

I

Urbi et Orbi

Urbi et orbi: this formulation drawn from papal benediction has come to mean “everywhere and anywhere” in ordinary language. Rather than a mere shift in meaning, this is a genuine disintegration. This disintegration is not simply due to the dissolution of the religious Christian bond that (more or less) held the Western world together until around the middle of a twentieth century to which the nineteenth century effectively relinquished its certainties (history, science, conquering humanity—whether this took place with or against vestiges of Christianity). It is due to the fact that it is no longer possible to identify either a city that would be “The City”—as Rome was for so long—or an orb that would provide the contour of a world extended around this city. Even worse, it is no longer possible to identify either the city or the orb of the world in general. The city spreads and extends all the way to the point where, while it tends to cover the entire orb of the planet, it loses its properties as a city, and, of course with them, those properties that would allow it to be distinguished from a “country.” That which extends in this way is no longer properly “urban”—either from the perspective of urbanism or from that of urbanity—but megapolitical, metropolitan, or co-urbational, or else caught in the loose net of what is called the “urban network.” In such a network, the city crowds, the hyperbolic accumulation of construction projects (with their concomitant demolition) and of exchanges (of movements, products, and information) spread, and the inequality and apartheid concerning the access to the urban milieu (assuming that it is a dwelling, comfort, and culture), or these exclusions from the city that for a long time has produced its own rejections and outcasts, accumulate proportionally. The result can only be understood in terms of what is called an *agglomeration*, with its senses of conglomeration, of piling up, with the sense of accumulation that, on the one hand, simply concentrates (in a few neighborhoods, in a few houses, sometimes in a few protected mini-cities) the well-being that used to be urban or civil, while on the other hand, proliferates what bears the quite simple and unmerciful name of misery.

This network cast upon the planet—and already around it, in the orbital band of satellites along with their debris—deforms the *orbis* as much as the *urbs*. The agglomeration invades and erodes what used to be thought of as *globe* and

which is nothing more now than its double, *glomus*. In such a *glomus*, we see the conjunction of an indefinite growth of techno-science, of a correlative exponential growth of populations, of a worsening of inequalities of all sorts within these populations—economic, biological, and cultural—and of a dissipation of the certainties, images, and identities of what the world was with its parts and humanity with its characteristics.

The civilization that has represented the universal and reason—also known as the West—cannot even encounter and recognize any longer the relativity of its norms and the doubt on its own certainty: this was already its situation two centuries ago. (Hegel wrote in 1802: “[T]he increasing range of acquaintance with alien peoples under the pressure of natural necessity; as, for example, becoming acquainted with a new continent, had this skeptical effect upon the dogmatic common sense of the Europeans down to that time, and upon their indubitable certainty about a mass of concepts concerning right and truth.”)¹ This skepticism, in which Hegel saw the fecundity of the destabilization of dogmatisms today, no longer harbors the resource of a future whose dialectic would advance reason farther, ahead or forward, toward a truth and a meaning of the world. On the contrary, it is in the same stroke that the confidence in historical progress weakened, the convergence of knowledge, ethics, and social well-being dissipated, and the domination of an empire made up of technological power and pure economic reason asserted itself.

The West has come to encompass the world, and in this movement it disappears as what was supposed to orient the course of this world. For all that, up until now, one cannot say that any other configuration of the world or any other philosophy of the universal and of reason have challenged that course. Even when, and perhaps especially when one demands a recourse to the “spiritual,” unless it is to the “revolution” (is it so different?), the demand betrays itself as an empty wish, having lost all pretense of effective capacity, or else as a shameful escape—and even when it does not appear as a supplementary means of exploiting the conditions created by the economic and technological exploitation. (To take what is “positive” of the West and to infuse it with something new—“values”—on the basis of an African, Buddhist, Islamic, Taoist, perhaps supra-Christian or supra-communist soul, such has been for a long time the sterile theme of many a dissertation . . .).

The world has lost its capacity to “form a world” [*faire monde*]: it seems only to have gained that capacity of proliferating, to the extent of its means, the “unworld” [*immonde*],² which, until now, and whatever one may think of retrospective illusions, has never in history impacted the totality of the orb to such an extent. In the end, everything takes place as if the world affected and permeated itself with a death drive that soon would have nothing else to destroy than the world itself.

It is not a question of “weighing in” for or leaning toward either the destruction or the salvation. For we do not even know what either can signify: neither what another civilization or another savagery arising out of the ruins of the West might be, nor what could be “safe/saved” when there is no space outside of the epidemic (in this respect, AIDS is an exemplary case, as are certain epizootic diseases on another level: the scale of the world, of its technologies and of its *habitus*, brings the terror of the plagues of the past to incommensurable heights).

The fact that the world is destroying itself is not a hypothesis: it is in a sense the fact from which any thinking of the world follows, to the point, however, that we do not exactly know what “to destroy” means, nor which world is destroying itself. Perhaps only one thing remains, that is to say, one thought with some certainty: what is taking place is really happening, which means that it happens and happens to us in this way more than a history, even more than an event. It is as if being itself—in whatever sense one understands it, as existence or as substance—surprised us from an unnamable beyond. It is, in fact, the ambivalence of the unnamable that makes us anxious: a beyond for which no alterity can give us the slightest analogy.

It is thus not only a question of being ready for the event—although this is also a necessary condition of thought, today as always. It is a question of owning up to the present, including its very withholding of the event, including its strange absence of presence: we must ask anew what the world wants of us, and what we want of it, everywhere, in all senses, *urbi et orbi*, all over the world and for the whole world, without (the) capital³ of the world but with the richness of the world.

Let us begin with a lengthy citation to which we must give our sustained attention:

In history up to the present it is certainly an empirical fact that separate individuals have, with the broadening of their activity into world-historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them (a pressure which they have conceived of as a dirty trick on the part of the so-called world spirit [*Weltgeist*], etc.), a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last instance, turns out to be the world market. But it is just as empirically established that, by the overthrow of the existing state of society by the communist revolution (of which more below) and the abolition of private property which is identical with it, this power, which so baffles the German theoreticians, will be dissolved; and that then the liberation of each single individual will be accomplished in the measure in which history becomes transformed into world history. From the above it is clear that the

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real intellectual wealth of the individual depends entirely on the wealth of his real connections. Only then will the separate individuals be liberated from the various national and local barriers, be brought into practical connection with the material and intellectual production of the whole world and be put in a position to acquire the capacity to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creation of man).⁴

This text from *The German Ideology* dates from the time that is considered, not without reason, as that of the “early” Marx: he nevertheless formulates what was his conviction to the end according to which “communism” is nothing other than the actual movement of world history insofar as it becomes global and thus renders possible, and perhaps necessary, the passage to consciousness and enjoyment of human creation in its entirety by all human beings. Human beings would henceforth be freed from what limited the relation in which they mutually produce themselves as spirit and as body. In other words, it was his conviction that humanity is defined by the fact that it produces itself as a whole—not in general, but according to the concrete existence of each, and not in the end only humans, but with them the rest of nature. This, for Marx, is the world: that of the market metamorphosing itself or revolutionizing itself in reciprocal and mutual creation. What Marx will define later as “individual property,” that is to say, neither private nor collective, will have to be precisely the property or the proper of each as both created and creator within this sharing of “real relations.”

Thus, for Marx, globalization and the domination of capital converge in a revolution that inverts the direction [*sens*] of domination—but which can do so precisely because the global development of the market—the instrument and the field of play of capital—creates in and of itself the possibility of revealing the real connection between existences as their real sense. The commodity form, which is the fetishized form of value, must dissolve itself, sublimate or destroy itself—in any case revolutionize itself, whatever its exact concept—in its true form, which is not only the creation of value but value as creation. Transcribed in terms closer to our current linguistic usage (if we retain the distinction of senses between “globalization” [*globalisation*]⁵ and “world-forming” [*mondialisation*])—a distinction that sometimes in France in particular encompasses two usages of the same word *mondialisation*—these semantic complexities are the indicators of what is at stake): globalization makes world-forming possible, by way of a reversal of global domination consisting in the extortion of work, that is, of its value, therefore of value, absolutely. But if globalization has thus a necessity—the necessity that Marx designated as the “historical performance” of capital and that consists in nothing other than the creation by the

market of the global dimension as such—it is because, through the interdependence of the exchange of value in its merchandise-form (which is the form of general equivalency, money), the interconnection of everyone in the production of humanity as such comes into view.

If I may focus even more on this point: commerce engenders communication, which requires community, communism. Or: human beings create the world, which produces the human, which creates itself as absolute value and enjoyment [*jouissance*] of that value.

Consequently, the “communist revolution” is nothing other than the accession of this global connection to consciousness and through it the liberation of value as the real value of our common production. It is the becoming-conscious and the mastery in act of the self-production of human beings in the twofold sense of the production of human quality (“total humanity,” free producer of freedom itself) and of the production of each by the others, all by each and each by all (“total humanity,” as circulation of value freed from equivalence, circulation of the value that responds to the human being itself, each time singular, and perhaps also to others, or to all other existents as singular).

Certainly, each of the determinative concepts of this interpretation of the history of the world appears to us today as what we know to be its fragility: process, consciousness, the possibility of uncovering a value and an end in itself. We could note that these concepts are not those upon which Marx constructs his argument explicitly: they rather subtend his argument. But what diminishes their role also reveals their uncontrolled and hidden presence. Whatever the case, something remains nonetheless, in spite of everything, something resists and insists: there remains, on the one hand, precisely what happens to us and sweeps over us by the name of “globalization,” namely, the exponential growth of the globality (dare we say *glomicity*) of the market—of the circulation of everything in the form of commodity—and with it of the increasingly concentrated interdependence that ceaselessly weakens independencies and sovereignties, thus weakening an entire order of representations of belonging (reopening the question of the “proper” and of “identity”); and there remains, on the other hand, the fact that the experience undergone since Marx has increasingly been the experience that the place of meaning, of value, and of truth is the world. Whoever speaks of “the world” renounces any appeal to “another world” or a “beyond-the-world” [*outré-monde*]. “World-forming” also means, as it does in this text from Marx, that it is in “this” world, or as “this” world—and thus as the world, absolutely—that what Marx calls production and/or the creation of humanity, is being played out.⁶

Our difference with him nonetheless reappears on this very point: with him, “human” implicitly remains a teleological or eschatological term, if we

understand by that a logic where the *telos* and/or the *eschaton* take the position and the role of an accomplishment without remainder. For Marx, the human being, as source and accomplishment of value in itself, comes at the end of history when it produces itself: the source must therefore end entirely spread out and accomplished. For us, on the contrary, “the human being” is reduced to a given principle, relatively abstract (“person,” “dignity”) and as such distinct from an actual creation. In truth, it is the figure of “the human being” and with it the configuration of “humanism” that are erased or blurred while we have, at the same time, the most compelling reasons not to replace them with (the figures of) “the overman” or “God.”

It is, however, not certain that with Marx the teleo-eschatological logic is so strictly geared toward the accomplishment of a final value. In a sense, it is even the determination of such a finality that remains lacking in Marx (if the absence of a finality is a lack at all . . .)—and this is perhaps what produced all sorts of myth-producing interpretations. In Marx’s entire text, nothing determines, in the end, any accomplishment except as, essentially open and without end, a freedom (“free labor”) and a “private property” (that which is proper to each in the exchange of all). But what, since Marx, has nonetheless remained unresolved [*en souffrance*]⁷—and we know what “suffering” means here—is precisely the grasping of a concrete world that would be, properly speaking, the world of the proper freedom and singularity of each and of all without claim to a world beyond-the-world or to a surplus-property (in another capital). Quite to the contrary, the world which, for Marx, could be the space of the play of freedom and of its common/singular appropriation—the infinity in act of proper ends—only appears to us as a bad infinite, if not as the imminence of a finishing that would be the implosion of the world and of all of us in it.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify the nature of absolute *value* in itself: the one that Marx designates as “value” pure and simple, not a use-value of which exchange-value is the phenomenal mask and social extortion or exploitation.⁷

Much attention is usually given to “commodity fetish,” the concept and/or representation of which are certainly important; but this also risks fetishizing this “fetishism” and risks making it the open secret of commodity. Now we must distinguish two perspectives: the first is that of the phenomenality of value (of “meaning” or of “the human”), a phenomenality that the “fetish” can make us forget (by reducing it to a religious mystification)⁸ that it probably pertains to a general law according to which value or meaning can only be (re)presented,⁹ even if not strictly speaking “fetishized.” The other perspective—the only one I will consider here—is the one that must consider value as such, the “thing in itself” behind the phenomenon.¹⁰

Absolute value is, in fact, humanity incorporated in the product through work as human work. It is thus humanity producing itself by producing objects (or, I will return to this, creating itself by producing).¹¹ But what is humanity? What is the world as the product of *human beings*, and what is the human being insofar as it is *in the world* and as it *works* this world? What is the “spiritual richness” of which Marx speaks, which is nothing other than the value or meaning of human labor as human, that is to say, also, “free,” but free to the extent that it is to itself its own end and that therefore it is neither value measured according to its use nor value giving itself as general equivalency (*it too is its own end*, but abstract and formal, a finality *for itself* . . .)? What is a value that is neither finalized nor simply equivalent to itself? What is a “human value” toward which the work refers, or whose trace it bears, without however signifying it and without covering it with a mystical veil? (This question, we note, amounts to asking: What is human value considered at a level beyond the reach of “humanism”?).¹²

Perhaps by considering its inverted figures one can approach this value. On September 11, 2001, we witnessed the collision, in the symptom and symbol of the clash, between the United States (summarized in the name, heavy with meaning, of “World Trade Center”) and Islamic fanaticism, two figures of absolute value that are also—not surprisingly—two figures of monotheism. On the one hand, the God whose name is inscribed on the dollar, and on the other, the God in whose name one declares a “holy war.” Of course, both Gods are instrumentalized. But I neglect here the examination of the instrumental logic that is latent, at least, in every religion. It remains that these two figures proceed from the same unique God (or from the same One taken as God) and expose the enigmatic sameness of the One that is, no doubt, always self-destructive: but self-destruction is accompanied by self-exaltation and an over-essentialization.

Let us keep in mind in any case that these two figures present absolute value as all-powerfulness and as all-presence of this all-powerfulness. Value is therefore first itself instrumentalized therein: it serves the reproduction of its own power, indefinitely, through spiritual or monetary capitalization. Value has value through this endless autistic process, and this infinite has no other *act* than the reproduction of its *potentiality* (thus in both senses of the word, power and potentiality). The “bad infinite,” following Hegel, is indeed the one that cannot be *actual*.¹³ On the contrary, the enjoyment of which Marx speaks, implies, as for any enjoyment, its actuality, that is to say, also the finite inscription of its infinity. It is not power that wills power, nor presence that insists in itself, but the suspension of will, the withdrawal, if not the fault, that marks enjoyment as enjoyment of a truth or of a sense, of a “spiritual wealth” or a “beatitude” in Spinoza’s sense (that is to say, as an exercise, as the act of a relation to the totality of meaning or truth).

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Power finds itself on itself as if on a reason that is always sufficient with respect to its exercise, even if destructive and self-destructive. Enjoyment does not give an account of itself. It is in this actuality without reason or end (no doubt the “free labor” of which Marx spoke) that value can be incommensurable, unable to be evaluated, to the point of no longer being a “value” and becoming what the German calls *Würde*, beyond the *Wert*, and which we translate as “dignity.”

The question posed by the world in formation is this one: how to do justice to the infinite in act, of which infinite potentiality is the exact reverse?

When the bad infinite appears to be clearly without end, completely unbound (having rid itself of its teleological humanism), then this question imposes itself, stark and blinding. To reverse an infinite into another, and potentiality into act, is what Marx calls “revolution.” It is necessary, in the end, that the world has absolute value for itself—or else that it has no value whatsoever, as the two forms of all-powerfulness, which have nothing but contempt for the world, indicate. It is in the end necessary that the infinite reason that gives an account of itself allows the actual without-reason (or actual existence) to appear—or that it liquidates itself in its disastrously interminable process.

One may assume that the problem of the apprehending of the world (of its absolute value) is posed in the following way: the world takes place, it happens, and everything seems as if we did not know how to apprehend it. It is our production and our alienation. It is not an accident if, since Marx, the “world” and the “worldly” [*le mondial*] have remained uncertain determinations, overly suspended between the finite and the infinite, between a new and former world, between this world and an other: in short, one may assume that the “world” has fallen short of what it should be, of what it can be, perhaps of what it already is, in some way that we have not yet determined. And it is probably due as well to the fact that “the world” has been secondary to the concept of a world “view” (it was no accident that a *Weltanschauung* played by accident a major political and ideological role in Nazism). It is as if there was an intimate connection between capitalistic development and the capitalization of views or pictures of the world (nature + history + progress + consciousness, etc.—all “views” gathered in a picture whose composition henceforth is blurred and runs on the canvas).

A world “viewed,” a represented world, is a world dependent on the gaze of a subject of the world [*sujet du monde*]. A subject of the world (that is to say as well a subject of history) cannot itself be within the world [*être dans le monde*]. Even without a religious representation, such a subject, implicit or explicit, perpetuates the position of the creating, organizing, and addressing God (if not the addressee) of the world.

And yet, remarkably, there is no need of a prolonged study to notice that, already in the most classical metaphysical representations of that God, nothing else was at stake, in the end, than the world itself, in itself and for itself. In more than one respect, it is legitimate to say that the great transcendent accounts of rationalism elaborated nothing else than the immanent relation of the world to itself: they questioned the being-world of the world. I only ask, in passing, that one reflect on the sense of “continual creation” in Descartes, on that of Spinoza’s *Deus sive natura*, on the “vision in God” in Malebranche or on the “monad of monads” with Leibniz. It would not be inaccurate to say that the question of the world—that is to say, the question of the necessity and meaning of the world—will have formed the self-deconstruction that undermines from within onto-theology.¹⁴ It is such a movement that made possible, after Kant who was the first to explicitly confront the world as such (and, in sum, did nothing else), not only the entry of the world into thought (as an object of vision), but its emergence as the place, the dimension and actuality, of thought: the space-time of meaning and truth. In this respect, Marx’s insistence on the world—an insistence that emphasizes both the “worldwide” (coexistence) and the “worldly” (immanence)—is itself a decisive advance of the self-deconstructive gesture. (In this respect, and however paradoxical it may seem, it is indeed in Husserl and Heidegger that it continued, and as well as, albeit differently, in Bergson and Wittgenstein.)

In any case, the decisive feature of the becoming-world of the world, as it were—or else, of the becoming-world of the whole that was formerly articulated and divided as the nature-world-God triad—is the feature through which the world resolutely and absolutely distances itself from any status as object in order to tend toward being itself the “subject” of its own “worldhood”—or “world-forming.” But being a subject in general means having to become oneself . . .

In order to grasp once more what is at stake in the question of the world as it presents itself to us in this way, let us consider the question of the concept in its simplest form: What is a world? Or what does “world” mean?

Briefly, I would say first: a world is a totality of meaning. If I speak of “Debussy’s world,” of “the hospital world,” or of the “fourth world,” one grasps immediately that one is speaking of a totality, to which a certain meaningful content or a certain value system properly belongs in the order of knowledge or thought as well as in that of affectivity and participation. Belonging to such a totality consists in sharing this content and this tonality in the sense of “being familiar with it,” as one says; that is to say, of apprehending its codes and texts, precisely when their reference points, signs, codes, and texts are neither explicit nor exposed as such. A world: one finds oneself in it [*s’y trouve*] and one is familiar with it [*s’y retrouve*]; one can be in it with “everyone” [*tout le monde*],

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as we say in French. A world is precisely that in which there is room for everyone: but a genuine place, one in which things can genuinely *take place* (in this world). Otherwise, this is not a “world”: it is a “globe” or a “glome,” it is a “land of exile” and a “vale of tears.”

From this brief characterization a few implications follow.

First, a world is not a unity of the objective or external order: a world is never in front of me, or else it is not my world. But if it is absolutely other, I would not even know, or barely, that it is a world. (For instance, for me, a few fragments of Hittite art do not even suggest the *world* of that art.) As soon as a world appears to me as a world, I already share something of it: I share a part of its inner resonances. Perhaps this term *resonance* is capable of suggesting the issue at hand: a world is a space in which a certain tonality resonates. But that tonality is nothing other than the totality of resonances that the elements, the moments, and the places of this world echo, modulate, and modalize. This is how I can recognize a short passage from Bach or from Varese—but also a fragment from Proust, a drawing from Matisse, or a Chinese landscape.

(It can be noted, provisionally, that it is no accident that art provides the most telling examples: a world perhaps always, at least potentially, shares the unity proper to the work of art. That is, unless it is the opposite, or rather, unless the reciprocity between “world” and “art” is constitutive of both. This also concerns the Marxist’s “enjoyment” of universal humanity.)

It follows from this that a world is a world only for those who inhabit it. To inhabit is necessarily to inhabit a world, that is to say, to have there much more than a place of sojourn: its place, in the strong sense of the term, as that which allows something to properly take place. To take place is to properly arrive and happen [*arriver*]; it is not to “almost” arrive and happen and it is not only “an ordinary occurrence.” It is to arrive and happen as proper and to properly arrive and happen to a subject. What takes place takes place in a world and by way of that world. A world is the common place of a totality of places: of presences and dispositions for possible events.

Presence and disposition: sojourn and comportment, these are the senses of the two Greek words *ēthos* and *ethos*, which contaminate each other in the motif of a stand, a “self-standing” that is at the root of all ethics. In a different manner yet oddly analogous, the Latin terms *habitare* and *habitus* come from the same *habere*, which means first “standing” and “self-standing,” to occupy a place, and from this to possess and to have (*habitus* had meant a “manner of relating to . . .”). It is a having with a sense of being: it is a manner of being there and of standing in it. A world is an *ethos*, a *habitus* and an inhabiting: it is what holds to itself and in itself, following to its proper mode. It is a network of the self-reference of this stance. In this way it resembles a subject—and in a way, with-

out a doubt, what is called a subject is each time by itself a world. But the measure or the manner of a world is not that of a subject if the latter must presuppose itself as substance or as prior support of its self-reference. The world does not presuppose itself: it is only coextensive to its extension as world, to the spacing of its places between which its resonances reverberate. (If a subject supposes itself, it subjects itself to its supposition. It can thus only presuppose itself as not subjected to any supposition. It is still, no doubt, a presupposition: thus, precisely, we can say as well that the world presupposes itself as not subjected to anything other, and that is the destiny of the so-called “modern” world. We could thus say that it presupposes itself only, but necessarily, as its own *revolution*: the way it turns on itself and/or turns against itself.)

Thus, the meaning of the world does not occur as a reference to something external to the world. It seems that meaning always refers to something other than what it is a matter of giving a meaning to (as the meaning [*sens*]¹⁵ of the knife is in the cutting and not in the knife). But thought in terms of a world, meaning refers to nothing other than to the possibility of the meaning of this world, to the proper mode of its stance [*tenuë*] insofar as it circulates between all those who stand in it [*s’y tiennent*], each time singular and singularly sharing a same possibility that none of them, any place or any God outside of this world, accomplishes.

The stance of a world is the experience it makes of itself. Experience (the *experiri*) consists in traversing to the end: a world is traversed from one edge to the other, and nothing else. It never crosses over these edges to occupy a place overlooking itself. Time has passed since one was able to represent the figure of a *cosmotheoros*, an observer of a world. And if this time has passed, it is because the world is no longer conceived of as a representation. A representation of the world, a worldview, means the assigning of a principle and an end to the world. This amounts to saying that a worldview is indeed the end of the world as viewed, digested, absorbed, and dissolved in this vision. The Nazi *Weltanschauung* attempted to answer to absence of a *cosmotheoros*. And this is also why Heidegger in 1938, turning against this Nazism, exposed the end of the age of the *Weltbilder*—images or pictures of the world.¹⁶

The world is thus outside representation, outside its representation and of a world of representation, and this is how, no doubt, one reaches the most contemporary determination of the world. Already with Marx, there was an exit from representation that was prescribed by the world as the unfolding of a production of men by themselves (even if, with Marx, this production retains features of representation).

A world outside of representation is above all a world without a God capable of being the subject of its representation (and thus of its fabrication, of its

maintenance and destination). But already, as I indicated, the God of metaphysics merged into a world. More precisely, the “God” of onto-theology was progressively stripped of the divine attributes of an independent existence and only retained those of the existence of the world considered in its immanence, that is to say, also in the undecidable amphibology of an existence as necessary as it is contingent. Let us recall, for instance, Spinoza’s God, the “immanent cause of the world,” or Leibniz’s God, which created “the best of all possible worlds,” that is to say, was limited to being a reason internal to the general order of things. The God of onto-theology has produced itself (or deconstructed itself) as subject of the world, that is, as world-subject. In so doing, it suppressed itself as God-Supreme-Being and transformed itself, losing itself therein, in the existence for-itself of the world without an outside (neither outside of the world nor a world from the outside). The speculative *Weltgeist* mocked by Marx becomes—and becomes with Marx himself—*Welt-Geist* or *Geist-Welt*: no longer “spirit of world” but rather world-spirit or spirit-world.

From this very fact, the existence of the world was at stake as absolute existence: its necessity or its contingency, its totality or incompleteness, became the inadequate terms of a problem, a problem that God’s disappearance transformed completely. Correlatively, being “in” [*dans*] the world could no longer follow a container topology, any more than the world itself was found “within” something other than itself. This is how being-within-the-world [*être-dans-le-monde*] has become being-in-the-world [*être-au-monde*]. This preposition *au* [in] represents, in French, what encapsulates the problem of the world.

To be more precise, one should add: “world-forming” [*mondialisation*] was preceded by a “world-becoming” [*mondanisation*]. This means that the “worldly” world of Christianity, the world as created and fallen, removed from salvation and called to self-transfiguration, had to become the site of being and/or beings as a whole, reducing the other world therein. But, as we will see, it is from the feature of “creation” that an inscription is thus transmitted to the global world—while the internal demand of a transfiguration is transferred to the “worldly” world. For the moment, we could say: world-becoming engages a displacement of value, and world-forming a displacement of production. But neither aspect of the process is a mere “secularization” of the theological: it is complete displacement of the stakes. The world does not replay the roles of the theological script for its own purpose: it displaces everything in another script, which precisely lacks a scene that is given or laid out in advance.¹⁷

This brief metaphysical excursus only has a very specific function here: that of showing that “the world,” in our philosophical tradition, has come to be identified firstly with the totality of beings that longer refers logically to any other being (to no other world: for a God distinct from the world would be

another world), and secondly, identified with the question, enigma or the mystery of the *raison d'être* of such a totality. If it is necessary without being the effect of a superior reason (or will), what is that necessity? But if it is not necessitated by anything, isn't it then contingent?—and in this case where does the fortuitous errancy of this existence go?

And if our world is neither necessary nor contingent, or if it is both at once, what does that mean? More generally, how does one disentangle oneself from this conceptual couple? Perhaps by considering a fact without referring it to a cause (neither efficient nor final). The world is such a fact: it may well be that it is the only fact of this kind (if it is the case that the other facts take place within the world). It is a fact without reason or end, and it is our fact. To think it, is to think this factuality, which implies not referring it to a meaning capable of appropriating it, but to placing in it, in its truth as a fact, all possible meaning.

Marx's text cited earlier can be replaced within the horizon of this problematic in several ways. It is first possible to see in these lines the reflection of a sort of inverted onto-theology, where the immanent cause of a world existing in itself eternally (like the matter of/from which it is made: one should look here at Marx's studies on Epicurean materialism) is the production of humanity itself represented as the final and total accomplishment of self-production (total man would almost be the accomplished self-production of matter as the condition and force of production). But it is also possible—and it is even in some respect necessary—to interpret it differently: indeed, if the production of total humanity—that is, global humanity, or the production of the humanized world—is nothing other than the production of the “sphere of freedom,” a freedom that has no other exercise than the “enjoyment of the multimorphic production of the entire world,” then this final production determines no genuine end, nor *telos* or *eschaton*. It is indeed not determined by the self-conception of humanity and of world, but rather by a beyond of production itself, here named “enjoyment.”

Enjoyment—in whatever way one wants to understand it, and whether one stresses a sexual connotation (by borrowing from a Lacanian problematic of the “real,” if you will, something I do not want to explore further here) or by stressing the Spinozist's joy, or mystical “union” (are these two senses that different? It is not certain . . .)—enjoyment, therefore, is what (if it “is” and if it is “something”)¹⁸ maintains itself beyond either having or being in the same way that it unfolds beyond or before activity and passivity.

By identifying this enjoyment of the global production of humanity, Marx indicates an excess with respect to production as well as with respect to possession (and this is perhaps that very thing which he tried to call later “individual property,” once again, neither private nor collective). Note—a troubling

circumstance—that such an excess of enjoyment (and enjoyment is excessive or it is not enjoyment) constitutes something like the exact parallel of profit that is the law of capital, but a parallel that inverts the sign of surplus-production. This is the case in the sense that the extortion of surplus-value profits from the value created by the work to deposit it in the account of the accumulation in general equivalency (according to the law of an indefinite addition, the principle of which is also excessive, but an excess whose *raison d'être* is accumulation, the end/goal being to indefinitely reproduce the cycle of production and alienation). In that sense enjoyment would be shared appropriation—or appropriating sharing—of what cannot be accumulated or what is not equivalent, that is, of value itself (or of meaning) in the singularity of its creation. But sharing singularity (always plural) means to configure a world, a quantity of possible worlds in the world. This configuration (features, tones, modes, contacts, etc.) allows the singularities to expose themselves.

The extortion or the exposition of each to the others: the most important is not to say, “Here is the decisive alternative!” (which we already know). What matters is to be able to think how the proximity of the two “ex-,” or this twofold excess is produced, how the same world is divided in this way.

In a way, profit and enjoyment thus placed back to back behave like two sides of the infinite: on the one hand, the infinite that Hegel called “bad,” the infinite of the interminable growth of accumulation, the cycle of investment, of exploitation and reinvestment (one could say that it is the cycle of infinite wealth as it began when the world, becoming precapitalistic, came out of the order in which wealth was accumulated for its shine rather than for its reproduction),¹⁹ on the other hand the actual infinite, the one by which a finite existence accedes, as finite, to the infinite of a meaning or of a value that is its most proper meaning and value.

I do not at all find it unreasonable to say that this perspective, which can seem perfectly abstract or idealistic, distant from harsh reality, is precisely what would be capable of diagnosing that which secretly drives our world insofar as it seems surrendered to an infinitely unruly unleashing of appetites of enjoyment: some moved by the drive of exponential accumulation, others provoked by the strategies of production that are subjugated to this drive. Under the unruly unleashing of the bad infinite (an unruly unleashing rightly called “deregulation” in free-market thinking!) that regulates itself according to the indefinite as such, there is a secret desire for the actual infinite: a desire for absolute value. Now it is manifest—it is even what current times render each day more manifest—that no abstract value, no equivalence nor any given representation of human beings or of world (or of another world), can satisfy this expectation. One does not enjoy the human being of humanism, or, if you pre-

fer, the human being of humanism does not have joy: it is *par excellence* the human without joy, it does not even know tragic joy (let us say, in one word, the joy of knowing oneself to be finite) and it knows neither the mystical joy (that of effusion) nor the Spinozist and Nietzschean joy (let us say, the one of knowing oneself *hic et nunc* infinite and eternal).

How can this be considered in an actual relation with the world, or rather with what happens to us as a dissipation of the world in the bad infinite of a “globalization” in a centrifugal spiral behaving like the expanding universe described by astrophysics, all the while doing nothing else than circumscribing the earth more and more in a horizon without opening or exit? How are we to conceive of, precisely, a world where we only find a globe, an astral universe, or an earth without sky (or, to cite Rimbaud and reversing him, a sea without a sun)?

It at least supposes one founding condition. This condition is nothing else than the following: it is a matter of being able to take completely and seriously into account the determination of *world*, in a way that has perhaps never taken place in our history—but for which our history today would offer the possibility.

If the world, essentially, is not the representation of a universe (*cosmos*) nor that of a here below (a humiliated world, if not condemned by Christianity), but the excess—beyond any representation of an *ethos* or of a *habitus*—of a stance by which the world stands by itself, configures itself, and exposes itself in itself, relates to itself without referring to any given principle or to any determined end, then one must address the principle of such an absence of principle directly. This must be named the “without-reason” of the world, or its absence of ground. It is not a new idea to say that the world is “without reason” or that it is exclusively and entirely its own reason. We know quite well that it is found in Angelus Silesius (“the rose grows without reason”), but one does not always notice how it works within all the great formulations of the most classical rationalism, including and especially when they are trying to find and posit a “principle of reason” for all things.²⁰

If I say that this thought works within the consciousness and the unconscious of the West, I mean that it is indeed an actual work, transformative and productive of value—a value that capital is not able, in spite of everything, to commodify without remainder: the value of the world, or more precisely the value of “world,” the value of being-world and of being-in-the-world as significance or as a resonance without reason.

But if capital is not able to absorb all significance in the commodity, although it aims at nothing other, that is perhaps also because it does not entirely come from the commodity alone: what precedes capital is wealth as

glitter, the wealth that does not produce more wealth, but which produces its own splendor and its own opulence as the glow of a meaning in which the world is wrapped (but also blinded and suffocated by its glitter—at the same time that such glitter is captured by the hierarchy). Capital converts the glitter into an accumulation that produces a wealth that is defined by its own (re)productivity: in this way, it transforms the brilliance into the indefinite process of a meaning that is always to come or always lost, and synonymous with enrichment. One could say that wealth loses in power of meaning what it gains as power of accumulation. One should never forget that the word *wealth* originally designated the order of power and greatness, the order of magnificence in the noble sense of the term:²¹ the so-called grandeur of the soul, perhaps its glory and exaltation. One can also recall that it is no accident if the signs of this spiritual greatness, in the beginnings of the proto-capitalist West, shift from wealth to Christian or philosophical poverty.

In this inversion of signs and in the henceforth interminably ambivalent relation that the West maintains with money (and commerce, finance, etc.), it is not only the beginning of the capitalist transformation of society that is at stake. It is also the more secret, and tricky movement by which, in capital, a change in the nature of “wealth” is accompanied by placing grandeur in reserve (in secret), that is, by placing *value* in the “valorous” sense of the word. Value becomes both the remainder and the excess of capital, or the foreign body that weakens and undermines it from within, as the other of its “political economy,” like the super-economy or an-economy that must reveal its gap and its violent demand there. It is that absolute value of value,²² and nothing else, that erupts anew in Marx’s work.

(But this is also why, far from submitting history, culture and the humanity of human beings to an economic causality, and “superstructure” to “infrastructure,” Marx analyzes, on the contrary, the way in which the transformations of value—that is to say, the transformations of the evaluation of value (or of sense, or of truth)—make economic and social transformations possible, etc. In the transformations of the evaluation of value, which are the transformations of the production of the ways of life, the technological and cultural processes are inextricably joined and in reciprocal relation. Marx did not reverse the supposed “Hegelian” history from an ideal determination to a material determination: he suppressed all determinations except that of the production of humanity by itself, a production that is itself precisely determined by nothing other.)

Today, wealth as a quantity that can be capitalized is identical to the infinite poverty of the calculable quantities of the market. But that same market also produces a growing order of symbolic wealth—wealth of knowledge and

significance such as those which, despite their submission to commodities, made the greatest culture of modern times, and such as those which seem to be invented today as a giant productivity that disseminates sense (symbols, signs, modes, schemes, rhythms, figures, sketches, codes for all gains and losses, in all senses, if I may say so). It could well be that capital—and perhaps its own capital, its head and reserve, the primitive accumulation of its own sense—appears in its insignificance and disseminates in a novel significance, violently disseminating all signification in order to demand the forcing or breaching of a sense yet to be invented: the sense of a world that would become rich from itself, without any reason either sacred or cumulative.

Thus, we propose a hypothesis with respect to an internal displacement of technology and capital that would make an inversion of signs possible: the insignificant equivalence reversed into an egalitarian, singular, and common significance. The “production of value” becomes the “creation of meaning.” This hypothesis is fragile, but perhaps it is a matter of grasping it, not as an attempt at a description, but as a will to act. However, such an inversion of signs would not remain a simple formal inversion, if the “signs” were the indexes of an evaluation: it would be a matter of a general reevaluation, of an *Umwertung* on which Marx and Nietzsche would finally concur. On the other hand, such a possibility must not be the object of a programmatic and certain calculation. Such certainty of a prediction would immediately render the *Umwertung* sterile and would predetermine its projects, its representations and, why not, its party with its operatives. . . . It must be a possibility of the impossible (according to a logic used often by Derrida), it must know itself as such, that is to say, know that it happens also in the incalculable and the unassignable. This does not mean that the possibility of the impossible remains formal or constitutes a transcendental with no relevance to any experience. It must devote itself to being actual, but the aim of actuality must take into account, at the same time, a boundless leap outside of the calculable and controllable reality. After all, the transcendental is also, always, that which constitutes conditions of possibility of experience, while at the same time *rendering impossible the subject of that experience* as itself an empirical subject. Willing the world, but not willing a subject of the world (neither substance nor author nor master), is the only way to escape the un-world. And the materialism of actuality—of the concrete life of human beings—must here conceive of matter as impenetrable, namely as the impenetrability of the truth of the world, the “meaning of the world” being the passion of this truth.

It would thus be a matter of producing and/or of allowing for a wealth to be given that would be enriched only by the splendor of such a meaning and that, in this way, would also be “poverty,” if this word does indeed designate

since the beginning of the West—not by accident—not the misery resulting from spoliation, but the *ethos* (and also the *pathos*), the value of which does not derive from ownership (of something or of oneself) but in abandonment. Poverty, or the being-abandoned—in all the complex ambivalence of these two senses: abandoned *by* and abandoned *to*. (One could show the emergence of a triple figure of poverty in this sense: philosophical-Greek, Jewish, or Roman.)

The three aspects of wealth would be: glitter, capital, dissemination, and they would constitute three moments of the body: the glorious and hieratic body of the Gods, the working body subjugated to the speculative spirit, the body exposed to contact with all bodies: a world of bodies, a world of senses, a world of being-*in*-the-world. But it goes without saying that these moments do not simply succeed each other like so many stages of a process, or like the ages of the world. It is their coexistence and their conflict that needs to be thought.

What is most troubling about the modern enigma—for specifically this is what constitutes the modern and which makes it, for the last three centuries, an enigma for itself, which even defines the modern as such an enigma, without any need to speak of the “postmodern”—is that the without-reason could take the form both of capital and of the mystical rose that represents the absolute value of the “without-reason.” One could almost be tempted, even beyond the wildest imaginations of today’s free market capitalists, to present the rose as the ultimate revelation of the secret of capital—a revelation that projected, it is true, until the indefinable end of perpetual reinvestment. Others would be tempted—and we all are today, more or less—to reveal, on the contrary, that the secret of the rose and of capital together occurs like an unprecedented geopolitical, economic, and ecological catastrophe, globalization as the suppression of all world-forming of the world.

It is in all respects not only reasonable, but also required by the vigor and rigor of thought, to avoid recourse to representations: the future is precisely what exceeds representation. And we have learned that we must grasp the world once more outside of representation.

Now, in order to distance such thinking of the world from representation, there is no better way than this one: to grasp the “world” once more according to one of its constant motifs in the Western tradition—to the extent that it is also the tradition of monotheism—namely, the motif of creation.

To appropriate this motif, I must take a preliminary precaution, but in an elliptical manner. “Creation” is a motif, or a concept, that we must grasp outside of its theological context. Let me indicate how this can be done schematically: as I have previously suggested, it is theology itself that has stripped itself of a God distinct from the world. At the end of monotheism, there is world without God, that is to say, without another world, but we still need to reflect

on what this means, for we know nothing of it, no truth, neither “theistic” nor “atheistic”—let us say, provisionally, as an initial attempt, that it is *absentheistic*.²³

If “creation” means anything, it is the exact opposite of any form of production in the sense of a fabrication that supposes a given, a project, and a producer. The idea of creation, such as has been elaborated by the most diverse and at the same time most convergent thoughts, including the mystics of the three monotheisms but also the complex systems of all great metaphysics, is above all the idea of the *ex nihilo* (and I do not exempt Marx from this, to the contrary: while his understanding of Christian creation is only instrumental, for him value is precisely created . . .). The world is created from nothing: this does not mean fabricated with nothing by a particularly ingenious producer. It means instead that it is not fabricated, produced by no producer, and not even coming out of nothing (like a miraculous apparition), but in a quite strict manner and more challenging for thought: the nothing itself, if one can speak in this way, or rather *nothing* growing [*croissant*] as *something* (I say “growing” for it is the sense of *creso*—to be born, to grow—from which comes *creo*: to make something merge and cultivate a growth). In creation, a growth grows from nothing and this nothing takes care of itself, cultivates its growth.

The *ex nihilo* is the genuine formulation of a radical materialism, that is to say, precisely, without roots.

Thus, we can now clarify what we said earlier: if the world-becoming (detheologization) displaces value—makes it immanent—before world-forming displaces the production of value—making it universal—the two together displace “creation” into the “without-reason” of the world. And this displacement is not a transposition, a “secularization” of the onto-theological or metaphysical-Christian scheme: it is, rather, its deconstruction and emptying out, and it opens onto another space—of place and of risk—which we have just begun to enter.

If the world is the growth of/from nothing [*croissance de rien*]*—an expression of a formidable ambiguity—it is because it only depends on itself, while this “self” is given from nowhere but from itself. But it is also because it is the growth of/from nothing other than nothing, a nothing that obviously is not a pure and simple nothingness, on the basis of which no growth could be conceived, but which is the without-reason [rien de raison] of the world. In this sense, the “creation” of the world is in no way a representation that is opposed to the representation of an eternity of the matter of the world. In truth, none of these things, creation or eternal matter, are representations, and this is why they are not opposites. The eternity of matter only means that there is nothing outside the world, no other world, and no space-time that would not be that of “our” world. This eternity is the eternity of space-time, absolutely. Creation*

is the growth without reason of such a space-time. The two concepts correspond to each other at the exact limit of metaphysics and physics: and this limit is not one that separates two worlds, but one that shares out the indefiniteness of the universe (or the indefiniteness of its expansion, as contemporary cosmology has it) and the infinity of its meaning.

By writing that “the sense of the world must lie outside the world,”²⁴ Wittgenstein simultaneously stated two things: that the world in itself does not constitute an immanence of meaning, but that, since there is no other world, the “outside” of the world must be open “within it”—but open in a way that no other world could be posited there. This is also why Wittgenstein writes further: “It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists” (TLP 6.44, 88).

The meaning of this *fact* is the meaning that the without-reason makes possible. Now, this means that it is meaning in the strongest and most active sense of the term: not a given signification (such as that of a creating God or that of an accomplished humanity), but meaning, absolutely, as possibility of transmission from one place to another, from the one who sends to the one who receives, and from one element to another, a reference that forms at the same time a direction, an address, a value, or a meaningful content. Such a content constitutes the stance of a world: its *ethos* and its *habitus*. Clearly, neither meaning as direction [*sens*] nor meaning [*sens*] as content is given. They are to be invented each time: we might as well say to be created, that is, to create from nothing and to bring forth that very without-reason that sustains, drives, and forms the statements that are genuinely creative of meaning, such as in science, politics, esthetics, and ethics: on all these registers, we are dealing with multiple aspects and styles of what we could call the *habitus* of the meaning of the world. (I limit myself to speaking of “statements” to remain close to the sphere where we situate meaning most commonly; one should also think of gestures, actions, passions, and formalities, etc. . . . Solidarity, love, music, cybernetics are also meaning in act.)

This does not at all mean that anything makes sense in just any way: that would be precisely the capitalist version of the without-reason, which establishes the general equivalence of all forms of meaning in an infinite uniformity. It signifies on the contrary that the creation of meaning, and with it the enjoyment of sense (which is not foreign, one should note, to the enjoyment of senses) requires its forms, its inventions of forms and the forms of its exchange. Worldhood, in this regard, is the form of forms that itself demands to be created, that is not only produced in the absence of any given, but held infinitely beyond any possible given: in a sense, then, it is never inscribed in a representation, and nonetheless always at work and in circulation in the forms that are being invented.

One could say that worldhood is the *symbolization* of the world, the way in which the world symbolizes in itself with itself, in which it articulates itself by making a circulation of meaning possible without reference to another world.

Our task today is nothing less than the task of creating a form or a symbolization of the world. This seems to us to be the greatest risk that humanity has had to confront. But it may well be that it has already done so several times, perhaps even that the world itself has already done so several times. This is neither an abstract nor purely a formal task—whether this word is taken esthetically or logically. It is the extremely concrete and determined task—a task that can only be a struggle—of posing the following question to each gesture, each conduct, each *habitus* and each *ethos*: How do you engage the world? How do you involve yourself with the enjoyment of the world as such, and not with the appropriation of a quantity of equivalence? How do you give form to a difference of values that would not be a difference of wealth in terms of general equivalence, but rather a difference of singularities in which alone the passage of a meaning in general and the putting into play of what we call a world can take place?

However, as I mentioned, this task is a struggle. In a sense, it is a struggle of the West against itself, of capital against itself. It is a struggle between two infinities, or between extortion and exposition. It is the struggle of thought, very precisely concrete and demanding, in which we are engaged by the disappearance of our representations of the abolishing or overcoming of capital. It demands that we open or discern in capital another type or another kind of a flaw than what we understood to be insurmountable contradictions, and that capital was able to overcome, thus overcoming also our representations. We must consider capital in terms of its height and power—in terms of its “wealth” and “fortune.”

The moment has come to expose capital to the absence of reason, for which capital provides the fullest development: and this moment comes from capital itself, but it is no longer a moment of a “crisis” that can be solved in the course of the process. It is a different kind of moment to which we must give thought.

But such thinking is not only theoretical: now as in the past, it is practically manifest and necessary—in the sense of the necessity and manifestedness of the world—that the struggle is straightaway and definitively a matter of concrete equality and actual justice. In this sense, Marx’s demand is not obsolete. The “thinking” of which we are speaking is necessarily involved both in the questioning of the “sense of the world”²⁵ and in immediate, political, economic, and symbolic acts. But the difference between Marx’s revolution and the one in which we are perhaps underway without our knowledge—and of which a

thousand revolts, a thousand rages, a thousand creations of signs are the flashing indicators—could be sketched provisionally in the following way: by conceiving of itself as a reversal of the relation of production, Marx's revolution presupposed that this reversal was equivalent to a conversion of the meaning of production (and the restitution of created value to its creator). What we have begun to learn is that it is also a matter of creating the meaning or the value of the reversal itself. Only perhaps this creation will have the power of the reversal.

Further, when Marx wrote that philosophers contented themselves with interpreting the world, and that it was henceforth a matter of changing it, he specified nothing with respect to the relations that the transformation entertains with the prevailing interpretations: Do the former suspend the latter? Do the latter determine, on the contrary, the former? Or else isn't it a matter of transforming the relation between them, and of understanding (that is to say, of enacting) that meaning is always in *praxis*, although no practice is limited to enacting a theory and although no theory is able to diminish practice? But the gap between the two is necessary to what is called *praxis*, that is to say, *meaning at work* [au travail], or even *truth in the work* [à l'œuvre].²⁶

This gap is not the gap between an interpretive philosophy and a transformative action, nor is it the gap between a regulative utopia and a resigned practice, nor the gap between a founding myth and the violence that sought to incarnate it. Indeed, under the three figures—interpretation, utopia, or myth—beneath their differences, the possibility of a correspondence of truth to a form, or of a coming into presence of an accomplished meaning remains presupposed. But the issue, on the contrary, is to be attentive to the gap of meaning with itself, a gap that constitutes it or that is its truth. Such a gap always places meaning in excess or in deficiency with respect to its own work.

In excess or in deficiency with respect to its work does not mean outside of all labor, but means a labor whose principle is not determined by a goal of mastery (domination, usefulness, appropriation), but exceeds all submission to an end—that is, also exposes itself to remaining without end. Here it is art that indicates the stakes: the work of art is always also a meaning at work beyond the work [à l'oeuvre au-delà de l'oeuvre], as well as a work working and opening beyond any meaning that is either given or to be given. But the opening without finality is never a work nor any product: it is the enjoyment of which Marx spoke, as enjoyment by human beings of what opens their humanity beyond all humanism. (This work is not without labor, any more than this enjoyment is without suffering.)

To create the world means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence. But this means to con-

duct this struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this *world* is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely *what* forms the justice and the meaning of a world.

Once again, to create as a struggle, which while struggling—consequently, by seeking power, by finding forces—does not seek the exercise of power—nor property—whether collective or individual, but seeks itself and its agitation, itself and the effervescence of its thought in act, itself and its creation of forms and signs, itself and its contagious communication as propagation of an enjoyment that, in turn, would not be a satisfaction acquired in a signification of the world, but the insatiable and infinitely finite exercise that is the being in act of meaning brought forth in the world [*mis au monde*].