify the movement through which different objects of thought are related to its action, though, in itself, it is already obligated to establish the relationships of some objects of common thought to the sovereign moment.

18. The behaviors I have just listed are effusive in that they demand muscular movements of little importance and consume energy without any other effect than a kind of interior illumination (that sometimes precedes anguish—even, in certain cases, entirely limits itself to anguish).

19. Previously, I designated the sovereign operation under the names of *inner experience* or the *extreme of the possible*. And now I designate it under the name *meditation*. Changing words signifies the boredom of using whatever word it should be (*sovereign operation* is, of all these names, the most fastidious: *comic operation*, in a sense, would be less misleading). I like *meditation* better despite its pious appearance.

20. In laughter, sacrifice, or poetry, even partly in eroticism, effusion is obtained through a modification, willing or not, in the order of objects: poetry makes use of changes on the level of images; sacrifice, in general, destroys beings; laughter results from diverse changes.

In drunkenness, on the contrary, and willingly, the subject himself is modified: it is the same in meditation.

21. Drunkenness and meditation still have this in common: the vague effusions of each are connected, are able at least to be connected, to other determined effusions. The change in the object—erotic, comic—in drunkenness appropriately responds to the modification of the subject. This is limitless in meditation. The origin of the effusion is

no less, in the two cases, the activity of the subject: in drunkenness, a toxin releases it; in meditation, *the subject contests himself*, hunts himself (capriciously, often even gaily).

22. In meditation, the overwrought subject looks for himself.

He refuses himself the right to remain enclosed in the sphere of activity.

Still, he refuses exterior means: toxins, erotic partners, or alterations in objects (comic, sacrificial, poetic).

The resolute subject looks for himself, gives himself to himself, meets himself in an auspicious shadow.

And more completely than with a toxin, he puts himself, not objects, at risk.

23. Meditation is a comedy in which even the meditating person is comedic. But also a tragedy in which he is tragic. But the comedic in a comedy or the tragic in a tragedy are limited, whereas a meditating person is prey to the comic or tragic without limit.

24. The closest effusion to meditation is poetry.

Poetry is a natural mode for the expression of tragedy, of eroticism, of the comedic (even before heroism): it expresses great squanderings of energy through word order; poetry is the power of words to evoke effusion, through the excessive expenditure of its own forces: in this way, poetry adds to the determined effusion (comic, tragic . . .) not only the flow and rhythm of verses, but the particular faculty of disordered images to annihilate the ensemble of signs that is the sphere of activity.

If one eliminates the *theme* and if one simultaneously admits the negligible interest of *rhythm*, a hecatomb of words without gods or reasons for being is, for man, a major means to affirm, with an effusion *deprived of meaning*, a sovereignty on which, apparently, *nothing encroaches*.

The moment when poetry abandons *theme* and meaning is, from the point of view of meditation, the rupture that opposes it to the humiliated stammerings of the ascetic. But in becoming a game without any rules, and in the impossibility, lacking a theme, of determining violent effects, the exercise of *modern* poetry subordinates itself, in turn, to *possibility*.

25. If poetry wasn't accompanied by the affirmation of sovereignty (offering a commentary on its absence of meaning), it would be like laughter and sacrifice, or like eroticism and drunkenness, *inserted* in the sphere of activity. *Inserted* is not exactly *subordinated*: laughter, drunkenness, sacrifice, or poetry, eroticism even, subsist in a reserve, autonomous, *inserted* in the sphere of activity, *like children in a house*. In their limits they are sovereign minors, unable to contest the *empire* of activity.

26. It is clear, at this point, that the question of power was posed and poetry was unable to avoid it. In the end, it is only an *evocation*; it changes only the order of words and cannot *change the world*. The feeling of poetry is connected to the nostalgia to change more than the order of words, the *established order*. But the idea of a revolution *resulting from* poetry leads to one of poetry *in the service* of a revolution. I have no other intention than to make evident the drama dissimulated under the words: *limited, poetry was unable to affirm complete sovereignty, the negation of all limits: it was, from the onset, condemned to insertion; escaping these limits, it had to bind itself (to attempt to bind itself) to the contestation of the facts of the order of things*.

27. Now, what does the contestation—political, in fact—of the established order mean? It claims power and could, theoretically, do this in the name of that which exceeds servile necessity (this used to be the principle of the poetic revolution). They act differently, this is a fact, but one must not contradict them. The major positions of political sovereignties (understood: those of the past, founded on heroism and sacrifice)⁹ were nothing less than minors inserted into the sphere of activity. The classical idea of sovereignty binds itself to that of commandment.¹⁰ Every activity was subordinated to the sovereignty of the gods, of God, of monarchs; but each activity was more distorted by this than by the sovereignty of a burst of laughter or of a child. Because by *engaging* the order of things, this became its purpose and it was no longer independent. In these conditions, the sovereignty that would like to remain sovereign quickly abandons *power* to those who want to maintain it authentically with ineluctable necessity.

28. Sovereignty is revolt, it is not the exercise of power. Authentic sovereignty refuses . . .

29. Complete sovereignty differs from minor sovereignty in this way: it demands adherence without reserve from its subject, who must, if possible, be a free man, having, in the sphere of activity, real resources.

30. From the outset, the sovereign operation presents a difficulty so great that one has to look for it in a slipping.

The slave-subject of Christianity attributed (returned) sovereignty to the god-object, whose project wanted to see that one grasped oneself, in effect, as an object of *possession*. The god of the mystics is free (relatively) by definition; the mystic is not (on the contrary, he is even willingly submissive to moral servitude).

31. A Buddhist is more proud. The Christian submits himself, in suffering, to the empire of activity, believing he reads therein a divine will that *wants* his subordination. The Buddhist denies this empire, yet behaves in turn as a slave: he considers himself as fallen, and he must situate the sovereignty that he wants for himself in the other world. He engages himself equally in the contradictions of *work* in view of a sovereign moment.

32. But man only has to do the work, if for no other reason than to assure and repair his forces. Ascetic work is bound to the condemnation of every sovereign moment, this is not the moment it pursues! Whatever its power of seduction and whatever successes, in spite of its principles, it has known, the mystic tradition, burdened by subordinate presuppositions, is also a platitude, ambiguous, a foot stuffed in a shoe.

33. We can in no way fabricate a sovereign moment from a servile state: sovereignty cannot be acquired. In the sovereign operation, I can become conscious of it, but the operation *supposes* a sovereign moment; it is not able to fabricate it.

34. This sovereignty cannot even be defined as a good. I value it, but would I value it if my certainty of it were equal to my ability to laugh at it? On such a summit (this is rather the eye of a needle), I am able to live on this condition: in that at every moment I say, "Sovereign? But why?" I define a neutral knowledge, describing sovereign moments: my sovereignty welcomes this knowledge the way a bird sings and I know no gratitude for my work.

35. I am writing in order to nullify a game of subordinate operations (it is, when all is said and done, superfluous).

36. The sovereign operation, *whose authority results only from itself—expiates this authority at the same time.*¹¹ If it atoned for it, it would have some point of application, it would look for an empire, for duration. But authenticity refuses this: it is only powerlessness, absence of duration, hateful (or gay) destruction of itself, dissatisfaction.

37. Still, I want to define it a little more precisely at the limit. Not that I must or could speak . . . , but *it speaks*, gathering at one time the totality of the “meditating person” . . .

What it says is the object of the next chapter . . .

Part III

Nudity

In the end everything puts me at risk, I remain suspended, stripped, in a definitive solitude: before the impenetrable simplicity of *what is*; and the depths of the world opened, what I see and what I know no longer has any meaning, any limits, and I will stop myself only after having advanced the furthest that I can.

Now I am able to laugh, drink, abandon myself to the pleasure of the senses, deliver myself over to the delirium of words; I can sweat in torment and I can die: if I had dissolved the entire world in me, I would remain subordinate to necessity, I cannot risk myself more than in joy, torture, or death.

I risk myself if sensuality or pain project me beyond a sphere where I have only one meaning: the sum of the responses I give to the demands of usefulness; I am at risk when, at the end of the possible, I tend so strongly toward that which will overturn what the idea of death pleases in me—and I laugh, taking pleasure in it.

But the smallest activity or the least project puts an end to the game—and I am, lacking play, brought back into the prison of useful objects, loaded with meaning.

.....
 this is, still, the *instant*

 this, presently, neither my absence nor me, neither death nor light—and my absence and me, death and light—a light laugh rises in me like the sea, fills the absence immensely. All that is—IS TOO MUCH.

.....
 . . . It doesn't matter anymore, I am writing this book *clearly* and *distinctly*,¹² I wanted it to be what it is.

.....
In the plenitude of ravishing, when nothing counted but the instant alone, I escaped the common rules. But only in order to find them again quickly, unchanged; and, similarly that, in the burst, the ecstasy—or the freedom of the instant—disappears to possible utility, even the useful being, which defines humanity, appears to me bound to the need for material goods, and, I imagine, to give them falsely superior ends. My method is at the antipodes of elevated ideas, of salvation, of all mysticism.