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By Force of Mourning

Jacques Derrida

Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas

Who could ever speak of the work of Louis Marin?

Who would already know how to speak of the works of Louis Marin and of all the work that bore them, a work without measure?

Work: that which makes for a work, for an *oeuvre*, indeed that which works—and works to open: *opus* and *opening*, *oeuvre* and *overture*: the work or labor of the *oeuvre* insofar as it engenders, produces, and brings to light, but also labor or travail as suffering, as the enduring of force, as the pain of the one who gives. Of the one who gives birth, who brings to the light of day and gives something to be seen, who enables or empowers, who gives the force to know and to be able to see—and all these are powers of the image, the pain of what is given and of the one who takes the pains to help us see, read, and think.

Who could ever speak of all the work and works of Louis Marin?

As for this work—but what does one do when one works?

Transcription of a talk given 28 January 1993 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris during a conference honoring Louis Marin and acknowledging the forthcoming publication of *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses*.

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When one works *on* work, on the work of mourning, when one works at the work of mourning, one is already, yes, already, *doing* such work, enduring this work of mourning from the very start, letting it work within oneself, and thus authorizing oneself to do it, according it to oneself, according it within oneself, and giving oneself this liberty of finitude, the most worthy and the freest possible.

One cannot hold a discourse *on* the “work of mourning” without taking part in it, without announcing or partaking in [*se faire part de*] death, and first of all in one’s own death. In the announcement of one’s own death, which says, in short, “I am dead,” “I died”—such as this book lets it be heard—one should be able to say, and I have tried to say this in the past, that all work is also the work of mourning. All work in general works *at mourning*. In and of itself. Even when it has the power to give birth, even and especially when it plans to bring something to light and let it be seen. The work of mourning is not one kind of work among other possible kinds; an activity of the kind “work” is by no means a specific figure for production in general.

There is thus no metalanguage for the language in which a work of mourning is at work. This is also why one should not be able to say anything about the work of mourning, anything about this subject, since it cannot become a theme, only another experience of mourning that comes to work over the one who intends to speak. To speak of mourning or of anything else. And that is why whoever thus works *at* the work of mourning learns the impossible—and that mourning is interminable. Inconsolable. Irreconcilable. Right up until death—that is what whoever works at mourning knows, working at mourning as both their object and their resource, working *at mourning* as one would speak of a painter working *at a painting* but

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also of a machine working *at such and such an energy level*, the theme of work thus becoming their very force, and their term, a principle.

What might be this principle of mourning? And what was its force? What is, what will have been, what will still be tomorrow, the energy of Louis Marin?

Let us begin by letting him speak. Here are a few words, his words, that say something difficult to understand. They advance a truth, advance toward a singular aporia that Louis Marin states or rather announces precisely on the subject of "mourning."

It says, and for the moment I cite just part of a sentence, as if it were all of a sudden suspended, an interruption coming to take its breath away:

the modalities of a work of mourning of the absolute of "force."¹

This fragment of a long sentence by Louis Marin names—and we thus repeat it—"the modalities of a work of mourning of the absolute of 'force.'"

Five nouns linked together, which can be read as the scanned filiation of a single genitive in the preface of his last book. And never before had I paid attention to the terrible ambiguity of this expression "the last book" of Louis Marin. It makes it impossible to decide between the final book and simply the most recent one, the last one to have come out. For there will be others. This one will simply be the last to have come out, though we know that those that will come out later will have been completed before this one, which will thus remain in the end, and forever, the last one. Forever. From now on the final one.

The preface to *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses* thus announces and pronounces that it will address the "modalities of a work of mourning of the absolute of 'force.'" The slow and cautious procession, the vigilant theory of these complements of the noun leave no determination exempt from analysis. If the word "force" is here in quotation marks, it is for a good reason; it is because the mourning in question and the so-called work of mourning are not self-evident; they go beyond understanding in some way, they go past the usual understanding of this word "force," indeed, they just don't quite go. It is a question, in truth, of the impossible itself. And that is why I took the risk of speaking a moment ago of an aporia. You will also understand, for this is the law, the law of mourning, and the law of the law, always in mourning, that it would have to fail in order to succeed. In order to succeed, it would well have to *fail*, to fail *well*. It would well have to fail, for this is what has to be so, in failing *well*. That is what would have to be. And while it is always promised, it will never be assured.

1. Louis Marin, *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses* (Paris, 1993), pp. 16–17; hereafter abbreviated *P*.

In the era of psychoanalysis, we all of course speak, and we can always go on speaking, about the “successful” work of mourning—or, inversely, as if it were precisely the contrary, about a “melancholia” that would signal the failure of such work. But if we are to follow Louis Marin, here comes a work without force, a work that would have to work at renouncing force, its own force, a work that would have to work at failure, and thus at mourning and getting over force, a work working at its own unproductivity, absolutely, working to absolve or to absolve itself of whatever might be absolute about “force,” and thus of something like “force” itself: “a work of mourning of the absolute of ‘force,’” says Louis Marin, keeping the word “force” between quotation marks that just won’t let go. It is a question of the absolute renunciation of the absolute of force, of the absolute of force in its impossibility and unavoidability; both at once, as inaccessible as it is ineluctable.

What then is force, absolutely? But also: what is this “without force,” this state of being drained, without any force, where death, where the death of a friend, leaves us, when we also have to work at mourning force? Is the “without force,” the mourning of force, possible? In the end this is the question Marin leaves us. It is with this question that he leaves us, like rich and powerless heirs, that is, both provided for and at a loss, given over to being forlorn and distraught, full of and fortified by him, responsible and voiceless.

If he leaves us with this question, at least he will have reformulated it in a singular and new way, indicating another path, another way to engage or to be engaged with it, with this proliferating thought that buzzes like a hive. (What is force? force itself, absolute force, if there is any? where does it come from? how does one recognize it? how does one measure it? What is the greatest force? the invulnerable force? And if this infallible force were the place of the greatest weakness, for example, the place of the “defenselessness” of death, of the dead’s “defenselessness,” of their helplessness, of their “without force,” and of the “defenselessness” and thus the “without-force of the survivors faced with death”? what is meant by “force,” in quotation marks? what is that?)

Let us look for another way to engage this aporetic question to which there are however so many different points of entry. They all come down to asking in the end what *is* that which is called “force.” In the quotation marks that suspend even the assurance of a term of reference, the question would seem to mark out a strange path. Which one? Force itself—by preceding and thus violating in advance, in some sense, the possibility of a question concerning it—force itself would trouble, disturb, dislocate the very form of the question “what is?,” the imperturbable “what is?,” the authority of what is called the ontological question.

For the powers of the image lead back perhaps in the last resort to

this power, to the force of an image that must be protected from every ontology. It would have to be protected from such ontologies because it itself, in truth, protects itself from them; it begins, and this is precisely the force of its force, by tearing itself away from an ontological tradition of the question "what is?" Marin recalls already in the introduction to his book that this tradition itself tended to consider the image as a lesser being, that is, as a being without power, or as a weaker and inferior being, a being of little power, of little force. To submit the image to the question "what is?" would thus already be to miss the image and its force, the image in its force, which has to do perhaps not with what it is or is not, with the fact that it is not or does not have much being, but with the fact that its logic or rather its dynamic, its *dynamis*, the dynasty of its force, will not submit to an onto-logic: its dynamo-logic would no longer be, it would have never been, a logic of being, an ontology. Or rather, to come at it from the other direction, which actually makes more sense: the ontological order (that is, philosophy) would have been constituted as such for not knowing the powers of the image: *for* not knowing or denying them, in the double sense of this "for," that is, *because* it did not take them into account, but also *for* mistaking them, *with a view to* doing so, so as to oppose them, in this most veiled and clandestine war, to the unavowed counterpower of a denial intended to assure an ontological power *over* the image, over the power of the image, over its *dynamis*.

Dynamis: the word seems indispensable. If I emphasize it so forcefully, while Louis Marin uses it only once in his preface as an apposition to the words "force" and "virtue," *virtù* ("the force in the image and of the image, the *virtù*, the virtue, the *dynamis* that 'propels' it to vision" [*P*, p. 18]), it is because this concept plays, it seems to me, a decisive role as soon as it is protected or withdrawn from the traditional ontology that generally dominates it. We will later see that this *dynamis* here links in a most original way the ideas it has always associated, namely, force, power, and *virtù*, with the possible or the virtual *as such*, that is to say, with a virtual that has no vocation to go into action, or rather, whose going into action or whose enactment does not destroy its virtual power.

With what does this have to do (if one can say this, since the logic of the act and of acting, of doing, is precisely what is at stake here)? It would have to do with a possible that is in potential of being only on the condition of remaining possible as possible, and of marking within itself—the scar of a wound and the potentialization of force—the interruption of this going into action, this enactment, an absolute interruption that bears no other seal here than that of death: whence a thought of the *virtual work*, one might also say of a virtual space, of an *opus*, an *opus operatum*, that would accomplish the possible *as such* without effacing it or even enacting it in reality. The thought of a spectral power of the virtual work. One that envelops or develops within itself a thought of death. Only death, which is not, or rather mourning, which takes its place in advance,

can open up this space of absolute *dynamis*: force, virtue, the possible as such, without which one understands nothing of the power of the image. And this “understands nothing,” this ontological denial, would be nothing other than philosophy itself, which thus cannot be considered to be one conjuring practice among others. For trying to reduce, weaken, and wear out a power of the image so as to subject it to itself, this philosophical exorcism of such powerful scope would—and this would be my hypothesis—in some way *regard* death.

It would regard that which should not be seen, and so denied, namely death. This clandestine war of denial would thus be waged in the shadows, in that twilight space of what is called mourning: the mourning that follows death but also the mourning that is prepared and that we expect from the very beginning to follow upon the death of those we love. Love or friendship would be nothing other than the passion, the endurance, and the patience of this work.

Whence this paradox: when Marin puts a question mark after the being of the image (“The being of the image?” [*P*, p. 10]) and later answers: “The being of the image, in a word, would be its force: but how are we to think this ‘force?’,” and when he once again puts the word *force* into quotation marks—this would amount to substituting force for being. But the logic of this substitution—and this is the reason for the conditional (“*would be* its force”)—itself calls for the quotation marks. *For this force owes it to itself not to be*. It owes it to itself not to be a being. It must thus now be on intimate terms with what is not force, with its opposite, with the “without-force,” a domestic and paradoxically necessary commerce being established between them. The greatest force is to be seen in the infinite renunciation of force, in the absolute interruption of force by the without-force. Death, or rather mourning, the mourning of the absolute of force: that is the name, or one of the names, of this affect that unites force to the without-force, thereby relating the manifestation of force, as image, to the being without force of *that which* it manifests or lets be seen, right before our very eyes and according to our mourning.

For what appears most striking from the very opening of this last book, *Des pouvoirs de l'image*, is that it brings about in an irresistible way a double conversion, I dare not say a double reversal. There is first of all the turn or move by which Marin protects the question of the image from the authority of ontology, and this is already a question of force and of power. Then there is the other turn or move whereby this first move finds its truth or its law in—if we can now put it in a nonontological way—what I would be tempted to call, using a code that would have precisely nothing Heideggerian about it, the being-towards-death of the image. Or, let us say to avoid ambiguity, the *being-to-death* of an image that *has* the force, that is *nothing other than* the force, to *resist, to consist and to exist* in death, precisely there where it does not insist in being or in the presence of being. This *being-to-death* would oblige us to think the image not as the

weakened reproduction of what it would imitate, not as a *mimēme*, a simple image, idol, or icon, at least as they are conventionally understood (for it is a question of moving away from this convention), but as the increase of power, the origin, in truth, of authority, the image itself becoming the author, the author and the augmentation of the *auctoritas* insofar as it finds its paradigm, which is also its *enargeia*, in the image of the dead.

In other words, we would not have *images*, a *typology of images* among which a particular class representing the dead or death might be identified. For it would be from death, from what might be called the *point of view of death*, or more precisely, of the dead, the dead man or woman, or more precisely still, from the point of view of the *face* of the dead in their portraiture, that an image would give seeing: not only would give *itself* to be seen but would give insofar as it sees, as if it were seeing as much as seen.

A displacement of the point of view, therefore, which quite obviously inscribes all the essays of this book into the ongoing tradition of work undertaken by Marin for many years concerning that which founds the foundation and institutes the institution of power in a certain logic of representation. And this work, as we all know, allowed him in the course of so many innovative, fertile, and brilliant analyses, to articulate a thought of the theologico-political and a certain icono-semiological theory of representation.

But it seems to me (and this is a reading hypothesis that regards, if I may say this, only me and indicates only a moment of my mournful reading) that in these important developments of earlier research an inflection or break comes to inscribe a paradox. This paradox complicates and in turn illuminates, it seems to me, the earlier trajectory. It concerns the mourning of force or the force of mourning, that is to say, a law according to which the greatest force does not consist in continually expanding ad infinitum but develops its maximal intensity, so to speak, only at the mad moment of decision, at the point of its absolute interruption, there where *dynamis* remains virtuality, namely, a virtual work as such. A moment of infinite renunciation as the potentialization of the virtual work. But the virtual work is not one category of work or image among others; it is the essence of the work, a nonessential essence, since it is an essence that remains possible *as such*. And this is death (or at least that's what this word here signifies—and there where there is no death in itself that would ever be possible as such there is only the experience of mourning without death: mourning is the phenomenon of death and it is the only phenomenon behind which there is nothing; the *phainesthai* of this phenomenon is the only possible access to an original thought of the image, and so on). Here is death, then, there where the image annuls its representative presence, there where, more precisely, the non *re-*productive intensity of the *re-* of representation gains in power what the

present that it represents loses in presence. And this point, which also punctuates an entire way of thinking the temporalization of time, is evidently the point, not of death itself, but of mourning, and of the mourning of the absolute of force.

If, therefore, the first examples Marin proposes in order to make this power of the image visible and energetic, in order to *illustrate* it, are images of the dead, one should not see here a simply fortuitous occurrence. It is in the *re*-presentation of the dead that the power of the image is exemplary. When Marin asks about this *re*- of representation, about the substitutive value that this *re*- indicates at the moment when that which was present is no longer present and comes to be *re*-presented, and when he then takes the example of the disappearance of the present as death, it is in order not only to track a re-presentation or an absolute substitution of representation for presence but also to detect within it an increase, a re-gaining of force or a supplement of intensity in presence, and thus a sort of potency or potentialization of power for which the schema of substitutive value, of mere replacement, can give no account. Representation is here no longer a simple reproductive re-presentation; it is such a regaining of presence, such a recrudescence or resurgence of presence thereby intensified, that it gives to be thought the lack, the default of presence or the mourning that had hollowed out in advance the so-called primitive or originary presence, the presence that is represented, the so-called living presence.

Here, in a word, is the question of the image, the image put into question, not the question “What is the image?” but “image?” Let us read Marin (*P*, p. 11):

The prefix *re*- brings into this term the value of substitution. Something that *was* present and *is* no longer is *now* represented. In place of something that is present *elsewhere*, there is here a present, a *given* . . .

[I underscore *elsewhere* here, though we are going to see in a moment that the radical example of death makes of this *elsewhere*, which refers to a Gospel, the metonymy of a possible *nowhere*, or at least of an elsewhere without locality, without a home in presentable space, in the given space of presentation.]

. . . there is here a present, a *given*: image? . . .

[This single-word question—“image?”—is going to come up more than once. But is it really a question of an image? Can one still speak of an image when representation seems to do more than represent, when it actually gains in intensity and force, when it seems to have even more power than that of which it is said to be the image or the imitation? Mar-

in's response will necessarily be double, *no and yes*: *no*, it is not simply an image if we are to accept the ontological concept of the image as the mimetic and weakened double of the thing itself; *yes*, for it is the very essence, the proper power, the *dynamis* of the image, if one thinks the image on the basis of death, that is, in truth, on the basis of the mourning that will confer upon it its power and an increase in intensive force. Let us continue this reading.]

. . . image? Instead of representation, then, there is an absence in time or space, or rather an other. . .

[The replacement of "absence" by "other" here no doubt indicates that the substitutive value is no longer operative in the couple "absence/presence" but in the couple "same/other" that introduces the dimension of mourning.]

. . . an other, and a substitution takes place from an other to this other, in its place. Thus in this primitive (or originary) scene of the Christian West, the angel at the tomb on the morning of the resurrection—"he is not here, he is elsewhere, in Galilee, as he had said"—which substitutes a message for this thing, for this dead body and its inertia, which makes appear the "force" [again in quotation marks, and we will later see why] of an utterance whose content is, nonetheless, limited to remarking upon an absence, "he is not here. . . ," the absence of the "same" in the heterogeneity of another semiotic potential, language.

Let us pause for a moment at this allusion to "the heterogeneity of another semiotic potential, language" in the presentation of the image. It explains and justifies in advance the very form of Marin's book, namely, the necessity of a textual weaving of words and images, the imbrication of glosses sewn upon the iconic tissue: glosses upon glosses that are, in truth, just as originary as the image, as an image that language will have made possible, and glosses of glosses that we here can only gloss in turn, on one side or the other of the image. Marin immediately goes on to repeat this question in a word ("image?"). He links it this time to the theme of resurrection and transfiguration:

Here—look here, listen here—in place of a cadaver, removed from the agency of signification, from the ritual gesturality of the funeral unction, a message: this exchange between the cadaver and language, the gap of this exchange, is precisely the resurrection of the body, and the traversing of this gap, the ontological transfiguration of the body: image?

[The question is repeated: "image?" This elliptical question without verb or copula suggests that the image is more than an image, stronger or

more forceful than the image defined and weakened by ontology. The same ellipsis also lets something else be thought: outside the evangelical, doctrinal, or dogmatic space of the resurrection, before it, more originary than it, but in an originarity of which Christianity makes an event, there would be the very possibility, the power, the force of resurrection and of transfiguration that will be treated so magnificently in Gloss 8 of the book to which I will return in a moment; this force would here stem from the semiotic heterogeneity, from the power of language, and from the power of alterity that works over the being-to-death of every image.]

Between dead cadaver [a strange redundancy, “dead cadaver,” which leaves no chance for illusion or hallucination] and enunciated message, the enunciation so *powerful of/by* an absence [*puissante d'une absence*]—. . .

[I underscore *powerful*, the key word in this expression “the enunciation so powerful of/by an absence,” because the adjective “powerful” matters more than both the subject, “enunciation,” and the complement of the attributive noun, “of/by an absence.”]

. . . and it is in this that its pragmatic and historical force resides, its foundational efficacy—the absence of the founding body.

[The logic of these propositions is dictated by a thought of the foundation itself as the power of the image: the body is not first founding and then, once dead or absent, confirmed in its founding power. No, this power comes to it from the imaginal transfiguration. This founding power advenes thanks to and as the result of the imaginal transfiguration. The foundation is first of all imaginal; it is from the very start fantastic or phantasmatic: under certain conditions, of course, and this is the central problem of the pragmatic conditions of such efficacy; all of history is at issue here, and, first of all, the enigma of all the examples taken in such an exemplary way, that is, at once invariant and (yet) indifferent, open to variation, from the Gospels. In any case, it will be said that this founding power of the image or of the portrait (of the king, for example), with all the political dimensions that Marin never ceased to analyze, did not exist before death. It comes to it from this imaginal representation, from the “exchange between the cadaver and language,” from the “ontological transfiguration of the body.”

But what might this mean? Why did the founding power of the image not exist before death? What might it mean in general for something not to exist before death, when the anticipation of death comes so indisputably to hollow out the living present that precedes it, and when mourning is at work, as we know, before death?

It means perhaps that the power of the image as the power of death

does not wait for death, but is marked out in everything—and for everything—that awaits death: the death of the king gets its efficacy from the portrait made before the death of the king, and every image enacts its efficacy only by signifying the death from which it draws all its power.]

It is this [“the absence of the founding body”] that will constantly require throughout the ages that the body be covered over, buried, and in a way monumentalized by and in its representations. Such would be the first effect of representation *in general*.

[I underscore *in general*. Such generality affects the Christian example with the sign of a possible imaginary variation, as if the privilege of Christian culture were, in a sort of phenomenological eidetic reduction, but the imaginary basis for an intuition of a general essence concerning the nature of a representation or an imagination in general, beyond the Christic space. When Marin here names the “first effect,” he is not pointing out a simple consequence, something that would follow upon the operation of the image: interested as always—as the great Pascalian that he was—in the logic of the effect, in the reason of effects, he knows that the image is nothing, that it does not exist before or outside the effect, the word “effect” designating at once the change brought about and that which *has an effect*, namely, the energy of the aspect, of the manifestation, of visibility, of *phainesthai*. The reason of effects thus comes not so much from the principle of reason or causality as from the fact that it reveals the power of representation, an essence of representation that effectuates more than its so-called ontological essence. If I gloss things in my own way, all the while trying not to be unfaithful to Marin’s intention, if I oppose the “reason of effects,” which Marin does not invoke directly here, to the “principle of reason” and, implicitly, to the interpretation of it given by Heidegger, whom Marin, it seems to me, if I am not speaking too hastily here, never evokes in this work (except indirectly, in a note concerning a reference by Panofsky to Heidegger [see *P*, p. 205]), it is to try to make sense of the underlying reason for this silence and to try implicitly or obliquely to justify it, assuming that a silence can ever be justified. For Heidegger always associates the predominance and the closure of a certain accentuation of the Principle of reason (that is, of the *Satz vom Grund* as principle of causality or of final causality, the *Grund* or the foundation here being the cause), especially since the seventeenth century, with a certain authority of representation. In so doing he perhaps misses out on understanding how the authority or power, and particularly the theologico-political power of representation, even if aesthetic, might come to it, even in its very founding agency, precisely from its lack or absence of *Grund*, from the *Abgrund* on the basis of which it founds: for it founds precisely there where the founding body, the founding agency or existence, comes to disappear in death, to act as the

one who has disappeared or passed away. All these are problems or dimensions of the foundation, and first of all of the political foundation—in and through representation—that, as such, never interested Heidegger, if I am not mistaken, at least not in *The Principle of Reason*, which is *also*, however, a meditation upon that which happens to representation, and through representation, in the seventeenth century.]

Such would be the “primitive” of representation as effect: to presentify, to make the absent present, as if that which returned were the same . . .

[There is here, then, an acute thought of mourning and of the phantom that returns, of haunting and spectrality: beyond the alternative between presence and absence, beyond negative or positive perception even, the effect of the image would stem from the fantastic force of the specter, and from a supplement of force; and the increase becomes fantastic at the very heart of lack, for Marin immediately raises the stakes, this capital raising of the stakes concerning a capital surplus value of the image, concerning, in sum, the *interest* of the image and of the desire for the image:]

Such would be the “primitive” of representation as effect: to presentify, to make the absent present, as if that which returned were the same and sometimes better, *more* intense, *more* forceful than if it were the same [my emphasis].

The “more” here seems affected by an “as if” (“as if it were the same”), but the more intensity or force, far from being lessened or attenuated by the fiction of the “as if,” draws from it, on the contrary, all its *dynamis*, at once its power and its increase of potential being, of being in potential. There is also here, I would be tempted to say, a theory of the capital and of the capitalization of energy, there where capital is represented from its heraldic depths [*abîme*], both in the chief or head (of state, for example) and in the capital portrait. For this is also a book on the decapitation of the king (look at *Entreglose* 8 entitled “The Severed Head” on Corneille’s *The Death of Pompey*) and on the fate of this capital punishment that turns regicide into an event whose possibility is inscribed right on the effect called “portrait of the king.”

To reinforce this demonstration of force and of what links power to death, Marin goes on to cite an extraordinary text by Alberti. In book 11 of his treatise *On Painting*, Alberti speaks of death and of friendship. I could not help but recall a certain moment during a seminar we taught together three years ago when we asked about what links friendship to the testamentary experience, particularly in a certain text of Montaigne, of whom Marin was also a marvelous reader. What does Alberti say here? If painting has within itself a force that is absolutely divine (*vim divinam*)

it is because it makes the absent present: "as friendship is said to do," Alberti then adds, thinking perhaps of a certain text of Aristotle, the very one that Montaigne evokes and that we had discussed in this seminar.² Alberti then moves on—right to the limit of death. Death is not one example of absence among others; it speaks to us of absence itself by naming the most absent of absences, the one that is given by death. Henceforth death, which is expressed, in sum, by all the other absences as absences, is what gives painting its greatest force, for "divine force" also means "the greatest force." But because it bears death, so to speak, this greatest force is also the "without-force," the mourning of the absolute of "force." And to suggest, as I have just done, that "divine force" means "the greatest force" is not simply to call divine that which is the greatest, that in relation to which nothing greater can be thought, as Saint Anselm would say, or to think it according to a schema of ordinary meaning that would unite the idea of God to the superlative; it is also to approach the divinity of the divine on the basis of death, or rather as the mourning-bearing power that makes the greatest force equal to the without-force, to the mourning of the absolute of "force." And under these conditions, the schemas of the eucharistic transubstantiation, of the transfiguration, or of the resurrection, even if taken outside the context of pure Christian dogmatism, retain an exemplary value for Marin's works, in the most enigmatic sense of this Christian exemplarity. This exemplarity does not suggest one occurrence among others but the occurrence of the unique and irreplaceable historical advent that allows one to give an account of all the effects of the "portrait of the king." By allowing them to take place, by giving them their proper place, it determines Marin's so necessary and so rigorous analyses on this subject—be it in the book that bears this title (*Portrait of the King*)³ or in the second part of this last book, "The Genealogical and Political Powers of the Image."

What do all these analyses, each one emanating beauty and truth, show? To put it all too poorly in a word, they demonstrate and display what, in the course of history, allows one to say, following Pascal, that "the portrait of the king is the king" and that it is the "'portrait effect,' the mimetic effect, the effect of representation, that *makes* the king" (*P*, p. 187).

This logic presupposes that a sort of death of the king comes *in advance* to divide the king's body in two: the individual or real body on the one hand, the fictive—ideal or representative—body of dignity on the other. (The politico-juridical history of the two bodies of the king in Christian Europe, such as it is analyzed by Ernst Kantorowicz, plays an organizing role in these texts of Marin; it runs through them, as we know, as the continuous thread of an axiomatic—so indispensable and obvious

2. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (1956; New Haven, Conn., 1966), p. 63.

3. See Marin, *Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha M. Houle (Minneapolis, 1988).

that Kantorowicz hardly has to be mentioned.) Now, as we know, this dividing or this redoubling of the king's body, this functional death of the physical body in the body of dignity, what Marin elsewhere calls the "caesura of the royal body,"⁴ could be written into the rights of absolute and hereditary monarchy only on the basis of a Christian doctrine. I'll cite just one sentence, at the end of Gloss 6 ("The Portrait of the King, Shipwrecked"), which would here have to be read extremely closely: "The king in his portrait, the king as image, the king-representation, is thus in the 'parable' a parody of the eucharistic mystery of the mystic body and of real presence" (*P*, p. 194).

One could readily show, in fact, that this logic remains at work wherever there is a monarchy in a Christian country, even in a Christian democracy, I mean in a democratic regime with a Christian culture, as soon as the unity or the independence of the nation-state is represented in the body of a monarch or president, no matter the length of the term or the forms of inheritance by election (filiation or succession), indeed, no matter the mode of election.

But let's return to Alberti: "painting," he writes, "contains an absolutely divine force [*in se vim admodum divinam habet*] that not only makes absent men present, as friendship is said to do, but shows the dead to the living so that even after many centuries [*defunctus long post saecula viventibus exhibeat*] they may be recognized by them with great pleasure and with great admiration for the painter" (quoted in *P*, p. 11). In Alberti's description we see pleasure and admiration becoming inextricably linked to mourning, the force of the three affects increasing from their combination.

Yet it is necessary here to underscore an obvious fact. It could easily be forgotten because it is so obvious, like the nose in the middle of one's face. It is that the image and representation are treated by Alberti—and by Marin citing Alberti—on the basis of the portrait. The portrait is not just any painting. It thus has to be recalled why it is the history of the image as portrait that must be investigated in order to analyze power, particularly the theologico-political power of representation. The portrait is not one fiction or figure, one face of the figure, among others. Not only because it represents at once the gaze that gazes at us and the head that governs the body and the chief or head who governs the social body. (In his political analyses Marx is always interested just as much in the head of those who govern as in the logic of capital.) But especially because, like the photographic portrait, its relation to the referent appears (and it is this appearance that counts even if one must not trust it) irreducible. This fiction of the figure, of the face, is given as essentially nonfictive, and it claims to give us—and Barthes relied a good deal, perhaps a bit too much, on this claim—what once was and could not not have been present

4. See Marin, *Lectures traversières* (Paris, 1992), pp. 179–93.

before the gaze or before the lens. What the portrait says, the *title* "portrait" (and it is because a title is of the order of discourse that we are here in a gloss), is that what is shown, portraited, is what was (supposed to have been) real, really present. This is obviously not the case of every other pictorial figure or fiction, which do not then strictly speaking deserve the name of representation, or even, in the end, that of image. The portrait is here the capital representation insofar as it represents the capital element in a power of the image. Forcing things only a bit, one could say that, *at least* from the point of view of the theologico-political power guaranteed by the portrait of the king, and based on Marin's analysis, there is no difference between painting and photography, for the photographic portrait continues to guarantee, and sometimes even accentuates, the function of the painted portrait. The photographic technique fulfills even more powerfully the pictorial vocation, namely, to seize the dead and transfigure them—to resuscitate as *having been* the one who (singularly, he or she) will have been. The presidential portraits that can be seen today in all places of public authority (government agencies, town halls, departmental and municipal buildings, police stations) express the origin, identity, and place of the capital gathering of legitimate power insofar as it holds us in its gaze and looks at us looking at it by recalling us to what looks at and regards us, that is, to our responsibility before it and in its eyes. It is also true that photography at the same time goes against the very vocation it fulfills or continues since it makes the portrait available to everyone. Through this technical democratization, photography tends to destroy the aura and rarity of the painting that restricts the commissioning of the painted portrait, which sometimes turns out to be a masterpiece, to certain privileged places, of which the court is at the very least the metonymic figure. In any case, one should not be surprised to see Marin, just after having spoken of what is "most intense" and "most forceful" about the effect of representation, and just before citing Alberti, make reference in a single sentence to photography, and more precisely to the photograph of someone who, as we say, has disappeared or "passed away," the photograph, like the portrait, having the virtue of making appear the one who has disappeared, of making them re-appear with greater clarity or *enargeia*. Before citing Alberti, Marin makes as if he were giving an example just in passing, a few words of pedagogic illustration: "Thus the photograph of someone who has passed away displayed on the mantel" (*P*, p. 11).

I am going to have to break this off, for there is not enough time; but before saying in a few words in what direction I would have liked to share with you the reading of this great book, I would especially like to convey to you, trying not to take advantage of the emotion, how difficult and painful it is for me to speak here of this book. This difficulty or pain has nothing to do with the time we do or do not have this evening; we and, alas, we alone, will later have more time. A bit more time.

Such difficulty or pain has to do with the strange time of reading that the time of the writing of this book will have, as if in advance, imprinted in us, the friends of Louis.

I imagine him writing these lines, citing and glossing Alberti in his preface not long before his death, for a book he did not know whether he would see, whether he would, while still living, see it come out. The book, as *you* will see, multiplies these analyses, these examples, these images of what I would call the survival effect, the effect of living on. Louis not only saw death coming, as we all see it coming without seeing it, as we all expect it without expecting it. He approached death, which approached him, more and more quickly; he approached it in preceding it, and anticipated it with these images and glosses, for which the grammar of the future anterior no doubt does not suffice to convey their force and time, their tense. The future anterior is still a simplistic modalization of a fundamental present or representation; simplistic because still too simple to be able to translate the strange temporality that here gives its force to the mourning affect of which we are speaking. It would likewise be too simple, though true in an oblique way, to say that Louis Marin, citing Alberti and speaking of the portrait of others, of death and of friendship, painted himself in advance, painting at the same time his grieving friends, pointing us out to ourselves in advance with a finger, and signing the extraordinary utterance, which he comments upon elsewhere, that allows one to say "I died" (this incredible grammar, this impossible time or tense that he analyzes in *La Voix excommuniée*).⁵

To say "I died," "I am dead," is not simply a future anterior. It is the strange time of his writing, the strange time of reading that looks at and regards us in advance this evening, that will have regarded us, that will regard us long after us. The "I died" is not a phenomenologico-grammatical monstrosity, a scandal of common sense or an impossible sentence with no meaning. It is the time or tense, the grapho-logical time, the implicit tempo of all writing, all painting, of every trace, and even of the presumed present of every *cogito ergo sum* (which, as I tried to show a long time ago elsewhere, necessarily implies an "I am dead." For in Descartes one cannot separate these words and the system of their enunciation from what is considered to be one of Descartes's minor discourses, namely, what he says of the Eucharist when he dares, more or less clandestinely, to enter into the debate among theologians on this subject. I later tried to show this again in a seminar where I referred, of course, to the works of Marin on the Eucharist and added to them this Cartesian gloss.).

During the past few weeks spent admiring *Des pouvoirs de l'image* I kept saying to myself that I have never known such an emotion in reading a book. It was not only the emotion of mourning that we all know and

5. See Marin, *La Voix excommuniée: Essais de mémoire* (Paris, 1981), p. 64.

recognize, even if it hits us each time in a new and singular way, like the end of the world, an emotion that overwhelms us each time we come across the surviving testimonies of the lost friend, across all the "images" that the one who has "passed away" has left or passed on to us.

There was, this time, something more, something else as well. There was another emotion that came to overwhelm this first mourning, this common mourning, coming to make it turn upon itself, I would almost want to say to reflect it to the point of vertigo, another emotion, another quality and intensity of emotion, at once too painful and strangely peaceful, which had to do, I believe, with a certain time of reading.

Without even trying to say something more, however minimal, about this magnificent book and about the strange time of reading by which I was overwhelmed, I would like to venture a few words on the subject of mourning, and on the time of an interminable mourning, so as not to rush ahead—something I would deem intolerable—to speak this evening of the last book of Marin as I might have spoken in another time and in more conventional circumstances of his most recent book. In returning regularly to common places, I mean to the places that were common to us, sitting in the office I shared with him for so long on Boulevard Raspail, walking around the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, taking part just recently in a discussion during the seminar he led for many years with certain among you whom I see in this room, I have said to myself that, ever since psychoanalysis came to mark this discourse, the image commonly used to characterize mourning is that of an interiorization (an idealizing incorporation, introjection, consumption of the other, in effect, an experience that would have received one of its essential aspects from the Eucharist, which was, for Louis, the great Thing, the great mourning-object, both his object and the object of his mourning, to which he will have devoted a work so original and all-consuming, a work that unrelentingly pursues the eucharistic body from every side—exegetical, philosophical, historical, logical, linguistic—as if it were necessary before dying to come to know what mourning is, to know how to come to terms with death, and how to transfigure the work of death into a work that gives and gives something to be seen). Now, if the modes of interiorization or of subjectification that psychoanalysis talks about are in some respects undeniable in the work of mourning where the death of the friend leaves us, that is, leaves us alone, I told myself the following, which is certainly not original but which I feel with a singular acuteness and, indeed, an increased intensity: if this interiorization is not possible, if it must not—and this is the unbearable paradox of fidelity—be possible and completed, it would not be because of a limit, because of a border that cannot be crossed, because of a frontier that comes to enclose a given space, organizing finitude into an inside and an outside that would be, in effect, homogeneous with one another, symmetrical and commensurable on each side of an indivisible line. It would be, rather, because of another

organization of space and of visibility, of the gazing and the gazed upon. Whatever the truth, alas, of this inevitable interiorization (the friend can no longer be but *in us*, and whatever we may believe about the after-life, about living-on, according to all the possible forms of faith, it is *in us* that these movements might appear), this being-in-us reveals a truth *to and at death*, at the moment of death and even before death by everything in us that prepares itself for and awaits death, that is, in the undeniable anticipation of mourning that constitutes friendship. It reveals the truth of its topology and tropology. When we say “in us,” when we speak so easily and so painfully of inside and outside, we are naming space, we are speaking of a visibility of the body, a geometry of gazes, an orientation of perspectives. *We are speaking of images*. What is only *in us* seems to be reducible to images, which might be memories or monuments, but which are reducible in any case to a memory that consists of *visible* scenes that are no longer anything but *images*, since the other of whom they are the images appears only as the one who has disappeared or passed away, as the one who, having passed away, leaves “in us” only images. He is no more, he whom we see in images or in recollection, he of whom we speak, whom we cite, to whom we attempt to give back words, to let speak—he is no more, he is no longer here, no longer there. And nothing can begin to dissipate the terrifying and chilling light of this certainty. As if respect for this certainty were still a debt, the last one, owed to the friend.

What this rhetoric of space, this topology and this tropology miss, what this description of lack lacks, is that the force of the image has to do less with the fact that one sees something in it than with the fact that one is seen there in it. The image sees more than it is seen. The image looks at us. (Indeed, some of you here this evening, Hubert Damisch in particular, work on this inversion of the gaze that comes from painting and on the dissymmetry and demastering brought about by such an inversion; and everything Marin tells us of the portrait has to do, in the end, with this inversion of dissymmetry that can be interiorized only by exceeding, fracturing, wounding, injuring, traumatizing the interiority that it inhabits or that welcomes it through hospitality, love, or friendship. This dissymmetry also inscribes—unless it actually depends on it—an essential anachrony in our being exposed to the other; it dislocates all contemporaneity at the very heart of what we have our sights on at the same time.)

Louis Marin is outside and he is looking at me, he himself, and I am an image for him. At this very moment. There where I can say *cogito, sum*, I know that I am an image for the other and am looked at by the other, even and especially by the mortal other. I move right before his eyes, and the force of this image is irreversible (because of the reversion, the conversion, of force into weakness and vice versa). Louis Marin is looking at me, and it is for this, for him, that I am here this evening. He is my law, the law, and I appear before him, before his word and his gaze. In my relationship to myself, he is here in me before me, stronger or more

forceful than me. It might be said that I came because other witnesses asked me to, because I appear also before those close to him, Françoise, Anne, Frédérique, and Judith, before his friends and the friends we had in common. This is surely true, but I would not have felt this imperative before them had I not known that what unites us is at once common and outside us, and that we are all looked at (each one of us singularly) by the one who, with each page, will have providentially deciphered and prescribed, arranged in advance, a reading of what is happening here, of what makes the present scene possible, foreseeing and watching over it with the benevolent regard (since it is he who watches out to watch over us) and with all the love of someone who can say, at the moment of dying, even if he is not Christ or even Christian, *hoc est meum corpus, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me* (Luke 22:19).

We are all looked at, I said, and each one singularly, by Louis Marin. He looks at us. *In us*. He looks in us. This witness sees in us. And from now on more than ever. But what might this indicate that would not be a mere rhetorical commonplace? It would indicate an *absolute* excess and dissymmetry in the space of what relates us to ourselves and constitutes the “being-in-us,” the “being-us,” in something completely other than a mere subjective interiority: in a place open to an infinite transcendence. The one who looks at us in us—and *for whom* we are—is no longer; he is completely other, infinitely other, as he has always been, and death has more than ever entrusted him, given him over, distanced him, in this infinite alterity. However narcissistic it may be, our subjective speculation can no longer seize and appropriate this gaze before which we appear at the moment when, bearing it in us, bearing it along with every movement of our bearing or comportment, we can get over our mourning *of him* only by getting over *our* mourning, by getting over, by ourselves, the mourning of ourselves, I mean the mourning of our autonomy, of everything that would make us the measure of ourselves. That is the excess and the dissymmetry: we bear *in ourselves* the gaze that Louis Marin bears *on us*. Powers of the image. This gaze is his, and it will always remain his, infinitely; it comes from him singularly, from him alone, alone as always, more alone than ever, over there, outside, far away. Far away in us. In us, there where this power of the image comes to open the being-far-away. This excess also brings about the limitless enlargement of the image. Its power of dilation gives it its greatest force in the mourning of the absolute of “force.”

It was, in the end, the experience of this time of reading that I discovered. Louis Marin described this scene on each page of his book, all the while mobilizing a corpus at once extremely diverse and singularly rich. I was thus read, I said to myself, and staged by what I read; I found myself caught up in the time of his time, inscribed, situated by this other present that was still his this summer. And my sadness, while trying to distinguish itself from his, could never really dissociate itself from it. It

still resonates in the very scope and score of his time. He remained the master of it, as one would say of a subject or a disciple.

It would be necessary to accede or do justice to this torsion of the time of reading. At once painful and fascinated, it calls or recalls in advance a sort of living present, or what is assumed to be so, that is, our own living present, toward the present of Louis Marin, toward the other fractured present of the one who, having written this book in a more or less continuous fashion over several years, developing still further premises elaborated for more than twenty years, wrote or reviewed a few months ago, I imagine, the preface, and reread—the ultimate test or proof—as the editors tell us, almost all the proofs, almost, or just about, the final proofs, the final test.

In doing this, he will have brought to term, that is, right up to the final interruption, the ordeal or the putting to the test of this default of force wherein is marked the “mourning of the absolute of ‘force.’”

For, in the end, what does this book tell us, in its at once paradoxical and prudent thesis, I would even say in its fantastic aporia, or, if you prefer, its ontological fiction? That this power whose effects it analyzes does not exist. It never attains existence, that is, the presence of the present. *There is* power, there are *effects* of power, but power does not exist. It is nothing. It *is attached to death*, which is not. There is only “force,” the quotation marks reminding us that the effect of force is attached to the representative fiction. This fiction counts only on the death of the one who is thought to hold power, from whom it then withdraws power by feigning to confer it upon him in the portrait. The trait of the portrait, its infinite attraction, is that it subtracts or withdraws: it withdraws or takes back all the power that it confers, because it requires already in advance the death of the subject, the death of the king as subject and of the subject of the subject in question, that is, of everything related to its reference:

In the representation that is power, in the power that is representation, the real—provided one understands by “real” the always deferred fulfillment of this desire—is nothing other than the fantastic image in which the subject would contemplate itself as absolute.

If it is of the essence of all forces to tend towards the absolute, it is part of the “reality” of its subject never to be content with not being so. The representation-effects that constitute powers and that powers in turn permit and authorize would be the modalities (historical, anthropological, sociological . . .) of a work—though infinite in space and time—of the mourning of the absolute of “force.” [*P* pp. 16–17]

All this is worked out, demonstrated, and will live on in the pages that will be read and reread on “The Severed Head,” concerning *The Death of Pompey* by Corneille where the “deadly mirror”—analyzed earlier in the chapters on the idol, narcissism, and the “position of the I”—lets us see,

in some sense, the very origin of the political and shows how the "great politician then converts the phantasmatic object, the head of the Medusa, emblem of the violent origins of the State, the severed head of Pompey, into its own face, the disquieting and cold mask of political power" (*P*, p. 157).

But the reading of *The Tempest* exceeds this purely political dimension. For it shows how the recognition that the king discovers in the gaze that representation turns toward him is also *cosmic* (see *P*, p. 175). Had I the time, I would have tried to venture into the current space of this *cosmopolitics*. But the pages that, while just as convincing and forceful as all the others, nonetheless moved me the most, I would even say overwhelmed me, are those that—in a reading of whiteness that is quite properly dazzling, in the writing of white light, in what one might want to call the photography of certain Gospels—speak about the *potestas filiationis*, about the son in the bosom of the father, the son as the sight of the image of the father. Of the father *in view* of the son, of the father looked upon, judged, made possible by the son. An abyssal thought of inheritance. It would be necessary to cite here the entire Gloss 7 on "the son in the bosom of the father" and reread what is said "in the light of the stained-glass window." Marin speaks of this in a dazzling fashion, for he is himself no doubt bedazzled by bedazzlement, by the knowledge "through bedazzlement," through the blindness that comes from an excess of vision. Here again is the theme of what Abbot Suger refers to as a "force renewed" through the very renunciation of all restitution, all reconstitution, all *post mortem* retribution: the gift itself (*P*, p. 213). And as for the Transfiguration, the event of the absolute visual that constitutes the ground without ground of the foundation of power, the bedazzlement of whiteness is there associated with this anticipation of death that also marks the time of this book, "as if," says Marin, "the extreme, final, image, that of the absolutely white figure or face, could only anticipate the taste of an exquisite death" (*P*, p. 239).

We will never have the time.

Had I the time, had I been able to treat the last six pages of this book, which speak in Gloss 9 of "The Reversion of Shadow and Light" and of a certain structural link between "genealogical power" and a supplement of force or "intensification" based on a passage from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, I would have tried to situate a bit better what is, to my eyes, Marin's singular place within a hidden tradition, at the heart of a secret lineage, one that is inadmissible to every church or chapel. I am speaking of this heretical filiation that runs from Pascal to Nietzsche, who was also the thinker of force and of the reciprocal convertibility of the strongest or most forceful and the weakest. These two thinkers have often been associated, especially during the heydays of existentialism. But I do not know of anyone before Louis Marin who has given to this intolerable genealogy, to this heretical heritage, such a force

of evidence, such titles, I would even say such a force of law. If this tradition was possible, virtual, dynamic, it did not exist, it never had such an incontestable actuality before the work of Marin, and singularly so in *Des pouvoirs de l'image*. That this actuality remains a potentiality without limit—that is what I would have wanted to show.

And that is what secretly links the gift to death.

Why does one give and what can one give to a dead friend? And what does one give oneself with this liberty, when one knows that the relation to oneself, that Narcissus himself, gazes at himself only from the gaze of the other, and precedes himself, answering then only for himself, only from the resonance of Echo, when this latter speaks freely of herself, for herself, by seeming to repeat the last syllables of the other and thus to give in to the jealous dictates of divine law.

Louis knew what I thought of him, he was aware of my admiration and my gratitude; he had countless indications of this in everything that was woven between our gestures, our various itineraries, our respective works as well, and in everything that went unspoken, which did not fail, as always, alas, to resound and resonate in all of this. But while he was aware of this admiration, I never really declared it to him to the extent that I am this evening. I am not saying this only, not only, to confess a mistake, a regret, or an inconsolable sadness. This situation is, in the end, rather common; it is what links me to more than one friend, no doubt to all those one calls “best friends.”

But then why? Why wait for death? Tell me why we wait for death? Marin’s last book will have again helped me to think this, to think that which in fact regards each of us so singularly, namely, the law of what does not return or come back, of what comes back to us only there where it can no longer come back to us, and so all comes down, like mastery, that is, like the fiction of force, to the incontestable authority of death, to the very inexistence of the image, to its fantastic power, to the impresence of a trace.

Louis Marin knew that this authority begins before death, and that death begins its work before death. Death’s watch [*veille*], the time of this book, had begun long ago for Louis Marin, well before the eve [*veille*] of his death.

This is also why this book cannot be closed, why it interrupts itself interminably. And however prepared I might have been for it, I read it too quickly. In a sort of haste that no mourning will be able to diminish or console. It happened to me too quickly, like Louis’s death. I feel as if I’m still on the eve of reading it.