
Iphigenia and Other Elisions

*... And hither am I come,
A Prologue arm'd, but not in confidence
Of author's pen or actor's voice, but suited
In like conditions as our argument,
To tell you, fair beholders, that our play
Leaps over the vaunt and firstlings of those
broils,
Beginning in the middle, starting thence away
To what may be digested in a play.
Like, or find fault: do as your pleasures are:
Now good, or bad, 'tis but the chance of war.*

—*Shakespeare,*
Troilus and Cressida

We fight wars on poverty, on drugs, against communism, against capitalism, for our daily bread. We fight for our right to be heard in the various forums of the world. Even our intimate relations seem dominated by the metaphors and facts of war: we are called to fight against codependency, children turn in their parents for smoking pot, and war after war pits actual or figurative siblings against each other. No life remains untouched; all deaths are wasted. Metaphorically, we belong to a motherland or fatherland so that we might constitute a family ready for war: children who will reflect the will of the patriarchs. The son and the father are tied together—allegorically and in reality—by the suppositions and facts of war, of a competition of man against man, family against family, nation against nation. This is true both insofar as we consider the family every man's private haven held apart from the public world and in the way that we constitute the forces of good and evil, spiritual and fleshly, God and Devil. Christ the Son, for a privileged example, is thus construed as the culmination of the law of the Father: not the birth of something new, but the bringing into becoming, into time, of the eternal. God the True Being is something hidden made manifest only through the coming of Christ, made true only through the violence of crucifixion. God's externalization in Hegel, the creation of gods in Nietzsche, the creation of mortals (the loss of immortality) in *Paradise Lost*, are all seen, through the Patriarch's eyes,

as products of war itself—in fact, all existence blends into the same war-time production: the very world is a product which expresses the internal (the manifestation of truth; the product of the forming powers or universal structures of consciousness), an internal created by the conditions of the external world (consciousness as reflection of, or combatant in, experience).

This mediation of outside and inside is man's first bow to the necessary existence of women (and the first tear in the fabric of war/production's self-interpretation). The individual must pass between the sperm of one generation and the actual fact of the next—without, if all goes well, polluting the pure intention of the father's ejaculation. Here the dialectic, the interdependence, of inner and outer mirrors the philosophical conflict of freedom and necessity, human volition and destiny, particular and universal, part and whole: all dialectical oppositions, all cast as war. The place, the locus or battlefield, has come to be identified as the human subject. Perhaps postmodernism, in so far as it is identified with the decentered subject, is the attempt to think after the wars: though we cannot (and would not want to) say war never happened, it remains to ask if it represents the true, to ask if violence is to be our future as well as our past.

Thought invokes a memory of wars, but—in a utopic world of nonviolence—it might as easily have been the memory, the songs, of the vanquished as of the victor. Postmodern thought opens up the possibility of thinking yet a different appointment of time, without a tyrannical past, without the weight of previous battles. Meaning, having meaning, is the way human life defines itself—it is the technology humanity uses to capture the multiplicity of experience. However, only within the system defined by this technology is all truth exhausted in meaning, all meaning completed in truth. For example, for most of us, death is merely the opposite condition to life, that is, meaninglessness. If a previously spoken word continues to be used by us in our appropriation of a tradition, we tend to say that it is still alive for us—the dead, when they were great creative authors, continue to inhabit our present speaking. This book, instead of questioning the life that continues in a tradition of words appropriated, questions the meaning of death that continues and death that inhabits—especially as it is not appropriated. I will argue that tradition, even the very use of words (which always in itself approaches a certain essentialism), is neither dead nor alive. The word does not bear a violence of itself, the death is always silent, the violence always already a referencing towards a silence—called violent to the extent that it wishes to enforce that silence. The style I am advocating, eschewing the technological faith in the sufficient word, is to accentuate the silence of a death: in this case, the metaphorical (but not inconsequential) death of a woman. Thus, in the particular example

with which I am beginning, I am asking of the manner of enunciating the universal in the act of denotation, of asking what it means to take a particular woman and say, "This." To take a sacrificial virgin and say, "Let her death signify our devotion, let her death be our life." Accordingly, we look to the often forgotten beginning of modern warfare: the Greek Agamemnon, chained to harbor before unfavorable winds, sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, to the gods—all in return for a quick voyage to Troy.² Other strategies are available; it is merely my timidity that causes me to start with war, looking for peace.

Iphigenia's sacrifice can be seen, among the many literary and polemical uses it can fulfill, as merely a metaphor for the various acts of exclusion committed in the name of masculine projects. Her name remains in this function, but I find there is more to her death as well—just as there is more to sexism than the domination of the masculine pronoun and unequal pay; they are symptoms and not causes, however much they may contribute to the reproduction of the cause itself. We are asking if a name—or a metaphor or an allegory—can do other than serve an end, can be other than a nodal point within some exterior economy. What is at stake is a signification that neither signifies nor falls on deaf ears. Not a Sade-like attempt to offend your undoubtedly bourgeois sensibilities, not Breton's pistol shot into the crowd: I do not force you to come to some new, enlightened resolution of contradictory positions. No synthesis is necessary, no understanding. No recognition of self or other. Something more like forgiving—but such words sound banal to the modern ear.

2. Some Greek hero is cheated
And your mother's court
Of its bride.

And we ask this—where truth
is,
Of what use is valour and is
worth?
For evil has conquered the
race,
There is no power but in base
men,
Nor any man whom the gods
do not hate.

(H.D., trans., "From the
Iphigenia of Aulis in
Euripides," in *Collected Poems*
1912–1944, pp. 80–81)

Perhaps all the more reason to speak them again, to begin—with them—again.

If one takes the eye of a god, all things stand in relation, all things have their reason and meaning, are either right or wrong. Instead, as mortals, there are some things we merely forgive, without reason. Allegorically, and this is a surprisingly hard position to maintain philosophically, I'm merely saying that Iphigenia was more alive, held more of whatever value we associate with life, before she was sacrificed to the greater causes of Greek glory. Unallegorically, we question how many deaths are acceptable to ensure the smooth operations of industrial plants, how many of a nation's children should die for the nation's sovereignty.

Martha Nussbaum, in *The Fragility of Goodness*, uses the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (along with the death of Antigone in Sophocles' Theban trilogy) to outline a complicated (and complicating) view of death and value in Attic Greece. The play finds Agamemnon in a bind of responsibilities (he is finite in face of the infinity of his responsibilities). Nussbaum poses the question of whether the contingent fact that another obligation supersedes the first may serve to release a moral actor from the bonds of ethical relations:

A duty not to kill is a duty in all circumstances. Why should this circumstance of conflict make it cease to be a duty? But if a law is broken, there has to be a condemnation and a punishment. That is what it means to take the law seriously, to take one's own autonomy seriously. Kant's view [that all conflicts of interest can be decided in favor of a single duty] does, ironically, just what Kant wishes it to avoid: it gives mere chance the power to remove an agent from the binding authority of the moral law. We can claim to be following a part of the deep motivation behind Kant's own view of duty when we insist that duty does not go away because of the world's contingent interventions. Greek polytheism, surprisingly, articulates a certain element of Kantian morality better than any monotheistic creed could: namely it insists upon the supreme and binding authority, the divinity so to speak, of *each* ethical obligation, in all circumstances whatever, including those in which the gods themselves collide.

Aeschylus, then, shows us not so much a 'solution' to the 'problem of practical conflict' as the richness and depth of the problem itself. (This achievement is closely connected with his poetic resources, which put the scene vividly before us, show us debate about it, and evoke in us responses important to its assessment.)(p. 49)³

In short, the form of the play has outdone the philosophical form of the resolution: it has posed a question and not posited an answer to some

previously articulated question. This is the ethical advantage of the artistic representation over the philosophical reserve (although it doesn't exhaust the distinction). The tragedy causes us (the viewers) to ask a hard question, without taking away the responsibility for answering. The structural doubling and tripling I merely gesture at here—life and death, freedom and necessity, subject and object, poetry and reason (all understood as structural and structuring moments)—would be the nexus of any writing, whether art, philosophy, polemic, or technology. It is a well-known oddity that in an artistically crafted dialogue Plato proposed throwing the poets out of the ideal city. Nussbaum, on the other side of written history, writes a logically coherent book of philosophy (partly) for the purpose of freeing the poets to their truth-finding mission. We can't ignore the division between stylistic means and projectural goals; this division is the call to self-consciousness itself—the urgency of understanding how we think of the 'what' of knowledge.

Self-consciousness is knowing that we know—knowing that not only do we see, we are seen: active and passive. Hegel saw this far but conceived of passivity as only the silent counterpart to the active: the slave who recognizes, and glorifies, the master. Against Hegel, becoming aware of the contents and structure of passivity, and not just the contents of our activity, is the first step towards a new type of moral order. All ethical decisions are begun, as the Old Testament points out, when God says, 'Hear me, O Israel!' Unable to stop their ears, the chosen have heard. The kerygmatic voice, the voice that commands from elsewhere, unattainable,

3. For Nussbaum, as she continues, both the solution and the problem still belong to the region of words and the appropriateness of their judgments:

Voicing no blame of the prophet or his terrible message, Agamemnon now begins to cooperate inwardly with necessity, arranging his feelings to accord with his fortune. From the moment he makes his decision, itself the best he could have made, he strangely turns himself into a collaborator, a willing victim. Once he had stated the alternatives and announced his decision, Agamemnon might have been expected to say something like, "This horrible course is what divine necessity requires, though I embark on it with pain and revulsion." What he actually says is very different: "For it is right and holy (*themis*) that I should desire with exceedingly impassioned passion the sacrifice staying the winds, the maiden's blood. May all turn out well" (214–17). We notice two points in this strange and appalling utterance. First, his attitude towards the decision itself seems to have changed with the making of it. From the acknowledgement that a heavy doom awaits him either way, and that either alternative involves wrongdoing, he has moved to a peculiar optimism: if he has chosen the *better* course, all may yet turn out well. (*The Fragility of Goodness* [1986], p. 35)

The irony that sustains the

movement I am writing lies in denying both answers—the outward certainty Agamemnon conforms himself to and the inward certainty Nussbaum calls for Agamemnon to maintain—in favor of a delaying tactic, of questioning the necessity of her death. Such a questioning of course, requires both a new theory of the necessary within socio-historical contexts and, in what Heidegger has shown is the same problem, a new theory of the question.

determines the structure of passivity. The particular content is a question of historical, or critical, ontology. Philosophy, for the most part, hasn't taken notice of this passivity—the bare fact of our consciousness—as a call of obligation. The function of this book is to show obligation as obligation—an obligation to question the function and activity of showing (of bringing meaning to presence, mine or the other's).

Marx used the Hegelian framework, the Hegelian conception of world history and transhistorically active forces, to structure a systematic critique of the world's progress. Any destruction of the precepts of metaphysics—of activity, presence, recognition, world history—has to accept the loss of the tool Marxist analysis provides. The various attempts to recoup this technology for the forces of good have either returned to one of the individualistic grounds of traditional philosophy or ignored the strength of the philosophical destruction of metaphysics by invoking some sort of pragmatism. Those convinced by the destroyers have turned to a glib insistence on absolute indeterminacy. This book, instead, by turning to the place (or better: the 'how') of obligation, to the figure of passivity and woman, repositions what used to be called the acting subject—strips him of his virility, of the masculine pronoun—such that old questions, questions of social justice, distributive economics, meaningful personal relationships, can be asked again without presupposing the patriarchal answer, without assuming that truth is possession, that possession is inheritance.

Accordingly, I have both a concrete purpose and a diffuse, overdetermined means,

like any writer of allegories. Thus will I ask to be read like a fiction and not as the truth. I will not write the result of previous thinking (its truth measured by its adequation to the matter to be thought). Not that I have hidden what is plain to see or dressed up an ugly truth, but that our truths are no longer simply monistic; you (singular) cannot come to the text with an expectation of exchange, of spending time in return for results, or maxims, possessed. In fact, insofar as you may want to understand, the text must require that you come to it as a host. You must welcome it and all those whom the text carries. You (plural) are multitudes, even as you (singular) sit alone, and you must come all together, satisfied merely to sit with a friend in a moment of enjoyment. Still, you will know that essential things were not touched, perhaps not even guessed at. Even your closest friends and lovers are other than you; that is simplest common knowledge. So much more so the actors on the stage or the words of a book. Correspondingly, I do not present a vocabulary to be adopted. I use 'truth', for example, in at least three recognizably different ways: all of them familiar to the average speaker. You may be able to trace my concepts of 'truth' back to supposed singularities in master texts, but that will cheat thinking with a catalogue of thoughts. Rather, try not to think too far behind the words: there is a certain surface you are being asked to see. Similarly, the death of a woman, the metaphor I am presenting here, is neither normative nor strictly descriptive. You are not being asked to judge whether my intentions are honorable, whether my words adequately represent the truth of 'woman'—exactly because I do not wish to refer to something other than

4. And, of course, the structure of presentation (insofar as it implicates the *structure* of addressing, of being addressed, of writing for an audience or being in the audience of a writing) is what the metaphor of the literary/ metaphorical itself contests and reinstates. But the question is not exactly new:

Icons—the Christ in triumph in the vault at Daphnis or the admirable Byzantine mosaics—undoubtedly have the effect of holding us under their gaze. We might stop there, but were we to do so we would not really grasp the motive that made the painter set about making this icon, or the motive it satisfies in being presented to us. It is something to do with the gaze, of course, but there is more to it than that. What makes the value of the icon is that the god it represents is also looking at it. It is intended to please God. At this level, the artist is operating on the sacrificial plane—he is playing with those things, in this case images, that may arouse the desire of God. (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* [1973], p. 113)

5. This translation is from Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), pp. 36–37.

6. *The gaze is at stake from the outset.* Don't forget, in fact, what "castration," or the knowledge of castration, owes to the gaze, at least for Freud. The gaze has always been involved. Now the little girl, the woman, supposedly has *nothing* you

can see. She exposes, exhibits the possibility of a *nothing to see*. Or at any rate she shows nothing that is penis-shaped or could substitute for a penis. This is the odd, the uncanny thing, as far as the eye can see, this nothing around which lingers in horror, now and forever, an overcathexis of the eye, of appropriation by the gaze, and of the *phallogomorphic* sexual metaphors, its reassuring accomplices. (Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* [1974], p. 47)

7. Because human intuition as finite “takes in stride” and because the possibility of a “receiving” which takes-in-stride [*eines binnehmenden* “*Bekommens*”) requires affection, therefore organs of affection, “the senses,” are in fact necessary. Human intuition, then, is not “sensible” because its affection takes place through “sense organs,” but rather the reverse. Because our *Dasein* is finite—existing in the midst of beings that already are, beings to which it has been delivered over—therefore it must necessarily take this already-existing being in stride, that is to say, it must offer it the possibility of announcing itself. Organs are necessary for the possible relaying of the announcement. The essence of sensibility exists in the finitude of intuition. The organs that serve affection are thus sense organs because they be long to finite intuition, i.e., sensibility. (Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* [1929], p. 18)

my own saying, and its (possible) reception, in its own time; exactly to the extent that I write—by presenting it again, by writing my doubts within it—from a tradition of speaking about women which has both determined the trajectories of our ‘real’ experience and is open to literary and political interventions. To what extent is it ‘open’? To the extent that its presentation already depends on the space of a questioning—a space which is perhaps best thought not as a vacuum, but as a propensity for the literary which makes being in an audience a (possibly) communal experience. We sit together, turning our attention to the complex priorities of questions over answers and the location (or the time?) of the responsibility for an answer—and I, the organizer of the event, offer to you: a screen.⁴

Silently the screen plays a ritual sacrifice—father slays daughter; no priest holds the blade—while the Shakespearean prologue (in my epilogue to this section) tells us we have skipped a few things. She is lifted into the air, her voice stifled “by the force and voiceless power of the bridle” (l.238–39). You, of the audience, will undoubtedly want to speak for her, but you do not know what claim can be made for her. If she lives, and this we are sure of, all the Greek men must die and (more importantly) the expedition to avenge Paris’s crime against hospitality will fail. (Agamemnon has a choice but the decision is clear. Let him be demagogue or snivelling coward: the decision is still clear.) The gods have spoken with thunderous voice and no other claimant will be heard. Instead, as Shakespeare’s prologue continues, invoking our duty as audience/judges, we see, inscribed on the sacrificial screen, the distanced, unvoiced words of

Aeschylus's chorus:

Her Saffron robes streaming to the ground,
 she shot each of the sacrificers with a pitiful arrow from her eye,
 standing out as in a picture,
 wanting to speak to them by name—
 for often in her father's halls, at the rich feasts given for men,
 she had sung, and, virginal, with pure voice,
 at the third libation, had lovingly honored
 her loving father's paean of good fortune.

(239–44)⁵

Close-up: the darting arrows of her eyes⁶—individual, individuating. The knife will be offered to you, and one of you might say, “No, let her live, I have never enjoyed the unfettered hospitality of the Mediterranean, I have no stake in her death.” But you say the ‘is’ of a universal, you praise the laws of the this and now. We cannot close our eyes to the fact of war. Accepting the obligation of our passivity may not require us to take up the knife, but we must—at least—keep our eyes open. We are all living destinies, results of others’ decisions, which precede us; it takes more than a lifetime to live a destiny: a destiny consummated in the moment over and over again. And the truth lies here (although the truth is not what we are seeking). We are, in every instant, always already read. And we are always already reading. We are constituted as same—as a community of sorts—before you start, before I start, as if you had finished, exactly in so far as you had given yourself over to being in an audience, exactly insofar as you had given up the pretension of ‘having’ a destiny. ‘Hear me’, a voice said, and we could not help but hear.

Small circles of rephrasing the question, stranding the answering. The time of our questions—and this says as much as any sentence in this book—is neither simultaneous nor linear, in precisely the same fashion that an object is neither form nor content; they are given in time, as time, with past, present, future, part, and whole. For the rest of the book, as far as we are capable of holding ourselves within the ‘matter itself’, this one picture, all that I will speak to, and more, will fill the screen. The book stands within the emblem—and yet there is no representation, no icon, to consume. The book stands within the viewing itself—without a subject’s eyes yet claiming the scene (or determining its meaning).⁷ To speak metaphorically of the metaphor is to approach not speaking at all; to continue to speak in the approach of that nothingness is to question the falling of the sacrificial knife.

A Woman's Death

I read this and I tell myself how terrible it is that we spend precious months of our existence trying to give 'proofs,' falling into the trap of critical interpellation, allowing ourselves to be led before the tribunal where we are told: give us proof, explain to us what feminine writing or sexual difference is. And if we were more courageous than I am, we would say: a flute for your proof, I am alive. I am not serene enough, except when I write. And when I write I tell myself that it is not enough, we need to do something else. However, it is true that the truest is like this: either you know without knowing, and this knowledge which does not know is a flash of joy which the other shares with you, or else there is nothing. We will never convert someone who is not already converted. We will never touch the heart that lives on another planet. I would no longer continue with my seminar if I knew that a sufficiently wide world was reading Clarice Lispector. A few years ago, when her texts began to circulate here, I said to myself, I am no longer going to give a seminar, all that is left to do is to read her, everything is said, it is perfect. But as usual everything has been repressed, she has even been transformed in the most extraordinary way, they have embalmed her, had her stuffed as a Brazilian bourgeois with varnished fingernails. So I carry on my vigil, accompanying her through my vigil.

—Cixous, "Extreme Fidelities,"
Writing Differences

It will serve well to briefly point to the breadth of the problem of judgment and impartiality. It has long been argued that there is no outside from which one judges truly dispassionately—for example, Nietzsche sees that to judge,

or think in any way, without interest is not to think at all.⁸ This claim has been taken to extremes unsupported by the nature of the arguments: it is, to begin with, a misconception of the nature of existence and language to invoke a reified private (and therefore irrefragable) belief.⁹ What is interesting to me here as a starting point is how often these questions of true and moral judgment revert to a question of women; my answer, eventually, will have to come down to the problem of how to speak of women, of the powerful history of that speaking, without avoiding speaking to the actually living women who may take up this book to read. The *locus classicus* of this avoidance, insofar as it is later taken up into the philosophical tradition in ways that are no longer simply sexist, is Kant's *Critique of Judgment* where the truth of the universal aesthetic judgment can only be decided in the absence of desire, in the distancing of the self from the meaning, or interest, of the words: where, accordingly, the beautiful woman is excluded from the world of pragmatic activity (and activity's necessary precursor, desire) so that her beauty may remain an unsullied object of contemplation, an escape from the trials and tribulations of man's true activity. Kantians may respond that Kant himself specifically thinks treating a human as an object is immoral. The problem is that this is a rule for regulating public life while private life (the individual in his preexisting mode of belief, if not in his particular beliefs) becomes correspondingly unassailable precisely where the freedom of separation that establishes critique as a possibility of thought is the freedom to separate oneself

8. That Nietzsche sees judgment as necessarily an act of violence is one of the central features of his thought and a locus of considerable argument. One is often tempted to see Nietzsche as the founder of an absolute relativism which cannot even comment on (make moral judgments about) its own activity. Mark Warren, in *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (1988), argues far more convincingly that Nietzsche's genealogy is not "Nietzsche's alternative to ontology" (p. 103) but that will to power is best seen as a "critical ontology of practice" (Warren's chapter 4). Warren exemplifies the difference: "Where Kant gives the necessary conditions of synthesizing objects, Nietzsche gives the necessary conditions of unifying agency" (p. 123). I think it is reasonable to see Nietzsche as standing in a particular line of thinkers, including Kant and Heidegger, who while minutely interested in the 'individual' have nothing to do with an idiosyncratic perspectivalism. This reading understands Nietzsche as in concert with the search for an understanding based on the concrete situation. However, and with this point we may be going beyond Nietzsche, the 'concrete' cannot be interpreted in advance—and especially not as the correlate of categories as broadly construed as 'life' or 'experience'. Experience and the life which claims to be its sum (either individual or communal) can only be thought after thinking the conditions for the possibility of the act of unification—conditions which are not transcendent of the act and its

enacted unifications. We are thus, however, at the space where the very language of "conditions for the possibility of" stops being usefully opposed, as structure, to the event. Speaking would be a violence, then, in so far as it unifies, and would be just only in accordance with the givens of that unification. The implicit (and unquestioned) sense of justice here, unnoticed by the vast majority of commentators, seems to me to be precisely what Heidegger is (appropriately) arguing against in his criticism of Nietzsche in "Nietzsche's Word: God is Dead" [and I will take this matter up, obliquely, later].

9. For the most famous example, "obeying a rule is a practice. . . . it is not possible to obey a rule privately" (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, [1945], #202). Levinas, whose response I will be following later, sees the other not as a guarantor of rule-guidedness (although it may, in fact, serve that end), but as being the very possibility of the obligation to speak (or think): what remains to be thought after Levinas, the question of Levinas's style or, more specifically, of his metaphors, is the problem of characterizing the speech which that obligation calls for. If it is merely a judgment, as *Totality and Infinity* implies, then existence would still culminate in (or call for) a set of descriptions. *Otherwise than Being*, however, much better explicates the fact that language, at its inception, is not a belief, but a patience. In this, although hardly a Nietzschean, Levinas too is searching

from the desired world of objects.¹⁰ Woman becomes the aesthetic object *par excellence* in the cultural configuration which makes any passivity (as a correlate of activity) into an objectivity (the correlate of a production). That is, as conscious human being and complement of the male, woman becomes the figure for passivity understood as withdrawal from activity and not as the active separation of self from object that would make the rationality of the self superior to its desires—and we note first of all that this forced inactivity took on numerous guises, such as that classification of work which finds housework, and many other types of work to which women are socially relegated, not to be part of a nation's productive activity. In a reiteration of the classic configuration of religious salvation as escape from life, *she* becomes *the* figure for death. In the same iteration, desire for her, since all desire is understood as the will to reach a goal, becomes *the* figure for life—life understood as the will to death. It will take a while to sort out the full implications of these statements, especially to the extent that we will eventually be questioning the appropriateness of characterizing speech in terms of judgment; however, in the interest of beginning from where we find ourselves currently situated, I am going to begin with the question of how our thinking of passivity and activity, and of private and public, structures our thinking of gender.

Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* is the literal chronicle of how a woman's moral and judicial decision-making process is different from a man's. Duration—the relation of the present to the eternal—is key here;

the typically male decision is based on the invocation of abstract eternal rights, reducing the moment to an infinitely small point on an infinitely large, abstractly uniform, line; the typically female decision is based on the existing state of affairs and its extended temporal implications. Here lies the man's difference between science and gossip, technology and narrative. Gilligan reflects the feminist appropriation of a particular side of recent arguments over the nature of knowledge—or, perhaps more appropriately, the reappropriation by a woman of a traditionally feminine way of knowing. Our task, as philosophers, is to think through the situation Gilligan presents without essentializing either the feminine or the traditional.

Sadly, one does not take such a book seriously as a work of philosophy (it is supposed to be sociology, psychology, or less, women's studies). This fact, self-referentially, refers (as supporting instance) to the reason and reasoning of her book and more broadly to the call for a different type of argumentation. It calls for argument which is no longer argument. No longer can we have, at least in the realm of moral decision making, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis—two litigants and a judge, two particular claims and a universal rule: knowledge is an intimate affair which requires considerations of shadings far more subtle than the black and white rules of formal logic. (Which, of course, no one believes in, but the point is to begin to question even its value as an ideal.) With such an invocation of the philosophical importance of Gilligan's work, however, I am not claiming that she has somehow already finished all philosophical questions for us;

for "the conditions for the possibility of unifying agency" (see my preceding note). The fact that he doesn't see these 'conditions' as themselves either powers or practices, instead seeing them in terms of their impotence and impracticality, provides the founding aporia of this book. Indeed, Levinas's distance from Kant, precisely here, points to a radical reconceptualization of the role of possibility in relation to actuality, a reconceptualization, I argue below, that grants us a thinking of ethics that extends beyond a mere respect for the other's existing truths and articulations as a subject.

10. The universality of the aesthetic judgment rests on the object's beauty apart from any subjectively determined concept; it becomes important to place the beautiful beyond the public world of a given culture to the extent that otherwise beauty cannot vouchsafe the transcendence of morality. The fact that ideal beauty (sec. 17) must rest with the human, and the human understood in his undetermined finality, completes the connection of beauty with the European ideal of the human (that is, the human seen as a separate individual who possesses qualities and faculties). This story would have to be greatly complicated by adding any of the various attempts to retrieve Kant from the history of a "bad reading" (and here I think especially of Heidegger's defense of Kant in the first volume of the Nietzsche books, based on his 1936–37 winter semester lecture course, *The Will*

to *Power as Art*). My critique of 'disinterestedness', although it will shift ground, is based very much on the possibilities of 'bad readings' becoming dominant ones, and philosophy prevailing in its thoughtlessness as the history of a misunderstanding, or even as the story of a deliberate, and powerful, deformation. Kant's intentions were never other than dispersed; our task is to understand our desire to individuate as our desire to erect our subjectivity in terms of a separation from, and violence against, the dispersed fields from which we grew. The deliberation of our deformations may be our only response—the call to the original or pure intention may be the problem itself.

11. "I knew it was night, yet the moon and the sun were in the sky at the same time and were struggling for dominance. I had been appointed judge (by whom it was not stated): Which of the two heavenly bodies could shine more brightly? . . . 'The most important thing about your dream, Cassandra, was that faced with a completely perverted question, you nevertheless tried to find an answer. You should remember that when the time comes'" (C. Wolf, *Cassandra* [1983], p. 87 [my ellipsis]). Cassandra's madness, it would seem, lies in insisting on making a judgment—or, in what would possibly be the same thing, in having to occupy the role where judgment is deemed impossible, yet still demanded.

rather, she should be taken as having opened onto a different kind of questioning. No question is more properly philosophical than the one that asks how a question is to be properly phrased, before moving towards any of its possible answers.¹¹

The supposed essentialism of any use of the term "woman" is usually criticized on one of two grounds: (1) As a consequence of the Kantian paradigm of judgment, one is supposed to achieve a stance outside our given social situation before gaining the right to speak—this stance would have to precede any true speaking. To essentialize women, in those terms, would be to speak of the existing characteristics of the situation women find themselves in as if it were the essential determinant of all women without first achieving a critical distance. (2) That one should never make the claim that whatever term is being used is in fact valid beyond the given cultural and social situation. Although they seem to stem from contradictory impulses, in a certain sense, the second merely radicalizes the first: the idea of freedom finds itself, as the possibility of possibility, to be the condition for speaking in general, but each act of speaking will be irrevocably tied to a previously given whole. My rejection of the Kantian paradigm of judgment, the rejection of the style of speaking which thinks of judgment as if it were outside of a situation, cannot avoid engaging in the first type of essentializing (and my *right* to speak could never be gained in as much as the critical distance would always be illusory, or at least merely partial). It is only possible, furthermore, to avoid the second kind of essentializing by abandoning the paradigm of judgment itself

(or, as with Nietzsche, by multiplying essentialisms in order to fight the old, established essences).¹² Modernism, I would claim, found its morality in (supposedly) avoiding the essentialism specific to a particular culture while postmodernism should find its morality in the refusal to withdraw from the obligation a situation already entails, an obligation to commence speaking for the first time.

One thus does not want to stage a war of subject positions, a dissemination of words as if they were mere markers of presence. The greater disseminating force, the textual move no avant-garde can complete, lies in replacing the very form of the historical subject, in creating a text that wants to read and be read.¹³ Such would be a writing that does not place itself in opposition to the reader, a writing that does not speak about or for the reader, that does not express some truth or some point of view. It would be a writing that begins, foregoing the teleologies necessary for judgment, refusing the pretension to unify in the name of some end, refusing the temptation to proclaim ourselves masters of a style.

Accordingly, we do not stake our honor on a bout—or encounter—with the text; neither do we join with it on equal terms; we invite it to engulf us. Hegel is guilty of the opposite of this tactical maneuver, famously, when he argues in his preface against prefaces: there are no shortcuts, one must argue the whole of the *Phenomenology* or none of it. Hegel wrote to engulf others and saw this engulfing as the model of truth itself (as writing). Likewise, Benjamin, in the unfinished *Passagen-Werk* (*Arcades Project*), proposed a radical montage style, a dialectical

12. This multiplication of identities has recently been celebrated in Nietzsche, but I wonder if even Nietzsche's masterful ambiguities truly capture what could be radical about a style that avoids the centering power of judging. In Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993), especially the chapter "Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex," one can find an extremely sophisticated and wide-ranging application of the strategy of playing with identity. Political, sexual, racial, and corporeal identities are all seen as subservient to the citational practice (as opposed to the founding speech-act) that undergirds the legitimacy of judgments. Following clues from Foucault and Lacan, among others, she is claiming a site of liberation already lies within the necessary structure of citation (of a repetition which creates, by referencing, its own legitimacy): the overdetermination of judgments gives a person caught within the framework the space to play with that framework itself. I mention her work because she is acutely aware of what I will be criticizing in identity politics: "The despair evident in some forms of identity politics is marked by the elevation and regulation of identity-positions as a primary political policy. When the articulation of coherent identity becomes its own policy, then the policing of identity takes the place of a politics in which identity works dynamically in the service of a broader cultural struggle toward the rearticulation and empowerment of groups that seeks to overcome the dynamic of

repudiation and exclusion by which 'coherent subjects' are constituted" (p. 117). The problem I have with this conception, and in this her work is serving as an advanced and sophisticated example of a certain (prevalent) poststructuralism, is that the time of citation is still configured as the freedom (albeit essentially finite) over speaking—identity, as I will argue later, demands that we think in terms of this time filled by instantaneous positionings and counterpositionings; the demands of the coherent subject are already implicit in a thinking of time as an assertion (or a performance) of positionality (including as an assumption of a subject-position). The possibility of a style which is not merely a multiplication of *identities*, of a style which is not concerned with the self's identity, reaches toward a speaking to (and not about) the other. This would be a time of passivity, or endurance, which does not culminate in inaction or despair—precisely because the style of the questioning, and the time of that style of questioning, precludes the self-absorption which characterizes modernity. In other words, although I am deeply impressed by the ambition and clarity of her critique, its conclusions about the nature of speaking—"the melancholic reiteration of a language that one never chose" (p. 242)—run exactly contrary to the understanding of the ethical foundation of thought I will be proposing here. Not that I have gained a pure moment of choice, but that I am obligated not to reiterate words as roles. Stylistically, then, the commencement that follows this obligation not to merely repeat the history of violence, is not enacted in respect for the other, or for the other's position, but in the speaking which allows a range of concerns to resonate without being fused together. Concurrently, my attempt, in the practice of these notes, is to affirm the words of others without thereby speaking in their place.

13. And, I would guess, this same problem motivates Lyotard's attempt to save Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment from the critiques leveled at his *Critique of Pure Reason* (although the separation would not be absolute) in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1991). My doubt, expanding on the need to think of the deformative misreading I evoked above, would be directed against the value of separating 'Kant' from his social and political reception. That is, even if a new theory of the judgment is to be proposed, and even if that theory avoids the reified 'subject of synthesis', we need also to ask whether the function of judging—as it is presently, and polemically, given within our society—would be changed at the level of its functioning. That is, even if Kant is separable from the history of his reception, and any name would be, does the reworking of 'judgment' break the tyranny of thought conceived on the model of a judging? The possibility of that question being phrased philosophically is the sense of following a surface instead of looking for some underlying truth. We shouldn't ask on what basis the functioning would (or would not be) justified, but rather on what bases it might be questioned and changed in general—a turn towards the possibility of questioning which abandons the necessity of an organizing trope such as 'judgment'. *The Differend*, I would also argue, and despite its obvious brilliance, is open to the same critique as well because it wishes to characterize the response to the call of obligation as itself a judgment. Everything returns, tautologically, to the necessity of the economy of violence.

encounter between the reader and the un-simplifiable truth of the field of the image, which was to be resolved, revealed, in the reader who engulfs the text which had previously threatened to engulf him (or her). The reader recognizes the primordial (communal) desire for harmonious unity in the jumbled images of the montage created by the artist struggling with the same fragmentation of modern urban life. She (or he), too, has known the confusion of the contemporary urban milieu and dreamed of its resolution (how this dream is instituted in the audience is itself open to question). The community of readers recognizes itself in the montage, and recognizing itself as a community the self of the community then effaces the trace of the work, engulfing the object seen, the montage.¹⁴ The powerful work of art would thus be the site of an engulfing and an effacement: either the readers are engulfed by the work itself or by the structure of the recognition the work articulates.

Writing a powerful book, a book that confronts the reader with the pure argument, with the necessity of its thesis, inextricably links all possible readers with the discourse of naked power. The terms of the game are already granted within the dialectic: activity, power itself, wins. What is the prize? The identity of subject and object: the subject becomes an object, *the* subject possesses, bodily is, all objects. Private experience is found to be commensurate with public experience; all individuals (once they have found their personal truth) live in happy contentment with the Spirit of their time. Hegel, here, is more logically consistent, more intrepid, than Marx or his followers: the concept of absolute experience

14. Buck-Morss gives us a sense for how complicated the question is:

Materially, the technologically produced "new" nature appears in the fantastic form of the old, organic nature. The *Passagen-Werk* gives repeated documentation of how the modernity that was emerging in the nineteenth century evoked both of these realms, in what might seem to be a collective expression of nostalgia for the past and the outmoded. But Benjamin leads us to understand a different motivation. On the one hand, it is an 'attempt to master the new experiences of the city' and of technology "in the frame of the old, traditional ones of nature" and of myth. On the other hand, it is the distorted form of the dream "wish," which is not to redeem the past, but to redeem the desire for utopia to which humanity has persistently given expression. This utopia is none other than the communist goal stated by Marx in the 1844 "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts": the harmonious reconciliation of subject and object through the humanization of nature and the naturalization of humanity, and it is in fact an ur-historical motif in both Biblical and classical myth. Greek antiquity, no heaven-on-earth in reality, achieved such a reconciliation symbolically in its cultural forms. To replicate these forms, however, as if some 'truth' were eternally present within them, denies

the historical particularly [*sic*] which is essential to all truth. Rather, the ur-utopian themes are to be rediscovered not merely symbolically, as aesthetic ornamentation, but actually, in matter's most modern configurations.

It is with the new, technological nature that human beings must be reconciled. . . . The paradox is that precisely by giving up nostalgic mimicking of the past and paying strict attention to the new nature, the ur-images are reanimated. Such is the logic of historical images, in which collective images are negated, surpassed, and at the same time dialectically redeemed. This logic does not form a discursive system in a Hegelian sense. The moment of sublation reveals itself visually, in an instantaneous flash wherein the old is illuminated precisely at the moment of its disappearance. This *fleeting* image of truth "is not a process of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does it justice." (*The Dialectics of Seeing* [1989], pp. 145–46)

She is quoting from the notes for Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (The Arcades Project), published as volume 5 of his *Gesammelte Schriften*. My point, echoing my contention against Butler, in a preceding note, is that the time of recognition is always still my time (time understood subjectively, and also methodologically, as the making mine of recognition). With Benjamin, the justice

begins with the formless identity of Being and Nothingness in pretextual (borrowing Derrida's sense for textuality in Hegel)¹⁵ preexperience and is fulfilled in the pretextual void, the absolute identity and passivity, of death. This is the death, like a woman, that we men are all said to desire (attracted to her negative, and negating, qualities). This is the death, that as a woman, as passivity, as the dialectical opposite of mastery, the culminating moment of (male) desire—ejaculation as death—is said to seek/represent.

Within this paradigmatically modern dyad, the activity of understanding may rest with the writer who presents *the* answer in writing for the passive audience to accept or with the reader who is forced to make present *the* answer within his (or her?) individual consciousness.¹⁶ Passivity never becomes a field of investigation; it is always merely the faithful and silent (or at least subjugated) counterpart to the active pole.

Readers familiar with the critique of the metaphysics of experience will recognize the course of my writing as deconstructive, as the negation of the simple privileges of activity. Other readers may recognize the urban academic's montage, the unity of a written activity, presented for consumption. I would delay these moments of recognition. Deconstruction understood negatively is merely a greater technology in the service of understanding, a tool for grasping the interior movements of the Spirit more effectively, a better fork for eating with. I delay, I defer the moment of the knife, because I deny the *work* of the understanding. Instead, my writing, with its montage of notes and digressions, seeks to maintain the priv-

ilege of passivity, to swell within and as the infinitely unfulfillable obligations of a world of writings (and, in that, to stop being 'mine'). Such a style resents *the* answer because that answer only responds to one question. Style alone, mimicking, parodying, and destroying what was once called experience or consciousness, opens onto an infinity of questions. In such a book, the reader merely wanders from path to path, like Beckett's tramps, devoid of reference points. The work fails understanding; it fails the ground. It refuses to reference a privileged experience. We, who are used to thinking of ourselves as experiencing machines, are left with nowhere to stand, nothing to process.

How are we to respond if we are allowed no footing? The point is there is no court to appeal to, no response to be voiced. The end of a line of questioning is not the end of questioning; to no longer ask, first and foremost, of ourselves and our identities is not to cease to exist as a questioner (the affirmation of questioning is not dependent on the identity of the self who questions—to that extent, postmodernism need not be, in fact is the opposite of, a despairing negation of the world). This affirmation without identity is the sense of Nietzsche's inscription on the title page of *Zarathustra*, "A book for everyone and no one." The text—a word that means that words mean—is not a dialogue we are expected to engage in, a series of logical steps we are supposed to reproduce, nor in fact, is it any type of exchange at all (except when viewed from the outside, with an eye toward turning some profit). When we begin to ask critically (suspiciously), and this question can be asked in

of the revelation can only be given in the reconciliation which is mine.

15. Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegelian Semiology" (1968), *Margins of Philosophy*.

16. "In contrast, Benjamin's dialectical images are neither aesthetic nor arbitrary. He understood historical 'perspective' as a focus on the past that made the present, as revolutionary 'now-time,' its vanishing point" (Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* [1989], p. 339).

many ways, what it might mean to possess knowledge, much less actually propose (as I want to do) an alternative to exclusive individual possession of exclusive individuated knowledge, we have stopped being able to argue before a judge: like Solomon slicing up babies, questions of possession, of division and exclusion, are all that can be asked in court—a whole and happy child would be just a fortunate (and completely accidental) by-product (happiness itself, after all, being typically defined by possessions).

Most importantly for my analysis, and inseparable from any of the moral, political, or epistemological positions I intend to question, is woman's place as other to man. This is, in some ways, the easiest part of my writing. A lot of work has been done recently on the subject, some of which I take advantage of. The nature of woman's position as other will inundate this entire text in rather twisting ways: giving us, for example, different ways of conceptualizing thinking without the economies of possession, of working for human freedom and justice without the horrifying 'necessity' of 'purifying' and 'just' wars. The act of suspension, the duplicitous activity (the lie) within passivity, opposes the singular activity (the truth) of analytic exclusion and reduction. By the latter logic there is no reason—it is in fact sexist—to identify the active as masculine and the passive as feminine. I would still like to learn to speak from within (albeit also against) this sexism. With a thinking, as mine wants to be, which remains within its time, any investigation into the world that denies the fact of the systematic subjugation of women that exists because of this dyad can be seen to both deny existing women's claims to life (who have, in fact, lived before any male-sponsored liberation) and humanity's claim (which is not a right) to a public life not dominated by war and its metaphors. 'Woman' here is used in an attempt to displace and question its traditional and contemporary uses as a metaphor—and my writing cannot occupy the space of allegory's conclusion—as an allegory for the exclusions perpetrated in the name of virility (against all races, classes, and genders) as well as for all of the inclusions performed without name or resentment. One begins thinking, with the allegorical, as with the parody of the allegorical's tradition, *within* the time of the allegory; one thinks the beginning, in the metaphor, by writing towards that which is not (or those who are not) already referenced *within* the tradition. I do not represent the claims of the excluded in front of the traditional judges (although there are times when such a representation is called for); I do nothing more than recognize that the time of my speaking, any speaking, requires an audience which I speak to (and not about). That audience alone makes time meaningful. Time, similarly, is not a product of the tradition, but its condition. Or rather: time is the very style of a tradition—and the style that might open onto, or itself be, the other(ness) of that tradition is my question