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THE SURFACE OF DISTANCE

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The Surface of Distance


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Abstract

In my thesis I have focused on the concept and the possibility of mediation, and ask whether or if this possibility—the possibility of an object to be transmitted, to be related, via a medium—can ever be justified by having recourse to rational frameworks. Considering language as one example of a medium, I base my inquiry on certain cases that occur in grammar, such as the words ‘ineffable,’ ‘unnameable,’ ‘unrepresentable,’ etc. I argue that these words all point to something which cannot be pointed to, insofar as what the word ‘ineffable’ aims to signify, to represent, is, because ineffable, not open to signification—what is represented by the word ‘ineffable’ negates representation and so cannot legitimize the word which seeks to represent it. This, then, inaugurates a different concept of representation, as well as mediation, which I elaborate at length throughout the text.

Özet

Tezimde aracılık kavramının olasılığı—herhangi bir nesnenin aktarılması, bir araçla ilişkilendirilebilmesi—üzerinde durmaya çalıştım ve bu olasılığın mantıksal, ya da rasyonel, bir çerçeve içerisinde meşru olup olamayacağı sorusunu sordum. Dilin arabulucuk kavramına bir örnek teşkil ettiğini varsayarak “isimlendirilemez”, “tanımlanamaz”, “söylenemez” gibi temsil edilemez, varsayımsal bir nesneye işaret eden kelimelerin gramatik yapılarını açtım. İddiam, tüm bu sayılan kelimelerin ifade etmeyi, göstermeyi, temsil etmeyi amaçladıkları nesnenin bu amacı değıllediğı, bu amacın dışında kaldığı, ve bu sebeple onu temsil etmeyi amaçlayan hiçbir kelimenin, bu değılleme hareketi zorunlu olduğı sürece, geleneksel bir temsiliyet mantığına başvurarak meşrulaştırılamayacağı yönünde.

"Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand." — The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Marx (italics mine)

"I will tell you right off hand: TV watching is scuba-diving." —Marshall McLuhan

THE SURFACE OF DISTANCE

1. Introduction

I hope for this introduction to serve as an aid, a model offered in anticipation of the text to come. In my thesis I have, in general, tried to focus on the concept and the possibility of mediation, and ask whether or if this possibility—the possibility of an object to be transmitted, to be related, via a medium—can ever be justified by having recourse to rationality; in other words, whether mediation can be explained by means of the dual, while in fact tripartite, structure of Subject-(Medium-)Object.

Considering language as one example of a medium, I have attempted my inquiry by first presenting a case from it, supported by examples from the domain of literature, a case that underlies such terms as 'ineffable', 'unnameable', 'inexpressible'. I argue that these words all point, each in their own way, to something which cannot be pointed to, insofar as what the word 'ineffable' aims to signify, to represent, is, because ineffable, not open to signification—what is represented by the word 'ineffable' negates representation and so cannot legitimize the word which seeks to represent it.

By focusing on this movement of negation, and by trying to explain the change it brings to the concept of language in general, I am taking a route which, historically, finds its parallel in the adherents to a term called 'apophasis.' The wide range of meanings that have come to define this word through its historicity are listed, in a way that does justice to their oppositions, their inability to form a coherent meaning for the word. Yet, as a first and provisional step, a meaning is nevertheless given: 'to state while denying the possibility of its statement.'

I thus propose, still within the domain of this first and provisional step, a hypothetical object that cannot be represented, and then proceed to lay out its

repercussions. An object which I coin the object of apophasis, or the apophatic object, which negates the very movement of objectification that is necessary to its representation, and so can no more be represented than made object, let alone be expressed, uttered, present, by or in language. Supposedly a halt to discourse, the ramifications of setting up this hypothetical, fictional object are plenty. Indeed, one may even go on to demonstrate, as I have in the text, how not only the words listed above, but all words, language in general, can be considered as objects of apophasis; this conclusion is reached no sooner than first defining language as composed of signs that are Universals, and then recognizing the concept of the Universal, which in the traditional structure of Universal/Singular/Particular constitutes the meaning of signs and of language in general, as an instance of apophasis. A quick justification for this movement can be given by emphasizing the Universal's absolute exteriority to any one context—a necessary exteriority if it is to contain the latter—which consequently situates it beyond the reach of any one subject so long as the subject remains grounded by their context. Hence, it is impossible ever to state the Universal, impossible to state the category, since the statement would always take place in a context where the Universal is exterior to, and doing so would necessarily render the Universal into a Particular, the category into one of its examples. The argument here is that the object of apophasis, viz. language, lies beyond any hope of encountering it so long as the subject remains limited, finite.

One of the repercussions of the apophatic object involves, therefore, a consideration of finitude, and the way the finite relates, if it at all can, to infinity. This consideration, as is demonstrated in the text, necessarily ends up in a revision of not only the duality which separates the finite from the infinite, but of the concept of separation itself: the concept of the boundary or the limit which bears on all dualities, since it is this operation, the operation that separates and keeps separate, that implicitly determines all objects while simultaneously guarding the answer to the question of what lies before them, in the middle. This question of the relation between the finite and the infinite is set out, with reference to Kafka's famous parable *Before the Law*, in terms of distance, where the countryman in the parable, who comes to seek audience with the Law, instead encounters an infinite distance before him. It is not the Law but only the distance to the Law that the countryman encounters, which, I argue, is what

the Law is: an object which lies outside the context insofar as it is an abstraction, a category, a Universal, can only be encountered in its absence from it, an essential absence which in the parable translates into spatial terms as an infinite distance. A distance that will always remain infinite before the journeyer however many steps are taken to cover it. And since this insurmountable distance is essential to the object of apophasis, receding infinitely from any one context regardless of the context, since it is the only way it can be encountered, it is plausible that one may take this distance to be it, resulting in a kind of object that only ever is the distance to itself.

Kafka's parable serves to identify the apophatic object, and the very technique of objectification in general, as a recession that generates the distance between the context and its exterior, while being nothing other than this distance. In other words, and also to repeat what is mentioned above, the object is the distance to the object, it lies in the middle between the subject and the object, where the exterior is only the limit that initiates the exterior.

We witness how the concept of an outside, an exterior, in this impossible condition of being the site of the apophatic object, proves difficult to remain as such. In this vein, Kafka's parable provides occasion to introduce still another repercussion of admitting apophasis to language, one that complements the problem of exteriority with an implicit connection to distance. It involves posture, introduced via the Latin 'stare' meaning 'to stand', which runs its common etymological strand through much of the terms used in the text, one such term being statement, which is included in the definition of apophasis, and the other, distance. As the text lays out in detail, with a close and scrupulous reading of the parable, the drastic manner in which the object of apophasis changes the concept of distance follows from its relation to standing, which is implied in the grammatical gesture of the statement: understood as a gesture that is as much physical as metaphysical, evoking the uprightness, the rectitude at once of the body and the category.

Thus, there is an intersection of the body and the abstract in one and the same word which constitutes, according to the provisional definition we have made, the movement of apophasis. This is born out in the narrative of *Before the Law*, where the bodies of the countryman and the doorkeeper are only too prevalent in their relation to the distance that is the Law. A similar remark can be found in Derrida's reading of the

parable, and I have taken it even further. The doorkeeper stands erect throughout, whereas the posture assumed by the countryman is continuously shifting: he is standing, sitting, stooping, and, finally, collapsing.

In conjunction with the intersection of the body and the abstract, I demonstrate that the event of collapsing, which the countryman undergoes at the very end of the parable, is simultaneously attributable to the Law: it is, similarly, the only posture that can befit the category, language. In other words the Law, from where it purportedly stands as a Universal, as a name, as a category outside the context, is always already collapsed. The claim is justified on the basis of the Law's negation of its own statement (the movement which, judging from the infinite distance it takes from the context, defines it as an apophatic object) which aims not only to state it grammatically but also posturally—put differently, the gesture of the statement, of stating a case or an object, insofar as this gesture is constantly being informed by the etymological presence of 'stare', is simultaneously a gesture which stands upright, whereby to state the object of apophasis becomes simultaneously to give it rectitude, an erect posture before a subject which, however, is a lie since this object, insofar as apophatic, negates its statement, negates standing, and so can only have collapsed before it. The parable itself corroborates this interpretation as the countryman, in order to look in through the door which opens on the Law, *stoops*, has to bend low, implying that the Law is not upright, not standing.

And this, incidentally, is what drives the argument put forward in the text, remarking how distance, as a concept understood rationally (where it is defined as an intermediary, between a subject and an object) can never be justified so long as the object it keeps away is conceived of as a Universal, as abstraction. This is when 'stare' is found, once again, this time to implicitly determine the structure of distance as a technique of separation, where the etymology of the term recalls *distare*, yielding *distare*, viz. 'standing apart'. Hence, distance in the conventional sense is justified only when it lies in between two (or more) things that are able to stand, or be stood, apart from one another; only when it is an intermediary site between objects that can be stated. The statement of an object, that it can be stated to begin with, that it can stand, becomes the condition of possibility of distance as a technique of separation. But if the

object cannot stand, if it negates its own statement, if it can only collapse before this distance, what then?

Relying on a moment of generalization in the text which we have mentioned above, where the apophatic object is identified with language in general (with all signs insofar as they necessarily refer beyond the context in which they are performed, to their categories, for meaning), it becomes possible to regard it as simultaneously defining the movement of objectification, insofar as objectification itself constitutes an act of decontextualization: a movement which stops it, abstracts, isolates from the context and from time. From this, it follows that the object, insofar as it is brought to a site where it lies outside the context, outside time, cannot be recalled to it without losing its constancy, which alone grants it objecthood. Thus, the object cannot be contextualized without losing objecthood, without already becoming admitted into a relation with a context where it is constantly changing. Put differently, the object cannot be stated, in a way that justifies the distance before it, without already negating this statement: it cannot be stood apart across distance without already collapsing, leaving the distance bare, infinite, uncompensated.

What this implies is that the movement of objectification partakes of the logic of apophasis, which then undermines the concept of distance, since the inability of the object to stand, to 'di-stare', is simultaneously its inability to be distant. The collapse of the object, in this respect, is its collapse into a state that negates distance which, by the same token, is a collapse into immediacy.

Though repeated frequently in the text, it might still be worth mentioning here that the state of immediacy befalling the object, immediate insofar as it is an abstraction, is Universal, arises from an ambivalence with regard to the distance taken by it. This ambivalence is described above, and yet, a more striking way of articulating it would be to describe this object as lying so far that it can't not simultaneously be near (FarNear, a term coined by the Medieval Christian mystic Marguerite Porete, is a parallel to this argument. I have not had the occasion to provide excerpts from her writings, which I reserve for a later project.) An object that lies infinitely, essentially far that it becomes distance, that is to say it becomes the medium separating it, the medium which itself can only be immediate. The object of apophasis lies infinitely far

where it collapses into immediacy. It is an object so distant it transcends distance, is no longer distant.

Thus, the two extremes of distance become interchangeable. I have rephrased this paradox in countless ways throughout the text, which serves to perform in the style of the arguments what is observed in the structure of the apophatic object, namely its multiplication, or its delegation, into endless examples of itself while itself, as the category subsuming these examples, as their arche, as their Universal, remains undisclosed. By performing, or imitating, the object it studies, the text constantly runs the risk of becoming an apophatic object itself: seeming at times without beginning or end; reiterating what is allegedly the same point in different manners; straying from the convention of rectitude, of linearity and so often ending with a collapse; endless paragraphs that are broken off by untimely dashes instead of fullstops, etc. What is attempted by doing so may be described as a mode of writing in which form and content mix, where the object is not merely transmitted, or mediated, by language, but has collapsed on the surface of this mediation where it becomes indistinguishable from it.

The aporia of distance at once constitutes the aporia of the medium, of the process of mediation. The medium is, or is indistinguishable from, the object it mediates, since the object, no sooner than stood across a medium, has always already collapsed on its surface. The true site of the object where it stands undisclosed, as a category, as Universal, as essence, is at best implied on this surface where it lies collapsed. In parallel with the logic regarding this object's infinite distance which simultaneously constitutes its immediacy, the following description seems relevant: it is undisclosed because it is already disclosed, as it is nothing other than its examples, just as the apophatic object, which stands infinitely far, also lies immediately before, insofar as it is nothing other than the distance which separates it. Let us repeat it once again, but differently: if the object is this distance, than it follows that it has already arrived at the subject (the Law is already present to the countryman in the form of its essential absence), and this because distance itself cannot be distanced, the medium itself is necessarily immediate, at its limit or its surface where the object, as the category that constitutes while negating language, collapses into immediacy with the subject.

The way mediation, as a concept, is distorted runs similar to the movement described provisionally above, and at more length in the text below, which, as we have partly elaborated, transforms the concept of distance into its own negation. At this very juncture, no sooner than distance is taken as an example of a medium, much as language had been at the start, the claim is then permitted that any rational explanation which illustrates mediation, as a process comprising the triad of Subject-Medium-Object, is already cancelled, disproven by the collapse of its object onto the surface of the medium where it is not mediated but already immediate, always already available to the subject. The implications brought about by this aporetic, complex, deconstructive gesture are far too many to exhaust, let alone in just this brief introduction: this single yet irreducible gesture implicates in its movement the domains, to list a few, of epistemology and science, politics and hierarchy, grammar, semiology, subjectivity, community, etc. all of which I hope to have at least briefly touched on in this introduction. I hope to provide further comments on each of them as the project develops, either in the text that follows, or in later projects.

I intend for this introduction to guide the reader, rather than to condition their reading, in all the different ways that are paved by the following.

2. Apophasis and its object

Let us begin by introducing, and laying out in detail, some of the meanings that may be implicit in a definition of apophasis.

The term, initially Greek, begins with the prefix 'apo-', which as a standalone unit implies being 'away', 'apart from', 'off,' and even, with some derivation, 'outside of' and 'separate to'. Its action is to negate, as part of the word it composes, the supplement, the appendix, which in this case becomes 'phasis', its corollary the Greek 'phanai', implying 'to say', 'to speak', or 'speech'.

In sum, the term might be defined, provisionally, and while not straying far from its Greek meaning, as ‘the raising of an issue by its denial’ or, put differently, to state while denying the possibility of its statement.

But it is worth noting how the prefix ‘apo-’ has also become tied, in its historicity, with meanings aside from those already mentioned, such as: ‘derivative of’, ‘to be related to’, and with still others such as the term ‘lack’, ‘absence’, etc. Regarding all these new associations that have rushed in to define the word, contributing to the weave of definitions that make up “apophasis”, we already arrive at a very complex relation, connecting speech with what it casts away, is outside of, is separate to, but is also related to, is a derivative of, lacks, etc.

2.1 Statement as an act of posture

The term, then, with all of the above implications, already opens a divide in the conception of language. It yields at least two modes of thinking, or modes of considering, language that would seem to oppose each other at face value. Let us take, for example, the etymology of a term listed above, namely, “statement”—not an arbitrary choice, not least because the term is already found in our definition of apophasis—whose treatment will support much of the discussion hereafter. The word involves the action of stating, which is itself connected to the Latin ‘stare’, ‘to stand’, and by also looking at the etymology of one of its contemporary—legal—synonyms, ‘declaration,’ linked to the Latin ‘declarare’, which implies ‘making clear, to reveal, disclose,’ the two, together, may help bring to relief some of the grounds for this opposition. Since apophasis, running a logic counter to the use of conventional, and let us also say positivist, language, divides this convention and sets, as one pole of this divide, such language-acts as stating, standing something (upright, as ‘stare’), no less while making that something clear, to disclose it (as ‘declarare’) and, as the other pole, a mode of language as principally a negative gesture: here, a statement is made not to disclose, but to only tell of the impossibility of disclosure, if stating then unable not to do it obliquely, indirectly, by way of stating the impossibility of stating, of standing.

The relevance to our discussion of the act of standing, as a spatial, corporeal—or perhaps anthropomorphic, in any case postural, verb, already implied in the positivist (and at once legal) noun ‘statement’, gains further ground if we analyse the word ‘object’, which holds value as much in the realm of philosophy—a mainstay of ontology, of epistemology, of science—as in matters of the judiciary, in judicial discourse, as a verb used to imply opposition (“I object.”). This overlap or coincidence of the ontological and the judicial on the plane of one word, the word “object”, also underwrites the word’s Latin cognate, the verb ‘obicere,’ ‘ob-’ suggesting ‘before; in the way of’, and -jacere ‘to throw; to put’, where the combination translates into the act of ‘putting before oneself’, both in the sense of ‘being given to oneself’, as an end, a finality, and at once as a hindrance, an impediment, in the manner of an obstacle (‘ob-stare’, standing before, in the way of, oneself; ‘opposing oneself’). It is a term almost bespoke for a discourse assuming self-negation within the spheres of both ontology and the judiciary. Likewise a similar conjunction could also be traced in the etymology of the word “subject”, where the same main verb -jacere is, here, compounded with the prefix “sub-”, as in “under”, with the composite word then carrying yet another implication of the spatial, or the prepositional, that of ‘to put under,’ all the while making it, again, at once judicial, if used in the sense of ‘subject to’, ‘being brought under’, ‘subordinated to’ (. . . a rule or principle; an ‘arche’, say, a hierarchy) and ontological if regarded instead as a constituent, a lynchpin of dualism, constituting what is the binary and the grammatical logic of the putative and notorious subject/object divide.

2.2 Apophasis as a language contrasting positivism

To foreground, by way of etymological analyses, a handful of these faint nuances of spatiality or—a term that will often be favoured in place of this— of prepositionality, stored away within or about each of these words, nuances that also betray, in one and the same approach, a complicity with the language of law, suggesting a complex—historical—proximity weaving the two idioms together, will tell us just how counter, and variedly so, these languages run to the logic of apophasis. This is because apophasis, in its own terms, implies a necessary rejection of nothing

other than that very prepositionality which links the words 'object' and 'statement'— a prepositionality wrought, to be precise, in the sphere of a positivist ontology that permits the possibility for the object to become object, the possibility of the grammar of the object, of becoming object and, therefore, harking back to the word's etymology, of being put before, which is a possibility that is no less grammatical than it is spatial as well as temporal, insofar as prepositional, ontological. We could call the idiom permitting and even relying on such an object, one which unproblematically admits of, or grants, prepositionality, for lack of a better term, a positivist language.

And it is that object of this positivist language, an object which may be put before as a matter of course, that apophasis rejects, insofar as it chooses as its object only (as what it states in order to speak of, what it puts before itself) that which it cannot speak of, which it cannot even put before itself to speak of. A non- or, as I will mostly be calling it in the discussions to come, an apophatic object. An object that escapes the possibility of becoming object and escapes, likewise, the ontology that would give ground to a preposition implying such objecthood, that would allow being put or stood before, behind, after or above, far or near.

It therefore can't not be the case, that no sooner than it is conceptualized, an apophatic discourse will have already performed an infinite number of rejections, disavowing as many languages as there are, any and all if subscribing to the positivist affirmation of the possibility of the object. Among these infinitely many disavowals, the one involving prepositionality, broached in the last paragraph but which certainly calls for more elaboration, bears on the fate of our discussion, as a principle (etymologically) guiding the words "statement" and "object" in their connections to a spatial and, therefore, positivist, ontology. This in the sense that the principle may become the ground whereon the two languages— the positivist, the apophatic—break with each other, with the one firmly standing on a ground of entanglements, relating (to) objects via their prepositions, and the other not. In this case what is negated by apophasis is not only that sartorial ground where the object is put, where the object stands, in favor of another ground to stand the object on, but also that it stands; the notion and the act of standing is no less an important target of its infinite negation, as what cannot be stated cannot stand, cannot 'stare', nor stand on any one ground, in any way, or be put, at all, much less be put before.

2.3 The iterative, onward movement of self-negation

Nevertheless, an apophatic gesture within or as a language does not adopt silence, the gesture is (part of) a language that pursues its object, however incompatible this object might prove with the pursuit, with the grammar that handles it, picks it up and puts it before. This is the aporia that, far from being an isolated phenomenon within a sphere of language otherwise unproblematic, otherwise functional and of a logic that conforms to itself, is consistent with itself, is instead already commonplace, a constitutive rub tormenting every instance of this language which only but speaks of how it can't. Moreover, the intractable quality of such a non- or an apophatic object in face of languages' attempts to assimilate it, into grammar, into location or locatability, an abusive confinement within the rules of an ontology of prepositionality, wherever this happens, will only keep reconstituting the aporia, reproducing it every time it is made an object, as part of a sentence or a statement, undermining even—or especially—the most straightforward, rectilinear of clauses, wherever it is taken up and put before by language. Rather than being a condemnation to silence, the aporia opens a language that perpetuates itself endlessly, iteratively, by its inherent attitude of rejection, by its own absolute duty to self-reject and by the inevitable fault to have unwittingly stated this rejection so as to have to reject this statement, too, via yet another statement, *ad infinitum*.¹

This tendency for disavowal (of not only the attribute of prepositionality per se, but any and all attributes insofar as subsumable under the ontology of the “statement”, a ground whereon to stand is to have already asserted, via this posture, objecthood) which we have said is inevitable, is still, however, never predictable, insofar as the ground for each instance of negation is never given in advance of the performance, does not provide the solid plane whereon to stand such a statement, a promised or prophesied object, before it is realized. Instead, the kind of ground that is suggested by this compulsive duty moving the language of apophasis onward, jerkily, via this almost-predictable act of redress which at once can't not reproduce the fault it

¹ For an historical survey of apophasis and a lengthier description of its recursive dynamic, I refer the reader to Michael Sells, *The Mystical Languages of Unsayings*.

redresses, is of a kind that we will try to demonstrate, almost in every instant of our discussion, to be a negation of the very concept of ground, a ground negating all posture, let alone the standing posture, the statement incarnate, unless to stand as such, rather than imposing an unshaken assertion of uprightness, of rectitude, is simultaneously to collapse, to have already collapsed or be collapsing, to stand while collapsing. The ground that is thus implied we will attempt to conceive further, by presenting various readings, to help stand this constantly foundering, already foundered, object of apophasis.

3. Distance as an apophatic concept

So far, we have given the impossibility of stating/standing the apophatic object; a prohibition, in other words, which only too readily extends to standing it anywhere near, far, or in any such relation to a body, to another like object, across a given space becoming then distance. This extension is relevant if only because it leads us to consider the implications that this language, in its denial of subordinating collapsed, crooked objects to the straightforward, rectitudinal law of the preposition, has on the positivist attitude toward distance itself—distance as mediator between poles, between objects that are not only stood (already contested by apophasis) but stood across from each other, across distance, which arguably is the only way to stand. To briefly introduce here what we will be taking up at length in the text, the apophatic object as an event in language, as the precise moment of a statement putting this object before, can't not transform, in the way it has our concept of objecthood into aporia, the distance implied in this prepositional gesture of putting the object 'before'. This includes all possible measures of being near, far, and any and all such prepositional qualities that necessarily imply in their functioning a certain finite measure of distance, and that not only realize while presupposing the validity of the law of prepositionality, but assert this validation on the ground of a distance (finite, ontological) that couldn't but go over the head of an apophatic object (infinite, dis- or pre-ontological).

The etymology of 'distance' evokes a Latin verb that we have already become familiar with. By articulating the prefix 'di-' (not to confuse with 'dis-'), which indeed suggests meanings similar to those of 'apo-', as in "off, apart from," to once again the

verb 'stare,' the composite definition of distance would seem to give the notion of 'being stood apart,' or 'standing apart,' a word thus immediately fitting in with the arsenal of etymologies we have put together (toward a myth of the preposition, sewing the notions of object, distance, and standing at a given etymological horizon; so rendering the object, that of 'being put before', into almost a synonym for a posture of distance, that of 'being stood apart', di-stare). We do this not least to demonstrate, or to establish, a kind of proximity already between these words (one measured not spatially, but semantically, a distance realized as a separation of grammar, mediating the words by way of their implications that are, as demonstrated, fundamentally prepositional) but also to trace a ground, a ground inherently negating groundhood where, despite this negation, the apophatic object stands, at least until it collapses, until it will have always already negated itself. It might be reasoned that this ground we are out to trace is quite impossible, while simultaneously it is no less inevitable, insofar as it is the condition of possibility of apophasis for when it occurs in language. It is the ground implied whenever denominations as false and unjustified as 'unsayable', 'infinity', 'ineffable', 'language', and the like are nevertheless said, their referents which aren't are put before, remaining distant as names before the speaker at least so long as to permit their saying.

3.1 The performative origins of the object

Before posing the question of how one may conceptualize this ground whereon stands what has already collapsed, it may be helpful perhaps to briefly comment on its phenomenology, in order to reconcile its manifestation, the possibility if not certainty of this manifestation (one enough to impel and to justify its own negation) with its impossibility, in the making of an event (to the extent that this reconciliation making the event will not, though I fear it can't not, lead to a violent reduction on both sides). Impossible yet inevitable, is how we have just described the phenomenon of this ground, for even though it negates any eventuality, any possibility of manifestation, its event is nonetheless secured in language where it will have already happened,

manifested, as a pure performative², no sooner than said and until such time as negated, when, during this negation, said again. In this regard, the performativity of language seems almost to be a condition for the aporia, insofar as what constitutes, or exposes, this impossible manifestation is tied foremost to a conception of language as action, as performance whereby grammar, or the sign, running somewhat counter to the conventional and positivist structure of referentiality (that envisions signs as pointing directly, arbitrarily, to their referents while presupposing them, logically and ontologically assuming the anteriority of the object to its statement, its finitude) is demonstrated to grant while presupposing its object, its finitude, granting finitude while taking it for granted. Here, in this reversed or collapsed mode of signification, where the performative act of language becomes almost indistinguishable from the constative, the referent is suddenly the sign's contemporary (and perhaps even, as we will discuss when reading Poe, its coincident) insofar as it is now not put in the anterior isolation of a signified but in a constitutive relation to the sign by which it is founded, granted finitude, objectified, under the guise of being a referent preceding its passive act of signification.

To then relate this performative capacity of language, its founding power exercised in the performative act of implying, to the ground we are out to trace, as the impossible manifestation of the apophatic object, we need only mention a case where the referent, coinciding as we have said with the performance of the sign, is implied and therefore constituted even when there can logically, ontologically, grammatically, semantically, be no such referent: compensating the sign even when, or because, nothing can compensate the sign, compensating it as implication, *ex nihilo*. In this case the statement, apophatic or other, paves while pointing to its own impossible ground, and so this manifestation, of the non-ground of apophasis, in its full impossibility and inevitability, depends only on its reference, to be constituted as an implication of a referential, prepositional act of language, to already be granted while implied the finitude it can't not renounce.

² Derrida, "Force of Law" . . . A brief excursion into the notions of performativity and referentiality is given here, serving mainly as an introductory treatment, as we will be returning to them on numerous occasions in the text to further consider their role with respect to the language of apophasis.

The ground of the aporia, then, is at least present in that infinitely small amount of time springing 'in between'—an intermediary time, the time of the performative until it is discredited by reason, minutely distinguishing the statement from its immediate disavowal, an infinitesimal ground that is destroyed no sooner than laid, a ground and a time where the unsayable is, by an abuse of language, said. And there is the apophatic object, disclosing itself as a non-address that accedes, or is employed by, grammar and, ergo, has already become address, before and distant, impossibly yet incontrovertibly present, never said yet still unable to be unsaid, an object standing apart from us at a site where this apartness already negates itself, whose posture is a language that can't not undermine itself, now confining, now excluding, what can neither be inside, nor out. We will now pose a question.

3.2 The question of a concept

This question, insofar as it might even be our central one, presenting a theme of sorts to guide the text until its end, is one that, for that very reason, will have to be bolstered with many, infinitely many, others in the course of receiving an answer, lest it collapse. It is this question: insofar as a ground is conceivable where this aporia occurs, where the apophatic object, what already refutes objecthood, is nonetheless vested with it, by a performative gesture of language, vested with it before it will have already divested of it, insofar as this ground lasting for only a non-duration, balancing the apophatic statement before its utter collapse that nevertheless has always already occurred, can give itself to conception, how then to conceive it?^{3 4}

³ To be sure, we can also rephrase this question which is our theme, a second and a third and a fourth time, with neither iteration our question, our direction any the less, and neither one implying no less that ground we are questing after, the ground at once of as many directions, if not all, as are said.

⁴ What happens if, at this moment, in the time of the question, we answer this question in the negative? Not as an apophatic gesture, whose perpetual dynamics is already discussed, but as an act or intervention of a positive empiricism wishing to overrule the condition of this perpetuity, to foreclose the ground of apophasis? I say this because, having posed this question now, we already lament the impossibility of overruling it even from an empirical standpoint, insofar as to reject the aporia, on the ground that no such object, in order to have been stated, can even so much as manifest in language to begin with so as to then justify a question concerning its ground, its conceptualization, as a simple and preemptive response hoping to nip the legitimacy of the question in the bud, to forestall the aporia. This would still not have forestalled it but, insofar as the forestallment itself turns on the necessary denomination of what it forestalls, would have reconstituted it, conserved it, reiterated the implication of this impossible ground that would have again justified the question of apophasis, re-legitimated it by denouncing this legitimacy, an effort that is no less at fault while showing up what is, laying the ground while overturning it. This empirical act of rejection, while undertaken to end the chain

4. Kafka, Before the Law

In the way of an answer I propose we read several examples, from mostly the fields of philosophy and literature⁵, as are designated today, that I believe might help us get some kind of grip—one without the handholds—on what the question implies. In a parable by Kafka, to begin with, titled ‘Before the Law’, which is the title also of the article by Derrida where he reads the parable, we are presented with an encounter, though not necessarily, that would seem to be in some relation to the aporia whose question we have posed, and which now stands. The parable narrates a dynamic, at once frozen and in flux, between a countryman who seeks an audience with the law, or the Law, and the gatekeeper guarding the entrance to it and who denies him this entrance, has him wait at or before the threshold of the gate, open as the gate may be, and the rest then describes the countryman perennially standing before what this entrance opens onto, without taking a step into it, always only before the sight (although, as we will shortly discuss, this sight presented beyond the entrance is never in fact seen by him, not as an object given to or intuited by his faculty of sight per se,

of negative iterations the apophatic object has triggered, would itself already become another such iteration, becomes the very operation of apophasis which it attempts to forestall, passively.

. . . So, the question of the object of apophasis may never be answered in the negative without already affirming it, but it can be disregarded, overlooked, and these in fact are two acts or gestures we will return to later, marking them as constitutive of distance as space, as a pure and positive spatiality, an emptiness.

⁵ With regard to our method of choice, of deciding among a plurality of cases on one and not others, maybe there ought to be an explanation, or a justification, a question at least, a question acknowledging this aporetic move that suddenly narrows an infinity, imposes measure on the immeasurable put before us by the question of choice.

Here, a decision as such, once made and articulated to the history of the text as an act finalizing infinity, cannot necessarily imply the superiority of what is chosen, the relevance of one example trumping countless others, such as when the choice is said to be made on grounds of merit: justifying what is chosen as such because it is the most distinguished, indispensable, as the very exemplar for the purpose at hand; and, in the case of the exemplar, any question of choice would indeed be a void one, insofar as the choice would have already been made, predetermined insofar as the exemplar already is the answer, already the *closest* to an expected standard, to an essential quality, becoming then the perfect choice, the *direct* fit. We will have occasion to comment on why such qualifying attributes of closeness to a given category, which serves as the condition of possibility of an exemplar, is, from an apophatic standpoint, for lack of a better word, iffy, and that the closeness even of the exemplar remains still and always an infinite distance, thereby either demoting the exemplar down to the common state of an example, or all examples to exemplars; for now, however, let us only ask whether a choice, a decision, could not be made—instead of out of an infinity of cases, and on the part of a chooser necessarily omniscient enough to master that list—from among whatever happens to lie, to be given, nearby, before the chooser, understood as a gesture guided not by standards of merit, judging cases by their proximity to a qualifying essence, but rather by their proximity to the question itself, in other words by their already immediate presence before the one asking, each partaking in the context of the question as uniquely possible answers, each already answering no sooner than posed the question, which is posed immediately before its answer. This is one possible reading of the quote by Marx which accompanies the title of this text.

but narrated to him, to us, by the gatekeeper) lying beyond it. It is this sight foremost, in the very measure that it is not a sight per se, made available to the countryman at the same time as barred to him, that might allow a reading of the parable from the standpoint of our question, on this ground where the countryman stands looking, prying, an onlooker insofar as never entering, standing before the distance that leads to the Law.

4.1 The sight of the Law

This sight, which is the sight of the law, of the category of the Law, lies close to our theme insofar as it discloses a structure, a kind of geometry or topology illustrating the gesture of abstraction which, from the standpoint of the countryman, who is almost at the threshold before it (or is, indeed, at this threshold, where he might perhaps become indistinguishable from it), would appear as or imply a series of doors and hallways (“From hall to hall there is one doorkeeper after another. . .” p.183), with each door/hallway unit placed further than the previous and so circumscribed by the previous, smaller so as to be discernible—increasingly less we might assume—inside the larger frame of the closer, a sequence boasting less clarity, less definition with each iteration onward. Geometrically, we should expect this series to converge, at a horizontal point, similar to what already gets infinitely produced no sooner than facing two mirrors, emerging at or as the limit of their reflective reciprocity, a point that suddenly has already located itself infinitely far from the observer. It is the end, to put it simply and impossibly, of an endless sequence.

This impossible limit before the countryman does not, however categorical it may be, mightily though it may introduce the very place, the site of the Law, the distant ground whereon the Law stands, take on the quality of an essence. For it does not accede to such a universality as to justify its site, its place, its inaccessible ground, outside of this particular encounter, the encounter at hand, with the countryman. Not a universal, then, this aporetic limit or ground—aporetic insofar as it designates an end, named the Law, to the endless series of doors and hallways, the interminable distance coming before it—is singular as it is presented, so says the gatekeeper, only to the countryman (“ . . .this gate was made only for you.” Kafka, *The Trial*) hence a limit as

such only to its observer, standing or sitting before it, looking on it. And we might also say, with regard to this limit whose manifestation is justified before the countryman alone, that perhaps its act of delimitation may also be justified otherwise: as a limit constituting while constraining not only the visual or perceptive range of the countryman, but, also the context, the context or ground where this encounter with the Law takes place (which would not have to be a physical location, as might be supposed the text depicts, represents, but, insofar as such a site, a ground, is implied in the manner we have discussed above—viz. by a performative act of language, already constituted no sooner than implied— would be the text itself; the text as the context grounding this impossible encounter, where the limit, the category of the Law, asserts itself as the apophatic terminus lying at the furthestmost where the ground of this language is finalized and where, in hindsight, it is constituted. It is where the text itself appeals to for its meaning.)

4.2 The metonymy of distance

One thing to mention, or to repeat, before deliberating on the aporia of this limit, is that the sight of the Law described above, as a perpetual recession of doors and hallways unfolding before the countryman, put as much beyond the door as within its frame, is not, in fact, seen by him, insofar as it does not explicitly take place in the narrative. In the text, we read only up to where the countryman is set, in his eponymous position, poised before the door just as he would lay eyes on what is beyond it (“the man stoops to peer through the gateway into the interior.” p.183), where the narrative suddenly breaks with him, and picks up the speech of the doorkeeper; just as the countryman stoops to behold the Law the text suddenly overflows with the implied presence of who guards it, and the sight beyond or within the doorframe, which the countryman would see then, there and then, gets told to him instead, to him while no less to the reader, its manifestation foreclosed and recounted instead almost as a cautionary tale (“From hall to hall there is one doorkeeper after another. . .” p.183, also quoted above). According to this, this foreclosure by language, what we have described so far to be the sight of the aporia, the sight as the aporia, however visual in the terms of its reference, would not be visualized *per se*. It would not an object, a

finitude put before the subject, but only ever be given to us and the countryman in language, in text, unless the text itself be considered as object, as an object of grammar. The aporia is then a sight whose event is always only grammatical, an event that is an object of, as it occurs only in, language, not unlike how we have construed the object of apophasis. We could even say, as concerns this resemblance, that the infinite recession of the Law can emerge only on the surface of the text before us⁶, as an implication, insofar as this is how the Law manifests before the countryman: on an open door before him that is, or is (metonymically) displaced by, the words, the language of the doorkeeper. Before the Law, the countryman encounters an infinite distance stretching beyond the open door of this language that guards the Law, on the semantic opening which, providing no access through or beyond it, even while implying this access, this beyond, is, for that reason, like only a surface of this opening, a surface of the distance that leads to the Law, that provides while prohibiting this journey, realizes while forbidding the possibility of going through, of stepping into this implied distance whose ground has already infinitely receded. (In this sense, qualifying an encounter with the Law as 'aporetic' may not be so inappropriate after all, insofar as the etymology of the word 'aporia' intimates just such a conundrum: from 'a-', without, and 'poros', passage, describing what is 'impassable, without passage'.)

This inaccessibility of the Law, the infinite recession of its site from a grasp conceived not, or not necessarily, as a tactile maneuver, implying prehensibility, but a grammatical operation of distancing and objectification that paves the way to knowledge, understanding, can be justified as being at least doubly so:

- (1) On the one hand, there is the interruption⁷ on the part of language, the narrative of the doorkeeper setting apart while constituting the Law by an infinite, indeterminate distance—indeterminate since, if the doorkeeper's narrative makes

⁶ cf. Blanchot, *L'Espace Littéraire*.

⁷ This forcible, metonymic, interruption of language that suddenly displaces, and that constitutes while displacing, the Law's manifestation before the countryman, that renders this manifestation into language as a place always only implied in performance, might as well permit us to compare his figure—insofar as what he stands before is not the Law as such but a language, a text, that implies the Law—to a reader (This conclusion may also be teased out from Derrida's article, especially in sections concerned with the readability of the Law.) . . . The act of reading is defined, therefore, as one undertaken as much before a text as before the distance of an infinitely receding object, before the surface of a page as before a horizon, an implied depth. Such a question of readership, and of meaning-making as it were, is one that we will take up at length later, while touching on the question of semantics in tandem with a text by Poe.

anything certain, it is how this distance isn't, as it places the Law further than the countryman can (hope to) go, while promising nothing more, never anything other than this ambiguity that there will always remain an infinite distance, always as many doors and hallways to pass through however many he might have left behind, always as infinitely many as he presently stands before;

(2) On the other, by somewhat displacing the question of infinity that nonetheless still determines this separation (and that can't not always leave the countryman short of reaching his goal, the Law he seeks, the object he longs for), we may recognize the basis for this inaccessibility, as an absolute separation, in him, in the countryman himself, in parallel with Derrida's article, by emphasizing the countryman's inertia, the immobility he never not assumes from the start of the parable through to its end, his perennially stationary figure with respect to this infinite distance before him, always tarrying before it—in other words, regardless of the infinite number of steps he would have to take to complete his journey, however desperate he would be in trying to take them all, the countryman does not take even the one that would begin it, whereon the distance, it could be said, the distance that would begin, concretely, past the threshold of the door, just past it, for the reason he never does cross it, never does set out on the ground it implies (landing not even that first step to save this ground from being mere implication, from being always beyond him, from being essentially far, save it underfoot finally as here as ground) it remains ungrounded. Insofar as never begun, this distance becomes fixed the way it lies before him, an object of distance presented on a surface that circumscribes it, a door that is the doorkeeper's language terminating the interminable within its frame and putting it immediately before, as *obicere*, stating it on end, a finite infinity that the countryman looks on but never (regardless if he cannot or will not, in any event does not) enters, almost as if he wants to keep it, this distance, constantly between him and the Law.

4.3 The inadequacy of the preposition

So the countryman refrains, or is barred, from moving, from setting out in order to exhaust this distance, as he only ever stands still and looks on— before the surface

of this distance that only implies distance, which, to say it once again, corresponds to the simple but impossible gesture of the language of apophasis as it puts before the reader (or the listener, the audience, etc.) what, standing at such a distance that negates distance, that negates standing, can't not any the less negate this preposition of being put before. And just as movement—any movement or attempt at movement made before this object, with the purpose of closing in on it, of grasping it, as is the case with Orpheus —served only to yield the inadequacy of movement, so also a preposition, any attempt at establishing grammatically, ontologically, and/or topologically a relation with the apophatic object, will likewise only serve to emphasize the inadequacy of this attempt, redefining the preposition as the inadequacy of the preposition, an act of grammar that is falsified no sooner than affirmed by its performance. Hence, the figure of the countryman, regardless whether in motion or not, can't not be structured by this aporia that has already discredited his orientation however eponymous, annulled even the integrity of his posture so long as it inherently implies this false preposition (I say inherently, insofar as the preposition, as a topological relation with another object, is already constructed, already assigned, inevitably and perhaps even hegemonically, no sooner than the object, apophatic or not, is located in the context at hand; no sooner than located, no sooner than foregrounded and admitted coincidence with others, as the Law is made coincident with others in the parable, any object will have suddenly already reworked all other orientations with itself as reference). In this regard not even the doorkeeper can be held exempt from the aporia, insofar as he has the Law behind him; but this 'behind', instead of reproducing the situation of the countryman, for whom distance lies before, as an object, framed and finalized, alters it—the doorkeeper differs from the countryman by what amounts to a rotation, a turn, which measures nothing less than the difference in their roles in the parable, a difference in ontology, a turn or revolution from one ontology to another whose operation, we could say, relates the countryman and the doorkeeper but, without, let us say this too, reducing them to one another.

4.4 Rectitude, posture, and the lie of distance

Without reducing, then, we can compare these two figures, under the rubric of orientation as a common denominator, insofar as they would seem to be distinguished foremost by this, by their bearings and their posture adopted in relation to the Law. The comparison presents us with two obverse examples of this relation, two cases of referencing the apophatic object, of having this false reference situated—as if the aporia of this situation alone wasn't enough to abort their distinction—before or behind. In this comparison, could we not say the doorkeeper, owing to his determination—as unrelenting as it gets—before the countryman (whose posture, in turn, as Derrida points out, is constantly changing; always either sitting, stooping, lying down, etc., before the former's constancy, his permanence) for that very reason runs even a greater, or perhaps the only, risk of being undermined by this aporia, insofar as it is his posture, and not his companion's, that, erect and maintaining absolute rectitude throughout the time of the text, bent on keeping dead-straight no matter what in his inveterate duty to uphold the Law, constitutes while exposing itself as the perfect target for or before the gesture of apophasis. More scandalously put, the doorkeeper's posture is the negation, the absolute negation, while seeming as nothing other than the absolute affirmation, of the very thing he, on the face of it, guards, represents, misrepresents while attempting to represent, standing on the pretext of representing what has already, always, collapsed behind him.⁸

The doorkeeper stands for the Law. He stands instead of the Law, in Law's stead, in Law's place from where the Law is absent but is, at once, present as this absence, constituting the place, the locality, the site from where its reference is made, via this absence⁹. What is more, guarding with such an absolute posture what is, according to him, supposedly even more able, competent, and daunting in stature than he himself

⁸ The figure of The Prince, in László Krasznahorkai's novel *The Melancholy of Resistance*, may be given as an extravagant example of the inability to stand, of the debility, the incompetence that defines the source of power. Another example which I will discuss later in the text, taken from one of the chapters of *The Arabian Nights*, however, might be even less indirectly applicable to our discourse on standing, given two lovers who faint on embracing, collapsing no sooner than united, then are tended back, by the servants who are at once their go-betweens, to a bedridden life of weakness and fragility, able only to act, and keep from collapsing, by way of their messengers.

⁹ The method of location, of assigning the position or locality of a particular object, must always presuppose such a dual ontology, a presence that stands for an absence, insofar as the object, no sooner than located, admitted into topology, must have already also been banished in order to have been found back in the context. So, the act of location is always already a relocation; a re-location. The terminology is of course Hegelian, but Blanchot's text can be considered standing closer by.

is, but that, on closer inspection, can only give this supposition, this statement, this standing posture, the lie, in this respect this very lie becomes the sole justification of the doorkeeper's power over the countryman. Incidentally, his statement asserting the threshold (the inaccessibility he attributes to the Law; the infinite distance he says the Law takes from the countryman, so deterring the countryman's first step onward while legitimating his own inertia, his constancy in maintaining the posture of rectitude) turns out to be founded on nothing other than the lie of this threshold, its implied distance, stated only on a ground such as where nothing can be stated.

Can we say, then, that the doorkeeper is not, as he himself claims, the weakest, nor even the strongest but, as far as the parable goes the only, the absolute, obstacle standing in between the countryman and the Law? Backed by the fiction of infinitely many others like him, he alone stands for this fiction¹⁰ raising that singular threshold before the Law in, and as, a language, a narrative, as the surface of language beyond which, or whereon, distance lies, a distance already given the lie by the very object that takes it, that annuls it by delimiting it farther than the farthest end (an infinitely distant object that, for this reason, is only falsely distant insofar as it, no sooner than infinite, is already apophatic, is already collapsed and so negating *di-stare*). In this case the Law itself is only this distance, the Category as nothing but the distance before the Category, already negating the doorkeeper who affirms it in person, in posture, who names, legitimates, what is already unnameable, illegitimate before it. And in the ontological dimension opened up between this vacillating cycle of negation and affirmation, a non-dimension where any ground is overturned no sooner than laid, is the ground of the parable where the countryman, an onlooker before the distance thus (imp)lied, stoops looking on its surface. In fact, insofar as the countryman, to return to the point made by Derrida, is to be found throughout the text in various postures, not excluding those of standing and lying down (the latter, he performs at the moment of his death, when the door is finally closed; the former when perhaps he is sizing up the doorkeeper, who in any case is taller, is tallness even, is rectitude, standing par excellence, or perhaps when he is talking with the flea on his shoulder) we could go so far as to say that he, though still not moving with regard to that unapproachable

¹⁰ Our argument is not unlike what Derrida, in his article, quotes from Kant, regarding the subtleties of the "categorical imperative" that introduce this very fiction—via the "as if" that Kant enjoins any civil servant employ while acting morally, namely to act in accordance with a moral duty 'as if it were universally true'—into the legal act.

distance before him, still does, in this particular sense, cover it: he treads it, approaches the Law only insofar as that distance is measured, not in any conventional unit but, as we have been attempting to conceive it, in posture; otherwise said, insofar as it is a categorical distance, counting not meters but all possible examples of posture between standing and lying down that simultaneously introduces as many orthogonal dimensions as between verticality and horizontality, between a statement and its collapse, between the doorkeeper and the Law. And if taken thus, then it would seem the countryman has already gone far, into this other kind of distance; he has, in fact, done nothing but tread this ground even while standing before it, as he—by sitting, stooping, most likely at some point slouching, etc.—has only ever positioned himself at different points along it, always only oscillating between the two limit-cases that, despite this lifelong exercise of mobility they make possible, or precisely because of it, are only ever lying before him.

In other words, although standing still, the countryman is still, nevertheless, within reach of that distance, of at least some if not the entire range of it, having access to postures that correspond to it, that constitute it, postures that found while inhabiting the categorical distance between the opposite—or infinitely distant—cases of standing and having already collapsed, upright and lying down; postures that trace, in their own language, the impossible distance or non-ground that is revoked no sooner than founded in apophasis, between statements of negation and affirmation.

This argument, though its path is bizarre, still corresponds, in my opinion, with how a distance rendered inaccessible by the doorkeeper's narrative is, on the face of it, always only before the countryman, totally framed in this infinitely sovereign preposition, is never any farther than where it is put immediately before him. It is, in this way, already accessible, as 'before', a surface to look on that already grants the countryman the access he waits for, insofar as such a surface constitutes the only possible manifestation of what, in any case, cannot manifest otherwise, can't not have already infinitely receded each time no sooner than put before. (Interposed thus between statements of negation and affirmation, between standing and lying down, permanently collapsing, many discourses, many languages just as postures, are available to the countryman who, perhaps for that reason, is able to talk to fleas.) Before we try and expand even further this argument regarding posture, however, let

us briefly dwell on another, similar feature of the two figures, regarding their orientations and how, or if, the two examples we are given, *prima facie* obverses of one another, could be justified as such and compared in one and the same context where they differ, not only formally, but ontologically, linguistically, threatening the integrity of even the context underwriting their encounter.

4.5 Comparing orientations; before and behind

Our previous remarks on prepositionality already supply the ground for a comparative analysis of the two orientations found in the parable. The structure of objectification that is implied, as we demonstrated, in the preposition 'before' (via, to repeat, the etymological connection between the term 'object' and the verb 'obicere', insofar as the latter connotes a 'putting before', and therefore might define the object, in part, as what-lies-before, in both of the two somewhat contrary senses of (1) grounding the possibility of knowledge, as the starting point, the hallmark, the ground as well as the first step, of modern positivist science, insofar as allowing for comprehension, for grasping, and (2) placing an obstacle, from yet another etymological proximity to 'ob-stare', 'to stand against', as impediment—and these two contrary senses, superimposed, would render one and the same object with regard to knowledge as both its possibility and its impossibility, its permission and its prohibition, on the way to and in the way of; otherwise said, the object, by emphasizing these connections, may be defined as a kind of ground that simultaneously trips while securing every step it nonetheless permits) and the deeply aporetic consequence of applying this structure, is, on the one hand, what we have to set against the orientation of the doorkeeper for whom this apophatic surface, this already collapsed object, mistaken for standing, for being ideally upright, for constituting Truth while in truth never looked on, never put before, is for that reason not the object, not or not yet the finite, finalized, molded infinity that manifests apophatically as a surface before the countryman but an infinity put behind where it stands infinitely powerful¹¹. And

¹¹ Blanchot, in his *L'Éspace Littéraire*, makes an almost identical correlation between the doorkeeper's infinity—non-apophatic, never or not yet objectified, not yet looked on—and the preposition 'behind', at which point he even speaks of a turn, similarly enough to our own conception of a turn such as would mark the difference between the doorkeeper and the countryman, and

perhaps it would not be false to say—insofar as to possess the dimensionality of the behind already presupposes the before, which leads to the necessity of an object before the doorkeeper, the surface that finds its articulation in the gesture of the countryman as he stoops and looks on that distance—that the only such object, from the standpoint of the doorkeeper, is the countryman himself, before whom the Law, for the doorkeeper, serves not as the possibility of change, of movement (the possibility that we have said mobilizes the countryman along his different postures in the parable ending with his lying down, his death) but the justification precisely for not changing, for taking this loyal stand against dying, for this reactionary inertia.

The Law, situated thus behind, becomes the legitimation of the doorkeeper's posture, it provides the ground or, the guarantee of this ground or, still otherwise, the promise of such a guarantee, insofar as the Law is, not even in the doorkeeper's own narrative, a positive entity but, only a promise at the end of distance, a promise lying far behind him that forestalls, that defers (via the doorkeeper's own doing, the fear he constructs by means of his own narrative) his turning around and looking on. In other words the Law, while safeguarding this rectitude and this orientation the doorkeeper maintains on end, the rectitude of the statement implying his permanence, constancy, simultaneously postpones his becoming the countryman or like him, postpones his submission to death, to a dying person, collapsing before the surface.

4.6 The metaphysics of posture

The question of the apophatic relation between finitude and infinity, between the Law and its subjects, may thus coincide, in the form of a mystical encounter underwritten by the logic of apophasis (demonstrated also by Derrida in his reading of the parable), with themes such as loyalty, deference, authority, hierarchy, etc.—to list

concomitantly the infinite and the finite, a turn toward that constitutes the gesture of finalizing the infinity, and that can always only yield a surface of the distance the 'behind' will have already infinitely receded into.

... Moreover, there are parallels to this argument in Derrida's article, where he cites the mythical narrative put forward by Freud, in *Totem and Taboo*, associating the origin of the Law and power with the cannibalistic consumption of the father in a primitive society, a communal killing undertaken by the male children in the society in order to abolish the father's authority, whereon this very authority, consumed and thereby removed from finitude, passes over into the infinite and becomes, consequently, infinitely more powerful. ("The dead father became stronger than the living one had been. . ." Freud, *Totem and Taboo*.) That this interdimensional passage from finitude to infinity should be facilitated by the act of eating, of consumption, is of particular interest to me and can perhaps be taken up elsewhere in the article.

only a few, themes that might traditionally find a place in arguments concerning the Law but without necessarily letting slip the possibility of any mystical coincidences as such. In this regard, the mystical interpretation of the Law in the parable, as a non-prepositional entity not of the same order as the two figures who position themselves before it, but of another, of a metaphysical order evoking the site of a category, a name, as the constitutive object as well as absolute endpoint of all legal actions—such as the countryman’s plea—exercised fundamentally on its assumption, allows us to consider these more traditional frameworks listed, cursorily, above, in tandem with the gesture of apophasis. Here, one salient thread, salient insofar as constitutive, running through the complex architecture of the legal, as well as any other, form of hierarchy would be this metric of posture, which as I have been arguing informs considerably many instances of language both legal and extralegal, daily and technical, corresponding in form to that of the normative human but where these designations, of acts of posture, extend far outward than implying just bodily references, so as to betray, and not exclusively in the example we have chosen, a footing in metaphysics, as designations of the various attitudes or stances assumed idiomatically while referring to what can’t not have already infinitely receded from this reference, this statement, leaving the attempt—grammatical, postural—essentially uncompensated¹², and this as the only form of compensation possible before the apophatic object.

And it is to this very embroilment of apophasis, power, and posture that we find the countryman, out of what we might call his naiveté, even ignorance, has come, in the hope of seeking an audience, where he ends up putting before his person, in an attempt to requite his demand with its needed address, the aporetic manifestation of nothing more, nor less, than a name, not as an accident¹³ but the very name he has come pleading to, a purely abstract designation lying inaccessibly farther than where it already, quite accessibly—insofar as stated there, pronounced there—stands. The

¹² This notion of the impossibility of compensation as the only form of compensation with regard to an apophatic object takes on a fullness in Weil’s work that I would later like to bring into the discussion. For now, I leave the allusion at that, hoping at least to evoke her proximity to the current phase of our discussion.

¹³ The claim on the accidental element of this encounter calls for some analysis, foremost in order to question whether the claim itself can be justified. It is no accident, it would seem, insofar as we regard the occurrence as essential; that the Law, as an apophatic object, can’t not manifest otherwise—on the other hand, with respect to the countryman’s intention it is doubtless an accident, since the countryman comes with the expectation of a Law that is, if we may put it this way, not vanishing (which to be sure it isn’t, since the Law isn’t vanishing at all, is a form before him, which only happens to be the form of evanescence). In this same paragraph I propose naiveté, or ignorance, as a pivot of this encounter where, indeed, we note the very concepts of accident and intention are strained; these last two will come even closer to snapping later on when, presenting a reading from Poe, I will attempt to conceive a model structure for an apophatic referentiality that may alter, though not necessarily for the better, this ambivalent strain.

Law is already immediately before him as no one, or no one other than the doorkeeper who constitutes while narrating this surface of distance; but at this point, the naiveté or ignorance of the countryman is rendered somewhat ambiguous, since there are multiple—at least two—answers, neither any less viable than the other, that could be returned before the question, were we to ask, what exactly is the countryman ignorant of, just what does he naively overlook to then give ground to the aporia before him? In the following paragraph, I would like to foreground the concept of naiveté or ignorance, as it might not only bring into still more relief the gesture, that constitutively puts the apophatic surface before the countryman, but also to introduce it as a theme, to be taken up repeatedly in the following segments of our discussion.

4.7 The act of overlooking—ignorance, naivete

It seems to me we may approach the question of naiveté (or ignorance) in at least two ways. (1) Insofar as the countryman puts before him, and thereby objectifies, what the doorkeeper staunchly keeps behind (and so keeps it invisible, infinite) out of fear but also deference, as well as *différance*—to import Derrida's concept—insofar as this stance of the guardian may count toward an abstention, a kind of forbearance from granting the pure designation, the name, of the Law this objecthood before it can always already be rejected, we might say that the countryman's gesture, of looking on this name that renders it into a surface of its own negation, this impossible objectification he naively grants to what has already rejected objecthood, is one that comes from his ignorance of precisely that fear and that deference, an ignorance which immediately reifies or resurfaces while addressing the repressed¹⁴, feared source of the doorkeeper's attitude. This ignorance makes visible what¹⁵, until the time of the text,

¹⁴ This particular allusion to Freud aims broader than just his concept of repression. Besides the explicit reference to 'Totem and Taboo' found in Derrida's text, and the subtle parallels existing in ours, Freud's remarks on the tabooed object—which connotes at once a prohibition and an empowerment, a freedom and a restriction—and the psychic framework this object of taboo corresponds to—an ambivalence in the relation that engages the psyche with its surroundings; things, objects, persons, etc.—partake in a logic that in my opinion is very closely similar to that of the apophatic object

¹⁵ The discourse of visibility and invisibility, the transformation of one to the other, is one that informs Blanchot's reading of Rilke where the invitation, of us by Rilke, to transmute objects from visibility into invisibility as a method to restore their sacrality, could be considered akin to the dynamic of apophasis whereby the object, as a pure abstraction, will have already receded infinitely far from the range of a preposition no sooner than preposed. However, in appropriating Rilke's prescription to fit the escape of the apophatic object, to uphold the mono-directionality of his prescribed movement becomes quickly unfeasible, insofar as the beginning of this movement can never be pinpointed to a particular time or location: to have started at the visible, and thereon receding to

had remained hierarchically consigned to this infinitely pervasive, ubiquitous site of power, a violent but imperceptible wind blowing every which way and also from behind the doorkeeper against which he, for all his rectitude, his seeming uprightness, leans on. This neglect on the part of the countryman, in one of the two ways we have divided our approach toward the question of naiveté or ignorance, is, thus, assumed over against this hierarchy, or against the threat of this hierarchy, overlooking the horror the Law promises to whomever might dare look on it, imposing while simultaneously legitimating this prohibition by empowering its observance, the relentless assertion of its truth, the statement of its rectitude while penalizing inspection, scrutiny. The countryman's ignorance of this prohibition, however, enables him to regard the Law outside of, or before, this fixed prepositionality in which the Law is always standing behind, where it is not yet collapsed since not yet turned toward, looked on, objectified.

It would seem, according to our analysis of the doorkeeper, that this kind of penal structure, simultaneously empowering while prohibiting its subject from turning toward it, has as one of perhaps many conditions of possibility this preposition, as an ontological mode of relation by way of which alone it exercises power, establishes hierarchy. And indeed, this false, apophatic, implied support behind the doorkeeper can itself be taken up in various ways, though it would seem the idioms in the English language have already more than a little to say on it. For example, we might find the phrase 'to stand behind someone or something', after considering some of its idiomatic uses besides the prepositional, already covers a surprising number of the implications we have just added to the doorkeeper's relation with the Law; I refer, most relevantly, to the legal—although no less social, fiduciary—use of the colloquialism which, insofar as the notion of a guarantee, of trust, is implied in it (eg. how the Law is said, often enough, to stand behind a contract), serves as a source of empowerment for asserting or stating the validity of, let us say in general, its object, of what it backs up. In other words what it helps stand by itself collapsing, a lying empowerment for this act of stating, of standing, a power the doorkeeper draws by and for, for and from, his

invisibility, from finitude to infinity, would also mean to have never started there, insofar as what has attained invisibility will have already collapsed back into immediacy with what is visible, already returned to where it had never left.

statement, justifying in the same words both his posture and his orientation and the Law before the countryman.

To emphasize this point: the source that empowers the statement, insofar as the statement, as a performative gesture, simultaneously constitutes while stating its object (even the verb 'to constitute', from its etymological neighbor 'constituere', splits into the Latin 'con-' and 'statuere', viz. to set up, which evokes, by way of 'status', once again, the infamous 'stare'), is, to that effect, established only by the statement itself—in still other words, the Law that stands behind the doorkeeper, that gives him ground before the countryman, as the promise of (still more) finitude (even) at the end of an infinite distance, is only an implication, a lie, implied on the surface of the doorkeeper's statement where the power he exercises in renouncing entry to this distance is itself only founded on the lie, the falsehood of distance. He constitutes by guarding what will have already collapsed no sooner than accessed, than turned toward, standing an already collapsed law behind him so as to not turn behind and lose rectitude, the statement, the stance, and before which the countryman is perennially, throughout the time of the text, collapsing.

Here we find a difference has already emerged, no sooner than the constancy of the doorkeeper has been underlined as he relates to this impossible site of power. We might turn, once again, to the thread of our comparison, insofar as the state of collapsing, embodied in the countryman in stark contrast to the doorkeeper who, relying on the Law, negates or postpones this state, might be formulated as the outcome of his inversion, or rotation, his turning that transmutes the statement from upright into permanently collapsing. It is a revolution around Law's absent axis that suddenly puts before what will have already receded out of this preposition's range. In this regard the two prepositions, before and behind, aside from supplementing Blanchot's work on their metaphysical connotations, may also be justified in the manner that they help us differentiate between the doorkeeper and the countryman in just such a metaphysical way; that they oppose the figures, not essentially but, instead, via a relational—even dialectical—approach. We thus locate their opposition, their antagonism, in the scene or context of this opposition's own evanescence, its passing away to the site (of the Law) where both figures, both prepositions, the countryman and the doorkeeper, reach for their definitions, demand their role in the text. This

demand, however, given the state of the Law (collapsed, non-site), is not compensated; the Law, in this connection and perhaps more generally, implies just such a place where no demand can ever not fall short of its compensation, never compensated insofar as already compensated, exhausted on the way to what had already been reached, on the way to what had never stood far but always only lay immediately before.

So long as our prepositions turn on this site that is a non-site, so long as they have, as their principle, their point of reference, their ground, this site that will have already negated any such definition, likewise any comparison they help found will, necessarily, be haunted by this surface-encounter that gives an urgency¹⁶, an immediacy to the aporia that we are barred from overlooking. I say urgent, insofar as that very distance between the antagonists (which is their condition of possibility—viz. the distance that stabilizes, that maintains the fundamental separation of forms that any comparison necessarily presupposes) cannot establish the antagonism without simultaneously putting it in face of, before, its infinite recession from itself, thus conceiving a framework that is already lost while reaching or receding toward its conception, toward the name that constitutes its law, a name not able to be reached insofar as subject to collapse, every time, no sooner than reached for. This devastating fate, then, if permitting a knowledge of the two prepositions, permitting the mastery of their difference so as to compare them, does this only in the context of their cancellation, relating the two prepositions before a site of absolute non-prepositionality, a site of relentless indifference before which the distance grounding the antagonism will have already collapsed onto a surface whereon neither antagonist stands apart—neither stands far, before, nor against, but will have already collapsed into immediacy with one another.

In this comparison the Law, or by this point I may perhaps just call it the surface (whereon the Law, as an impossible site or the impossible distance to this impossible site, is always only implied), itself becomes a medium, one that already negates the antagonists it nevertheless relates, affords a comparison while simultaneously casting

¹⁶ As I've mentioned before, the terminology of some of these writings recalls some of Levinas' own, in particular the compilation of texts that make up 'Humanism of the Other'. I hope to present readings of several excerpts taken from this work later on, while speaking of the implications that an apophatic understanding of language, as has been conceived so far and will be extended, might bring to bear on the theme of anarchy.

doubt on the separation of objects presupposed by the comparison, the separation that is upheld by this very distance that can't not have already collapsed it.

5. Distance as medium

On branding the surface of distance as a medium, where those that are mediated differ, let us repeat, not essentially but in their relation, their already negated reference to the object of apophasis, we may recall a discussion we had begun earlier, apropos the theme of ignorance, or naiveté. It was, as we had proposed, the countryman's naiveté that articulated the gesture of apophasis, by making available to him this act of looking on the Law, the gesture that collapses the Law onto a surface (a surface that now, after our attempt to compare the two figures via their prepositionality, has become a reference point, a surface of the object of their mediation that negates while relating the two, that merely implies their distinction, that is the apophatic ground on which the difference between the doorkeeper and the countryman turns). Resuming our discussion on naiveté with particular regard to the apophatic surface as a medium, that relates while negating the two figures in the parable, let us first recapitulate the terms in which we had set forth this discussion.

5.1 Ignorance as the possibility of dying

Our method had been to approach it, the task of locating precisely what gets overlooked by this naive posture of the countryman, so as to permit his doing what the doorkeeper does not, in two ways: the first way described it as being an ignorance¹⁷ of the force of the Law (the force that preserves its distance from collapsing, as it fixes while cowering the doorkeeper into a single, the only, prepositionality where the

¹⁷ The terminology employed here—naiveté, ignorance—may be compared to a section in Derrida's article where he brings up the notion of inarticulacy; all being terms that, together, may be said to imply an inability, or incompetence, to familiarize the Law in some way, to wrest it from its essential peculiarity into an intimacy that, hopefully, will defer to the countryman's own terms. The text goes on to introduce notions of legibility and illegibility whereby the Law, no sooner than it is made legible, insofar as it constitutes an apophatic object, will have already receded into illegibility. The countryman's ignorance, his inarticulacy, in such a connection, is no fault of his own, nor is it rectifiable by any means known to us or the doorkeeper, since it is the essential quality of the Law to have already demonstrated, each time no sooner than read, regardless of the proficiency of the reader, the same movement of having already infinitely receded into illegibility. Here, the inherent risk of apophasis seems to target even the very possibility of literacy which it depends on as a language, as apophasis.

essential lie of the statement, the upright posture, the rectitude, of both the Law and the doorkeeper, may be continued, each via the other, keeping distant from a time that will have already collapsed them into immediacy, whose strange logic we have partially outlined in the preceding paragraphs). This first kind of ignorance overlooks this entire dynamic, it omits the terror the Law promises to whomever would look on it and simultaneously the power and immortality to whomever would turn away from it. We might even assume the countryman, had he turned away at any point, would have already become the doorkeeper, who is always only just another doorkeeper in the sequence, standing for the Law's infinite distance, but insofar as he comes in neglect of this threat as well as promise of power, insofar as his ignorance drives him to look on the site of its true reference, its source, he remains excluded from it—excluded from the possibility of a stable preposition, from this infinite delegation of the power to stand—and so collapses before it as it likewise collapses before him; it is therefore naiveté, or ignorance, that permits this death.

This death, indulged by the countryman, is forbidden to the doorkeeper, owing to a knowledge that stems not necessarily from the Law but, perhaps, remembering how it is his narrative, his words that meet the countryman's gesture at the moment when he looks on the Law, from himself—suggesting that it is he, perhaps, who, insofar as he himself constitutes while stating, in his own words, the Law, constitutes no less the terror the Law promises, that it is none other than he who articulates to the Law this fear that coerces while simultaneously empowering him to stand above and before the countryman immortally. He postpones death by situating it behind him, by stating while relying on the implication of its distance behind him, so as to not turn and forfeit his rectitude, until such time as when this Law that only allegedly, only in narrative, in implication, had stood behind him, that only on trust had guaranteed his speech, will have never at all been upright, will have always already been collapsed and the doorkeeper with it, much the same as it lies collapsed before the countryman now, whose ignorance it is (whose rustic naiveté, whose illiteracy) that collapses it, by making available to him, rashly no doubt, this apophatic orientation where the Law, in contradistinction to the doorkeeper's orientation which narrates rectitude so long as it is positioned behind, can only have already lost it, collapsed, no sooner than before.

The themes of naiveté, ignorance, etc., therefore seem almost essential to any distinction between the two figures. And the attempt to define this naiveté, as we have demonstrated above, as that which neglects or is ignorant of the Law's promise/threat, and which then objectifies the source of this promise/threat, suddenly brings into relief the doorkeeper's own complicity, conscious or not, in this self-legitimizing insofar as self-negating dynamic of power. His foundational role in maintaining a law which, if ever the Law is to stand, can only do so behind him, while already collapsed; it can only stand behind and only by being relied on to do so, can only stand if being stood for in this way.

But this simple prepositionality, which seems to confer a certain measure of rectitude on the Law so long as it lies behind, still does not exhaust its power, which is its rectitude, since even the countryman, who has the Law before him, who immediately faces the source, the collapsed site of this power, beholding its necessary lie, the horizontality of rectitude, even he still postpones to meet it, still keeps it away and distant even while he faces the collapse of this distance and the immediacy of the meeting. And so there is, in my opinion, at least one other remark to be added to the discussion of the countryman and his naiveté, which further correlates the process of mediation with our concept of the surface: here, besides implying the utter neglect of this institutional power that is both a promise and a threat and that founds the immanent—immanent while simultaneously transcendent—hierarchy, the countryman's attitude implies, also, the overlooking of what, no sooner than looked on, betrays this hierarchy. Namely the overlooking of the Law's collapse, the overlooking of this immediacy the Law that is infinitely far has already collapsed into no sooner than put before, an overlooking, in still other words, of this surface where distance is a lie and also the only possible object; where the Law is only the distance to the Law, the object the distance to itself, already accessible as this distance insofar as immediate¹⁸, already accessed on this surface of distance, before a naiveté that looks on but also overlooks this access in favor of an infinite mediation, toward an end that places the Law inexhaustibly, inaccessibly, far, and still powerful in the very measure of this inaccessibility.

¹⁸ Because mediation itself cannot be mediated, it is immediate. Distance, even if infinite, always begins immediately before. The subtleties bearing on this particular treatment of mediation are taken up in the following paragraph.

So, to overlook the promise and the threat of the Law is what permits the countryman to put the Law before him, and to look on it, while to overlook its collapse, the immediacy it has already collapsed into, is what prevents him from recognizing it, its origin and power, in the very figure of the doorkeeper before him.

5.2 Immediacy

Let us justify the word 'immediate' in the way it has occurred in the previous paragraphs. This justification might turn us, once again, toward etymology, to an explication of the verb 'to mediate', which carries with it the old English sense of 'intervening', 'to intervene' and/or 'to interpose,' (not unlike the doorkeeper's language that engenders while interrupting the countryman's relation to the Law) and even the transitory sign of 'middle' if taken as far as the Latin 'medius'. And, negating all these via the prefix 'im-', the adjective in its contemporary form tells, therefore, of the quality of being without intervention or interposition, without a middle ground, without this language which realizes while prohibiting—indicating a case where the object is met without distance and, insofar as it is distance that maintains the subject's integrity or distinction from the object and vice versa, where the object is not even met, insofar as both the subject and the object would have already collapsed in their encounter which does not permit distance to separate them since their encounter itself is distance. Here, there is only the meeting, a meeting whose parties are only ever implied on the surface of its immediacy, immediate insofar as taking place on the surface of mediation.

The attribution of immediacy to the Law, however, as constitutive of an apophatic object in general, behaves in a manner that subverts distance as a continuous, linear spectrum, insofar as this attribution, implying the absence of mediation, is given to define what, before the countryman, promises nothing but mediation. It is the attribution of immediacy to what lies infinitely far, to what takes not just any amount of distance but the greatest possible distance, so as to stand on the very limit of distance where distance collapses, and so where the farthest simultaneously becomes the nearest, *LoinPrés*¹⁹, the one that simultaneously implies infinite and no mediation,

¹⁹ The term is borrowed from Marguerite Porete.

implying both the absence and the plenitude of mediation, its lack as well as its overabundance.²⁰

5.3 The coincidence of extremes, far as near

So, we find this attribution of immediacy, to the object of apophasis, to what is infinitely distant, must be such that by suddenly ascribing the same site, in one and the same encounter, to what comprises two diametrically opposite sites of reference for an order allowing the relativization of the things lying between them, their arrangement into hierarchies of distance and accessibility informed by power, suddenly collapses the very ground of this order, collapses the power of the middle, collapses the spectrum of distance allowing things to be more or less proximate than one another onto a surface where all things are both immediate and infinitely far, where this site that promises absolute inaccessibility simultaneously becomes where all things are already accessed no sooner than stated.

Let us expand on what we have said. The rational conception of distance, as we have briefly outlined above and at the beginning of our discussion, allows relative values, denoting gradations of distance and proximity to be assigned to objects as they lie before an observer, an onlooker. Everything is situated along this infinitely receding order, relativized insofar as circumscribed by points of reference that constitute a unified spectrum of distance, which, however, when traced to any one of these points, its constitutive limits, any one of its defining boundaries which secure the relativization by providing a universal ground for it, will have only met its own cancellation, its own negation; the structure of relativity will, therefore, have always already collapsed insofar as its points of reference are stood apart only apophatically. The cancellation emerges as these points, supposedly separate, are found to already coincide, collapsed on the same surface where they are already immediate as shapes of the distances they take from an onlooker. The rational conception of distance, then, adhered to in the above manner, itself leads to this other, apophatic ontology which

²⁰ This ambivalent structure of mediation, that everywhere superimposes the opposites of a binary so as to constitute the apophatic object, may be compared, and found closely similar, if not identical, to Blanchot's treatment of 'the work' found in a text already cited. (viz. *L'Espace Littéraire*.)

negates it, inviting its own collapse that suddenly already transforms each relative value into an essential name, each adjective into identity, objects that are not prone to change across distance insofar as they are distance. They are the implication of distance, distance already immediate on the surface of its implication, never farther than this surface whereon lies the site of all names, all definitions, all essences, as forms, as spoken, written, performed, all uttered²¹ with infinite immediacy.

In other words this ambivalence, necessarily pertaining to the distance that separates the apophatic object from an onlooker, disrupts the fact of this separation by confusing, by superimposing, its limits. It circumscribes an infinite field of mediation within a single—singular—encounter, on a surface already offering all things that constitute while partaking in the immediacy of the preposition ‘before’; a surface that, insofar as it is the surface of mediation and therefore is itself immediate, without any distance to stand it apart insofar it is itself distance, cannot be distinguished from even the subject who states it. The Law is inseparable from the countryman who, then, already lies on this surface of distance, an onlooker whose fate, in the parable, is to have already collapsed on the surface lying immediately before.

Overlooking, in the way it has been proposed—as a passive act, passive insofar as constitutive, simultaneously, of both the object and the subject and so preceded by neither of them, not planned by either insofar as before either, never impending or if impending then also already occurred, spontaneous, available to language only in hindsight—may be revisited in conjunction with the theory of immediacy presented above (which, to say it once again, turns from the mediated object to face the immediacy of its mediation, the reckless and already infinite encroachment of media on the person or subject, a non-deferrable urgency that takes place by collapsing, by ‘collapsus’; ‘col-’, together + ‘labi-’, to slip — to slip or to fall, together, . . .by collapsing both object and subject on the surface of their medium whereon they, in turn, lie, are implied). In such a revisitation, the object of the gesture of overlooking,

²¹ The apophasis that underlies the name or a definition of any given thing, object or person, indeed of language in general insofar as language comprises of just these, can be given, evoking Hegel, as the unavoidable transformation of the name from the universal into the particular no sooner than it is spoken. In this way, the name itself, as it resides in its pure site outside history, can never be said without already being particularized, a site that can’t not have already collapsed within reach no sooner than put out of it, already being stated on grounds that negate universality. Instances of attributing this transformation to the act of speech, while employing methods not altogether dissimilar to Hegel’s, can be read in texts of Ibn al-‘Arabi as well as those of other mystics from the pre-Renaissance era, some of which I hope to cite if not discuss lengthily in the later course of the discussion.

before the distance that is the Law that already claims the countryman as part of its surface, its encounter, is this claim, the claim that both have already collapsed, a claim which lies behind distance. The countryman relegates it so long as he is, physically as well as ontologically, grammatically and historically, taller than it, either while standing, sitting, or stooping, while he is still not yet collapsed.²²

5.4 The upright posture

Overlooking, insofar as it is a neglect of this surface, where the Law and the countryman will have already vanished no sooner than meeting and where this meeting will have always occurred, becomes one of the maintaining gestures of this separation from the Law, a separation that is fictive insofar as founded on its statement, the standing statement that engenders separation while delimiting it, constitutes while compensating distance with an end, the final object toward which the countryman looks while simultaneously overlooking the distance before it where the object already lies, where he has already come before the Law.

And so, to overlook the surface is, according to what we have said, a neglect, a naiveté on the part of the countryman. But perhaps not. The question seems critical enough, the question whether this neglect, this overlooking, can be logically subsumed as an act under some form of agency, attributed to a person or subject (for example, the statement that it is the countryman who overlooks) insofar as it is overlooking that, while relegating before the upright posture the immediate collapse, the negation, the evanescence or infinite recession, of the upright posture, simultaneously constitutes

²² Overlooking, in the way it has been treated here, connected to arguments of rectitude and the upright posture, has much to engage with modern concepts of human evolution, insofar as these narrations that regard the history of humankind's posture, occurring prevalently in the writings of Freud, depict bipedalism and the taller vantage it provides as a gain in the struggle for survival, given the access, the knowledge, of a greater range of the surroundings, in possession of a greater distance than before. But does this greater access, we might ask, not simultaneously bring about greater inaccessibility, with the emergence of things that, able to lie much farther across this new scale of distance that suddenly exceeds the person, are out of reach in the same measure that they are already reached but overlooked, the very same inaccessibility which, engendered by his overlooking, infinitely postpones the countryman's access to the Law? ... In this context, tracing the etymology of the grammatical act of the statement and its overlap with posture, and the way such an overlap goes toward constituting, ontologically, the duality of the subject/object, we may be led to the overlooking posture, to the state of overlooking, and so to bipedalism, as a state that, among others no doubt, prevents the immediacy of that distance where the duality, being maintained by this distance maintained by it, will have also already collapsed on it. ... On this note, the doorkeeper perhaps embodies the ideal of such an evolutionary theory upholding survival as history's engine, insofar as the rectitude he displays absolutely, relentlessly, justified on the premise of what cannot even stand, is what grants him absolute survival, immortality, in contrast to the countryman who does not survive but without whom, we could say, neither can the doorkeeper.

the upright posture. In other words, the countryman cannot be said to overlook, insofar as he himself originates in this overlooking; as his personhood stands, is founded, not unlike the object of apophasis, only on the primordial neglect of its own collapse that, even as this collapse stands infinitely far, lies immediately before, has already come to pass, and where this neglect, this overlooking of the lie of personhood, of subjectivity and objectivity, upholds the person, upholds the lie of agency that constitutes while negating the possibility of action.

Earlier we had associated the countryman's position, his collapsing statement before the Law and before the doorkeeper, with a turn—marking the difference in orientation between the doorkeeper and the countryman, relating their prepositions. A turn that, let us recall, was metaphysical no less than it was, in both senses of the word, revolutionary (which, re-emphasizing the meaning this same notion assumes in Blanchot's text, viz. the turn as permitting death, permitting finality, had implied to us different mortalities associated with changes in posture; here a sitting, stooping naïveté that is able to die) and that, not least for this, already assumes ontological proportions; unlike the doorkeeper who does not die so long as he forbids himself this turn, the countryman is able to look on an infinite distance and collapse (it) before it. But—and this is the point where the complexity of our argument increases—the countryman, even as he faces the Law, is still unable not to overlook its collapse, not to recognize the immediacy of its absence, the mediatory statement and its negation, the rectitude and its lie superimposed. He lacks them despite having them before him, in or as the language of the doorkeeper standing simultaneously in service and in contrast to the Law. He can't not overlook how everything is already within his reach, insofar as it is, as we said, this overlooking that characterizes him, characterizes his subjectivity before the object, his person before the Law. Standing on the ground of this deferred realization which is that first step he never takes, the step that commences a fall, he nevertheless holds to the mediation between him and the Law where nothing happens, despite the fact everything is happening; he is already collapsing.

There might be warrant, on the face of it, to the claim that the countryman, by not entering that distance lying immediately before him, by not already collapsing on it, postpones, postpones while overlooking, his own death, simultaneously constitutes

himself as the forgetting of this death, looking on to where it will never occur while overlooking where it nevertheless has already occurred.

5.5 The question of death

Here perhaps we can additionally comment, as regards the moment of this collapse, whether it would be favorable—however the collapse may, in the parable, intimate the death of the countryman—not to discard the implications of this event (already countless, promising infinite valency) in favor of a single, monolithic reference to death. Leaving this question unanswered, in the course of our discussion I hope to entangle, overburden, implicate, this event, this collapse, which is at once this deferred step on to the surface of distance, with exceedingly many associations that all, to some extent, might bear on the theme of death while at the same time differing perceptibly from it. Death is only one possible description of the event of this collapse which already befalls the countryman. That said, it might be worth pointing out that this particular association of the surface with death, an association we still retain only not exclusively, brings our argument that much closer to Blanchot's writings, in particular to a consideration, already traceable in *L'Espace Littéraire*, of the site of language as death. This treatment of language and death stands close to the kind of subjectivity proposed above, namely the personhood of the countryman defined, in part, as an overlooking of the ground, the surface where this personhood has already vanished. In this line, I would like to elaborate further on this possible identification of the surface as death.

6. The surface as death

Blanchot's conception of language as death, and the applicability of this concept to the surface (of distance, of language, of any medium²³, of the surface of any medium

²³ The focus of Blanchot's text is language, and later he even brings up the notion of distance as constitutive of this language, which not only corresponds to our argument but also supports another, phrased several times already, claiming that it is the structure not only of distance but the medium, of all media, to constitute relation at the same time as negating it; and so to imply, as an apparatus purporting or promising mediation, promising an end, promising the end, the object being mediated, a death, a finality, etc., that

implying mediation) can be drawn from a particular understanding of anonymity he points out as occurring in language. Having marked language, or a particular site within language designated grammatically by the third plural pronoun 'their', as the site of this anonymity, death is, as Blanchot argues, always already present—present insofar as this impersonal pronoun, this mode of address, by excluding and/or annihilating the first person singulars, inaugurating a site where neither 'me' nor 'you', neither object nor subject, any longer stands, constitutes the site of annihilation and or exclusion also of subjectivity, of personhood. And, in conjunction with our argument which locates the site of the collapse as that between the subject and the object (before the object and before the subject, as the inaccessibly distant ground of apophasis, inaccessible because already accessed, a surface where the subject and the object are in turn only implied, lying already collapsed, addressed without address, promised without fulfillment) this grammatical death evoked by the impersonal pronoun suddenly offers the acknowledgment also of a plurality. Death, in this sense, is an infinite, undetermined multiplicity that inhabits, that already overpopulates the surface. Death is the surface of whichever distance interposed between 'you' and 'me' where everything (imp)lies, a plenitude necessarily overlooked so long as both pronouns stand. . . across it, before it, apart from it, looking over the distance instead of on it.

6.1 The collapse of personhood, of subjectivity

On the question of what 'immediacy', as a concept, might entail in relation to distance—as the surface of a medium able to engage while simultaneously collapse any form of separation, as a measure of difference relating objects on a common ground that ends up canceling this relation, at the (non-)site of apophasis which is here no sooner than elsewhere, collapsed into immediacy no sooner than stood infinitely apart—I believe we may have still more to say on the repercussions of the countryman's encounter with the Law. The surface before him, no sooner than drawn

would then delimit, justify, compensate, even exonerate while compensating the medium if not for the collapse, already come to pass, of all such promises that suddenly leaves the medium bare, uncompensated, infinite and, insofar as infinite, immediate. Here we anticipate a moment in the discussion when the emphasis put on language will shift to media in general.

into being by narrative, as a place, a site, a topology, suddenly partakes of just such an immediacy that, by the harsh, urgent, peremptory connotations of this term, cannot concede the slightest distance before it. It cannot concede this distance to any preposition without having already collapsed it, a feature which can't but suggest to us that the countryman, no sooner than he is before the surface, is the surface, is already claimed by the medium that, from its surface in turn, implies him in the way it implies depth, distance: already collapsed, already a lie.

It is a question of subjectivity, of personhood therefore, that emerges as a topic of consideration when the site of the object has been conceived as to lie only on the surface of its medium, where this surface, insofar as it is a limit to mediation, itself behaves necessarily as an immediacy where the object is already possessed, where it is never lacking and what lacks, instead, is the person in possession of it. Thus, the movement not only confuses the kind of mediatory distance presupposed by rational, individualist conceptions of subjectivity and personhood, but, inevitably, personhood itself. Later, I hope to say more on the repercussions of immediacy as it informs, influences, while derailing traditional forms of subjectivity, often in reference to the writings of Levinas, perhaps in order to devise another form of it that, standing immediately before its collapse, can accommodate its negation. A subjectivity that can stand on its own collapse, can account for this gamble that at every step bets anew its condition of possibility, putting its personhood at stake, an ontological uncertainty as at play when the countryman balks at the prospect of stepping on the surface, when he hesitates, standing still, always standing, while collapsing, on the brink of this distance without distance where he will have already collapsed.

Finally, let us not proceed without mentioning that all of the terms introduced above—plurality, multiplicity, plenitude, etc.—each inform, in their own way, the implications of this step, of this bet and the uncertain ontology of the surface as an apophatic ground where not even this ontology can stand. In order to emphasize the role they play in determining our concept of the surface, as well as to provide the argument with yet another figure alongside that of the countryman and the doorkeeper, I propose we turn to another text, by Poe, where similar considerations (of death as surface identified with the impersonal pronoun; of this surface as teeming with anonymity where distances are apophatic; where distance is only an implication of its

collapse yet still and always immediate as this implication; death infinitely plural while anonymous; no one because everyone, etc.) arise.

7. Poe, *The Shadow*

The text I propose we read, in light not only of our most recent discussion concerning death as the surface of distance, but also concerning the object of apophasis (the Law, etc.) and the role mediation (distance, language, etc.) plays in constituting while interrupting any relation to it, a relation to this object whose sole possibility of relation is the interruption of its relation, is *The Shadow*. I have provided an excerpt—

“. . . the shadow was vague, and formless, and indefinite, and was the shadow neither of man nor God—neither God of Greece, nor God of Chaldæa,ck nor any Egyptian God. And the shadow rested upon the brazen doorway, and under the arch of the entablature of the door, and moved not, nor spoke any word, but there became stationary and remained. And the door whereupon the shadow rested was, if I remember aright, over against the feet of the young Zoilus enshrouded. But we, the seven there assembled, having seen the shadow as it came out from among the draperies, dared not steadily behold it, but cast down our eyes, and gazed continually into the depths of the mirror of ebony.” (p.135, *The Essential Poems and Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*)

I will read it closely. The shadow, which I will tell you has priorly entered the room from an open window and floated across until it was against the door, is described, in the passage above, explicitly as the shadow of no one, of nothing, and this negative identity is then repeated, or iterated, in the declamation of the shadow when, later on in the parable, it finally speaks, introducing itself—“The shadow spoke, ‘I am SHADOW.’”. Given that we may read this figure as a trope for negation, alongside the more explicit connection to death, and given also that here, this shadow, if this much can be surmised from the introduction, does not emerge in relation to—as the shadow ‘of’—an originating body, but only as name, as pure substantive, it seems we may regard it, this name that states itself before all relation, standing there as the absolute form or object of negation, as an apophatic object consisting exclusively of the negating gesture.²⁴

²⁴ Shadow is hence granted objecthood—stood, put before, etc.—not via the preposition, not via being forcibly admitted to an infinite topology of relation, but instead via the omission, the dismissal, the neglect or the overlooking of this topology, of the logical

In this substantive form of the apophatic object, there is already a difference, a derogation, from how this same object was laid down in our reading of *Before the Law*. There it was this relation itself, the sort of prepositional engagement with the object of apophysis, not fitted to the Shadow, that had problematized the encounter with this object while simultaneously demonstrating the problem as the essential form of this encounter. We had said the Law, as this object of distance, could admit of no relation as itself was the canceling of relation, insofar as it was also relation itself, was the medium interposed before it, was the infinite, collapsed distance it had taken to separate itself from the subject where it had already met the subject, no sooner than before it. And the preposition ‘before’, constituting while overlooking the collapse of this relation, thus engendered the aporia of the surface where the pronouns—the countryman, the doorkeeper, the Law, etc.—related by the distance of the preposition had already collapsed on it. Their ontologies did not precede the preposition, but were only implied on the surface of its performance. And in the case of *The Shadow*, so long as this prepositional engagement is not asserted or stated, there is, literally and grammatico-ontologically speaking, no distance, no mediation that is said to come before the shadow. It is is, in other words, the distancing act (of objectification) that the Shadow, in itself, in its substantive posture, in its immediacy as name, as Shadow, refuses, escapes or resists. This pose of immediacy is what would arguably distinguish it in a comparison with the Law, insofar as the latter is, from the very beginning of the parable, never not already prepositional, always already before (indeed, ‘before’ is the opening word of the text, even of its title)²⁵.

Where the comparison may be justified between the Shadow and the Law accepting they are both objects of the negating gesture, it is this difference, mentioned

necessity of being ‘the shadow of . . .’, in order to stand only as ‘Shadow.’ Here, in the Shadow’s dismissal of a relation that, aside from prepositionality, would simultaneously articulate a sense of possession, ownability to it—as belonging to some person or object whom or which it would, exclusively, be the negation of—in this implicit disavowal of becoming property, the Shadow’s attitude seems to concur with Blanchot’s argument, cited at the close of the last chapter, that stakes his theory on the anonymity of death, where death, Blanchot claims, is no one’s death, “is public”, “it belongs to them”, to the site of the impersonal pronoun insofar as death is the surface where the person will have already collapsed, in other words expropriated, lying verbosely yet indistinguishably on its negation, its shadow. And this link with the notion of an anonymous death, with the boundless murmur of language that is speaking without speakers, a surface of relation infinitely relating without persons or objects, becomes the more striking no sooner than we consider, returning to the *mis-en-scène*, that the shadow is stood against Zoilus’ feet, as evidently his shadow, as the shadow of Zoilus but who, now, lies dead and so cannot accede to its possession, cannot possess what he is indistinguishable from.

²⁵ Considering that, in Kafka’s parable, the Law is always found in its prepositionality, and that, for the text at hand, might even be nothing but for this preposition, I wonder if a reading of Heidegger—his theory of being as essentially connected to, implied in, language, yet still not, never, articulated by it—might not help us elaborate on this point, to support the claim that beyond the implication of its distance on the surface of the medium, the object, as the Law or else, is nothing.

above (that revolves, in multiple senses of this word, on their accession to a medium, here to the medium of language) that may account for the opposing behaviour of the seven in Poe's text to that of the countryman. He who, having this non-object nevertheless put before him, this absolute refusal of mediation nevertheless mediated via the doorkeeper's language stating the object of the Law's infinite distancing which is nothing but for this mediatory statement, naively looks across it, across the medium while overlooking its immediacy, at the object and not on the distance where it lies; in this way, in this posture that stands remiss, in disregard of the end that has already come, the countryman is not feeling dread, so long as he still cleaves to the lie that the Law is far and not simultaneously near, is mediated but not simultaneously immediate, is lying across this distance but not simultaneously on it. In his overlooking of the surface the countryman is not threatened. He is only slightly nervous in this infinite proximity to his own collapse (unaware though he is, or might be, of the distance as such²⁶, which already promises the sweeping, fatal immediacy of the Law). This vague apprehension instilled in him, surfacing or re-surfacing in him, however much it is weakened by the distance that has not yet collapsed before him, that still saves him, for this reason lacks intensity in comparison to the terror of the seven. They are filled with dread no sooner than witnessing the Shadow's entry that cancels the guarantee of any such mitigation; the Shadow enters already as that surface without the safety of the distance the countryman cleaves to. They are in awe of its presence, since for them the Shadow arrives already as the threat of this fatal immediacy—this threat or risk that is so prevalent in Blanchot's writing—that has already come. A risk that, no sooner than noticed, will have already unleashed the danger. And one might argue it is for this reason, for this denuding of the immediate in the corresponding grammatical absence of the preposition, that the seven, unlike the countryman whose site is freed by the mediation of this threat (. . .but incidentally also robbed of event, a site where nothing

²⁶ But then why (and this is a question which, however many approaches might have been taken to satisfy it, is still, and always, infinitely open to more speculation) does the countryman demur before the step, does he keep putting off that step if, one wonders, he is not already in the know, somehow, at once as a premonition and a reminiscence of something yet to be learned and long forgotten, that no sooner than he takes it the medium that saves him now from his end will have never stood and his end already come?

happens in the wake of this event stolen by the distance of the 'of', of the 'before')
'dare not behold it.'²⁷

7.1 The ebony table, the metonymy of distance

Neither of the seven in Poe's text beholds this shadow, though just why that may be is not given, the reason is passed over with indifference, implied yet undisclosed behind the remark that "[they] dare not." But can't we, at least provisionally, with our commentary on Kafka's text still close by, draw a parallel between this fear, this apprehension of the seven, a sentiment of a moiety with other like terrors found in most of Poe's mystical writings, and that of the doorkeeper, who, similarly, 'cannot bear to look' through the door behind him, for fear of other doorkeepers? But the site of their similarity is also where the two parables differ, though still not in opposition, since the doorkeeper stands with his back turned, while the seven interpose, metonymically, between themselves and that which they dare not behold, with eyes cast down, the surface of the table before them, an interjection in place of the purely negative object as a proxy, or a lesser burden, easier or less terrorizing to behold and, by way of beholding, to make object. And this interposed surface, it cannot be stressed enough, is one of distance, a plane of ebony opening before them a depth that is fake, disingenuous but which, despite the falsity, affords them at least the possibility of the preposition. It is a lie they can set up, gaze 'into' or behold before them while the

²⁷ With regard to this reading, there are a few subtleties in the composition of Poe's text that might, unless acknowledged, provide occasion for a valid criticism. I am aware, for example, of the particular caveat in attributing the Shadow (the risk of) immediacy, since, if it has so much as entered the room, floated across it toward the door, and is now there, there, then already there is an infinite supply of topological references that will have placed it in relation, in preposition, already mediated. And, even before this criticism which hinges on the obvious spatial element of entry, there would be warrant to the claim that even with as little as a name, the Shadow is already before us, already object, performatively—so, the inevitable distance taken by the apophatic object from all language ultimately blurs the distinction between substantive and preposition, and renders all instances of language into the same act of objectification where the object itself, as *obicere*, as putting before, already implicitly partakes of some prepositionality. But it also seems the reading we have laid out, beginning with granting the Shadow the immediacy it nevertheless negates, taking its substantive form as the basis of our argument, is in line with Poe's symbolism, since, as later sections of the parable are to demonstrate, this aporetic, false meeting of the object of apophasis with language—with any of its sundry names, adjectives, qualifier, etc.—is drawn out to a greater extent when the narrator adorns it with several adjectives ('formless, indefinite, vague'; see below). These adjectives pose a similar aporia insofar as what is formless, indefinite, and vague is already what negates the principle requirements of naming.

So, in closing this footnote, let us mention that by granting immediacy where this grant necessarily falls short of its referent, this aporetic state is, I believe, still a help in establishing a comparative ground between Poe's and Kafka's text. That said, even with these remarks the question, whether the comparison between the parables is, may ever be, justified, is one I intend to leave open, likewise with regard to all the comparisons I will propose we make, insofar as the site of this justification itself is apophatic, itself will have already receded from justification.

shadow, not directly regarded, unable to be, remains thus present, coincident to the lie of distance.

What is therefore implied in this gesture, the aversion (*avertere*; turn away from; cf. the doorkeeper) that constitutes and institutes distance, installs it as a buffer, is not only that the technique of distancing operates already as one of metonymy (which we had already said while reading *Before the Law*) but that no sooner than exposed to the rubric of apophasis, it simultaneously becomes progenitive (which again, while reading *Before the Law*, we had said). Distance becomes an ontological, grammatical, placeholder which simultaneously engenders what it displaces, putting a false, safe, and impossible distance before what is not that immediately affirms its existence, opens the possibility of its relation which collapses no sooner than said.

7.2 The object as the site of indeterminacy

These qualities (metonymic, progenitive) were all, arguably, already imputed to distance while reading *Before the Law*. In this second text however, though the kind of distance at play would seem similarly apophatic, the encounter it mediates does not, as before, imply an object as categorically determined, as evocative indeed of the very concept of determination, as the Law. Rather, the distance beginning with or at the seven, extending along or into the ebony surface of the table, has for its limit, its definition, what is— only too paradoxically—described as the ‘indefinite’ (“...the vague, the formless, the indefinite.”) A comparison of the parables would, then, turn us toward establishing an analogy between such two, and opposite, manifestations as attributed (1) to the Shadow (namely, the impossible object that is dreaded for its ambiguity, that promises disaster without an intermediary, that is nothing without this intermediation) and (2) the Law (namely the object signifying the end of all disputes, that is premised on the possibility of absolute determination, that promises unequivocity for those distressed by ambiguity).

More generally, the comparison tempts us to draw a parallel between the definitions of ambiguity and of category pure and simple, between the negative and

the positive, the ambiguous and the determinate²⁸, a parallel that almost becomes a tangent given that the Shadow, like the Law before the countryman, is positioned on the doorway: it is circumscribed, while displaced, by the immediate threshold whose access lies inaccessibly far, a distance that is already only a surface before both the countryman and the seven looking down.

7.3 Zoilus

It is these handful of tropes, read in tandem with Kafka's, which imply a ground on which to establish an apophatic ontology of distance. Although, before moving on with this project, let us briefly mention, in passing, the late Zoilus of the parable—who is lying down, not standing, because he is dead, we are told, and at whose dead feet 'the vague, formless, indefinite' object of absolute negation rises, overlaying, or positing itself, as we stressed above, against the frame of the door. In considering this mis-en-scene, and the relative orientation of Zoilus (the deceased) as regards the shadow, I hope it will not be too farcical, though I suspect it will have to be, to understand Zoilus not only, in other words absolutely, as lying down but, given the sharp angularity at which the shadow joins him, in a way rising below the feet of Zoilus ("over against the feet of the young Zoilus enshrouded") almost as if it were a ground to him. It is a ground composed of negation on which only the deceased, lying down, stand. This amounts to describing Zoilus as not only lain, horizontal, but at the same time vertical on this shadow of a ground, on the surface before the countryman where the Law stands already collapsed, where the Law becomes indistinguishable from the countryman.

²⁸ But it would be spurious, I think, to go so far as to claim The Shadow's ambiguity as missing from Before the Law, as if no vagueness underwrote the encounter of the countryman. If anything, insofar as the particular, geometric, structure of distance—the endless series of doors and hallways ending at the site of the Law—was objectified, insofar as the infinite was subordinated to finitude, to yield a surface of distance before the countryman (as a surface that demonstrates what it simultaneously withholds; distance), then we can regard the ambiguity of the Shadow, as a description, a qualifier for the apophatic object, as always already hinted at in Kafka. What is more explicit in the case of Poe, however, is that we are presented a broader range of words, adjectives, qualifiers, to associate with this object of pure negation—with the place of the category, the location or site of the abstract, which has now become, on top of what it already had become under Kafka (while never having become it), 'formless, indefinite, vague.'

8. Summary

We had entered on our discussion mainly with some deliberations on grammar, in particular with a handful of prepositions that, as we have been arguing ever since, underlie, constitute, inescapably, some if not all words and/ or concepts of a language of apophasis which necessarily negates them, negates prepositionality (not to mention words and/or concepts in general). It is, moreover, my wish, in continuation of this first step, to have had also recalled, at each turn, the hidden—because relegated—implications in this language of the body and/or the bodily, of posture and orientation, of space and topology, implications that here flourish this wrong, this barren, this failed-in-advance philosophy that attempts to reckon the apophatic object. In summary, I underline once again how these implications bear to differing extents on all domains of abstraction traditionally considered discarnate, which simultaneously inaugurates, or recalls, a metaphysics of posture, and of preposition.

I hope, with this comparison that brings Poe and Kafka's parables so close together, to have found some ramifications of our already failed attempt to construct a language of apophasis. So far it has been the two prepositions, 'before' and 'on', which have singled themselves out for the purposes of our discussion, in the sense that one, the former, supplies the possibility of a gesture that ends in objectification (the gesture not strictly of the countryman, but generally of putting before, putting before oneself, a putting before that implies the subject no sooner than it states the object), and likewise the possibility of the reference, of referentiality; and the latter, 'on', supplying the possibility of the statement, of standing, by opening a relation in grammar with the ground 'on' which the statement, the object, may stand or be stood.

It is but a step from here, to displace the object (that well-secure, indemnified trope of the language of positivism and scientificity) in the framework above, with its apophatic counterpart, and we would have already begun founding a language (and here the verb 'to found' should be taken to imply all its Latin usages, which, to list a few, are 'bottom, base', in other words ground, understood somewhat interchangeably with 'end, depth') not on solid ground, and so not partaking of the securities, indemnities such a ground provides for being able to remain indefinitely—absolutely—upright, but a language founded, based, on its own foundering, on

collapsing no sooner than having stood, so as to translate from a language of uprightness, of straightness and verticality, of rectitude (moral, geometrical, etc.), to one perhaps of tottering or even lying down, after the manner of Zoilus or, less radically if possible, after the countryman's, who is stooping (for why, after all, does the countryman stoop, when attempting to look in through the gate? In Derrida's text, the matter remains speculative—"Is the law then low, lower than he? . . . unless the law is lying down. . . the law then would not stand up. . ." p.207.)

Having covered at least some provisional relation between posture and language, the statement that the Law, insofar as it lies infinitely far, is apophatic, can indeed not stand, since it negates prepositionality, negates being put before and stated, stood upright, is one we would have already repeated numerous times. This would then imply, as one possible reading of the parable, that the countryman, no sooner than having found himself tangled in this aporetic encounter, in his hope to seek audience with the Law, to come into contact with it, be admitted in, can't not change his posture, assuming he has arrived standing, he can't not first sacrifice his uprightness (as the Law always already does) if he is to stand any chance of being admitted.

So the conjecture, brushed past in the article by Derrida, that the Law may be lying [down], is relevant to us, insofar as the collapse of this category, when held up to the light of Poe's scenography, begs the association to Zoilus, who, too, is lying down yet standing, in the manner we've elaborated above: he stands on the bottomless ground of the shadow which, beneath him, solely negates, is this negation, is a ground comprising the cancellation of itself and of the logic of difference that renders each thing, each object, apart from while simultaneously a part of the rest—apart/a part—in the making of a context, a weaving together, whose togetherness, whose con-, is therefore already negated no sooner than assumed. And it is here that I wish to recall the following argument: that the inherently faulty logic of apophasis collapsing the Law, bringing the Law to where it always already was, is not a movement specific to the Law, to the category of the Law, but a movement essential to the definition of all categories, of the category in general, a destiny beleaguering the very site where the name, the idea, the universal, is stated, put before in whichever way so long as to implicate an infinity to reach it, this site of the object, of what lies before.

8.1 An apophatic semiology

What entails the argument recalled above is the identification (tantalizing, in every sense) of language—understood to be a structure consisting throughout of signs that possess, or imply, meaning, and which meaning, for its justification, appeals to categories that are, if conventional, already universal—as apophatic in general, and of each object of its grammar, behaving semiotically, as already collapsed, whose meaning is a lie, implied²⁹.

Let us repeat and extend this final remark. Language, assuming it is made up only of categories to begin with, of signs able, or expected, to perform similarly across an endless range of dissimilar contexts, would itself have to negate, therefore, and so transcend, the single reach of any one of these contexts, that are its particular instances. The semiotic performance thus implies, in the hopes of recovering meaning, a language necessarily residing elsewhere than this performance, an abstract system promising communication whose realization lies, before the context, beyond the plenitude of its cases, infinitely far. And to impute this act of transcendence, of absolute negation and decontextualization, to language wholesale, would at once afford the proposition that every possible division of language, insofar as semantic, categorical, is really apophatic and that, accordingly, all we have done conceptually up to now, regarding the two separate encounters with the Law and the Shadow, may, in fact, be defined as a rejection of the possibility of meaning in general, at the very moment of a mystical encounter with language, whichever form this encounter takes, where meaning is never grasped insofar as it is already grasped.

²⁹ The semiotic implications of having not one, but the entire domain of language determined by apophasis requires a lengthier, and inarguably more ontological, treatment than is given here. In particular the distance, the kind employed in the discipline of semiology that is devised to maintain the separation between a signifier and a signified, which is simultaneously physical (for example, the trope of pointing with the finger that Wittgenstein underlines in St. Augustine, and metaphysical (as an abstraction, a distance relied on as background spacing in logical operations) if apophatic then would suddenly inaugurate an immediacy that renders the signifier into being its own signified, into being a performative realization of its own signified in the performance. So, apophasis conceives of an immediate semiology different from, but not in opposition to, the Derridean movement that anticipates a chain of signifiers without end, insofar as here the end, the transcendental signified, the apophatic object, as in Derrida, never arrives, but is nevertheless present on the surface of its sign precisely as this impossibility of arrival, as an implication, as an end that is a lie. The issue of what happens to semiology when its distances collapse, that is an apophatic semiology, of whose structure we have thus begun to conceive, will be visited frequently, later on, and at several points during the course of our discussion.

8.2 The question of a science of apophasis

If this solution is decided on, namely to institute such a case whereon no category, no constituent of a language, is able, or allowed, to stand, then we might find ourselves going back to an earlier question, asking how an encounter, aporetic to be certain, with language, with Shadow, with the Law, with the category, with meaning, etc., may be possible, in a way that frames it as an object of study, as the object of a science³⁰, of empiricism or phenomenism or else, to begin with. Likewise, if the linguistic category—an absolute—is rent apart so conclusively from each of its performances, the concept from its examples, meaning from (the act of) signification, name from (the event of) recognition, how can these generalities ever be broached³¹, encountered within a context—within a particularity—as generalities, as names, without the general having already devolved into one of its particulars, always only its example, an object (*obicere*) lying always on the way to and in the way of itself, already collapsed no sooner than before, negated by the site of its statement?

The problem of such an encounter, which demonstrably stands for a meeting of the universal and the particular, is not solved as easily, or straightforwardly, as by citing the famous concept of singularity alone—at least not without proposing a certain modification to this concept. This because in defining all categories, all universals, as

³⁰ It seems we have taken another route (by way of first supposing the apophatic object to be a valid object, valid enough in its grammar and its performativity to grant, in turn, analysis) toward the concept of 'the trace' as expounded by Derrida; but here the route seems, because of this very supposition, to deviate from, though without necessarily opposing, the Derridean concept, for although the impossibility of an end, of even an interruption to the movement of signification referring each sign to another ad infinitum, is likewise admitted in the effort to conceive of the apophatic object (*viz.* the end to signification), in the form of (an infinite) distance always lying ahead however much of it has been covered, the interruption, the end, differently from Derrida, does manifest: it manifests as this very impossibility. The end is encountered as an object of endlessness, as the object of distance which, unable to be objectified/distanced before a subject insofar as already this distance, no sooner separated than it already brings the end of separation, the end of the subject by collapsing (it) on the surface of the encounter, the context. This dynamic which ends not only separation but also temporalization, arguably, is a teleology that has already come to pass, and it is thus that the apophatic object differentiates itself from the trace, while possibly also complementing it, insofar as, like the trace, it never ends because, unlike it, it has always already ended.

We will return to this subtle difference, which loses its distinction to so many angles but the one, in particular while presenting, in a continuation of this project, a reading of the myth of Orpheus. The myth, in my opinion, serves as an example to outline some of the implications of an apophatic ontology, the surface, with respect to time, or temporalization that this footnote anticipates.

³¹ This, incidentally, is the impasse that leads the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* to overlook, or to turn away from, the question of ethics, insofar as ethics belongs to the domain of the absolute, of the categorical imperative, the 'must' which stands infinitely apart from all contingency, context, and, therefore, to his well-known enjoinder that one *should* remain silent on the matter of what cannot be said. Moreover, his reference to mysticism regarding this very point, besides foregrounding his relevance for our project, will be referred to later, as part of an attempt to cast doubt on his eventual denunciation of the *Tractatus*, in toto, by outlining the similarity of implications—ontological, metaphysical—grounding this early work and the posthumously published text of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

apophatic, as impossible to be stated, we are necessarily implicating, no sooner than proposing the definition, the entire tripartite logic founding this concept of the singular (viz. universal-particular-singular), whereon the unicity denoted by the term, the intersection conjoining the abstract and the concrete, would also have to be the effacement of this intersection, the removal of this joint no sooner than fitted, and to admit the impossibility of what is unique, singular.

In this sense the countryman's position, collapsed by the immediacy of distance, would herald another subjectivity, one other than or another kind of singularity³², which would owe its distinction from the latter to its very definition of distinction itself, its technique of distinguishing, of distancing (itself from) what stands before it. And though this subjectivity has, to an extent, been long since anticipated by our reading of distance as an apophatic performance, which already collapses the subject and the object on the surface of their encounter, I am still drawn, for some or no reason, to take another route in while approaching its question. A route where the complicity (to be understood as much in its Latin, as in its contemporary sense) between a given technique of differentiation—e.g. distance, an ontological technique insofar as it is separation itself, constituting the subject—and the principal definitions of media subscribed to, upheld, exercised by this subject would be more pronounced than if another was taken.

To put the emphasis on this pronouncement, in other words, is to account for how our mutual definitions of subjectivity and objectivity, in turn bear, indirectly perhaps, on our normative conceptions of media, the two definitions granted while presupposed within the structure of the medium that engenders while mediating them, that only constitutes the object by the promise of its knowledge, as the principal tool of an epistemology which produces while presupposing its facts; the fact of what is mediated, a knowledge of the other. On this route which we have already embarked on, the terms distance and mediation are tied irrevocably together, so as to warrant, in the least, a consideration of media as measured against the same apophatic movement

³² A subjectivity whose inklings may already be found, and are developed, throughout the writings of Levinas, especially those that figure in the collection titled *Humanism of the Other*. Though of some relevance here, I postpone reading Levinas to when we will have started discussing (the concept, the possibility of) anarchy, an-arche, as the concept will be demonstrated, side by side with its contemporary interpretations and 19th century underpinnings, to partake essentially of a logic that is, incorrigibly and self-destructively, apophatic.

that collapses distance, which can then, perhaps, count as one example toward an underlying theory of media in general.

In closing, we would not be repeating any of the above remarks by saying how this, in the course of our discussion, is when the door, the non-or receded object before the countryman, and the shadow before the seven (itself a recession overlaid against the doorway, circumscribed by a doorframe), may both be taken as instances of a grammar whose logic, if this name still fits, pertains to mediation in general, to all media lying, necessarily, in between, interposed and so conditioning, even engendering, from this middle, in retrospect, objects, things. And the aporia we have come to familiarize ourselves with, then, in relation to the object of apophasis and, indeed, to the object in general, whereby the object has already collapsed no sooner than it is stated, seems ruinously at play on all sites that are in-between, with language constituting only one example of such a medium where the object it separates is this act of separation.

Consequently we are led, from our estimation of language as apophatic, to the bolder one of all media as such³³, of the medium as only a surface of itself where it already collapses, and where the object it mediates, the object—apophatic, inconceivable—that we have so far naively been conceiving of, despite being fundamentally a negation of this medium, being what ends or collapses it, nevertheless or therefore becomes its very condition of possibility. It is the already-collapsed pose whose uprightness still constitutes dis-stare or standing apart, the revenant object negating while constituting the possibility of mediation, implying it.

³³ This movement, though it certainly comprises more than just a switch in terminology, does not, for that matter, imply verticality, an ascent from a given tier of abstraction to a higher one where the employment of 'media' as a concept would subsume, or sublata, the concept of language as the lower tier. The switch is horizontal, where each concept stands at once before and behind the other.

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