

Therefore one must turn away from the first night. That at least is possible. One must live in the day and labor for its sake. Yes, one has to do that. But to labor for the day is to find, in the end, the night; it is thus to make night the job of the day, to make night a task and an abode. It is to construct the burrow. And to construct the burrow is to open night to the *other* night.

The risk of surrendering to the inessential is itself essential. To flee it is to be pursued by it. It becomes the shadow which always follows you and always precedes you. To seek it methodically is also to misconstrue it. Not to know of it makes life easier and tasks more feasible,

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but in ignorance it still lies concealed; forgetfulness is the depth of its remembrance. And whoever senses it can no longer escape. Whoever has approached it, even if he has recognized in it the risk of the inessential, regards this approach as essential, sacrifices to it all of truth, all the important concerns to which he nevertheless still feels attached.

Why is this? Is it the power of error? Is it night's fascination? But it has no power, it does not call, it attracts only by negligence. Whoever believes he is attracted finds himself profoundly neglected. Whoever claims to be in the thrall of an irresistible vocation, is only dominated by his own weakness. He calls irresistible the fact that there is nothing to resist; he calls vocation that which does not call him, and he has to shoulder his nothingness for a yoke. Why is this? Why do some embark upon works in order to escape this risk -- to elude rather than respond to "inspiration," constructing their work as a burrow where they want to think they are sheltered from the void and which they only build, precisely, by hollowing and deepening the void, creating a void all around them? Why do others, so many others, knowing that they betray the world and the truth of purposeful activities, have only one concern: to deceive themselves by imagining that they still serve the world in which they only seek refuge and assurance? In this way they no longer betray only the movement of true endeavors; with their bad conscience -- which they assuage with honors, services, with the feeling of accomplishing all the while a mission, of being guardians of culture, the oracles of a people -- they are traitors to the error of their idleness. And perhaps others neglect even to construct the burrow, for fear that by protecting them this shelter would protect in them that which they must surrender, would bolster their presence too much and thus avert the approach of that point of uncertainty toward which they slip, "the decisive combat" with indecision. No one hears tell of these. They leave no account of their journey, they have no name, they are anonymous in the anonymous crowd because they do not distinguish themselves, because they have entered into the realm of the indistinct.

Why? Why this move? Why this hopeless movement toward what is without importance?

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Orpheus's Gaze

When Orpheus descends toward Eurydice, art is the power by which night opens. Because of art's strength, night welcomes him; it becomes welcoming intimacy, the harmony and accord of the first night. But it is toward Eurydice that Orpheus has descended. For him Eurydice is the furthest that art can reach. Under a name that hides her and a veil that covers her, she is the

profoundly obscure point toward which art and desire, death and night, seem to tend. She is the instant when the essence of night approaches as the *other* night.

However, Orpheus's work does not consist in ensuring this point's approach by descending into the depths. His *work* is to bring it back to the light of day and to give it form, shape, and reality in the day. Orpheus is capable of everything, except of looking this point in the face, except of looking at the center of night in the night. He can descend toward it; he can -- and this is still stronger an ability -- draw it to him and lead it with him upward, but only by turning away from it. This turning away is the only way it can be approached. This is what concealment means when it reveals itself in the night. But Orpheus, in the movement of his migration, forgets the work he is to achieve, and he forgets it necessarily, for the ultimate demand which his movement makes is not that there be a work, but that someone face this point, grasp its essence, grasp it where it appears, where it is essential and essentially appearance: at the heart of night.

The Greek myth says: a work can be produced only if the measureless experience of the deep -- which the Greeks recognized as necessary to the work and where the work endures its measurelessness -- is not pursued for its own sake. The deep does not reveal itself directly; it is only disclosed hidden in the work. This is an essential, an inexorable

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answer. But the myth shows nonetheless that Orpheus's destiny is not to submit to this ultimate law. And, of course, by turning toward Eurydice, Orpheus ruins the work, which is immediately undone, and Eurydice returns among the shades. When he looks back, the essence of night is revealed as the inessential. Thus he betrays the work, and Eurydice, and the night. But not to turn toward Eurydice would be no less untrue. Not to look would be infidelity to the measureless, imprudent force of his movement, which does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, in her distance, with her closed body and sealed face -- wants to see her not when she is visible, but when she is invisible, and not as the intimacy of a familiar life, but as the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy, and wants, not to make her live, but to have living in her the plenitude of her death.

That alone is what Orpheus came to seek in the Underworld. All the glory of his work, all the power of his art, and even the desire for a happy life in the lovely, clear light of day are sacrificed to this sole aim: to look in the night at what night hides, the *other* night, the dissimulation that appears.

This is an infinitely problematic movement, which day condemns as a form of unjustifiable madness, or as exonerating immoderation. From day's perspective, the descent into the Underworld, the movement down into vain depths, is in itself excessive. It is inevitable that Orpheus transgress the law which forbids him to "turn back," for he already violated it with his first steps toward the shades. This remark implies that Orpheus has in fact never ceased to be turned toward Eurydice: he saw her invisible, he touched her intact, in her shadowy absence, in that veiled presence which did not hide her absence, which was the presence of her infinite absence. Had he not looked at her, he would not have drawn her toward him; and doubtless she is not there, but in this glance back he himself is absent. He is no less dead than she -- dead, not of that tranquil worldly death which is rest, silence, and end, but of that other death which is death without end, the ordeal of the end's absence.

Day, judging Orpheus's undertaking, also reproaches him with having proved impatient. Orpheus's error seems then to lie in the desire which moves him to see and to possess Eurydice, he whose destiny is only to sing of her. He is Orpheus only in the song: he cannot have any relation to Eurydice except within the hymn. He has life and truth only after the poem and because of it, and Eurydice represents nothing other

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than this magic dependence which outside the song makes him a shade and renders him free, alive, and sovereign only in the Orphic space, according to Orphic measure. Yes, this is true: only in the song does Orpheus have power over Eurydice. But in the song too, Eurydice is already lost, and Orpheus himself is the dispersed Orpheus; the song immediately makes him "infinitely dead." He loses Eurydice because he desires her beyond the measured limits of the song, and he loses himself, but this desire, and Eurydice lost, and Orpheus dispersed are necessary to the song, just as the ordeal of eternal inertia is necessary to the work.

Orpheus is guilty of impatience. His error is to want to exhaust the infinite, to put a term to the interminable, not endlessly to sustain the very movement of his error. Impatience is the failing of one who wants to withdraw from the absence of time; patience is the ruse which seeks to master this absence by making of it another time, measured otherwise. But true patience does not exclude impatience. It is intimacy with impatience -- impatience suffered and endured endlessly. Orpheus's impatience is thus at the same time a proper movement: in it begins what will become his own passion, his highest patience, his infinite sojourn in death.

Inspiration

If the world judges Orpheus, the work does not. It sheds no light on his faults. The work says nothing. And everything proceeds as if, by disobeying the law, by looking at Eurydice, Orpheus had only obeyed the deep demand of the work -- as if, by this inspired movement, he had indeed captured from Hell the obscure shade and had, unknowingly, led it back into the broad daylight of the work.

To look at Eurydice, without regard for the song, in the impatience and imprudence of desire which forgets the law: *that is inspiration*. Would inspiration, then, transform night's beauty into the unreality of the void? Would it make Eurydice a shade and render Orpheus "infinitely dead"? Is inspiration, then, that critical moment when the essence of night becomes the inessential, and the first night's welcoming intimacy becomes the deceptive trap, the *other* night? We cannot say otherwise. From inspiration we sense only failure, we recognize only confused violence. But if inspiration pronounces Orpheus's failure and declares Eurydice lost twice over -- if it expresses the insignificance and the void of the night -- it turns Orpheus and it propels him toward that failure and that insignificance irresistibly, as if to renounce failure were

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much graver than to renounce success, as if what we call the insignificant, the inessential, error, could, to one who accepts the risk and surrenders to it without restraint, reveal itself as the source of all authenticity.

The inspired and forbidden gaze destines Orpheus to lose everything: not only himself, not only day's reality; but night's essence. This is certain, unexceptionable. Inspiration pronounces

Orpheus's ruin and the certainty of his ruin, and it does not promise, as compensation, the work's success any more than it affirms in the work the ideal triumph of Orpheus or the survival of Eurydice. The work, through inspiration, is no less compromised than Orpheus is threatened. It reaches, in that instant, its point of extreme uncertainty. That is why it resists so often and so strongly that which inspires it. That is also why it protects itself by saying to Orpheus: You will keep me only if you keep from looking at *her*. But that forbidden movement is precisely what Orpheus must accomplish in order to carry the work beyond what assures it. It is what he cannot accomplish except by forgetting the work, seduced by a desire that comes to him from the night, and that is linked to night as to its origin. In this gaze, the work is lost. This look is the only moment in which the work is lost absolutely. Something more important than the work, more bereft of importance than the work, announces and affirms itself. The work is everything to Orpheus except that desired look where it is lost. Thus it is only in that look that the work can surpass itself, be united with its origin and consecrated in impossibility.

Orpheus's gaze is Orpheus's ultimate gift to the work. It is a gift whereby he refuses, whereby he sacrifices the work, bearing himself toward the origin according to desire's measureless movement -- and whereby unknowingly he still moves toward the work, toward the origin of the work.

Then for Orpheus everything collapses into the certainty of failure where there remains only, as compensation, the work's uncertainty, for is there ever a work? Before the most convincing masterpiece, where the brilliance and resolution of the beginning shine, it can also happen that we confront something extinguished: a work suddenly become invisible again, which is no longer there, has never been there. This sudden eclipse is the distant memory of Orpheus's gaze; it is the nostalgic return to the uncertainty of the origin.

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The Gift and the Sacrifice

Were we to insist upon what such a moment seems to say of inspiration, we would have to state: it links inspiration to *desire*.

It introduces into concern for the work the movement of *unconcern* in which the work is sacrificed: the work's ultimate law is broken; the work is betrayed in favor of Eurydice, in favor of the shade. Insouciance is the movement of sacrifice -- a sacrifice which can only be light and insouciant. Perhaps it is sin. Indeed, it is immediately expiated as sin, but its substance is all levity, unconcern, innocence. This is a sacrifice without ceremony, where the sacred itself, night in its unapproachable profundity, is given back -- through the insouciant look which is not even a sacrilege, which by no means has the weight or the gravity of a profanation -- to the inessential, which is not the profane but less than any such category.

Granted, the essential night which, before his insouciant look, follows Orpheus -- the sacred night which he captures in the song's fascination and which, then, is maintained within the song's limits and its measured space -- this night is certainly richer, more august than the empty futility which it becomes after he looks. The sacred night encloses Eurydice; it encloses within the song what surpasses the song. But it is itself also enclosed. It is bound, it follows, it is the sacred mastered by the force of rites, which is to say order, rectitude, law, the way of the Tao, and the axis of the Dharma. The look of Orpheus unbinds it, breaks the limits, breaks the law that

contained and that restrained essence. His gaze is thus the extreme moment of liberty, the moment when he frees himself from himself and, still more important, frees the work from his concern, frees the sacred contained in the work, *gives* the sacred to itself, to the freedom of its essence, to its essence which is freedom. (This is why inspiration is the gift par excellence.) Everything is risked, then, in the decision to look. It is in this decision that the origin is approached by the force of the gaze that unbinds night's essence, lifts concern, interrupts the incessant by discovering it. This is a moment of desire, of insouciance and of authority.

Orpheus's look links inspiration to *desire*. *Impatience* links desire to *insouciance*. Whoever is not impatient will never come to insouciance, to the instant when concern is united with its own transparency.

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But whoever is merely impatient will never be capable of the insouciant, weightless gaze of Orpheus. That is why impatience must be the core of profound patience, the pure flash which an infinite waiting, which the silence and reserve of this attention cause to spring from its center not only as the spark which extreme tension ignites, but as the brilliant point which has escaped this mindful wait -- the glad accident, insouciance.

The Leap

Writing begins with Orpheus's gaze. And this gaze is the movement of desire that shatters the song's destiny, that disrupts concern for it, and in this inspired and careless decision reaches the origin, consecrates the song. But in order to descend toward this instant, Orpheus has to possess the power of art already. This is to say: one writes only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing. To write, one has to write already. In this contradiction are situated the essence of writing, the snag in the experience, and inspiration's leap.

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Inspiration, Lack of Inspiration

The leap is inspiration's form or movement. This form or this movement makes inspiration unjustifiable. But in this form or movement inspiration also comes into its own: its principal characteristic is affirmed in this inspiration which is at the same time and from the same point of view lack of inspiration -- creative force and aridity intimately confounded. Hölderlin undergoes the rigors of this condition when he endures poetic time as the time of distress, when the gods are lacking but where God's default helps us: Gottes Fehlfahrt hilft. Mallarmé, whom sterility tormented and who shut himself into it with heroic resolve, also recognized that this deprivation did not express a simple personal failing, did not signify that he was deprived of the work, but announced his encounter with the work, the threatening intimacy of this encounter.

Automatic Writing

In our time -- and in a form which misunderstandings and facile interpretations have impoverished but also preserved -- this essential aspect of inspiration was rediscovered by surrealism. André Breton sustained it by persevering in his affirmation of automatic writing's value. What did this discovery contribute? Apparently the opposite of what it signified: an easy method, an instrument always at hand and always effective, poetry brought well within