

CIRCLES IN MEDITATION

Meditation on Himself

Nothing more distressing than this daylight, nothing hazier. So you would paralyze the brightness? You haven't yet broken the spell of sleep, and already you're discomfited by noise and, trickling through the noise, your first terrors ruffling the silence. You see the wall, but strained with cold, spoiled with lines: and you among them. You feel a movement at the window, and you sluggish, without strength, frozen. All of death in perfection, and you raw, still at the very first point of considering the day and yet already wishing for its end so that sleep could finally take better care of you than you can.

Look, and look again, at this slow light on which depends the management of things and your movements. And you heavy, hesitant, divided, hurt, it seems, by the slightest refraction, the slightest trammel. Your head, once the site of forests and illuminations, could be crushed by a fingertip's lightest touch; your bones collapse under the mere weight of the sky. Your mouth already clogged with words tasting of lead before you've said a thing.

So what is it to you, this newborn day? This day of which they say that night, its mother, miscarried from the mere sight of your lamp put out? Such a great thing, the night, perish for so little? And for what? A feeble light so far, but which, the moment it takes form, disheartens your eyes. It gives you headaches, vertigo, blinding flashes, nausea, arrows of pain on the side of the heart.

You close your eyes. The eyes open inside your body hold no horizon, but neither do the eyes locked under your lids. You do not see, you are seen. All of the light gathers in order to observe you. Get out of your eyes, because it is already there. Get out of the beginnings if you can: the beginning of sight is the first limitation of sight, its form, another. Look for some essence of sight that has neither beginning nor form, but gives both beginning and form to what you are looking for. Be done within this infinite that subsists on itself. Look and judge this vision compared to which everything visible is only a point of light at the price of the sky, only a nothing at the price of an all. Look there.

Your hands heavy on your eyes. Would you have believed this paltry vision? As soon as your hands withdraw, as your fingers stop pressing, the mirage is gone. Rub with your palms where the tears are pricking. The air already brighter. On your right, the door. On the left, the windows: one window, and another. You see them out of the corner of your eye: extreme smallness of your world.

For now you've come full circle back to the moment of entering this meditation, you are again at daybreak, in its paralyzing light. But what have you learned? Having nothing, what could you expect from reflection? That a few minutes pass, that the abyss of panic be followed by resigned anticipation of certain habitual gestures: turn out the lamp, pick up your clothes, swirl and shake the liquid in your cup, so much effort for so little gain?

The anxiety remains. The light hazy. Where am I if not here? And if here, how bear it yet again, this day, another day? The thickening noise and the light that defines, outlines, fills the room, leave me hollow. I do not recognize myself in them. I squeeze with impotent fists the shell of a virtual almond, a bubble of infinitely thin glass, trying to crush them. But they resist.

And I look, and look again, at this slow light on which depends the management of things and my movements. I strain, not toward thought but surrender, not toward time but duration, to fill it, sew it up. The light knocks, and I open. It gives me nothing, but I have asked nothing, promised nothing. I do not want to see it, but what can I do?

Night is now closed to you; you have forgotten even its frightful mire which, however, you would not give up. Why? Because you were embedded in it without your other you, a you alien and entirely absent? Because you were taken in, as if in spite of yourself, for a patience without pity, a pain without responsibility? Because you did not have to answer your own: what have I done?

Even into the Night

It is summer, but drawing near its end; the light comes later now, I feel it. It is morning, skipping a page, the edges a little more eaten by ink, blurred. Night is getting longer. Even if you do not stay in bed alongside it, it is there. It makes you move, your bones sluggish, your thinking short of the event.

You wait for winter, for more than winter: a northern life, in limbo, without confrontations. So you do not really prefer sleep or non-light, nor do you really fear the light or waking up, but rather the transition. The smallest transition hurts you, the smallest transfer, because then there are images that track you and reverberate. And for this paltry discovery you have saddled yourself with consciousness rather than confusion?

What would it take? That nights draw closer together, that sleep lengthen, suns darken, days attenuate (which they do, of course, which they do), that a time come, to ease you, when you need not drain even the shortest day between each night and the next, because they would no longer be separate?

Objects began to strip and shed the garment of their form on the last steps still visible outside the dark, wrapping their blunt mass in fabrics of golden transparency. And, heedless of my anxiety, let me see them naked beneath their masks, ever so empty and silent except for their most intimate opacity that they defended to the last.

Their aspect seemed truly that of first, & philosophic, matter, scraped clean of any qualities: which so troubled my mind that I felt myself atremble and on the verge of crying out, so great my surprise and lack of understanding: for I was not calm enough to resist the anxious questions that assailed me from all sides.

Nevertheless I deemed myself almost happy to enjoy this rarest of visions, which at the same time stirred such forebodings of disaster as I could barely endure. But so as not to succumb to something like despair, I kept turning my eyes away from such contemplation, as if it were forbidden.

And the objects, which seemed in some way careful of my terror (judged unfounded by, but nevertheless giving a certain satisfaction to, some possible intention behind them), continued to lose one after another of their individual properties, the scent of their *haecceitas*, even while still remaining here and there, and distinct in at least one of them.

Thus furnishing proof of patience and modest shame, I hoped to escape as an integral subject from the immediate consequences of these happenings, to be and to remain just an attentive onlooker on the steps, in the light, where I had paused to watch the evening. But in spite of my repugnance, I was forced to penetrate into the dark along with the innocent belongings of the world, which, as I said, every minute surrendered a larger portion of their singularities.

And I stood aside, ill at ease, my eyes shifty and unsteady, not daring to look in their direction for fear of what I might find.

The light, however, real if weakened, continued to probe into the cracks of a wall which, as my eyes adjusted not so much to the color black (the halflight, being both grey and pale, was neither bright nor dark), as to the lack of distinctness, seemed to surround a fountain splashing with naked, trembling nymphs. Perhaps an illusion born of my imagination, my mind still not very capable of bearing the now almost complete dissolution of things.

Indeed, I soon realized that what I had taken for a gathering of nymphs was only a fitful movement of shadows. I had thought I saw a fountain, a liquid jet of tumbling mist and lust, but in fact had before me only an accelerated shrouding of objects now almost reduced to extension and duration. If I were a painter I would have been less anxious.

I made an effort to be calm and, since attributing souls to these disappearances was decidedly not permitted, forced myself to comprise the phenomena under the general category "grey" and to assign them, in purely sentimental, arbitrary gradations, almost satisfactory quantities of "more" or, if necessary, "less."

Who or what could so have denatured the world? I was now certain that where I had left it to climb the porch steps, peaceful in the evening light, there remained only bare disused ribs, porous shells of buildings, enclaves without greenery, and that returning there, even in the unlikely case that I were able to, I should find only useless desolation.

I regretted, O how I regretted the thoughtless impulse that had made me turn my eyes from the hill outlined in red by the insistent sphere of sun in order to follow, higher up, in back, the movement (which had seemed strange) of the fig tree at the dark end of the steps, which suddenly almost resembled the window, the cloud, the shovel left leaning against the *restingue*. Very little time had passed, but I remembered, so it was no longer the same moment.

This was how it began, not the disappearance of things, but their dispossession. (Nothing had disappeared, I was sure; I was, as before, part of this whole, a whole, alas, almost entirely lost because without properties.) Moreover, my memory of this yet so recent moment had something incomplete and changing about it, as if this sickness of objects had begun much earlier, with some kind of incubation period that the splendor and calm of the red evening had kept me from noticing.

Now I could no longer feel the wall, and the light had overtaken me, an almost atonic light that did not draw any color from the faintly vibrating space it reached in the distance.

After this cottony fusion the light itself would cease, I was sure. And I had not enough time left to keep a protective distance, the skepticism of the point that forbids both to think of it in pieces and to conceive of two unlike identities coinciding on it "in time and place."

I could still see, which did not fail to astonish me, given the more and more radical absence of anything to look at. I saw, but what exactly? Shreds, remanences, retinal afterimages of the red vacancy of sun at the far end of the vineyard, where it plunges down into the western valley between the Pyrenees and the Pic de Norre. With these fleeting crumbs, my mind, disappointed by my eyes, tried to dress up the neutral apathy of this "place" that things had melted into. But it did not manage to convince me.

The Idea of Form

Later, other "objects" already without grain, without surface, skirted me and went on to join an impalpable simplicity, an extension bereft of any definite description. It was still "now," the "now" that had begun with my leaving the steps still in the light to plunge into this anxiety, this empty space, this confusion.

Still later, there was an irreducible, new, other moment. Because it would be unrepeatable and the last oneness, I entered into it. I advanced with closed eyes, but still saw before me the same grey, grey-in-itself, the "stuff of the world": a complete void without hieroglyphs or particles, entire, without the smallest change.

Whose pain closed in behind me and accompanied me even into the night.

Whether it be truly infinite, or simply beyond my reach, I cannot behold it but asquint, upon a vestige, a delayed effect, a garment, a reversal, a mirror, a shadow or a riddle. *Descart* of any blueprint, I can nevertheless not leave it to chance, nor to any principle that could only distinguish, order or constrain.

Orpheus called it the Eye of the World because it rests on the single inner and outer edge of natural things; Empedocles, Principle of Differentiation; Bruno, Internal Artist. There are many other definitions. For me, it is Infernal Inference (I do not circumscribe it thus, I name it). As soon as you touch paper, as soon as you clear your throat, it cuts in, comprehends, compresses. But without it, the paper would not be touched, or the least sound uttered, let alone heard. Defense everywhere open to loss.

For form cannot declare itself without also declaring the formless, which, however, is not separate from it nor relegated to another place: on the contrary, form cannot but give rise to the formless, cannot but expose its secret inner impropriety.

I have known flawless, brilliant moments when something evident, sharp and simple was to appear to me, was to take on a face; here, the very eveningness of evening, the nightness of night, outside the latent light as much as the diminished dark. Yet I could do nothing.

Commonplace, the sun, commonplace, the earth with all its irregularities, its grass and shingles, its confusions. Red. Absorbed, it seemed, once and for all. But the moment dispersed like the warmth of stone under my fingers.

And my eyes, which kept going back and forth between the assembled tribe of cypresses and the singular line of each tree's presence, without being able to maintain any real demarcation between them, remained stupid.

For form, I agree, is stupid. Substituting trees for the sky cannot absolve it of lack, let alone correct the void, a hospitality that cannot be refused. Neither can saddling ourselves with difficult multiplicity.

To show, at the same time, both an intellectual awareness and a stupefied, dumb absorption of worlds does not promise moral avenues to sight, umbrage to descendants, or etymological support to sentiment.

For all that it is true that form is the only manner and alone produces samples of things, not essences; whereby it avoids the simpering of sense, the catastrophes of message, as well as the juggling of substitutions. "*Manner is the number and state of things where each remains as it is.*"

Form is but the movement whose form it is. Which it does not keep, but shares with all, to become poetry. Thus it is, because "thus is what it does best." It has not happened to be thus (it has no anterior form); it will not happen to be thus (it has no future form); it is "thus, now." "Now" is poetry.

In the infinitely tenuous present, form moves to set up the "now" of poetry. Here is its infernal inference: to come as near as possible to the demon of silence who "*implors our help.*" (Hence, in the guise of indifference, the modern terror of, and recoil from, poetry.)

It does not say anything. It "would prefer not to." Or again: it does not say except by saying.

All formal poetry is an "unmeasured prelude." Form is carved in filigree, like an absent meter, as if "diaphanous": a light refracted out of darkness. It is lodged in the place of memory: I have said here.

The form of poetry comes out of the irreparable world. It does not build on what "*cannot-not-be*," nor on what "*can-not-be*," but on what, at the same time, "*can-(not-(not-be))*" and "*can-(be-and-counter-be)*."

(Chinese, I have been told, makes these distinctions quite naturally as it does not confuse negation and contrary. But there also exists a logic for it that is, on the one hand, very old (Nicolas de Cusa's "not-other than") and, on the other hand, extremely contemporary (Lawvere-Heyting's theory).)

Flowers, Flower

Commonplace, the sun, commonplace, the earth with all its coniguities, its trees and walls, its coverings. Red, black. Fused, it seemed, once and for all. The moment had entrenched itself like the heat of day on my lids.

And my eyes, which kept going back and forth between the assembled tribe of cypresses and the singular line of each tree's presence, without being able to maintain any real demarcation between them, remained stupid.

The seed buried in the belly of the earth, rotted topsy-turvy in the compost heap, winter-whipped, at the first sweet sign of spring rallies its little parts, sends forth little roots to lay siege to the soft clods and suck their marrow, pierces the earth and sprouts a little white shoot, a green nib, feeds visibly, fattens in time-lapse, grows tall,

stiffens a green stem, buds with the Sun's help, secretly digests its colors. The bud swells, pops gently, displaying in the crack its trials of apprenticeship and a ray of time-ripened beauty.

Nature, careful of its fragrant treasures, protects them in curious ways. Some it arms with sharp points, others with bristly burrs; covers these with coarse bracts, sets others under the shelter of huge leaves, winds up secret springs so that, unburtoned by Aurora's influence, they can rebuon themselves in the evening, before the horrors of night.

Some issue from a green globe, others from a tube, a button, a box, a pannier-shaped basket, a cup, a mottled cushion, a corset, a spike, a bell, a knot, an olive, an eye, a juyube in bloom, a cotton-lined clove, and throw themselves at the light.

The stem is thin or slender or fat, stiff, drooping, smooth, bitter, crenelled, speckled, knotty, or fuzzy, sloughed, sheathed, simple, branching, glossy, gnarled, twisted, leafy, twined, naked, sprouting shoots.

The flower is meager or fleshy or soft, downy, coarse, folded, flat, raised, bulbous, inverted, shingled, cockled, pointed, notched, oval, round, dense, rank, heart- or almond-shape, fretted, bordered, lacy, plain, prickly,

with compound beards, with harrows of pointiers, pushing up shoots and hammers toward the tip, turned toward Heaven, bending down to the earth, veined, all one color, flecked with motley, lashed with red veins, bloody, rounded, puckered, slashed, crimped, wrinkled, braided.

Its fragrances countless: sweet, strong, heavy, brusque, bedbug, gloomy, sleepy, quick, delicate, dry, harmful, chancy, mongrel, raspberry, damp, penetrating, fleeting, cloying, acrid, deathly, agreeable, tempered, insipid, saccharine, balmy, aromatic (the scent of the *muscaris*, the grape-hyacinth, in the moats of the Cité, down by the ramparts).

tanned, faded, subtle, voiced, unvoiced, circumspect, sharp, flat, soul of scent, hieroglyph, cuneiform, essence, pure vapor, blunt, whipped, fanned, bowed, rain-drowned, wide-awake, sophisticated.

Its color? matte, washed-out, scarlet, purple, persian, violet, high, low, shimmering, soaked, snowy, milky, golden, sapphire, hyacinth, saffron, gold-wash, celestial, sea-green, iris, leaden, blackish, pale green, horn green, thumb green, gold green, grass green, dark green,

Component parts are seed, root, bulb, the fleshy and pulpy node, the first shoot sticking its nose out of the ground, stem, joints, binding, sockets, eye, bud, gum, collar, tear;

appurtenances: leaves, defensive thorns, aglets, filaments, tendrils, bark, marrow, sap, the heart that grows saffron, spurs, spikes, serrations, lace, braids,

its weapons: spirit, manna, sap, flair, occult qualities, color, beauty, pleasing arrangement of leaves.

its future: plants, shoots, stamen, pistils, suckers and seersuckers, anthers, foliage, beards, crests, pearls as in imperial crowns.

And its color darkens, lightens, dim color, pale, yellowed, fading, gone, wilted, withered, earthen, rotting, faint, feeble, short-lived, inconstant.

The Garden of Cyrus

Fall and decline of flowers, the roses, the yellow tulips go to pieces, drop petal after petal, shed their beauty, ruin of gardens, flowers bruised by handling, ripped, torn.

But the seed is found in the pod, the flower's collar, the tip of the filament, the belly, the floss, the fluff, the case, the point of bracts, the spur.

And the seed buried in the belly of the earth, rotted topsyturvy in the compost heap, winter-whipped, at the first sweet sign of spring rallies its little parts, sends forth little roots to lay siege to the soft clods and suck their marrow, pierces the earth and sprouts a little white shoot, a green nib, feeds visibly, fattens in time-lapse, grows tall,

That the elegant ordination of vegetables, which has found coincidence or imitation in the innumerable diversities of art, yet is also not absent from the mineral world, this is an axiom that, though strangely overlooked by the many, nevertheless belongs within the province of truth.

Could we satisfy ourselves in the position of the lights in our night sky or discover the repetition of the fixed stars to be so invariably soothing if we did not grasp here some imprint of Pythagorical music or the quasi Orphic resonance of a secret crystallography?

But not to look so high or imprison our reasoning in the quincunx of galaxies, observable rudiments of such harmony, transferred by derivation or similarity, are also abundant in subterranean concretions, in gypsum, talc and honeycomb-stone as much as in the crossword imprints of ferns and fossils.

Always, year after year, the same symmetry is deducible from the pendulous excrescences of trees like the walnut, aspen, or poplar which, hanging all the winter and maintaining their network close, by the sudden expansion thereof prove to be the early foretellers of spring; it is discoverable also in the long spikes of pepper, the rustling palms of willows and the flowers of the *sy-camore* or even *asphodel*, before any fragrance or duplication.

Thus has nature ranged the flowers of *sainfoin* and *honey-suckle*, which belongs to *Marie de France* (or *Tristan*, if preferred); and somewhat after this manner the beard of the domestic leek, which ancestral superstition enjoined us to set on the tops of houses, as a supposedly invincible defense against lightning, thunder and disaster.

Consider, then, the geometry of the sunflower's flat, lozenge-figured seedboxes, of the pineapple's rhomboidal protuberances, of the pine seed's dictated stiffness dusted with purple resin, the *parasol* pine's pollen, of the elliptical trajectories in which they spread and scatter over the ground.

For even in ordinary round stalk plants can we read this quintuple disposition, the first leaf answering the fifth in lateral enumeration, just as our loves in season shed their petals in circular patterns. Grass, heather and the fresh shoots of oak trees conform very exactly hereto.

Without omitting how leaves and sprouts which compass not altogether the stalk often cross in alternating long and short diagonals, like the legs of quadrupeds when they amble. This can be seen inexplicably multiplied in the exuberance of poppies, in their chiasmic five-leaved flowers as soon as they are in repose, wrapped for such sleep about the staminous beards, obliquely opening and closing upon each other.

And the buds finally which, awaiting the return of the Sun, do after the winter solstice multiply their interlacings and little figures: *lilac* stylites, *rye*, *black henbane*, *lupin*.

We conclude from these seminal considerations that the very exiguity and topological unpredictability of seeds in regard to their unfolding is one of the magnalities of Nature (if we understand by this proper name the exercise of genetic memory, which in spite of multiplicative fantasies is on the whole very constrained). The vast variety of flies or straw does not stem from mutually irreducible monads, but from infinitesimal modifications in rhythmic and sequential bracketing.

The rose at first is thought to have been of five leaves, as it yet grows wild in the fields. But even the most luxuriant, most combed varieties maintain this number in the teeth of any explanation. And everywhere are inscribed within the parenthetical pentagon, as are the vine, the red maple and the fig leaf.

Here some have imagined proof of the mystic nature of this first spherical number and measure of spherical motion, claiming that every globular figure placed upon an even plane, in direct volutation, returns to the first point of contact in the course of its fifth contraction and convolution.

And say that the same number does not only divide the equator of the Starfish, but in that identical order and following identical arrows disposes the elegant semicircles, cavities, spikes and orange tongues of the sea urchin.

Adding further that the circular foundations of the majestic branches of the oak manifest upon incision the pentad signature of a Star; which practice of Nature, become a mystery for art, had once furnished two problems for Euclid.

But the briar, we will say, which sends forth shoots and prickles from its angles, does it not also take care to maintain the pentagonal signature in the unobserved loop of a handsome porch within it? (And let us not forget the five typographic characters in the winter stalk of the walnut, nor the five small buttons dividing the circle of the ivy-berry, with many other observables, which cannot escape the eyes of signal discerners.)

Colors Worn

But without spinning this theme further unto numerological extremes not scorned by those whose pentamulatory thoughts we have mentioned, the following proposition will no doubt be more easily accepted, namely that segments of right lines and arcs of circles make out the bulk of plants, whence the profusion of double helices, conical sections, volutes, pyramids and Archimedean spirals (*eadem mutata resurgo*!).

And that (scholium or, rather, corollary—for sure—to the preceding proposition) under these conditions the Flowered Field, to wit the learned herbal of characters that fill the pages of our printed books, far from being simple adjustment of segments and arcs (of which the former directly inspires the I or *iota*, the latter, the O or *omicron*) in proportions derived from the ideal ones of Man's limbs (proof, if needed, of the non-disharmony of microcosm and macrocosm), has its source and metaphor in the art of gardening.

But is this not finally to say that the vegetal alphabet of the stars, its seeds of light flung in a wide flourish as far as the eye of the mind can see, is no other than the one that wafted toward me from the fragrant periphery of grass in the meadow where I lay one warm evening, obviously, reading, with this meditation going through my head?

Say this body is light, that body dark. Say it. From one party to the other, the color has suffered tiny modifications. Compare them. To two unequal distances? Two incommensurable numbers? From one to the other, the color has suffered a loss of brightness. But in the one case, there was an internal insistence sustained by time; in the other, surrender, which did not make for continuance.

White paper, flat sheet of white paper whose surface comes from the sky, a sky brighter, whiter, bluer than the white paper, and blue for being white. The sky is less light, the white of the sky less light. Say it. Yet the blue in the white of the paper is also the heavier of the two, the darker; at the extreme opposite of white, falls the weight of the sky, of the blue. Is it the sky that is flat, and the paper, vaulted?

Alcabitio saw pure white on the top of Fuji, pure white made of snow and a paper cone, white carved on white, a hollow, an eruption? Was it still white? Still pure? Or simply a better white, a little purer than all other white, extremely refined along the near lines of this vision? Could you tell? Could you say: it was pure white, a bowl of pure snow turned over, and falling?

You say paper looks grey against snow, you say snow looks dark against naked desire (Bernart de Ventadorn: *que la news quan ilh es nuda par vas lei brun' er escura*). You place a lump of snow under the lamp, here; then away from the lamp, there. Tell us what you see. You see white, but which? The snow burns the paper, the lamp chars the snow; the lump of snow, granted, but the sheet?

In spring, green was the first color. Could you say that? Perhaps. But that, in summertime, green was the indissoluble, intimate union of sky and sunflower, could you, still? And this: that the pines were green, ever green, and that in spring the pines were still green, but a little more so? Had they lost some of their green in the fall? Which? Year after year? Neither the blue-green of yews, nor the yellow-green of pine needles at their root, which is this green that would not veer toward blue, toward yellow?

Say that between red and green all the yellow fades out, say it, Plunge some green, thrust a handful of pine needles into the dark. Burn an oval ball of coal over a mica pane. Pour a jar of pale honey on a pale plate. Think it. Think these transitions. Can you really think this red-to-green, this green-to-yellow? Not this way. How? As lifting off the pine, the anthracite, the honey?

Somebody has superimposed some yellow on top of white, some red, and even some white. Somebody asks us: describe the yellow-white, the red-white, the white-on-white. How are we to take it? I say yellow from this angle, red from that, but the white? What is a white angel on white? I do not understand. I remove the yellow, I remove the red. There is a moment when only white is left. But that changes nothing.

The red was fading steadily, leaving a residual impression of green. You closed your eyes. You opened them. Now it was not green coming off the red, but blue. Once more, it again was blue. And yet once more. But perhaps you had never found any green there? Perhaps the green had only been an illusory imprint as despicably false as a memory?

Suppose then the distinction between green and red annulled. We say green and mean fire, sun, a star's carmine mouth; we say red and mean pines, glaucous water, willows. Sometimes. Sometimes the other way round. All colorblind. No objective correlative, in short, for the separation of "red" from "green!" Think of this situation: watch how yellow penetrates fields and leaves, how blue gains the cedars, watch the violet petals of the sun. But white?

In the language of my tribe, there are only two words (adjectives, if you like) that can be used for colors: the word *x* and the word *y*. The *x* objects are not *y*, the *y* objects are not *x*, at least if we simplify greatly. And if I say: "this is *x*" (I am answering your question, you are the one with the tape recorder), is it bright for you? And if it is bright and, according to me, "is *y*," is it a darker object?

Our sky (my tribe's) is opaque, our snow transparent. Paper is also transparent, paper especially. But sky and paper have the same color (or so we say), and paper the other (there are only two). You play the tape back several times; you scratch your head. You thought that snow and paper were the same color, the color we call *x* (this is not false), that all white objects were *x*, and that white was an opaque color. But in fact, we do not have a simple, unnoticeable, undifferentiated sliding from the opaque to the transparent. There is opaque, there is transparent, but there are also four other definite, distinct states that cannot be reduced to these.

The water under the willow, transparent green. The snow on the road, transparent white? This is not possible, you said. But paper? The paper you held against the lamp, through which the lamp light came to you, the paper on which you had written the transparent and green water under the willow, the opaque snow on the road, the snow which, placed on the paper, was melting slowly, was slowly transformed into green water, into back-ground?

Colors worn like shadows. Opaque white ground, which under transparent colors takes on their traits. Something white under the color white: does it look white? A white bowl full of snow: pure white, that is to say, blue. But it was the snow that looked blue in the cracks of the roof, not the bowl. The light bounced off it. Snow, puff of pure, transparent water, in the bowl of my hand, through the oval skylight. Seen.

Grey windowpane, difficult for light to pass through. Pain of the light in the grey pane? Grey? Where did the pane get the grey you grant it? Dust, pollution, a tired world, dusk? Choose. Sort the trees, the trees grey with evening, the grey stone walls (*restanques*), the dispossessed, exhausted, motionless things. Then fill the windowpane with white, but without pushing away the world, the outside. You cannot do it.

Water still green, transparent water, pane of transparent green under the willow, limpid, blocking your walk. Green willow in the water, green willow. Clouds on the bottom of the water, the color of water? Green clouds? Look. Cut out the water, watch the clouds, the leisurely clouds, high in the sky, white. Abstract the green of the water, the transparent green. Wind comes down, the water wrinkles, foams, foams white. Pane of transparent white?

The End of Clouds

Dark white. Say it: dark white. What do you see? Dark red. But white? Embers. But snow? Sheets at night. But winding sheets? Some thing, then, black? Does a thickened silence make noise? Between water and wash? Between the snow surface and the air? Between paper and sky? Volume of air, wooly particles? Filaments of dark? Grey? What do you see? What emerges from the dazzle?

Think of the tribe with only two colors: one color x , the other color y . All white is x . Red, blue, green, yellow are no matter what. And dark white, then? A dark x ? A light y ? Or colorless like light, like numbers, homeless? Or now luminous, now dark? A "portmanteau" color where they encroach, where x and y overlap? Dark white? And on the other side of this borderline, pure white?

Say white. Say color. Say colorless color. Say black. Say: black sun. You see it: an angel, face of light, against an infinitely narrow wall. This sun bright, that one dark, not black, dark white. Compare them. Compare the colors worn, the deprivation, the setback. Say: white. Say: white sun, white carved on white, carved on the eye. Impossible.

pinet. I was sitting under the pines across from Salles: it was a beautiful evening, the air quiet and calm, the sunset red, without clouds. Everything seemed frozen, bright, immobile. When I looked up, after a long time of staring at the crisscross of pine needles I was sitting on, I had the overpowering illusion of a form that I had seen in the sky before.

days. My days were poorly occupied. Gave little satisfaction to the intelligence. Not only forgetfulness, reflection, too, would have required a different apportionment. The clouds contained the present. They ruled the sky. Their drift charmed me. And in a pinch, at certain moments, they could even make a difference in how the world looked to me.

clouds. My window had been open all night, as usual. Toward four o'clock I was awakened by the pre-dawn and the smell of wet earth, cool and dark. I expected my usual view. But the space between the sky and the hill was almost completely flooded with clouds, the highest and fastest forming their own separate hills amid these plains of forms ploughed by the wind.

forms. If we try to leave off thinking, try to approach the one, infallible absence that absorbs all things, should this not entitle us to participate in the continuity shared by all beings? Unnoticeably, while I was staring, various forms appeared in the confused bustle, swift, incalculable combinations undone too soon for my limited understanding, my heart crushed by evening.

cloud. The thin air without shadows, the solitude of the dry rocks all over the hillside held me. The slope was slanting clay, ocher, almost red, with green veins (paradise of ruined colors). I lay down, my head on tufts of thyme and lavender, my heels against the top of a crumbling stone wall. The sky full, parallel, almost vertical, dotted with one single, round, white cloud.

clouds. As delimited shapes they had to be different from one another. How else could one tell them apart. And yet, to my eyes they could not but form a whole, at least from the moment I tried to take my distance from their medley in order to come to some understanding. From time to time I allowed my eyes to roam, soon defeated by the curve of the earth.

water. A kind of dike formed by trees knocked down by the wind and rotten with age. Alders, aspens and poplars have taken root here. Green wall, impenetrable vegetal wall. However, the *Céze* filters through the rubble and comes out with a meringue of foam to form a natural basin of great purity. In it, the light beds down an almost black sky with small cloud complications.

moon. It was noon, a summer day, and the mere choice of these words shows what an as it were ardent atmosphere so much light had extracted from the rocks, the almost exhausted sun, the white, dusty, silent walls. The moon melted into this sky like a light cloud.

equivalents. How could a form, a disposition of air that even with repeated encounters had remained almost entirely alien to me, have such impact on my thinking? Was it that, for a moment, it felt right to let go? or that their randomness allowed me a time of idle waiting?

hours. Heavy, cold, the hours wasted in their pursuit lost all sense of time. They dragged without noise; they were spent without producing anything. The light, once more up in the morning impossible to avoid.

clouds. Even back then I did not like evening, even before it came to resemble dawn. Clouds had the run of the sky. They were of the low-hanging kind, small and monotonous, in quite unnecessary profusion. There was no sound of torrents in incompressible caverns: in other words, no storm brewing. There were only shifting planes.

clouds. Universal harmony, we think, belongs to vastness. We look for it in the clouds because, we believe, it must be there. But where? They have no apparent limits (who would argue from their actual, inevitable dissolve in the mountains or their tumble into the sea) and slip through our fists all the way to the infinite, in the anxiety of our precarious days. Even when their shadow has by chance come to rest on the wall.

cypresses. It was midnight, the moon had set. There was uncertainty on earth. The earth more than dark. Sounds separated by long silence. The cypresses, smoke of an intractable lamp, of dim dust, just barely moved by a breath. Wild garlic. Incommensurate stars. And between.

clouds, solitude. Solitude suited them. Not that they were faltering, but there are different ways of sliding across the sky. I would never have thought that such soft, cottony concentration could be reconciled with such an exigent geometry. But how, without any support, consent to dissolution?

valley of the dam. I very rarely leave the valley between the sun-drenched hills of Sallèles, the valley of the dam, which used to be so leafy, so green before the fire slashed the pines. Half a century ago, I was not afraid to cut through the tangle of reeds and brambles that hides the water. Now, I don't stray from the path. The clouds have not changed. Throwing back my head, I see them as before, scurrying along the surface of the waters of the sky.

poison. Tea is a great help if you want to be bored in a calm way. Below the rather slow poison of the clouds, a lukewarm cup best suits their unvarying weak emotion. Clouds after rain, like snails in the grass, habits of peace and indifference, liquid weakness that calms the heart.

clouds. Again I was sitting under the pines across from Salles, a repeated target for my local sadness. I suffered not only from oblivion, but also from the deep space between sky and hill, almost completely flooded with clouds. Trying to leave off thinking, to approach their absence, I lay down, my head on tufts of thyme. To my eyes, they could not but form a whole where the light bedded down an almost black sky.

window. Soon I had but the choice of these mere words to show this disposition of air which all my life had remained almost entirely alien to me, even though I had wasted so many hours of my time in their pursuit. The clouds had the run of the sky here, in universal harmony with vastness. My window had been open all night. Earth more than dark.

Once or twice or three, four times a year, I put my suitcase down in this high, narrow room and look out on the crescent street where I am walking with the *Times*, one or two or three floors down, in the small hours when milk carts are left at the doors of hotels, of this hotel, always the same, I look toward the trees of the park with its locked gates between the crescent street and the straight one,

look at the Lord John Russell a bit farther down Marchmont Street, on the right, its wooden sidewalk tables with one, two, or three not quite empty glasses of lukewarm beer abandoned a few minutes before closing time, its low chairs and very low rotten benches where we sit among the locals, almost inaudible and quasi inarticulate old gentlemen, and two or three girls dressed in unimaginable greens and pinks will chat with a waitress dressed in the same style,

look at the grey and brown Guinness foam spilled over the low table, the color of the wood the same as the best bitter, or perhaps so much spilled best bitter has given the wood the color of beer, close to that of the two or three pennies left on the table, in the crescent street where we walk at night on wet, brown leaves dropped from the trees of the locked park that are bare now and brown like the spilled beer on the low table of the Lord John Russell, we walk to the hotel door under the leafy and dark trees some night or other at the end of summer, some mild night in May, some night,

I pile the narrow bed in the high, narrow room with plastic bags full of books from Dillon's or Waterstone, from Books etc. murder one or Foyles, I take the books out one by one, lying on the bed, my head on the single narrow pillow placed vertically against the papered wall, the books stacked on the floor at the foot of the low bed, right by the door,

I close the door and put the newspaper down on the low bed, it is still night, or else the sun is crawling through the curtained window toward the bed, or else it is barely dawn, the wind rushing through trees armed with their first green or tearing off their end-of-August leaves, already less clinging, the rain beating the flagstones, and the wind sweeping into my room between the bottom of the (barely) sliding sash and the low sill above the radiator,

I open the door as soon as I hear the two peals of four notes, it is seven-thirty solar English winter time, and I go down to the cellar, the hotel basement, toward the smell of tea, bacon and toast, I look at the crescent street where I am walking, one or two or three floors below the window of the high and narrow room,

I look at the ceiling in the glimmering crescent of night in the room, in my vacant and vacuous night, for me alone the distant voice of Big Ben, once or twice or three, four times its four notes, descending only once,

I walk through Marchmont and Herbrand streets, through Montague Place, isolated amid the English voices low enough, anonymous enough, comprehensible only if I make an effort, I watch the city calmly give in to the dark, like a rural landscape with gentle distances, like the crescent street that I watch from my window as it plunges into the night,

with London plunging into the dark, with night falling, there is less noise, and sounds merge one by one from the mass, as if combed out by the night, I sit down on a bench in Russell Square, in a pool of light between trees, between the trees I see the sky, the source of light, the source of light is also the source of evening.

the dark already black, already pitch black in the mass of trees, in the bushes of Russell Square, the nearest leaves perfectly outlined, defined against it, I see the light so feeble, so theatrical, so yellow as it fades, lingering in pockets on the crushed, still visible, fragrant grass,

London, limbo, "an absolutely inessential supplement to life," to my life, neither certainty nor comfort nor despair, words overheard lying on my back, once or twice or three, four times a year I lie down with an empty head under the yellow lamp, under the high ceiling of the narrow room, I listen to one or the other, or the full four quasi iambic four-note peals, the hour, the last hour of night, the wind rustling in the leaves of the trees lining the inner side of the crescent street, the sky lading rain on the glass rectangle of the phone booth at the corner of Marchmont, over its green side (phone cards) (the last red booths are opposite Dillon's), the rainy night repeating "sorry, all lines are busy, sorry, all lines are busy,"

because here I am surrounded by the other language, because the voices are softer, because the threshold of understanding is a bit higher, the lamps in the nighty street weaker, more yellow, because I have nothing to do, to think here, only to hang on to the hours separated by the same four notes, once, twice, three, four times the same four notes deep in the quiet night in London where I come,

in this hotel we come to, where I look at this photo taken from above, from an upper window, of me walking on the sidewalk of the crescent street, reading.

Coda

now I look out of the window
now I go out in the street
now I look out of the window
the street, a crescent of houses and trees
the sky, incompressible, takes a leap
now I look out of the window
now the street, empty and gone.

The Notebook

An empty notebook is like an abandoned head with nothing left in it: it used to be able to retain, but not any more. I intend to clutter this one with unprofitable traffic. And since you put it in my hands, I will fill it with a certain confusion of words, which ones, I don't yet know. And their fallout I'll, if possible, address: to you, telling their poverty, and to oblivion, exalting its calm scattering.

Don't be surprised if I decide to tanniel it without so much as one illuminating through—a kind I don't possess. It is a maxim of the Scepics that certainty cannot be based on reason. And yet I cannot keep this emptiness from having its effect on me. Some phrase will fall here; hence all are signaling. And just as the massive earth's invisible center violently draws me, so, at a given distance from all words, I have inexplicable affinities with some; there are invisible, yet solid paths on which one configuration touches off another and seems to lead right here. Do you not feel yourself the pull and expectation of some statement?

A loop has opened in these first pages, full of a silence impossible to ward off. It does not utter the kind of words that have remained secret from the beginnings. Nothing said here will be strange though common, unbelievable though certain, elevated though ordinary. Nothing profitable, nothing of value. It is an absolutely commonplace fate to receive a world as our share and not be enriched by it. In which mystery cult should I, year after year, have tracked its pattern entangled in disparate, supposedly harmonious contingencies? I have not come for offerings, but dissession.

These words won't cause a stir, won't unseat the glory of colors, nor rival the effect of passing clouds at the end of day. A meditative construction, a plan to put forward their argument, is as deep as they go. Their method is slow sequence without ornament or exaltation: each page changes, continues into the next via similitude.

For in fact no world is ours. This is what the constant functioning of our mind tells us, against all propensity toward hope. Streets reveal it, encounters witness it, voices prove it. The unfolding of signs makes it evident. So abundant are these demonstrations that the refuge of white sheets, their promise of infinite, negative delights, seems a unique Gift granted by Him who Gives, if there is such a One. Come in through the window, floating through the panels of the mirror, along the pillows, the clouds. There.

There, you will no doubt read to mean: these lines in a notebook filled for you, the parabola of a dispatch bearing everywhere the question, "What's the matter?" To which, after long and ripe consideration you'd reply: "This," "this" for sure, because nothing visible can do better. Because if the world itself had been shown to us even just once, its aspect could not have failed to stupefy. But it will go otherwise and, no doubt, till the end.

A line still empty is of infinite dimensions: an infinite wall, I'd say, if the metaphor of an infinite wall were not too hackneyed to express this boundlessness. A narrow, interminable length, then, which is nothing, which could and, if it were, would be unprofitable. A loop, a torus, globules of incessant, boundless whiteness in a ring. In which every word, all words, will be lost.

Time is so obvious a determinant here that wise minds have taken this as proof of its linearity. But we enter and leave every line as if it had no before and progressively destroyed its after. As if every movement of the eye devoured it. Before us, white body of paper looking penetrable, behind us, black body of signs already overwhelmed by the infinite, vacant distance, where there revolve the planets of words under influence.

I would prefer not to interrupt at the edge of the page, not always to go back to these uneasy beginnings, these principles of unreality. And I would like to fill this notebook so solidly that the pages would be black from left to right and from top to bottom, but with legible fill. I would like to escape what is countable, escape enumeration. This would give me a kind of imbecile happiness, the kind felt by saints convinced of the terrible, amiable, blessed, grandiose, impenetrable and incomprehensible goodness of their God. It would perhaps be a delight homologous with straying between the sheets.

In every line there is intention to continue, continued intention, and deflection. Which, though they are essentially one and the same, are nevertheless assigned three separate manners. For every line of this piece of writing affects the following line and is at the same time inflected by it, just as it has affected the line preceding it. The current pulls it beyond itself even while it hastens to turn object. And destructive coherence wins out over a sober, fluid lightness.

So we should never summon up but what is extremely contemporary with the act of reading; the last word presented as if still followed by a blank, which your anticipation might fill with what light you please, though not with those phrases already congealed in a semblance of communication, the cursed future of the perfect. But everywhere, clearly, this trinity: the immobile, the already said, the forgotten.

Writing aspires to the levitation of the spoken word, which is far too lacking in seriousness and modesty. Here it is, heavy with meaning, running through secret passageways toward its object, but also as jammed as if not moving at all. Meaning before the line is the parent of meaning; after the line, meaning congeals. But the meaning we perceive, see, retain, proceeds from all three. We are both author and witness of this triple alliance.

Before tacking the first page, I took the small paper squares from cigarette packs that you had given me (I won't tell which) out of the grey envelope with the blue line seal and placed them on the page as obstacles: infinitely thin foils as if of a Riemann surface. This was the page in the empty notebook: "route l'âme résumée / quand lente nous l'expirons / en plusieurs ronds de fumée / abolis en d'autres ronds / etc."*

Meaning is the tempter, meaning trickling from the line with the words addressing you: the address is the meaning. The meaning, incommensurable with the line, infinitely thin like the foil of a Riemann surface.

The meaning does not differ from the line (except in the infinitely negligible thickness of the paper pulled out of the rounds of smoke exhaled in expiation). The meaning does not diverge from the line, except perhaps in that completion precipitates and congeals it, whereas the line keeps going, and I will never reach its end. Neither will you.

*From Stéphane Mallarmé: "all of the soul summed up / as slowly we exhale it in / a few rings of smoke / that fade into other rings" —Trans. note.

Somber and vain and without comfort, the night. Somber and vain, the beginning of day. Unused, idle, the notebook long empty, like a dispossessed head. The leaden paste, the chalk ball of day against the windowpane. Nominal trees, stripped of their leaves by winter. We would need a large Seraphim, an infinite good, someOne. Would we?

Profitable silence is the measure of all things. Not the thumb-size sun, nor man, nor human beings. In silence, unformulated truths wait at the far end of lines never to be reached, understood, rhapsodized. Fearlessly, the silence of the written joins unwritten silence. To you this would no doubt mean snow, expectant snow, taciturn, borne in through the window, caught in the panels of the mirror, toward the bed blown.

Where the read notebook will again be empty, as if it had always been.