

Positions — 1: Writing and the Voice¹

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Preface

Two concepts have so far marked out for us this path of the “Vodouic body:” those of initiation and possession. Both concepts belong to the system of writing. The use that we have made of them, however, aimed to follow — in the fissures, at the edges of the limit, within the labyrinth of writing — the spacing of the voice. In engaging the problem of how to disentangle the voice in writing, where the voice dies, what we are putting in place is a politics of the voice, a libidinal politics, which aims at fidelity to the voice. We believe we see here stakes that not only have to do with Vodou, but which also have to do with one of the theoretical implications that it imposes on us today.

The analysis of Vodou has been the place and occasion of a theoretical reworking of what the writing of Vodou already imposes. We must now identify the stakes, strategy, and tactics of such a reworking. Either Vodou displaces us, or we close it off inside the problems with which writing produces us. Trying to explain the theoretical positions by which we elude writing to lend an ear to the voice is at the same time to force ourselves to find out how far focusing on the drive that makes its space in Vodou — rather than on the sign where interpretation constrains possession — can lead us. Thus, what seems to be theory continues in writing, but on its edges and in its interstices of intensities, precisely where it allows itself to be spellbound, a practice that began on the side of the theater of possession. This analysis, which

¹ From “Positions,” Part 4 of *Le vaudou: un espace pour “les voix”* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1976).

can only advance in a stumbling way, is thus sustained by a desire to follow, in the writing of history, that which ruptures history and constantly compels political, disciplinary, scientific, methodological, and epistemological adjustments. To follow the nomadism of the drive as exactly as possible, which is the ambition of this analysis of Vodou, we must clarify its principal theoretical positions and indicate, as best we can, the rifts that a fidelity to voices introduces in meaning.

1: Writing and the Voice

The relation between the voice and writing that we have instituted by our Vodouic voyage [*voyage vaudouïque*] cannot be simply reduced to dualism. It is the identification [*repérage*] of a machine: writing, this instrument without which mercantilism cannot proceed to the accumulation of capital. This writing that sets up a double scene by its very existence (the official and the obscene, the good and the bad, the Other and the same, truth and action), that postulates a remainder and founds calculation, is an essential condition of what traverses the culture and history of Haiti under the name of Vodou.² The refusal of the writing-voice dualism means not turning the voice into a remainder of writing that could then be thought of as its cause. If it is the nature of writing to produce a remainder, it is because writing is an instrument of conquest and a system of counting at the same time. On the one hand, it conquers by bringing into a signifying (and thus conventional and profitable) unit. On the other hand, it names and numbers. It counts. It makes multiplicities, innumerable and without remainder, pass into measurements where the infinitely repeatable unary trait introduces a controllable and exchangeable plurality. The remainder instated by writing is of the order of this second plurality. It supposes the numera-

² The whole point of Part 1 was to establish this. (Unless otherwise designated, all notes are by Willy Apollon).

ble. It renders possible and conditions the calculation of surplus value. It has nothing to do with the innumerable of the voice. Writing enumerates, counts, calculates, and the remainder is its next conquest, if it is not already its capital. The imperialism of writing must ceaselessly reproduce its remainder, a wilderness to conquer, multiply, add up, spend, and accumulate. What is hidden, the object of signification, makes hermeneutics into a weapon of conquest. Missionary churches, expeditionary forces, market capitalism, then industrial capitalism, etc. The hollowing out of truth by writing — that Other without name or face — is the final legitimation, without recourse, of the entire organization of the monopoly of violence (political power) through which writing extends its domination. The Other, this removal of truth so it becomes necessarily inaccessible, is also not this remainder of writing. The final legitimation of the transformation of energies into absolute violence, the Other is at the same time the motor of guilt. The Other is therefore, in its very inexistence, that without which writing does not function, without which the text has no authority. And the Other cannot be counted. It makes no number with anything else. It makes counting possible. It is the “facelessness” of writing. The remainder, on the other hand, is the numerable, which is not yet named, not yet brought under the unity of the trait. It is part of the same like its promised land. It is a still savage tribe, a people to convert to Christianity, a potential market, not yet constituted or dominated by capital. If the remainder does not yet constitute a sign because it is not yet numbered, it is nonetheless what can modify a sign, according to the system on which all the work of writing depends. The remainder is therefore a yet uncultured nature, a promised land, the shifting horizon of a planned voyage. That without which writing can only repeat itself, it is more the newcomer than the stranger. It assures the reproduction of capital. Because of it, the work of writing gains this strange trait of not having to stop.

But the remainder is not for all that the internal limit of writing, insofar as the numerable, even under the figure of exteriority that characterizes it, is a production of writing. The internationalization of capital could never be its internal limit; on the contrary, one of its fun-

damental powers is an infinite power of internal transformation, the creation of new wild spaces to civilize, new models of satisfaction to sell, new subtleties of expenditure, the reorganization of all the perverse structures and displacement of all limits. Novelty, which writing produces in its own field, has nothing of the strange intensities that writing undertakes to diminish. Novelty is the richness and surprise of the sign's own game in the interior of writing. As for the stranger who transports drama and trance, it is this madness, this loss and expenditure without limit that, in trying to open possibilities of "life," writing borders and bypasses. The stranger is a ceaseless flowing of an unavoidable "exteriority" that makes familiarity impossible, a second death that is foreign to that of the individual but that solicits him in his anxiety [*angoisse*]. Writing deploys number and calculation of expenditures to open a familiar space in this strangeness without name. It makes "life" possible, not as biological singularity but as deferral (a stay of execution).

In the formation, as well as in the historical reproduction of Haitian Vodou, the *loas*³ remain strangers, the cultural and historic figures of the voice. It is remarkable, as we have noted, that the possessed undergo an alteration of "voice." More important for us than the transformations in bearing that occur over the course of the crisis of possession, the modification of the voice connotes the presence of a stranger in the *bounfort*.⁴ Our insistence on this "ethnographic" fact means leaving behind a simple distinction between the oral and the written. For us, it is not simply about distinguishing written civilization from oral civilization and studying their confrontation in Vodou. For the practitioner of Vodou, the crisis brings about access to psychological states sometimes situated, by political analysis,⁵ as compensation or as an il-

3 Editorial Note: *Loas* are Vodouic spirits or "voices."

4 Editorial Note: The *bounfort* is the space where the Vodouic ceremonies occur, where the *loas* or voices possess or mount the initiates.

5 But religious analysis proceeds according to the same type of arguments. On this subject, one should read the work of Jean Kerboul, *Le Vaudou, magie*

lusory substitution, for a situation of socio-economic domination. Such an analysis fails to deal with the strangeness of the voice. That the crisis of possession exists in dominated societies and gives rise to situations, behaviors and attitudes, said to be feminine, is secondary, though it is related to the kind of question we want to sustain. On the contrary, we find in this type of analysis and its conclusions the confirmation of a problematic to elaborate: that the work of writing to submit everything to meaning and number is the space of an ambiguous evocation where the voice comes either to die in the sign or to open a transitory space for the nomadism of the free drives.

The voice evoked here is not the one that produces linguistic writing. It is not part of the linguistic machine. Even if all the ortho-graphs capture it in language to extinguish the living word [*parole vive*] there, it is never there other than as a prisoner...the stranger. It is what inhabits the common language, like an outside-sense, cries, a multiple din [*bruit*] of bodies that are not organic but erotogenic, fragmented, useless and without boundaries. It is not simply connotation, but a part of a body torn and traversed by multiple drives illegible to any institution. The phonemic here is the restitution of writing. The voice works writing, alters it, but is not there as its other or its remainder. It transforms writing into a place of transit where errant libido can be mobilized in joyfully useless excess and expenditure. Vodou and its secret societies are not the elsewhere of white writing [*l'écriture blanche*]⁶

ou religion, (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1973). The author, who provides us with an interesting work on the family heritage of the *loas*, remains within the religious presuppositions that colonize Vodou, and the “superstitions” that they introduce into it. He has already personified the diabolical too much to distinguish the imaginary from the symbolic in Vaudou, and even less from the real.

⁶ Translators' note: We have translated *l'écriture blanche* as “white writing,” but the wider sense of the term in its theoretical context is indicated by Susan Sontag in her introduction to Roland Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero*: “the notion of zero degree, neutral, colourless writing—first discussed by Sartre,

that organizes the theater of democracy in the formation of Haitian society.⁷ They pass through this theater, overturning official assurances, they spread doubt, unjustifiable fears and nocturnal horrors. They profoundly modify the pieces and articulations, perverting their function. But this is not the other of the system, nor is it another system. This plurality, without proper name, that destroys all the units of national space does not have the organization of a system. No hierarchy to locate. Neither Bible nor Church. It is not even another country. It is the tearing up of the country. It is not seeking to give Vodou a language, nor to find its hidden language. This out-of-sign is pure voice. The sacred and secret language of initiates says nothing. It activates formulas without depth. It figures the unheard of in the audible and materializes the voice. No linguistic research can recuperate it to deliver it to writing. And the incapacity of the initiated to translate the sense for us is not from ignorance or lack of culture. By this “speaking in tongues” the voice travels in writing and transforms it. Period. There is nothing to understand. There is only to let oneself be possessed by the voice. All efforts to rehabilitate and to defend reintroduce writing in the end, whereas it is simply a matter of organizing a passage, constituting edges and borders, where the voice can travel in the alteration of writing.

The voice thus evoked is not that of the possessed. We have noted this. We say that the voice of the possessed [*la possédée*] (whether man or woman it is always the bride of the *loa*) changes. Is it another voice? Is it the voice of the other? And what is the status of this other? These questions build a machine of identification which extinguishes

who called it *l'écriture blanche*, in his famous review of Camus' *L'Étranger*— enters Barthes argument only briefly: in the introduction (pp. 4,5), as the ‘last episode of a Passion of writing, which recounts stage by stage the stage the disintegration of bourgeois consciousness.’” *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

⁷ See above what is said about this on the occasion of the initiation of *boungan* and *mambo*.

the voice in nomination. Exorcism? The voice is not identifiable in language. It can't be walled up in writing-language. Appearing to come from elsewhere, it is primarily an alteration of the relation of the initiated to language and to his own voice. It is this alteration that marks the passage of the voice in writing. The voice fades out in the enunciation where it gives body (as *jouissance* and suffering) to the rupture of social relations, where possession surges forth. It is not the prisoner of the discourse that comments on and glosses writing, any more than it is its other or its opposite. The voice insinuates itself into discourse and disassembles it [*le démonte*]. It derails discourse. Not that it has something to say. The voice has no message. It is the very act of the perversion of official writing and discourse.

Of course, the postures, behaviors, and discourse of possession are ruled by culture. But this rule is only apparent. The many differences in the behaviors and speeches of the *loas* specifically prevent foreseeing what Loko will do or what Erzulie will demand.⁸ The initiation aims to establish a writing—a control that is—on this unforeseen. And even among the *bounsi canzo*,⁹ the intervention of the *boungan* or the *mambo* is often necessary to chase away the *loa* that goes beyond the ritually foreseen and bearable frameworks for its “passage,” or to control the possessed in the grip of invisible forces that subjugate him or her and make him or her pass the limits of the possible for the *bounfort*. The control — ritual writings — that the Vodou brotherhoods have

8 Editorial Note: Loko is the guardian spirit of the *bounfort*, and Erzulie is a feminine, virginal spirit, which Apollon describes as “the figure itself of the libidinal, celibate errancy, with no borders or center, unlimited expenditure, death to work in the respite of sense.” *Le vaudou* p. 222.

9 Editorial Note: The *bounsi-canzo* names the second stage of initiation in Haitian Vodou. The “*bounsi*” status refers to becoming the bride of the *loas*, which Apollon describes in terms of a symbolic adolescence, whereas the *boungan* or *mambo* stage refers to an adult status where the universe of the *loas* is faced in solitude by the man or woman who attains it. See *Le vaudou*, p. 156.

constituted are flexible. They are channels open to voices for their nomadic wanderings in the cultural field delimited by official, democratic, Christian discourse. But they are also protection for the *bounforts* against the upheavals that accompany this passage of the voices. An anguishing unpredictability remains in the organizing ritual that seeks to bring the voice back to another writing. The whole cabalistic interpretation of Vodou rests precisely on the foundation, the legitimization of this other writing that would be at the origin. As if there could be another kind of writing! As if the function of writing were not always and everywhere the constitution of an elsewhere (truth and/or number, either way): the hollowing out of absence, which justifies the violent reduction of the present expenditure — without limit and without name — to controllable and profitable investments! The passage of the drive to the institution. The gridding of immeasurable and senseless pluralities by numerable units. From sense to number, the work of writing everywhere repeats the same under different modalities. What changes it are only, here and there, flaws, fissures in its organization and boundaries, which it lends to possession and to the erosion of its space by the voice.

We could also, in the manner of Vodouesque ideology [*l'idéologie vaudouesque*], posit the voices as an original extraterritoriality, black and African, unassimilable to Western writing. Vodou is then an historical “remainder,” an exclusion that incessantly returns in Western language insofar as it dominates the banks of the Artibonite and the entire pearl of the Antilles. The voices would thus speak this irreducibility. They would pronounce the limit of the West at the same time that they would signify the strange alterity of Africa.

We do not exactly believe that Vodou could have taken on such a function over nearly two centuries. That would be to cross out history, not so much the history that writing produces but history as it escapes writing and only appears there to displace, fracture, and finally alter writing. The question of the voice is more general and fundamental than the particular would-be resistance of African(icity) to white assimilation. If Vodou is a space opened by and for the voice in writing, it is not only as an ethnological particularity. What is at stake here is not

specific to Haitian Vodou. But it so happens that Haitian Vodou is an exemplary situation. Since the beginning of capitalism, from the very first capitalist accumulation, the enterprise of writing, which the hegemonic classes use as a weapon, has not been able to reduce the voice, the innumerable and unspoken plurality of nomadic drives, to a role in discourse. It is not simply as an irreducible or a remainder that the voice thus resists language. It is as a living word, as a demand for *jouissance* and not a production of meaning. The production of sense is indeed an activity of language; it sets up the limits where writing constrains the possible in discourse. The voice does not dwell in discourse. It traverses it without even leaving its trace. What makes a trace in the wake of the voice results from displacements effected in discourse by the passage of the voice. The voice does not give into the legibility that it traverses and perverts, because it cannot feed the sayable. What clears and obscures a path for itself with the voice, or better still in its passage, remains the unheard of. It is not simply what has never been heard, but what offers itself more to the auditory than to the understanding, something on the order of a “seizing of the ears.”¹⁰ The sense of hearing is the opening in the initiated body that is marked, eroticized. The voice has nothing to say and offers nothing to sense or meaning. It possesses in the excess of *jouissance* and/or the horror of suffering. Surged from the initiated body,¹¹ it makes no address. It takes possession. What it breaks in the body is its organicity. The organic body is produced in and by writing. The voice, noise and murmurs from out-of-sense, ravishes the body of writing. Where medical discourse identifies the organs, the

10 See what is said about this on the occasion of the initiation of *houngans* and *mambos* in the previous chapters [Editorial Note: See Apollon, *Le vaudou* pp. 143-44; 169-70].

11 The initiation that binds the corporeal individuality of a *hounsi* to a *loa* is in fact a fragmentation. It has the function of marking the body and dedicating it to the fragmentation required by the multiple possessions to which this *hounsi* body (a body feminized by the *jouissance* of voices) is henceforth entitled by the initiation.

voice displaces the limits. It interrupts the productivity of organs and their connection to socio-economically defined relations. It introduces disorder in them, by rendering impossible the functional relationship [*rapport de travail*] that attaches these organs to social profitability, to medical discourse, and to the established order that identifies them. The voice disorganizes the body, by compromising the unifying and discriminating action of writing. The voice thus feminizes it. It does not efface the marks of the masculine, it distorts and displaces them, annuls them for the time of its passage. Its passage transforms an organic body into a body of jouissance/suffering. It is the rupture, the displacement, the perversion, and the traversal of the limits that writing produces in language and of which discourse, especially political discourse, is the reproduction under every imaginable form.

Duality and Articulation of the Individual to Society

However, it is under a discipline commanded by writing that the work of occulting the voice is accomplished, orchestrated by all the human sciences under the individual-society relation. In fact, these sciences are the perfection and refinement of the montage of the theological and economic, and thus political, enterprise of writing. On this point, the analysis of Vodou — if carried out in this way, which is our own (following in the trace of its distortions of writing, the nomadism and transit of the voice) — could only be revelatory. It opens a philosophical space.

Whether it is a question of psychiatric, ethnological, political, or literary analyses of Vodou, the occultation of the exigencies of the drive is carried out in the mode of the relationship of the individual to society. It all comes down to the steps taken by an individual, initiated or not, who has to deal with an untenable socio-economic situation, and who has recourse to the *loas* through the intermediary of a brotherhood, an initiate, a *houngan*, etc. Here, the space of voices is seized upon as a means, to which an initiate gives access. The schema

is simple, classic, capitalist. On one side there is a defective situation, a lack. On the other are the means of production and transformation of the situation and finally, between the two, intermediaries who have the dual power of possessing the means of production-transformation, and of assuring, or not, its proper functioning. We will not dwell here on the obvious model of political economy. This model supports all the analyses that bring the impossible articulation of the drives to history back to the relation between the individual and society. It seems more urgent to us to locate the theological enterprise that commands this reduction. In fact, as we have already shown it is a work proper to writing. It is a dual work that we can pinpoint here, once again, as carving out an elsewhere of sense, and at the same time organizing the numerable. This approach, which has a double appearance, works in fact to articulate the true — the theological — to the numerable — the political economy. It is maintained and reproduced in several places in the human sciences, epistemology and interdisciplinarity being the most noteworthy. But the singular case of Vodou immediately shows us where it is necessary to let go of such a process: at the articulation of psychiatry to ethnology.

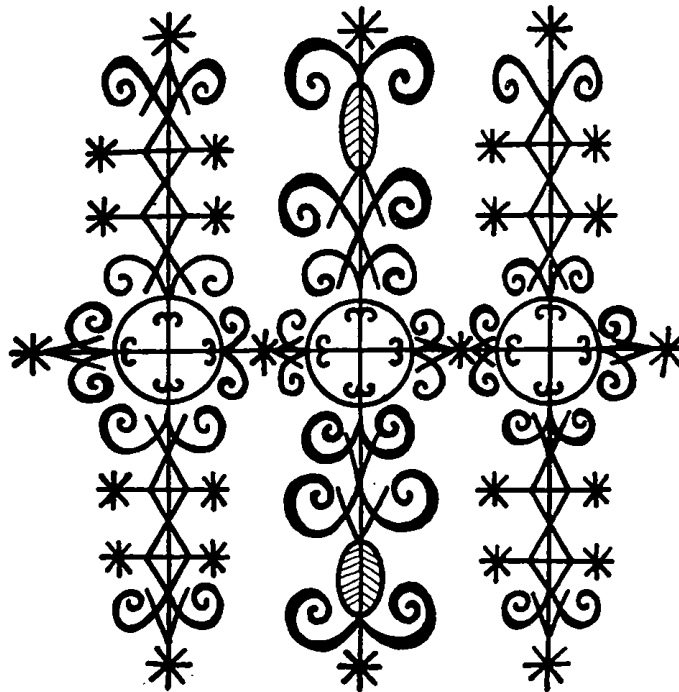


Figure 1: Marassa - Dossou - Dossa

[Figure 1] (The Twins) The repetition of the same is the emergence of strangeness within the familiar. Under the repetition of the one, the unlimitedness of the innumerable already breaks through. For the libidinal practice that is Vodou, it is necessary to introduce a possible life, a reprieve, in this flow of excess [*la démesure*]. The cult of the marassa, by reducing the repetition of the same to the double, attempts this limitation of infinite power. The stakes are as high as the tyranny that the twins, dead or alive, can exercise over the parental group.¹²

¹² Editorial note: Drawing by Christiane Beaudoin, reprinted from p.277.

This theoretical articulation is the place of a discursive production where a clandestine desire to obscure the impossibility of some sort of sublimation is pursued. What is at stake there is, again, an interest in the dialectical synthesis of two irreconcilables. In the end, both this synthesis and this dialectic aim at one thing from the start (from the original constitution of the two antagonistic poles): the reduction of the drive to the sign, of the drive's multiplicities to the writing of history. The dualism at origin is part of the overall system that aims at this reduction. But also, the division and autonomy at the origin, methodologically necessary but ideologically maintained for each of the so-called human sciences, serves the same purpose. The most brilliant example that we know of, the standard in the theoretical field as it is constituted, is the third part of the first volume of *Structural Anthropology*¹³ titled "Magic and Religion," primarily chapters IX and X. We see there, applied in the most magisterial and incontestable way, this reduction to the same, here identified as the structure. Elsewhere psychoanalysis¹⁴ will proceed in the same manner, but in a different mode, forgetting that the habit does not suffice to make the monk. Here the structure, there the signifier. The reduction remains. The writing at the origin returns at the end. Of course, we carefully clarify the irreducible difference¹⁵ of the signifier to writing. But even elaborated to infinity (seminars...where the voice dominates and how! ...well!), these details do not manage to hide the forest...of signs. To only retain writing's

13 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, Vol. I (Paris: Pion, 1958), 183-227.

14 In some *écrits* designated as such — Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1956).

15 And we cannot indeed ignore this difference or the difference of structure to writing either.

literary and/or literal dimension was certainly a parry against the signifier, where the voice can make its way. But signifier or structure, is it not the same issue? Such debates take us away from the essential: the constitution of the Other, an elsewhere for the truth, on a basis of the numerable, the repetition of the unary trait.

The countable, the unit, is the individual. Its constitution, as we have shown, is for the purpose of control, negation, of nomadic, tribal and asocial multiplicities. The number, at once numeration and nomination — the activity of writing — is found at the center of the social act. It realizes the rationalization of the organization. It makes room for money and accumulation. The undivided does not only territorialize the innumerable; by sedating the drive it regulates expenditure. It assures borders and a center and provides the drive with objects. A socio-culture can thus order itself, excluding some and marginalizing others, since the history it writes is the story of this structure, where the jouissance of some is conditional upon the elimination of others. But this is not without legitimizing ignominy. Whether by metaphysics, by law, or by the right of the state, number is always supported by truth. It requires dominant classes. The monopolization of violence must be centered somewhere, otherwise expenditure insinuates itself into number and leaves it vulnerable to excess, to errancy, to the nonsense of jouissance. But this return of horror already inhabits number. The infinite repetition of the same strangely represents the innumerable and excessive. The irrepressible demand for the growth of surplus value, even in its simplest form of reproduction, undermines the stopping point necessary to the concept of number. What thus takes the form of a contradiction, which we dare to think can be surpassed — dialectically — is the erosion of writing by the dissemination of the pluralities hidden within it.

But against that, there is only one barrier: the consolidation in theory and practice of the relation between the individual and society.¹⁶

16 Among other things, by discipline, as Michel Foucault has rightly shown in *Surveiller et punir*, 3rd part, pp. 131 to 230 and 5th part, pp. 300 et seq.

For us, Michel Foucault does a detailed dismantling — these are some of

This reinforcement finds its privileged site in the subterranean process of writing across ethnological and psychiatric practices and discourses. When in the 16th and 17th centuries the idea of individual subjectivity (previously limited to the king, the pope, the bishop and a few Greats) first spread, in “parallel” to the first accumulation of capital, possession emerged in the European city. This framing of the multiple under such a new and fragile unity required significant “technical reorganization” for a social formation in full historic transformation.¹⁷ The passage from witchcraft to possession is a counterpoint to the passage from the religious persecution of an evildoer on the request of a group, to the medical diagnosis of an illness on the request of a judge. It is from there that we must grasp the process, well before what is thus still designated as demonic possession becomes hysteria under the indications of psychiatric discourse. Progressively, before our eyes, the same medical discourse that produced the organic body (as a body that is no longer an object of demonic possession, susceptible to foreign spiritual and “affective” intrusions, but rather an organ-body, a system of organs,

the walls of writing.

17 On this subject we refer to Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). Very rigorously, he shows how the “hysterical” outbursts of the possessed women of Loudun dramatize profound and global social transformations on a regional stage, where all the antagonisms of the global social drama are in evidence.

units of production whose work is relatively autonomous) is going to inscribe mentalism in it. The body of jouissance and of possession, having become machine, a laborious system of organs, is endowed with a central organ, where number stops. The passage from demonic possession to mental illness speaks to this new work of writing, in a new enterprise of redistribution of numerable, controllable, evaluable and profitable units. The demonic always runs the risk of becoming a simple mechanical breakdown susceptible to “repairs” in the psychiatric “garage” (institution). Nothing will then have happened that disturbs writing. The machinery will have been put back in order, returned to its normal face. What may be avoided in this way is the recognition of the stranger and, in the longer term, the frightening unknown of his demands. The great disturbance [*dérangement*].

This mentalism, center of the reduction of the innumerable plural to the countable, is also the location of an elsewhere withdrawn from the gaze and everyday analysis and reserved solely for the hermeneutic power of the initiated psychotherapist. It is the secret place of a truth that is delivered by initiation from supervisor (didactician) to candidate (analysand). All of neuropsychiatry, all the discursive formations and scientific procedures or techniques that aim to give an account of biological structure, of physiology, of the functioning and the role of the brain and of the central and peripheral nervous systems, divert us at the same time from the critical consideration of this mentalism, which this “organic reality” has the function of legitimating. This mentalism reproduces for each individual the elsewhere of psychic truth, an interior writing, secret, hidden, a system of signifiers, on which the whole history of subjectivity thus constituted is founded. This mentalism that the medical discourse endorses, in spite of, if not because of its “material base” (the unity of action of a central nervous system), is the return of structure, as a kind of “natural” writing. We know to what extent the medical discourse overdetermined the concept of nature in the secular phase of this new expansion of the theological enterprise. Although this dominant function of medical discourse is only apparent in a few key notions, mainly in the field of law and psychiatry (notions of perversion, sexuality, legal or therapeutic abortion, etc.) we should not

hesitate to suspect its presence wherever an ultimate theoretical justification is needed in order to halt debates and to display authority in the human sciences. The theological functioning of medical discourse, as revealing the ultimate cause, cannot be underestimated, especially if it is a matter of questioning it where it divests itself from its biological problematic, in the claim that it interprets the unconscious.

The same mentalism in fact occupies the theoretical field of the unconscious. The unconscious is the unconscious of the patient. It is the individual unconscious, which, at the limit, if one is a pure Freudian, one will oppose to a collective unconscious, to distinguish it and to articulate its difference and irreducibility. Meanwhile, this theoretical detour reinforces dualism and the overall displacement of the question. This individual unconscious, opposed to a collective unconscious, still avoids the rising tide of the drive. The search for what in possession would be “subjective” and what would be “cultural,” each as unconscious as the other, creates theoretical spaces where attention shifts away from investments of the drives, which are neither individual nor social fundamentally, but pure voice that fades away on the edges of individual or social organizations, without finding any echo or companion there.¹⁸

The psychiatrist and the psychoanalyst interpret. They have a knowledge of the patient’s discourse that would escape the patient. They know better than he or she does what the patient wants to say. Because all that the patient can say is the discourse of the other, a

18 We must note A. Kardiner, *L'individu dans la société* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). [Abram Kardiner, *The Individual and his Society: The Psychodynamics of Primitive Social Organization*, Columbia UP, 1940]; Georges Dévereux’s whole theoretical work, principally in *Reality and Dream* (New York: Anchor, 1969), 35-182, and despite notable differences, certain aspects of Géza Roheim’s approach in *Héros phalliques et symboles maternels dans la mythologie australienne* [*Phallic heroes and maternal symbols in Australian mythology*], (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). [Translators’ Note: *Australian Totemism* could be the book referenced, in its French translation].

production of the mental, of this mental that the psychiatrist and the psychoanalyst know so well, since they have constituted it themselves, from “their experiences,” as this central place, where the innumerable of the discourse of the patient must encounter its final meaning. This elsewhere of the truth, this other without a face, but which has the name of the father, is the stopping point of wandering and the limit to excess. The (dead) father, indestructible, offers no check on the moves of the horde of the sons. He does not stop commanding the articulation of name to number, of theology to political economy, of truth (which the subject must come up against), to social obedience (where the subject’s individual adventure must end).

If the psychiatrist¹⁹ is this shaman or this exorcist²⁰ who must expel the disorder of the drive — which breaks the relation between the individual and society — from the individual body, the ethnologist is a traveler of the outside who works the limit of this relation in search of an impossible possession, without letting himself get caught up in the madness of the gods,²¹ as if on a voyage. This back-and-forth traces the stages of an experience of the limit, which must domesticate what is wild [*sauvage*] in the ethnologist. Here the ethnologist is not simply an individual. What is at stake is cultural apprenticeship. The journey to the outside is conditioned, from the start, by the return to the same. In other words, the ethnologist does not set out. This wild orality²² will be-

19 But how much better is the psychoanalyst. We should not be fooled: Despite the affirmations of the intentions of psychoanalysis, the technical mastery of bringing the libidinal into writing is part of the actual practice of analysts.

20 On this subject the analyses of Luc de Heusch are for us very enlightening. L. de Heusch, *Pourquoi l'épouser* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 226-283.

21 We borrow this expression from Henri Junod, *Mœurs et coutumes des Bantous, la vie d'une tribu sud-africaine* (Paris: Payot, 1936), t. II, 432-460.

22 See also on this subject the very suggestive pages of Michel de Certeau about ethnography in Chapter V of *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

come, thanks to him, here on the inside, an object produced by writing. What travels is writing itself. In the same way, when the missionary precedes the merchant, and the Bible the factory, it is capitalism that travels. This transformation of the orality of the Other by the writing of the same is done according to the rules. What Junod writes about the Thonga of Mozambique, Michel Leiris about the Ethiopians of Gondar, Jean Rouch about the magic of the Songhay and Métraux about Haitian Vodou or the shamanism of the Indians of the Gran Chaco, all of this comes back to the rules of writing and thus to an out-of-sense, a strangeness that, if it did not become an object of curiosity, would disturb writing and undermine its guarantees. And if inside these oeuvres the disorder and disturbance that are nevertheless very present remain subjective, it is moreover because a whole scientific university organization, a whole system of relations between researchers, between teachers and students, receives these texts and extends in them the annulling effect of writing in relation to this strangeness as it comes to us from the ethnologist. So, it is not only the writing that travels. Between the ethnologist's travel bag and his travel stories, alterations to the voyage secretly insinuate themselves both within this will to write and within our desire... to "read."

This will to write is not due to the individual only. It is the whole of Western society that is the ethnologist, that wants to bring the innumerable of the wild [*sauvage*] back into the countable through writing. What is available to the ethnologist's traveling eye is a neutral plurality. He must introduce a limit into it, in order to locate the singularities. The units that he sections out of this multiple, extend, without his being aware of it, the writing that inhabits his demand for knowledge. He is in a position where the interpreter like the informant must — in order to remain in this position and continue to benefit from the status that it provisionally creates for them — satisfy its demand ... for "information." The method of the ethnologist, inseparable like that of the analyst, or of the shaman, from an overarching culture and its economic and political stakes, is the machinery where the passage from an insignificant orality to the hermeneutics of a writing of history takes place. Indeed, the function of speech in societies that are

out-of-text where the book has no place, could never be simply the gloss and commentary of truths kept secret in texts reserved for specialists. In such societies, speech cannot be completely assimilated to communication alone. This incantatory orality that the ethnologist sets in motion through his trips among the Tupinamba, the Mataco of the Gran Chaco, or the peasants of the Mabilia does not tell the story, nor the structure, of their community. It does something else. It is the machinery of writing that delimits in its discourse, the narrative of the structure. This does not mean that these social formations are not also, from beginning to end, locked up in the enclosure of the sign. But this enclosure does not produce the text, nor the book, all this machinery where truth finds number. This does not mean that expenditure is not calculated, nor that plurality is not counted, nor that what exceeds is not mostly bordered. But the territories organized for the nomadism of the drive in “wild” space do not aim primarily at bringing all of that expenditure and jouissance back to the individual unit, itself traversed by multiple institutions, which regulate this expenditure and this jouissance. The dialectic of individual and society, which is summed up in the Western idea par excellence of the person, of the conscious and responsible ego, is not, in the wild space, the axis around which orality turns. The voices are madness or divine ecstasies [*jouissances divines*], according to the case. They pass, possess, haunt. They are the exteriority of the interior, the depth of the surface. They do not say. They alter the codes, territories, spaces, languages, and productions where a society seizes up in the anguish of becoming other. Like demonic possession and mysticism in the 16th and 17th centuries, they clandestinely accomplish irreparable modifications to the social formations where they operate. They are in the present already, the disturbance of a future that will never be anything but a future anterior. It will have been. Never grasped in their fugitive presence, which disorganizes the foundations of the present, they cannot but be brought back to writing. This orality, thus told, traces in the writing of the ethnologist, the displacement of limits, the stirring up of horizons and zones of prohibitions, all the uncontrollable quaking of the ground of values, which is not only the effect of the activity of writing in late capitalism, but also and above

all the alteration, the disturbance of this writing machine, in the space opened to the voices by the neutral plurality of the drives. There is no meeting of cultures. Ethnology tells of unforeseen displacements. This place, where Western writing constituted the ethnological procedures and method, both as this elsewhere where the savage could come and read the truth of his social practice, and as this center, where the neutral plurality of his foreignness could be brought back to the countable units of the political economy, is the very place where writing sees the innumerable resurges in its center and is no longer simply on its exterior borders. The analysis of possession and shamanism not only sheds light on what demonic possession and mystical ecstasy are about, but also refers to what is denied by medical discourse, in capitalist social formations, as well as in those called socialist: a practice of psychiatry and of psychoanalysis, a socio-political organization of “ethnological research” by financing societies, whether the University, the State, or private or public Companies.

First constituted outside ethnological writing which had, and has, to bring it back to numerable pluralities, wild orality — thus foreclosed—makes a brutal return in the very text of the West. Everywhere, in Central and Latin America as well as in the new Africa, wild orality subverts the limits of the acceptable, but also, savagely, in the very heart of the capitalism of the center — not only in its periphery — it rots all the administrative, political, economic, cultural, familial, and educational frames, barriers and channels. At the end of the journey that led from the cultural staging of “life” to this oral strangeness, where the rules were no longer those of writing, the ethnological West discovers at the heart of its journey, and planning, this voice of the drive that it was searching for in the strange exteriority of wild orality. The wild [*sauvage*] within it steered the boat of Ulysses. And everywhere, on all the beaches of the sign, sedentary cyclops and terrestrial sirens returned him to his oceanic wandering. His geographical peregrinations did not only substitute for the plunge into time where the historian watches for strangers, to whom he gives a status (and especially a stature) as ancestors, and for this abandonment of the body to the seductions and possessions of the voice, that psychoanalysis risks.

The ethnologist extends these disciplines and tests their foundations, by offering them the resistance of the reality of the wild. This reality has troubling consistency. The historian's concern with finding corpses, his obsession with tracing the roots of conjunctural socio-political positions back through time, carries with it, clandestinely, a legitimating metaphysics. An Other is buried in history,²³ who would say the truth, and our innumerable presence would come up against his name. The writing of history thus excavates the past like a lack, underneath the organization of the discourses where the hegemonic classes define the sense of the Western text according to their interests in the historical conjuncture. Psychoanalysis, which is more punctual, organizes the errancy in the field of language, and connects the body to the overflows and strange frenzies that the voice introduces into writing. But it does this in the mode of a subjective quest for an object, which would regulate the expenditure of intensive pluralities brought back to the unity of desire. The lack thus opened sends analytic discourse and practice back to the dimension of historical writing. The otherness of the wild [*sauvage*], on the other hand, is clearly not missing from ethnological writing. It can therefore serve as reassurance — and not only as scientific and epistemological reassurance — for both the writing of history and the analytic cure. Thus does history, this ethnology of the inside, no longer lack its own wildness. And analysis, which articulates subjective history to the social organization of the same, may still lack an object of desire, but the facelessness of the Other may seem more bearable. In the meantime, a “subjective history” — which Freud calls a Construction — will be attached to a socio-economic conjuncture.

All these discursive formations, apparently so distinct from medical discourse (which founds individuality), and from juridical discourse (which regulates its socio-political and cultural staging), are in fact refinements and consolidations of these discourses. It is only a question of perfecting the relation of the individual to society, while

23 See on this subject Michel de Certeau, *L'absent de l'histoire* (Paris: Marne, 1973) and also *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 7-23.

avoiding throwing the ideological status and social functioning of this relation into question. Also, it is not an accident, but rather a conjunctural result, that brings together nationalism (even in its most varied and subtle forms, from the parochial spirit to racism), counter-transference, and ethnocentrism, as structuring elements of the figures of Western subjectivity. These are three dimensions, or three faces, of the same work of writing that delimits subjective unity in its relation to a countable plurality. The writing of history, endlessly repeating, in the sign, the political maneuver of constituting a national unity by marginalizing the multiplicities that are inimical to such an enterprise, defines at the same time a code of identification, with well-policed ethical and juridical boundaries beyond which one can be either a foreigner or a traitor. Ethnocentrism, maintaining the phobia of psychological alienation by means of many adjustments and epistemological rationalizations, assures the solid anchoring of the self in the models of thought, sensibility, interior attitudes, etc., that are the very mark of writing in the organic body. Counter-transference, propped up by professional ethics and economic interest, filters all the libidinal flows, which will break through dykes intended to hold for the short or long term, inside an individuality so well regulated, but also so fragile. In fact, the balance of the whole relation between individual and society is based on the ability of the first term of the relation to faithfully reproduce the structures of the second. From this point of view, the efforts of eth-

no-psychiatry²⁴ and of Freudo-Marxism,²⁵ seem to insert themselves into these interdisciplinary approaches, which are protected by very strong epistemological defenses and that have, with respect to the relation of the individual to society, a political function of shutting out

24 Despite such obvious differences between these authors, how can we not wonder about the function of works such as Cécile and Edmond Ortigues, *Œdipe africain* (Paris: Pion, 1966); Guy Rosolato, *Essais sur le symbolique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968); Géza Roheim, *Psychoanalysis and Anthropology*, Paris: Gallimard, 1967). I retain this set of texts of G. Roheim in particular because it is where he specifically elaborates the theory of such an enterprise. In the same way, of the translated work of G. Devereux I will retain only: *Essais d'ethnopsychiatrie générale*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) and his *Ethnopsychanalyse complémentariste* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972); and how many admirable suggestions in another collection of the same author, *From anxiety to method in the behavioral sciences*, (Paris and The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1967). We find the same aim in Roger Bastide, who seems conscious of this aim beginning with his famous text *Sociologie et psychanalyse* (Paris: P.U.F., 1950), until the last one where he still follows the same intention: *Le Rêve, la transe et la folie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972). More interesting, in any case we feel closer to works such as: Julio Caro Baroja, *Les sorcières et leur monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); Robert Mandrou, *Magistrats et sorciers en France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Pion, 1968). But also Sigmund Freud, "Une névrose démoniaque au XVII^e siècle" in *Essais de Psychanalyse appliquée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952). These authors study how the work of writing, the changes of history, the transformations of the political, socio-economic, and cultural structures, hardly manage to exorcize the alteration that inhabits and motivates them, nor to eliminate the innumerable and the neutral plurality that they never finish framing, controlling and reducing.

25 Mainly the whole current of thought that is broadly related to the work of Herbert Marcuse, but also the work of one Wilhelm Reich, to a certain extent.

questions and challenges.

To work at and to reopen the enclosure of these interdisciplinary approaches is a possible philosophical objective. It is maintained, we believe, throughout this text. It is also in this historical conjuncture that philosophy can lose its traditional function of legitimizing order — established by the theological enterprise and political economy — in order to make itself the place of questions that must be posed, and a machine for the disruption of writing in order to open a space for the voice.

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