

Thinking Out of Sight
Writings on the Arts of the Visible

JACQUES DERRIDA

Edited by Ginette Michaud, Joana Masó, and Javier Bassas

With new translations by Laurent Milesi

The University of Chicago Press | CHICAGO AND LONDON

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations vii

Editors' Foreword ix

PART I. *The Traces of the Visible*

The Spatial Arts: An Interview by Peter Brunette
and David Wills 3

Thinking Out of Sight 31

Trace and Archive, Image and Art 49

PART II. *Rhetoric of the Line: Painting, Drawing*

To Illustrate, He Said 89

The Philosopher's Design: An Interview
by Jérôme Coignard 94

Drawing by Design 98

Pregnances 118

To Save the Phenomena: For Salvatore Puglia 129

Four Ways to Drawing 142

Ecstasy, Crisis: An Interview with Valerio Adami
and Roger Lesgards 145

Color to the Letter 156

The "Undersides" of Painting, Writing, and Drawing:
Support, Substance, Subject, Suppost, and Supplice 175

To Save the Phenomena

For Salvatore Puglia

This text appeared in the journal *Contretemps* no. 1 (Paris: TRANS.I.T.I.O.N., L'Âge d'Homme, Winter 1995): 14–25, together with photographs of works by Salvatore Puglia in the following order: *Autour* (1987, 148 x 102 cm, watercolor); *Intus ubique* (1986, 50 x 64 cm, watercolor); *Als Schrift* (1987, 70 x 100 cm, tempera); *Hors d'attente* (1985, 160 x 110 cm, watercolor); *Présages* (1984, 24 x 34 cm, watercolor and Indian ink); *Croce e Delizia* (1986, 20 x 28 cm, watercolor); *He-2H.B.* (1982–83, 24 x 30 cm, inks and paper collage); *Aurora* (1985); and *Orso petroso* (1988, photograph).

After doing some work as a researcher in the field of history, Salvatore Puglia (born 1953) began exhibiting his montages in 1985 at the Galerie Suisse in Strasbourg. Since then, his activity as an artist has always involved investigations into the documentary sources of images, in keeping with a practice that considers history's traces as matter to be transformed.

In parallel with his exhibitions, he has published texts in the following journals: *Quaderni storici*, *Détail*, *Linea d'ombra*, *Revue de Littérature Générale*, *Vacarme*, *Lo Sciacallo*, *Mediamatic*, *Issues in Contemporary Culture and Aesthetics*, and *Any*. He has edited the collective work *Via delle immagini / Leaving Pictures* (Salerno, 1999) and organized two exhibitions: "Iconografie transitorie" (Rome, 1999) and "Memoria e storia" (Naples, 2001).

"To save the phenomena" (*sôzein ta phainomena*), or else "to save the appearances." The phrase is attributed to Aristotle, but he probably never signed it literally [*dans sa lettre même*]. One should one day (but when?) revisit the prejudice of attributions, as one says or does in painting, but this time, and with the benefit of hindsight [*selon l'après-coup*], with regard to what



Figure 3: Salvatore Puglia, *Vie d'H. B.*, 1982-83, 24 x 30 cm, ink and collage on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

philosophers actually say. They will have signed some rather unbelievable philosophemes.² Sometimes the philosopher writes for this blindness of the future perfect to the future perfect—in which he would like to rest, but having said more than he seems to have believed.

Commenting on the *De Coelo*, Simplicius transcribes this almost untranslatable formula, “to save the phenomena,” in Latin, a language that we use when we venture a hypothesis about an Italian painter: *salvare phaenomena*, *salvare apparentias*. One often relies on it when speaking of a hypothesis, precisely; one that, whether true or false, but preferably hardly credible, is still useful to predict, calculate, even explain the effects, after the fact [*après coup*], anachronistically, at last to *render* an account of [*rendre compte*] what appears (*phaenomenon*), in the radiance of the *phaïnesthai* and the brilliance of the visible. This will be a bit the purpose and above all the imprudence of what I am about to attempt now, the randomness of which increases with my hypothesis from the fact that the sayable here seems to belong to the visible and, always inscribed in its time, would not be able to justify any claim

to anything whatsoever without the assistance of a part and parcel of it [partir de la chose même].

On the subject of the phenomena, Roman writers, “read into overle,” have written that we shall also do so in our own time. Aristotle speaks of the phenomena. And this vocabulary of the phenomena brings us nearer to what has been the matter of painting. Let us not forget that Aristotle speaks of acquittal, speaks also of thought, thinking (*le rendre-penser*), of explanation, interpretation, of calculation. It would come a little later [*après*] it.

How can we longer in Greece. A hypothesis is in light of an event that would be the end, even though it exhibits its last moments, the Roman world: for I will not say the Roman world. The simulacrum of a world, the *Phaïstos* (the *sôterion*), will first of all in painting divests himself of the world. Whatman, in Europe, the one who takes the world, Greek, and Jewish, and Roman, is the world for him? And from him?

Let us draw and now give other forms to

How to gather ashes in painting? To gather them while looking at them [*regarder*], what are, ashes? In a word, how to save the thought word [*le mot, juste*], and by the way, to observe this word, it must be seen, for instance. Ash is in *Ashbox* just as we use this word as Ariadne's thread to lead a thread that we shall hold loosely and, like the hypothesis, with a somewhat distrustful saying, *must* [*il faut*] *at once*, *at the*

nothing whatsoever without being part of it. Without being at the same part and parcel of it [*partie prenante*]. Just to see at the same time the parts.

The safeguard of the phenomena, Aristotle certainly had none of it [*ne pas de cette oreille*], busy as he no doubt was having it out with the world (we shall also do so in our own way). In the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle speaks rather of "rendering"³ (*apodidonai*) the phenomena. And this vocabulary of restitution, of reproduction, or of compensation brings us nearer to what has always been attributed to the painter: the *apodosis* in question, the *apodosis* speaks of acquittal, speaks also of the exchange of the gift, the *apodosis* speaks of thanksgiving [*le rendre-grâces*], attribution, accountability [*le rendre-compte*], explanation, interpretation, translation, the delay between the word and calculation. It would come and paint following [*après*] the word "after" [*d'après*] it.

We are no longer in Greece. A hypothesis could guide my "saving the phenomena" in light of an event that would perhaps no longer inhabit the world, even though it exhibits its language. Or, in spite of so many hypotheses, the Roman world: for I will stop neither in pre-Christian nor in Christian Rome. The simulacrum of a soteriology, this doctrine of a savior, the Holy Savior (*sôterion*), will first lead us toward the risk taken by the painter in painting divests himself of Greek, Jewish, and Roman elements. What can, in Europe, the one who takes the risk of being everything Greek, and Jewish, and Roman still save? What salvation can be offered for him? And from him?

Let us draw and now give other forms to the same question.

How to gather ashes in painting? To put it otherwise, how to keep them while looking at them [*regardant*], and for that very thing that we must see, ashes? In a word, how to save them? Will it be by the word, will it be the right word [*le mot, juste*], and by the word "ash"?

To observe this word, it must be *seen* at work and *heard resounding* in the world, for instance. *Ash* is in *Ashbox* just as the ash is in the urn. We shall use this word as Ariadne's thread through the maze of this exhibition, a thread that we shall hold loosely and that we shall follow from afar, like the hypothesis, with a somewhat distracted gaze. This ash word, we must say, *must* [*il faut*] at once, at the same time, be seen and heard. Is

As they seem [*semblent*] without assembling [*sans (se) rassembler*]. In saying, they divide themselves and are shared, they no longer identify themselves, precisely, because while looking at us, they resemble one another [*se ressemblent*]; they do not sound, they look like words,⁶ which does prevent them from resounding. One thinks them at last because one no longer recognizes them. They dislocate their own duration as they say the same. They give (rise to) place [*donnent lieu*], they give this place in silence, the word seems to keep quiet all of a sudden while exploding when it "saves" into painting, as one says with words and as one should from now on no longer say, when the intruder [*intrus*] explodes into (*intus*) the mute space of the picture, when it explores it curiously, with the anxious curiosity of a viewer still wants to save that of which he divests himself. It explodes without ever allowing painting any longer, well almost, to expose itself, resounding, convoking, invoking in it the implosion of the very voice that gives us to think while giving (rise to) place.

Is it not so? [*N'est-ce pas?*]⁷

We inhabit, do we not,* the ashes of such an old history, when with Socrates and Plato, S. and P.,⁸ the thinkable or the intelligible (*noeton*) was embodied in the figure of the visible (*eidos*). A figure that may not be a metaphor. A merely apparent paradox, and whose appearance must indeed be saved: this is the condition for what could be called "logonomy," the very law of the *logos*. S. and P. had thought thinking under the law of daylight, and yet this optical assignation was not ephemeral. It will last until the end of the sun, which, let's not forget it, does not merely give us to think while giving us to see, not only engenders but also burns and reduces, will reduce everything to ashes. Can one save the ashes of the *eidos*? What's new under the sun, since S. or P.? The question will resound on its own in the night of this labyrinth.

His words seem to keep quiet, but at the heart of a howl. They are madmen pointing the finger at reason. They have just lost the normally so-called discursive function, now they are running wild: either in their alphabetical phonics, or in their graphic relentlessness, in the aphony of the line. But the sound and the line can no longer be heard, they no longer reflect each other. They go out of tune [*se désaccordent*], they are discordant with one another but justly (*Dikē: Eris*). The normally so-called discursive function, the old intelligibility is not really lost, the "deceased" [*la défunte*] is safe and sound, a survivor gone astray in the landscape, a still eloquent yet deposed ruin.

Pompeii lovers, their sublime graffiti. A monument in which the value of what saves decreases in time [*en mesure*]. Music.

So it sounds [*On dirait*], does it not?*

Such a work can first of all be read, can it not,* like a funeral oration for the old couple: not to S. and P. but to *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; and even better still to *Dichten und Denken*, to the alliance of poetry and thought. This alliance could be sealed only with the advent of the untranslatable. The poetic is what gives us to think language in the place where there is no language, the absolute idiom, that is to say, the proper name, at once calls for and insures translation. The poem is the untranslatable, the signature of the proper name, the singular event in what this or that metaphysics would call the "body of the letter."

Admittedly.

But this untranslatable is never absolute between languages, it is only between language and nonlanguage. It is this untranslatable, therefore, the thought of the poetic itself, that the inscription of language in nonlanguage, can deliver at last, give, if not render and save. No poem will give one to think the essence of poetry, the untranslatable [*imtransmissible*] history of a proper name, as a certain putting into work of words in the mute space of painting can attempt, if not definitely achieve.

You will say, won't you,* well, this is what poets do, they space out the words' sonorous visibility. Yes, this is what I wanted to say: then they are also painters of the family of the one whom I am speaking about. The essence of *Dichten/Denken* is to be thought in space, isn't it;* it spaces itself out "before" gathering in the ashboxes of spoken poetry (*Ashboxes* is also the title of a series exhibited in 1988) . . .

For it must be said, as long as the multiplicity of languages, Babel in a word, as long as the tower is held in language, as long as it *entowers* [*s'entoure*] and surrounds itself with words, it leaves beyond reach the ruthless gravity and the disconsolate chance of space, of space played against time, forever: the absolute untranslatability of *sight-speech* [*parole-vue*] out of time, of writing as such. And, therefore, of such and such a proper name, this one. As long as it entowers itself, as long as it rises in the midst of the word, in the element of the hearing-oneself-speak, it has time. It gives itself

... (I have to read). It has him
... Monument of nostalgia, P
... the hardened ashes. It
... (real history) and arises f

... something else. Absolutely
... name is pronounced, is it
... in itself but outside work
... of letters that exceed him
... the colored matter of a lang
... confined in the heart of the th
... about: in the ashtray of l
... *the not meum corpus*: without sote
... to you, see my name backwa
... quite the contrary, that never, ne
... myself dying. Each time I see you, f
... that one of us both will see the othe
... as we do—therefore—of this v
... will I see that very thing—that I s
... needs thinking, is it not:* the *losesa*
... *losesave* who?

Salvatore Puglia, for example. But ho
... this example without losing it im
... and in what binds the name to int
... Salvatore Puglia inscribes the other. Does h
... himself gives himself over to ins
... [page], typography, impression, impri
... clausal clause, inclusion. He types th
... the noun "name" for example,
... brackets, in the righthand bottom cor
... (1986), where the name's noun seems
... between brackets to the thing's noun (p
... have always preceded said inscripti
... [line], given place, and opened itself to
... inclusion, according to what is already
... Greek, Latin, and Germanic languag
... not a preexisting form or box in which
... the contents of words. The boxing-in
... tion, it opens in the penetration of an i

time to go around [*faire le tour*]. It has history on its side, and the odysseys of translation. A monument of nostalgia, Phoenician too, like the alphabet, Babel raises [*élève*] the hardened ashes. It raises them (like those children who are taught to read history) and arises from [*relève de*] their scattering.

Ashbox is something else. Absolutely untranslatable, not because it is mute (a proper name is pronounced, is it not*) but because it keeps words outside words. In itself but outside words, this funeral urn suspends man in a memory of letters that exceed him, downward, with all their size, held aloft in the colored matter of a language, the English language, the one once confined in the heart of the thing, the ash box, the other thing I was speaking about: in the ashtray of language, the selfsame dust loves me." *Hoc est meum corpus*: without soteriology, without assumption, see me speaking to you, see my name backward. "I see myself dying" does not exclude, quite the contrary, that never, never ever, never in full daylight do I see myself dying. Each time I see you, for example, *I know*, I think that I know that one of us both will see the other one dying and never will we die together as we do—therefore—of this very knowledge, at each moment. Never will I see that very thing—that I see permanently, such is the *eidos* of what needs thinking, is it not:* the *losesave* at once, in one single noun that is a verb. Losesave who?

Salvatore Puglia, for example. But how to aim? How to see the uniqueness of this example without losing it immediately in the generality of a concept and in what binds the name to intuition or the *logos* to the *eidos*? Salvatore Puglia inscribes the other. Does he really inscribe, S. P.? Apparently, he by himself gives himself over to inscription: incision, insertion, stamp [*pigée*], typography, impression, imprint, mark [*griffe*], graft [*greffe*], parathetical clause, inclusion. He types the voice, the verb, the word and the nouns, the noun "name" for example, and in Greek: see *onoma* between brackets, in the righthand bottom corner of the watercolor *Intus ubique* (1986), where the name's noun seems not to oppose but to associate itself between brackets to the thing's noun (*pragma*) in space, in the site that seems to have always preceded said inscription of the saying [*ladite inscription du site*], given place, and opened itself to the *in* or to the *intus* of penetrating inclusion, according to what is already a European setup (the triangle of the Greek, Latin, and Germanic languages). No, space does not precede. It is not a preexisting form or box in which one would confine the verb's tense or the contents of words. The boxing-in [*emboîtement*] is born of intussusception, it opens in the penetration of an intuition through the generality of the

THINKING OUT OF SIGHT

Writings on the
Arts of the Visible



**JACQUES
DERRIDA**

*Edited by Ginette Michaud, Joana
Masó, and Javier Bassas, with new
translations by Laurent Milesi*