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The Truth in Painting

will want to remove such a painting from his daughter's sight. It does not
deserve to last, to be taken as a model.

Artists, if you are eager to see your works endure, I advise you to stick to hon­
est subjects. Everything that preaches depravity to men is fit to be destroyed,
and all the more surely to be destroyed the more perfect the work... Who
among us would dare to blame the honest and barbaric hand that will have
committed this kind of sacrilege? Not I, who am nonetheless not unaware of the
objection that can be made to it: namely, how small is the influence that
the productions of fine art have on public morals. (OE, 471-72)

If the true criterion of posterity's judgment is not therefore resemblance
or truth but its dissimulation, what sentence will the tribunal pass in the
end on La Tour, on one who is neither the dauber eliminated by history
nor the academician whose longevity is assured? What place will this di­
abolical technician [machiniste] occupy at Bertin's table if it is true that, in
the final analysis, posterity prefers a creative, "poetizing" mimesis to a re­
productive one? If it prefers God to the devil, lies to truth? Diderot does
not decide, but the whole of the "Salon of 1767" implies it: he will never
be in first any more than in last place, given that the rigorous opposition
between the two types of mimesis is purely fictitious.

TRANSLATED BY JENNIFER BAJOREK

§ 10 Conjuring Death: Remarks on
The Anatomy Lesson of
Doctor Nicolas Tulp (1632)

It is a lesson.

A professor—recognizable right away, as he is the only one wearing a
hat (this is Doctor Nicolas Tulp, Amsterdam's top surgeon, a world­
renowned man of learning who presides each year over the ceremony of a
public lesson before his confreres)—is situated at the far right of a group
of seven doctors, his audience, arranged in a pyramid. At the base of the
pyramid, and in contrast with this group, there is stretched out horizont­
ally a cadaver. Standing just behind it, the professor (though his mouth
is closed, as indicated by the gesture of his left hand) is about to describe
and explain what had until then eluded their gazes but is now beginning
to be made visible by the dissection he is performing on one of the hands
and forearms: by the opening he is making—for that is what the word
anatomy means1—in the body, thereby bringing into the open what the
skin had covered and concealed, and what would have best been not seen,
so that its discovery seems to be the betrayal of a frightening secret.

The gazes of the seven doctors, each depicted with his own unique per­
sonality by Rembrandt—who, in accordance with their request and an
entire tradition,3 has painted a veritable portrait of each—diverge: they
are not all looking in the same direction, though they are all inhabited by
a common inner concentration, a particular quality of attention, which is
tense less out of fright than out of an intense curiosity animated by the
singular desire to learn and to know. It is through this common "scientif­
ic" gaze that these men belonging to the same corporation or practicing
body form one body [font corps]: they are held together there, standing,
staring down into some inaccessible depth, "holding eyes" in the way that
others hold hands in a circle. Theirs are luminous eyes, turned toward the light of truth.

Except for the hands of the professor and those of the person who seems to be taking notes (along with those of the individual situated near the top, the most distracted of them all, who lets one of his hands show outside his cloak), just about all that is visible of these persons' bodies is the head. Encircled by a white ruff, put into relief by it, the head stands out, detached, and rises above the rest of the body, which is covered up by dark clothing.

And with this dissimulation of the body, its fragility, its mortality, comes to be forgotten, even though it is exhibited in full light by the pale cadaver that is right there, purely and simply lying there, naked (only the sex is modestly veiled), in the most absolute anonymity. Those around him seem to be unmoved by any feelings for him, for someone who, just a short time ago, was still full of life, had a name, was a man just like them. Their gazes display neither pity, nor terror, nor fright. They do not seem to identify with the cadaver stretched out there. They do not see in it the image of what they themselves will one day be, of what, unknownst to themselves, they are in the process of becoming. They are not fascinated by the cadaver, which they do not seem to see as such, and their solemnity is not the sort that can be awakened by the mystery of death.

They have before them not a subject but an object, a purely technical instrument that one of them manipulates in order to get a hold on the truth of life. The dead man and the opening of his body are seen only insofar as they provide an opening onto life, whose secret they would hold. The fascination is displaced, and with this displacement, the anxiety is repressed, the intolerable made tolerable, from the sight of the cadaver to that of the book wide open at the foot of the deceased, who might now serve as a lectern.

This opening of the book in all its light points back to the opening of the body. For the book alone allows the body to be deciphered and invites the passage from the exterior to the interior. It is this book (and the opening it provides onto the science of life and its mastery) that attracts the gazes, much more even than does the point of the scissors that has begun to peel away the skin from the body stretched out there.

The book of this Lesson, which, on its own, balances out the rest of the painting, communicates with the many other books found in Rembrandt's paintings: for example, with that held open by Jan Six (in Jan Six Standing at the Window [1647]), who is depicted leaning against the opening of a window, his back turned to it, thereby suggesting that only the book provides a true opening onto the world and access to knowledge. It can also be compared with the one found in the Minerva at the Hague Museum; there, too, the book is open and luminous, supported by a closed book (the equivalent of the feet of the cadaver), while a draping droops downward, symbolizing the dispelling of darkness through knowledge.

The doctors of The Anatomy Lesson are gazing down at the book of science with the same attentive fervor as that found in other paintings in which the evangelists are poring over the sacred books from which they draw the confirmation of their message (see, for example, Jordaens's The Four Evangelists, mentioned by Claude).

In The Anatomy Lesson, the book of science takes the place of the Bible; for one truth, another has been substituted, a truth that is no longer simply confined to books, since it finds its experimental confirmation in the opening of a cadaver. The cadaver of Christ (for example, the one by Mantegna in the Brera Art Gallery in Milan, alluded to by the second Anatomy Lesson; that of Amsterdam) has been replaced by that of a man recently hanged, a purely passive object, manipulated, displaying no emotion, signaling no Resurrection, Redemption, or nobility. The cut into the flayed body thus also cuts into the religious illusion of a glorious body.

The lesson of this Anatomy Lesson is thus not that of a memento mori; it is not that of a triumph of death but of a triumph over death; and this is due not to the life of an illusion, but to that of the speculative, whose function, too, is one of occultation.

What is most astonishing about this Lesson is that with the help of a cadaver that is fully exposed but that no gaze sees as such, the cadaveresque that each living being, already from the origin, carries within itself comes to be hidden. If the spectator of The Anatomy Lesson does not shudder in anxiety at the sight of this painting and can even admire it in complete serenity, it is because he is dealing with an image, a representation with a pharmaceutical function. At the very moment when an opening toward the inside and the depths of the invisible is offered to the gaze, the painting as such remains sheer exteriority, a visible, colored, and luminous surface: Apollonian.
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Just as Raphael's painting of Saint Cecilia breaking human musical instruments, spurning them for the sake of celestial music, does not allow the spectator of the painting to hear the divine music, so Rembrandt does not show everything. He is attempting to show what painting has always wished to mask and to reveal what must not be shown according to the laws of an aesthetics of good taste, Diderot being here a prime example. (Diderot recommends that the Académie teach painters "the secret of using their talent to redeem the distastefulness present in certain natural objects," and he asks it to ban the in-depth study of anatomy and flayed figures, and to remain on the surface of things, on the outside, denouncing any views of the inside of the body as indecent, perverse, and treacherous. But Rembrandt does not, in truth, exhibit the entrails.

The same is true of the second Lesson, in which the cadaver nevertheless occupies a central place and is shown eviscerated, the operating physician having detached with a cut of the scissors the dome of the scalp in order to observe the cortical convolutions of a brain soaked in blood (something that is more difficult to bear with a neutral scientific gaze). The seduction offered by the colored envelope of the painting makes tolerable the sight of the flesh. Rembrandt's painting does not reveal the secrets of the living any more than those of its own creation. It does not admit that it, too, has entrails.

I would thus oppose to this first Anatomy Lesson by Rembrandt not, as is normally done, the second one, but rather a painting by Goya, either the Witches' Sabbath or the Pilgrimage of Saint Isidore. In those disquieting gatherings, everyone forms a single body through a certain quality of their gazes, oriented this time, however, not by an extreme interest in science but by a common horror and terror. Their eyes are turned not toward some present object, like the cadaver in Rembrandt's painting; but toward something absent, threatening, and unnameable.

The luminosity of Rembrandt's gazes, which express the luminosity of intelligence and science, has given way to the obscurity of the night and the expression of anxiety. The fascination of the gazes points this time to something absent that imposes itself and can be related to fascination as it is defined by Blanchot in The Space of Literature:

What happens when what you see, although at a distance, seems to touch you with a gripping contact... when seeing is contact at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze, as if the gaze were seized, put in touch with the appearance... What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image. . . . Fascination is solitude's gaze. It is the gaze of the incessant and interminable. In it blindness is vision still, vision which is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing, the impossibility which becomes visible and perseveres—always and always—in a vision that never comes to an end. . . . Whoever is fascinated . . . doesn't perceive any real object, any real figure, for what he sees does not belong to the world of reality, but to the indeterminate milieu of fascination. . . . This milieu of fascination, where what one sees seizes sight and renders it interminable, where the gaze coagulates into light . . . light which is also the abyss, a light one sinks into, both terrifying and tantalizing. . . .

Whoever is fascinated doesn't see, properly speaking, what he sees. Rather, it touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. Fascination is fundamentally linked to . . . the immense, faceless Someone. Fascination is the relation the gaze entertains—a relation which is itself neutral and impersonal—with weightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees because it is blinding.
“My Life” and Psychoanalysis

To Jean-Luc

I always wanted to tell the story of my life. The entire beginning of my analysis was me telling a story. A linear, continuous story, I never lost the thread: I “strung things together,” always knowing ahead of time what I was going to say: never the slightest break, the slightest gap, never the slightest flaw where a slip of the tongue might have a chance to sneak in, where something might happen. And thus nothing happened. From the other side of the couch, nothing. “My life” was met with indifference.

Everything “started” when I had nothing more to say, when I no longer knew where to start or how to end. At that moment, what I had recounted before came back, but in a way that was entirely other, in a discontinuous way, in different forms (memories, dreams, slips, repetitions), or it never came back. I understood that I had tried, by telling the story of “my life,” not to recount it—-it is too much for words—but to master it. I had been at once foolish and unfaithful.

My mouth then stopped being the place from which flowed a reassuring discourse—bocca della verità—and became a cave from which more or less articulate and intelligible words burst forth, cries whose extremely variable tone (booming, evanescent, barely audible, halting, melodious, etc.) surprised even me. I had never heard myself speak like this, and “I” did not recognize “myself.” Generous mouth, spilling its offerings of semen. Closed mouth, mouth sewed shut, pursed, sealed. Constipated.

What passes through my mouth in analysis, then, has nothing to do with truth or meaning. It comes up from my guts to be offered like a gift: it is up to the other to appreciate it. Thus, the analyst’s silence is intolerable. It is the sign not of an indifference to the events of my life, but of a depreciation of my most intimate possession. A blunt refusal of my gifts, of what comes out of my stomach, of what I produce: my merchandise, then, is shit! So it is just as well not to give anything, not to say anything; silence, at least, is golden. But this silence, too, is intolerable to me. Hence the imperious need to hear my words taken up and taken. Not in order that they be given meaning, interpreted. But to establish an exchange that might transform “caca” into gold. That might allow me to get up, to remain standing, and to leave. (January 1976. Fragment of analysis)

Nightmare: At the Margins of Medieval Studies

For Bernard

“By their frequency and by their character of emotional sign, a number of incantatory expressions are arrayed in the modern reader’s memory, engraving this strange adverb from another age. The ‘tant mar, i fustes ber’ [‘unlucky Lord, indeed’] before the battered hero, the ‘mar fui see’ [‘woe is me’] of the heroine in tears; that is about all that is left of Old French after it has been forgotten.”

I will be speaking here of this strange, unheimlich remnant of another age: mar. A relic neglected by traditional medieval studies, marginalized, considered unclassifiable, intractable. At best, with a reductive gesture common to grammatical description, it is placed in a well-known genre, that of negation, among the negative maledictions, imprecations, and interjections of all sorts available to Old French. It is placed in an unfixed class, constructed through proximity, a class that is marginal with respect to grammar, and this only after etymological research.

The work of Bernard Cerquiglini is meant to show that the “unmanageable” can be managed, the “unclassifiable” can be classified, all the while retaining its irreducible specificity. He points out the tie between the adverb mar and discourse, regulated discourse at that—a connection that had not been made previously. Abandoning the notion of etymological explanation (according to traditional philological practice, a branch of genealogical and patriarchal thought), which at its origin had turned away from syntax and substituted a systematic and structural philology, B. Cerquiglini demonstrates that the lexeme mar, that “segment of a vanished language,” is a constitutive element of medieval discourse, that it plays a role from which we can construe some of the major precepts, and that it heed a number of strict and complex constraints. In short, “syntax
Notes to Pages 224–233

11. See, for example, Beyond Good and Evil, aphorism 5.
12. “The itinerary around the table at the house of the wealthy Bertin, where the Abbé de la Porte, the editor of *L’Observateur littéraire*, is stationed at the least desirable end, will be described in almost the same terms in *Rameau’s Nephew*” (editorial note from the Garnier edition, OE, 507 n. 1).
13. Painting men as they should be is one of the three ways of imitating that Aristotle discusses in his *Poetics*. For the general opposition between the genres of the still life and the portrait in the eighteenth century, see Hobson, *The Object of Art*. See in particular La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Sentiments sur quelques ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure*, écrit à un particulier en province (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970 [1754]).

I admire all those imitations of nature carried to a certain degree of virtuosity and illusion . . . the representation of the simplest and most familiar human actions . . . All these objects, when presented with artifice and picturesque magic, will necessarily please our gaze and find a place in our collections. But the same is not true of history paintings . . . Besides entertaining us with pleasure and illusion, painting should still be a study of morals. (74-75)
14. See also the *Encyclopedia* article entitled “Encyclopedia”: “Those who came after the first inventors were for the most part nothing but their slaves.”

17. See the *Paradox* and “L’éloge de Térérence.”
18. “Naivété is a great resemblance between the imitation and the thing, accompanied by a great facility of execution. It is water taken from the brook and splashed on the canvas” (OE, 825).
19. “There would be no manner, neither in drawing nor in color, we would like to imitate nature scrupulously. Manner comes from the master, from the Academy, from the School, even from antiquity” (OE, 673).
24. For Nietzsche, in addition to the preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*, see posthumous fragment from *The Gay Science*.
26. Ibid., 14:305.

Chapter 10

This essay was originally published in *La part de l’œil* II (1993): 41–46.

Note from the editors of *La part de l’œil*: “Sarah Kofman kept her word, as she always did. She had agreed to contribute to this issue of *La part de l’œil* and had suggested analyzing the relationship between the body and the book in a painting by Rembrandt. Her friend Alexandre Kyritsos was kind enough to look for the manuscript and send it to us. Here it is, then, just as Sarah left it to us. From his conversations with Sarah Kofman, Alexandre Kyritsos relates a few details that deserve to be recalled here because they are part of the history of this text and thus part of its reading and interpretation: Sarah emphasized that this pairing of the cadaver and the book, both of them open and offered to the gazes of the doctors surrounded by objects situated in a play of light, offered, quite beyond the conventions of the genre, a representation of the scientific method. The book, a sum and source of knowledge, at once confronted and supported by the test of materiality in experimentation, gives a new impetus to the discourse of science, its texts and its commentaries.”

The translator would like to thank the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at DePaul University for its generous support of this work through a Faculty Research and Development Grant.

1. Claude Frontisi, *Klee, l’anatomie d’Aphrodite: le polypytique démembre* (Paris: Adam Biro, 1995): “The term anatomy can refer to several different things. First, dissection: one thus speaks of an anatomy room, of an amphitheater, of anatomical drawings, or of artistic anatomy. By metonymy, the term designates nudity (to show one’s anatomy) and even the sex (one’s private anatomy). Finally, beginning in the seventeenth century, the word is used in a figurative sense to refer to analytical discourse (the anatomy of a work)” (46–47).
2. See Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, posthumous fragment:

What is aesthetically offensive inside a man with no skin, bloody masses, intestines full of excrement, inards, all these monsters that suck and swell and pump, shapeless, ugly, or grotesque, and moreover awful to smell... This body hidden beneath the skin seems to be ashamed!... When he is no longer a physiognomy or structure, man is but an object of repugnance for himself, and man does his utmost not to think of this. (Nachgelassene Fragmente 1886–1889, vol. 9 of Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980], 460)

One should also read the chilling story by Georg Heym, "The Autopsy," in The Thief and Other Stories, trans. Susan Bennett (London: Libris, 1994), 65–67. After emphasizing the contrast between the dead person lying on a table, who has begun to give off putrefying odors and is turning completely white, and the doctors who come in ("friendly men in white coats with duelling scars and golden pince-nez"), the story goes on to describe the dissection or autopsy as a veritable butchery, sparing the reader nothing, making it difficult, in fact, to go on reading:

They approached the dead man, and looked him over with interest, talking in scientific terms. They took their dissecting equipment out of the white cupboards, white boxes full of hammers, bone-saws with strong teeth, files, gruesome batteries of forceps, small sets of giant needles like crooked vultures' beaks forever screaming for flesh. They began their ghastly handiwork, looking like fearsome torturers, with blood streaming over their hands. They delved deeper into the cold corpse, and brought forth its inside like white cooks disemboweling a goose. The intestines wound around their arms, greenish-yellow snakes, and the excrement dripped onto their coats, a warm, foul fluid. They punctured the bladder, the cold urine shimmered inside like yellow wine. They pouted it into large bowls; it had a sharp, biting stench like ammonia... His skin began to fall apart. His belly grew as white as that of an eel under the greedy fingers of the doctors who dipped their arms elbow-deep in his wet flesh. (65–66)

A text like this forces us to see the intolerable and so breaks with classical aesthetics and their pharmaceutical function, with Apollonian art.

3. The tradition was that the doctors would be painted at the same time as their students so that the painting would depict the home of the corporation. In 1603, Pieter Isaacz painted the first Anatomy Lesson, four years after Aert Pietersz. had inaugurated the practice of painting the portraits of directors and their associations. After the Lesson of Doctor Van der Meere, there came The Anatomy Lesson painted by Miereveld of Delft (1667), the Lesson of Doctor Sebastiaen Egbertsz de Vry by Thomas De Keyser, and, of course, the two Anatomy Lessons by Rembrandt, painted some twenty years apart. [Translator's Note: See Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Joan Deijman* (1666), at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.] Cf. Marcel Brion *L'âge d'or de la peinture* (Brussels: Middens, 1964), 99ff.

4. The ruff collars here seem to play the same role that haloes around the heads of saints once did.

5. According to the account, the cadaver is that of a recently hanged man, identified by name and nickname as Abrian Adriaenz, called the kid, *Het Kind*.


7. These attentive men, bent on scientific knowledge, are contemporaries of Van Helmont, who was teaching at that time in Brussels and had asked his confreres to give up the two pillars of all science, theology and logic, and to replace them with observation and deduction through the manipulation of natural objects rather than through discourse.


[I]t is not to be feared that this *ecoreche* [flayed figure] might remain in the imagination forever; that this might encourage the artist to become enamored of his knowledge and show it off; that his vision might be corrupted, precluding attentive scrutiny of surfaces; that despite the presence of skin and fat, he might come to perceive nothing but muscles, their beginnings, attachments, and insertions; that he might overemphasize them, that he might become hard and dry, and that I might encounter this accursed *ecoreche* even in his figures of women? Since only the exterior is exposed to view, I'd prefer to be trained to see it fully, and spared treacherous knowledge I'd only have to forget. (1191)

11. Cf. Frontisi, who shows how the painter Fontana, on the contrary, exhibits in the painting itself its material infrastructure, its "anatomy" (Klee, *l'anatome d'Apphrodite*, 57).


Chapter 11

This text was originally published as "Shoah (ou la Dis-Grace)" in *Les Nouveaux Cahiers* 95 (1988–89): 67.


2. Translator's Note: Robert Faurisson is perhaps the best known of the French "revisionists."
Chapter 12

"Damned Food" was originally published as "Sacree nourriture" in Manger, eds. Christian Besson and Catherine Weinzeppelin (Liège: Yellow Now, 1980), 71-74. "Tomb for a Proper Name" was originally published as "Tombeau pour un nom propre" in Premiere Livraison 5 (1976). "Post-scriptum—1992" was originally published, along with a reprint of "Tombeau pour un nom propre," in La part de l'oeil 9 (1993): 84. "My Life and Psychoanalysis" was originally published as "Ma vie et la psychanalyse" in Premiere Livraison 4 (1976). "Nightmare: At the Margins of Medieval Studies" was originally published as "Cauchemar: En marge des etudes medievales" in Comment s'en sortir? (Paris: Galliéa, 1983), 101-12. The three translations by Frances Bartkowski ("Damned Food," "Tomb for a Proper Name," and "Nightmare") were first published under the heading "Autobiographical Writings" in SubStance 49 (1986): 6-13.

1. Translator's Note: Chat-rat verges on the French pronunciation of the name Sarah.
2. Bernard Cerquiglini, La parole médiévale (Paris: Minuit, 1981). [Translator's Note: The first French phrase is spoken to the hero in the Song of Roland, the second by the heroine Enide in Chrétien de Troyes, Erec et Enide.]
3. And hence its literary resonance. Cerquiglini's whole study begins with the inscription of mar in literary texts.
5. A distinction that Freud takes up from Charcot in Studies on Hysteria.

Contributors

Sarah Kofman (1934–1994) taught philosophy at the Université Paris I and was coeditor, with Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc Nancy, of the series "La philosophie en effet," put out by Editions Galilée. She is the author of over twenty books, among them Nietzsche and Metaphor (1993), published by Stanford University Press.

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Edited by Thomas Albrecht, with Georgia Albert and Elizabeth Rottenberg

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Stanford University Press
Stanford California 2007
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The editors would like to thank Chris Lewis and Philip Leider, for the inspired idea of putting together an anthology of Sarah Kofman’s writings and for their contributions to the early stages of this project; Werner Hamacher, editor of the Meridian Series at Stanford University Press; Elizabeth Constable; all the translators who prepared the translations especially commissioned for this volume (Jennifer Bajorek, Pascale-Anne Brault, Ben Elwood, Patience Moll, Michael Naas, and Ann Smock), for their attentive and thoughtful responses to Kofman’s prose and for their patience and understanding during the years it took to compile this collection; Jacques Derrida, for the gift of his untitled eulogy for Sarah Kofman, which serves as the introduction; Alexandre Kyritsos, Sarah Kofman’s companion and literary executor, for his stated enthusiasm about this project and for permissions; Megan Holt, M. J. Severson, and Megan M. Haisig at Tulane University, for their work as research assistants; Santhosh Daniel, former editorial assistant at Stanford University Press, for all his help and good humor; production editors Mariana Raykov at Stanford University Press and Deborah Masi; Julie Palmer-Hoffman, for her careful and conscientious copy editing; Emily-Jane Cohen, Assistant Editor at Stanford University Press; and Norris Pope, Director of Scholarly Publishing at Stanford University Press, for helping to bring this project, as Sarah Kofman might have said, to term. Finally and foremost, we thank Helen Tartar, editor during the formative stages of the project, for her guidance and her often expressed belief in the timeliness and relevance of this book.

“The Impossible Profession,” “Ça cloche,” “The Evil Eye,” “Scorning Jews,” “The Melancholy of Art,” and “The Resemblance of Portraits” are
The diversity and extensiveness of Sarah Kofman's body of work make choosing essays and book excerpts that would be somehow representative an impossible task, in some ways not unlike the impossible tasks of the art critic and the psychoanalyst Kofman has written about. And as we learn from Kofman herself, to make claims for the exemplarity or special significance of particular texts in an author's oeuvre, over and above other texts, is always a suspect gesture to begin with, and is usually destined in one or another way to fail. It is suspect insofar as it implies on the part of the anthologist the would-be "gesture of mastery" that Kofman so frequently finds in the texts she writes about. And it is destined to fail insofar as it is often the seemingly insignificant or marginal texts and passages in an author's body of work, rather than those texts and passages commonly regarded as paradigmatic or central, that prove to be the most telling about that author, as Kofman repeatedly demonstrates in her readings. So our task as editors of an anthology entitled Selected Writings of Sarah Kofman, given everything that such a venture conventionally implies, puts us into a double bind: between a demand and a necessary suspicion of that demand, between the demand and the impossibility of being able properly to fulfill it.

In making our selections, what we have done, therefore, is to relinquish any overt claims to exemplarity or comprehensiveness. We have chosen for inclusion in this volume a series of texts that speak in one or more ways to six topics with which Kofman's work has been in particular identified by its readers, and with which her work has in particular identified itself: (1) Freud's writings; (2) Nietzsche's writings; (3) the figure of woman in...
Western philosophy and metaphysics; (4) visual art and aesthetic theory; (5) Judaism and Anti-Semitism in European history, literature, and philosophy; and (6) autobiography. We have divided the book into five sections corresponding to these six topics and then assigned several texts to each section. Some of the included texts are taken from existing English-language publications and may thus already be familiar to readers of Kofman in translation. However, most of the materials in this book have been translated into English for the first time.

The book’s opening section, entitled “Reading (with) Freud,” presents the aspect of Kofman’s work that is perhaps most familiar to her English-language readers, given that much of it is available in translation: her engagement with psychoanalysis in general and with Freud’s writings in particular. Its first two selections are “The Double Reading” and “The Impossible Profession,” the introductory chapters of two monographs on Freud: L’enfance de l’art: Une interprétation de l’esthétique freudienne (1970), Kofman’s first book; and Un métier impossible: Lecture de “Constructions en analyse” (1983). The former is excerpted from The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud’s Aesthetics, a 1988 translation of L’enfance de l’art, while the latter, the introduction to a book-length study of Freud’s metapsychological writings, appears in English for the first time. The third selection in this section, “Ça cloche,” a 1981 essay on sexual difference and the undecidable economy of fetishism in texts by Freud and Jacques Derrida, appeared in translation in 1989 and is republished here in a new translation.

The book’s second section, “Nietzsche and the Scene of Philosophy,” is an obvious choice as companion and follow-up to the first section, given that Kofman returned to Nietzsche’s texts as often as she did to Freud’s, and far more frequently than to any other topic she wrote about. It contains two previously untranslated works: “The Evil Eye,” an essay on Schopenhauer’s and Nietzsche’s divergent views of tragedy and their far-reaching implications, taken from Kofman’s 1979 book, Nietzsche et la scène philosophique, and “Scorning Jews: Nietzsche, the Jews, Anti-Semitism,” a longer text originally published in 1994 in book form under the title Le mépris des Juifs: Nietzsche, les Juifs, l’antisémitisme. The latter is a relevant and timely contribution by Kofman to the ongoing debate about Nietzsche’s anti-Semitism and relation to Judaism, and we are especially pleased that this text, long overdue for publication in translation, has now been made available to English-language readers.

The book’s third section, “With Respect to Woman,” also presents an aspect of Kofman’s work that is comparatively well known to English-language readers, especially to readers in the fields of feminist theory and Women’s Studies. The first selection is an excerpt from another monograph on Freud, The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud’s Writings, a 1985 translation of L’énigme de la femme: la femme dans les textes de Freud (1980). The second piece, entitled “The Economy of Respect: Kant and Respect for Women,” an essay on the figure of woman in Kant’s texts on sublimity and the moral law, is a previously published translation of a chapter from Kofman’s 1982 book, Le respect des femmes (Kant et Rousseau).

The book’s fourth section, “The Truth in Painting,” introduces work on visual art and portraiture, a particular area of interest for Kofman toward the end of her career. In contrast to the material included in the previous sections, this work is likely to be unfamiliar to most readers of this anthology, as very little of it has thus far been translated. The section includes two chapters from Kofman’s 1985 book, Mélancolie de l’art, “The Melancholy of Art” and “The Resemblance of Portraits: Imitation According to Diderot,” and concludes with Kofman’s last text: “Conjuring Death: Remarks on The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolaas Tulp (1632),” an incomplete fragment of an essay on Rembrandt on which Kofman had been working at the time of her death in 1994, which also appears in English translation for the first time.

The book’s final section, “Judaism and Anti-Semitism / Autobiography,” contains a poem by Kofman on needful memory and potential obliteration of the Holocaust as well as a series of five short autobiographical texts, here brought together for the first time, several of which speak specifically to Kofman’s childhood experiences during the Holocaust and to her Judaism.

As readers at all familiar with her work are aware, Kofman’s way of quoting from the texts she writes about is informal, inconsistent, and idiosyncratic. More than a few quotations are not attributed, or only very generally attributed, to source texts, and some are incorrectly attributed. In addition, Kofman sometimes modifies the lines and passages she quotes, in accordance with her specific purpose or meaning or with her memory of the texts she is discussing. In the translations that were prepared specifically for this volume, the translators and editors have attempted to identify as many of the unattributed quotations as we were
able, quoting from and giving reference to existing English translations whenever possible. In some cases, we have modified the quoted translation, in accordance with Kofman's version of the passage in question, or with her meaning. In cases where no English translation exists, we have whenever possible translated from and made reference to an identified foreign-language source. Any attributions by Kofman of quotations to incorrect page, section, or volume numbers in a given source text have been silently corrected; the occasional attributions of quotations to incorrect source texts have been marked as such and corrected. In our translations of Kofman's notes, we have, for reasons of space, limited ourselves to making reference to existing English translations. In the absence of any English translation, we have kept the original foreign-language reference, supplying full publication information and page numbers where possible.

The previously published translations included in this volume have been left largely unaltered, except that we have updated their notes so as to identify previously unidentified references, and so as to refer to any English translations of Kofman's sources (including her own texts) that have appeared since the translations' original publication. Any inaccuracies in the notes and references have been silently corrected.

The intentional tentativeness of this book's structure should be noted. The five topical sections to which the individual selections have been assigned are meant to be entirely provisional categories. Although their use is of course a standard convention for organizing an anthology like this one, they are also susceptible to—and symptomatic of—all the limitations inherent in such a convention: the limitations inherent, for example, in the assumption of certain thematic categories (over and above others), in the assumption of categories as such, and in the accompanying reduction of complexities and specificities. We intend them to be taken as similar to what Freud calls constructions, or to what Kofman calls speculations: fictions whose function and very being is provisional and whose durability and self-identity is always open to question. It will be obvious to readers that most of the selections included in this book could be classified under several of the organizing rubrics, and that all of them speak to more than just a single topic and to more than their most manifest topic. In addition, the selections directly and indirectly speak to and echo one another across the topical lines between them, among other ways through explicitly shared formulations, motifs, themes, metaphors, and references. In making the selections that we did, we have therefore tried to bring out not only the richness and heterogeneity of Sarah Kofman's body of work, but also its surprising coherence. We encourage readers of this book to take as their guide Jacques Derrida's insistence in his introduction that we take into account, each time we evoke a theme or motif in the work of Sarah Kofman, the intertwining threads that weave and displace the insistence on a motif in the long series of books, each very different but each bearing in itself the metonymic reference to all the others, in what is a sort of open quasi system, a coherent network that is nonetheless without closure, at once consistent and structurally interminable, an incomplete—incompletable seriality.
Introduction

Jacques Derrida

At first I did not know—and in fact still do not know—what title to give to these words.

What is the gift of a title?

I even had the fleeting suspicion that such a gift would be somewhat indecent: it would imply the violent selection of a perspective, an abusive interpretative framing or narcissistic reappropriation, a conspicuous signature there where it is Sarah Kofman, Sarah Kofman alone, Sarah Kofman herself, over there [là-bas], beyond here, well beyond me or us here and now, Sarah Kofman who should be spoken about and whom I hear speaking.

Sarah Kofman would then be the best title, were I not afraid of being unable to measure up to it.

Finally—since the question remains that of the gift and of what it means to give a title—it seemed to me more just to speak, and for just this reason, of the gift in Sarah Kofman, of her gifts: those she gave us, those she left us, and those she, too, perhaps received.

The title would then be

Sarah Kofman's Gifts

And here are a few possible subtitles, to give you some idea of what I would like to say:

Here There
Open Book, Closed Book
Protestations

Here and there, we find the body and we find the book, the open book and the closed book. And protestations. Between the two, between here
and there, between the body and the book, between the open book and the closed one, there would be, here and there, the third, the witness, the testis, testimony, attestation, and testament—but in the form of protest or protestation.

I

One wonders what is taking place. One wonders what a place is, the right or just place, and what placement is, or displacement, or replacement. One wonders about such things insofar as a book always comes to take the place of the body, insofar as it has always tended to replace the proper body, and the sexed body, to become its name even, and occupy its place, to serve in place of this occupant, and insofar as we collaborate with this substitution, lending or giving ourselves over to it, for this is all we ever really do, we are this, we like this, and each word speaks volumes for lending itself from the very first moment to this spiriting away of the proper body, as if already at the behest of the proper body in question, following its paradoxical desire, its impossible desire, the desire to interrupt itself, to interrupt itself in sexual difference, interrupt itself as sexual difference.

What is a place, then, a right or just place when everything seems to be ordered, and seems to begin, by the mourning of this replacement?

What is a just place when everything takes place and takes its place as if the dying wish of the so-called proper, or lived, or living body—for when I say “body,” I mean the living body as well as the sexed body—as if the supreme affirmation of this headstrong living being were this testament, the oldest and the newest: “this is my body,” “keep it in memory of me,” and so, “replace it, in memory of me, with a book or discourse to be bound in hide or put into digital memory. Transfigure me into a corpus. So that there will no longer be any difference between the place of real presence or of the Eucharist and the great computerized library of knowledge.”

This great eucharistic paradigm was first of all, and perhaps will always remain, what is proper to man, I mean to the son or the father. For is this not a scene of men? No doubt, as long, that is, as we keep to the visibility of the scene.

We will perhaps talk later about the veil of a certain Last Supper scene, I mean the Last Supper [Cène] of the Holy Table. We will touch upon the veil of modesty that it lays out or barely lifts over sexual difference, from the promise and the gift of the body, the “this is my body and keep it in memory of me,” right up to the laying in the tomb and the Resurrection.

Sarah Kofman knew this; she thought it, I believe, and analyzed it—but she protested, yes, she no doubt protested with all the strength of a living irredentist against this movement to which, like all of us, and from the very first day, she had to succumb. It is of this protestation that I would like to speak, Sarah Kofman’s protestation, such as I hear it and believe myself, in my own way, to share in it.

I am not sure I have the right to assume you would know this, but you should be aware that Sarah Kofman was for me, in her own way, and for more than twenty years, a great friend. Yes, in her own way, but I was her friend in my own way, too. I will not be able to speak of our own way, which was certainly different, nor of our ways toward one another, whether good or bad. But were we not the only ones, she and I, and am I not the only one today to know, if not to understand, something about this?

What we shared within the public space, for instance in places of publication, had to do first with the exercises and interests, the aims and challenges of philosophy, of thinking, teaching, reading, and writing. These interests and exercises go so far beyond the limits of a short narrative, indeed of a terminable analysis, that I will not even attempt to speak of them. Those interested will find innumerable small signs in our respective publications. These remains are little more than elliptical greetings, sometimes just a wink; they remain to be interpreted by anyone, including myself, for I am not always certain from where I stand today that I am still able to decipher them.

I have spent the past few weeks rereading certain of Sarah’s texts with the feeling, the certainty even, that for me everything still remains to come and to be understood.

But there is no longer any doubt: such testimonies survive us, in calculable in their number and meaning.

They survive us. Already they survive us, keeping the last word—and keeping silent.

But the place of a survivor is unlocatable. If such a place were ever located, it would remain untenable, unbearable, I would almost say deadly. And if it appeared tenable, the speech to be held or the word to be kept there would remain impossible. Such speech or such a word is thus also untenable—unbearable.
The word kept untenable, held to be unbearable \(\textit{parole dé-tenue intenabLe}\).

In a text that I shall cite later, Sarah speaks of a "secret" that is held (a "secret they would hold," she says, the "they" being "doctors," men of science, appointed physicians), and it is the secret of a life, of life, of what she calls "an opening onto life."\(^2\)

How does one give an account of the secret of what is held or kept and so refuses itself in this way? The question is all the more formidable insofar as this unlocatable double, the place \(\textit{to hold}\) and the speech \(\textit{to be held}\) or the word \(\textit{to be kept}\), the experience of what is twice held untenable, is at the same time the most common experience of friendship.

There is nothing exceptional about this.

From the first moment, friends become, as a result of their situation, virtual survivors, actually virtual or virtually actual, which amounts to just about the same thing. Friends know this, and friendship breathes this knowledge, breathes it right up to expiration, right up to the last breath. These possible survivors thus see themselves held to the untenable. Held to the impossible as possible impossible survivors, so that some might be tempted to conclude from this that friends are impossible people.

We are that, we were that. I will talk a great deal, here again today, of the impossible. And of the impossible between Sarah and me.

Impossible: that is no doubt what we were for one another, Sarah and I. Perhaps more than others or in some other way, in innumerable ways that I will not be able to recount here, considering all the scenes in which we found ourselves together, all the scenes we made before one another. I sometimes catch myself again making a scene before her, in order to catch up with her, and I smile at this sign of life, of the life in which I am doubt still obscurely trying to keep her, that is, keep her alive. To "conjure death," as she says in her last text—which implies both conjuring it up and conjuring it away, to summon ghosts and chase them away, always in the name of life, to summon and chase away, and thus to pursue the other as the other dead. As if I were making yet another scene before her in response to hers, just so as to make things last long enough to say to her: you see, life goes on, it is still the same old story. . . .

But because it is all about "being impossible" here, perhaps we must accept this side of things. That is, if we can. We cannot say everything—it would be impossible to say everything about Sarah, what she was, what she thought and wrote, to say everything about a work whose richness, force, and necessity the future will never cease to appreciate. We can only accept this side of things \(\textit{en prendre son parti}\) and take up sides \(\textit{prendre parti}\).

I am thus taking up this side of things by taking a side—the side of Sarah.

So here would be another title:

Sarah's Side

Taking a side, then, within this side of things, I finally chose to speak of the art of Sarah. Her art—and this is the side on which I will wager—will have given me the chance to take sides.

I will thus speak of her art but also of her laughter—indissociably. We would thus have two additional subtitles.

Since the death of Sarah—and I owe it to her, as I owe it to the truth, to say this, assuming that I might at last be able to do so—since the death of Sarah—and what a death—it has been impossible for me to speak as I knew I wanted to, impossible to speak \(\textit{to her, to her}\), as one does without pretending to friends who have disappeared, impossible also to speak \(\textit{of her}\), as other friends, who are also mine, have known how to do—and have done so well, and were so right to do.

I thus had to try to relearn everything, and I am still at it.

Let us then not hasten to think of mourning, of an impossible mourning. For we would then run the risk of missing, or actually we would not fail to miss, under some clinical category, some general type of mourning—to which a certain guilt is always associated—this incisive, singular, and unappeasable suffering that I simply could not bear, precisely out of friendship, to transfer onto someone else, and even less onto some conceptual generality that would not be Sarah, Sarah Kofman herself.

For me, too, of course, Sarah was unique.

And even if I were still to blame her for my suffering, at least it would be her, and her alone, who would be implicated, and that is my first concern here. There would be nothing very new in this, for over the course of twenty years of a tender, tense, and sometimes stormy friendship, of, dare I say, an impossible friendship, impossible right up to the end, we often blamed one another. She would make fun of me, she in me would once more take me to task, were I to try to deny, transfigure, sublimate, or idealize this long story.

Against such a lie, she would once again be right.

Among all the things we shared (I have already said that I would not be
able to count them, and besides, the texts bear witness to them to a certain point, there was this protestation (a word I prefer to accusation), of which I would like to let something be heard through her laughter and her art.

I will thus venture a few words to try to say what I believe I can hear through her art and her laughter, as well as through her interpretation of both art and laughter, which, it seems to me, carries through all her work and, from her body, carries all the books in the great body of work she has left us.

According to the hypothesis I am going to put before you, Sarah interpreted laughter like an artist, she laughed like an artist but also laughed at art, like an artist and in the name of life, not without knowing that neither art nor laughter saves us from pain, anxiety, illness, and death. For she knew these things better than anyone else: pain, anxiety, illness—and death. Art and laughter, when they go together, do not run counter to suffering, they do not ransom or redeem it but live off it; as for salvation, redemption, and resurrection, the absence of any illusion shines like a ray of living light through all of Sarah’s life and work. We will later hear a few of her texts that say this better than I can right now. This ray of living light concerns the absence of salvation, through an art and a laughter that, while promising neither resurrection nor redemption, nonetheless remain necessary. With a necessity to which we must yield. This ray of living light was her lucidity and what I was tempted to call, a moment ago, by analogy, her irredentism, right up to the end, and even through the end.

Her art and her laughter, themselves indissociable, were also indissociably interpretations of art and laughter. Her interpretations were not only readings or theoretical acts but affirmations, themselves art and laughter, and always affirmations of life. When I insist that they were not only readings but also acts and experience itself, my point is not to exclude reading from this. For reading was always on the part of Sarah a firm, unreserved, unconditional, uncompromising, unrelenting, and implacable demand.

Implacable interpretations, implacable like Nietzsche and Freud, for example, and all those pitiless doctors of arts and of laughter whom she cited and summoned to appear and speak, inexhaustibly, sometimes against themselves, in truth protesting always against themselves, and against one another, while laughing it up.

For she, too, was without pity, if not without mercy, in the end, for both Nietzsche and Freud, whom she knew and whose bodies of work she had read inside and out. Like no one else in this century, I dare say. She loved them pitilessly and was implacable toward them (not to mention a few others) at the very moment when, giving them without mercy all that she could, and all that she had, she was inheriting from them and was keeping watch over what they had—what they still have—to tell us, especially regarding art and laughter.

Art and laughter were also for her, no doubt, readings of art and of laughter, but these readings were also operations, experiences or experiments, journeys. These readings [lectures] were lessons in the magisterial sense of an exemplary lecturing or teaching (and Sarah was a great professor, as so many students throughout the world can testify); they were lessons of the lesson in the sense of an exemplary teaching, lessons in the course of which, life never being interrupted, the teacher experiments: she unveils in the act, through experimentation and performance, giving the example of what she says through what she does, giving of her person, as we say, with nothing held back, throwing herself into it headlong, body and soul. The truth being in the symptom.

One of these lessons of the lesson given by Sarah is, for example, that this tormented being laughed a lot, as her friends know, like a little girl shaken by the irresistible joy of uncontrollable laughter on the verge of tears, a little girl whose kept secret does not age and whose tragedies have not stifled the freshness and sparkle of her innocent laughter.

Another of these lessons of the lesson given by Sarah is that she not only talked about art, painting, and drawing in others—or interpreted by others, such as Nietzsche or Freud—but painted and drew as well. And among all the things that she gave me, which I keep and keep looking at, there are some of these works.

And then, and those who knew her well know this, Sarah laughed a lot even when she did not laugh, and even when, as was often the case—and others here can also bear witness to this—she did not laugh at all. For she did not laugh everyday, as you know—indeed, it was quite often the opposite—but even then she was still laughing—and right away, both during and after. I want to believe that she laughed right up to the end, right up to the very last second.

She would cry for laughs—that is my thesis or hypothesis.

I would thus like to imagine that all the meditation we see at work in her work might resemble a long reverie on everything that might be meant by the expressions “for laughs” and “to cry for laughs,” following the
Nietzschean–Freudian interpretation of laughter, on the edge of anxiety, on the edge of the conscious and unconscious ends of laughter, of what is done for laughs, in view of laughing, by virtue of laughing, by virtue of laughter's apotropaic economy or economy of drives (I will come back to this in relation to Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* and Sarah's book *Pourquoi rit-on?* [Why Do We Laugh?])—yes, why do we laugh, and why do we cry?), right up to the post-Platonic or nonmetaphysical structure of fiction or the simulacrum, of what has worth only "for laughs," for example, the simulacrum in art and in literature.

In what sense were these great lessons of art and laughter affirmations of life for Sarah?

The affirmation of life is nothing other than a certain thought of death; it is neither opposition nor indifference to death—indeed one would almost say the opposite, if this were not giving in to opposition.

I take as testimony, and as a sign, even before beginning, Sarah's last text, "Conjuring Death," published after her death by Alexandre Kyritsos in *La part de l'oeil*. Like others, perhaps, I am tempted to approach Sarah's last text today so as to take by surprise, in some sense, but also to make linger these last words leaving her lips, to make them resonate with her first words, as I will later do, and to hear in them a final confidence imparted or confided to us—and notice I am not saying a last wish or last word.

Something for which we must be responsible, a confident confidence barely veiled, to which we should also respond or correspond.

This very beautiful text is unfinished. A sketch, then, brought to term—interminably, as if a sign of life. It begins with a sentence of just a couple of words, an *incipit* that fits on one line alone, it alone on the line:

"It is a lesson."

It is a lesson, she says.

She is talking about *The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp* (1632), by Rembrandt. Sarah interprets in this painting the strange historical relationship between the book and the body, between the book and the proper or lived body of the mortal, to be sure, but also between the book and the body of the body or corporation of doctors gathered there, a body whose gaze is completely occupied by the book rather than by the body.

There is too much to say about this text, so I will choose just a few themes, three or four, to let them speak to us today—of Sarah, from Sarah, mixing my words with hers. I read this both posthumous and living—so very living—text as an ironic autobiography of Sarah Kofman, her *autobiogriphure*, her auto-bi-claw-graphy, as she would have said, but also as a painting that has been re-painted and de-picted by her own hand.

It is, in the first place, the story or history of a preference for the book. We can there follow the narrative of a historical fascination with the book when it comes to occupy the place of the dead, of the body cadaver. Actually, I prefer the English word *corpse* here because it incorporates at once the body [*le corps*], the corpus, and the cadaver, and because, when read in French, *la corpse* seems to put the body in the feminine and to become an allusion to sexual difference, if not a respect for it.

*Une corpse*: here would be the subject; there would be the object.

I say "historical fascination" or "history of a preference" for the book because all this belongs to a history. It is precisely a reading of this history that this lesson on a lesson offers us.

For what does Sarah Kofman tell us of this corpse in *The Anatomy Lesson*? That this image of the corpse is replaced or displaced, its place taken by the book (as seems to be happening to us at this very instant), replaced—displaced by a "book wide open at the foot of the deceased." This open book organizes: an organ detached from the body, it has an organizing mission. Detached from the body, this quasi organ, this corpus, in turn organizes space. In an at once centripetal and centrifugal fashion. Decentered with regard to the body, as you look at the body, it centers or recenters in turn a new magnetic field; it irradiates it but also capitalizes on it and captures all the forces of the painting. An open book attracts all the gazes.

This book [*Translators' Note: lui—masculine pronoun*] stands up to, and stands in for, the body: a corpse replaced by a corpus, a corpse yielding its place to the bookish thing, the doctors having eyes only for the book facing them, as if, by reading, by observing the signs on the drawn sheet of paper, they were trying to forget, repress, deny, or conjure away death—and the anxiety before death.

Sarah Kofman remarks on this fascinated repression and insists firmly on it—the difference being barely perceptible between a fascinated repression and the repression of a fascination. Perhaps fascination has in
fact a privileged relationship with la corpse, with the possibility of the cadaver of a sexual difference, of sexual difference as cadaver. One would have to inquire once again, from this point of view, into what Blanchot analyzes under the words “fascination,” “remains,” “cadaverous presence,” and “cadaverous resemblance” in “The Two Versions of the Imaginary” (The Space of Literature).

But instead of seeing here a simple negativity of distraction (negation, denegation, lie, occultation, dissimulation), Sarah Kofman seems to sense in this repression, in a no doubt very Nietzschean fashion, a cunning affirmation of life, its irressippressible movement to survive, to live on [sur-vivre], to get the better of itself in itself, to lie by telling its truth of life, to affirm this truth of life through the symptom of repression, to express the irpressible as it is put to the test of repression, to get, in a word, the better of life, that is to say, of death, giving an account of life: to defeat death by affirming a “hold on the truth of life,” a “science of life and its mastery.” There would thus be a secret of life. Life would hold the secret of the secret, and all secrets would keep life alive. For the claim over such a secret, even if it is not justified, even if it is merely an allegation of anguished scholars, could still be read as a redoubled affirmation of life.

Lessons given: what this lesson on the Lesson, this physiological lesson on a lesson of anatomy, gives us would be not only a diagnosis concerning a repression or a denegation (later on, we will also talk about a “conjur ing” and a “conspiracy”), not only a thesis on the historicity of this repression and this denegation, but an at least implicit interpretation of the very concepts of repression and denegation, an interpretation of their ultimate function, of the ultimate meaning of their strategy. Under their negative or oppositional appearance, through their grammatical or strategic negativity, repression, suppression, and denegation would be in the service of an affirmation of life. Repression would be yet another ruse of affirmation, a trop [too much] and a trope, an excess and a figure of the “yes” to life, a number or figure of the amor fati. The science of life would itself be an art of living; it would have come from, and would take part in, an art of life. The side or part taken by the artist, the art of the painter (like that of the interpreter), would consist in interpreting the truth of this art of life.

The invincible force of this art of life, a force that is at once irreducible, irredentist, its time literally interminable, even in death, at the moment of death, the elan of an art that is at once all powerful and, in the end, powerless, given to failure, frustrated before what is called death itself, this impotence of the all powerful, this ineffectiveness of an all powerful that refuses to let up even though it is really nothing—that is what invites a good laugh: it is truly comical, it is not, laughable, crazy, off the wall, and we can receive from it, as a lesson, the inheritance of an art of living that knows a thing or two about the art of laughter.

That is at least what I think I hear in the following passage, which mentions life three times in this place where book, cadaver, corpus, and corpse exchange places.

They have before them not a subject but an object, a purely technical instrument that one of them manipulates in order to get a hold on the truth of life. The dead man and the opening of his body are seen only insofar as they provide an opening onto life, whose secret they would hold. The fascination is displaced, and with this displacement, the anxiety is repressed, the intolerable made tolerable, from the sight of the cadaver to that of the book wide open at the foot of the deceased, who might now serve as a lectern.

This opening of the book in all its light points back to the opening of the body. For the book alone allows the body to be deciphered and invites the passage from the exterior to the interior. It is this book (and the opening it provides onto the science of life and its mastery) that attracts the gazes, much more even than does the point of the scissors that has begun to peel away the skin from the body stretched out there. (My emphasis)

Sarah Kofman thus says “displacement” of an “anxiety repressed” and the “intolerable made tolerable.” In numerous texts, too numerous to cite and analyze here, Sarah Kofman has thoroughly examined the question of the relationship among laughter, jokes, and the economy of repression, the complicated symptomatology of repressed anxiety. She did so in the wake of a Freud whose work she interpreted without concession or complacency, particularly in Pourquoi ris-t-on? Freud et le mot d’esprit, this magnificent book to which I said I would return shortly and with which I will, in fact, conclude. As for “the intolerable made tolerable,” I might be tempted to read this economical formulation, this formulation of economy itself, as, if you will allow me, the anticipated description or prognosis—diagnosis of what we are doing here: to make the intolerable tolerable by looking toward books, toward Sarah’s great book in so many volumes, in order to turn away from her. But at the risk of persisting in this guilty turning away and of making the offense even more serious, all the while cultivating memory, I read this formulation of a last text (“the
intolerable made tolerable") as a quasi self-citation of Sarah herself: ten years earlier, in *Melancholie de l’art* [The Melancholy of Art], she used the same formulation in a paragraph that I would also like to cite, as a citation within the citation:

And what if the beauty that hides the evanescent aspect of all things were itself ephemeral? The decline of what makes the intolerable tolerable [here are the words that echo a decade later in the formulation I just read] would cause vertigo and disarray. This refusal of the mourning of beauty reveals the cathartic function of art, which is as mystifying as that of the speculative, a mirror capturing images that are too devastating, unbearable. To break with everything in art that responds to our desire for eternity is to dislocate the space of representation and meaning; it is to invent a space of indetermination and play—to open up a wholly other space. Thus beauty is never exempt from melancholy: it fails to get over philosophy, to get over mourning it, it cries over the collapse of meaning, the loss of reference and discourse, the "sacrifice" of the subject and the object. (back cover, signed S. K.)5

The “logic” of this argument is twisted. Its spiral frustrates every attempt at getting a grasp on it.

In the first place, there is a demystification. It cruelly lays bare a cathartic function, the sublimation at work in art or in the experience of beauty. It dissects everything that makes the intolerable tolerable. This cathartic function of the fine arts [beaux-arts] is "as mystifying as that of the speculative," and thus of philosophy, or at least of a certain knowledge on the subject of philosophy. This insistence on associating the speculative and art, on seeing in them the same mystification to be demystified, the same cathartic function, the same purifying denegation, the same occultation to be undone, can be found once again ten years later, in Sarah’s last text, the one with which we began, “Conjuring Death: Remarks on The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolas Tulp (1632).” We find there, for example, this sentence, which I will read again later, but differently: “The lesson of this Anatomy Lesson is thus not that of a memento mori; it is not that of a triumph of death but of a triumph over death; and this is due not to the life of an illusion, but to that of the speculative, whose function, too, is one of occultation.”

In the second place, the same demystification targets the melancholy of art or of beauty: an inability to get over or be done with mourning, the very failure of mourning that it nonetheless endures.

But, in the third place, and especially—and this is for me the most important point, the most difficult argument—the consequence that Sarah Kofman draws from this double demystification is not the injunction to get over mourning this impossible mourning, not to abandon art, beauty, or the speculative. Quite the contrary. In breaking with the “desire for eternity” that engenders at once mourning and the impossibility of mourning, mourning and melancholy, it is necessary—and here is the injunction or, at least, the necessity, in the most enigmatic, most fatalistic, sense of this term—it is necessary “to invent.”

It is necessary to invent, but what? Something with which to play and over which to laugh as an artist. It is necessary here implies at once lack or mourning and joyous necessity: “to invent” “a space of indetermination and play,” “to open up a wholly other space”—there where place is lacking, where the place is already taken, where there is only replacement.

A space of indetermination and play, a wholly other space. This is what she tells us, what she asks us, as what remains, but remains "to be invented." This other space would not be deserted by the beautiful; it would not be a desert of art and beauty. It would open the way to another affirmation, other but older, more ancient; and since it, too, remains to come, this affirmation is also younger than everything it endures, through, and thus beyond, if this is possible, the experience of an impossible mourning become possible.

A mourning of mourning or a mourning without mourning, therefore. An affirmation that no doubt passes through a denegation of denegation, with all its symptomatology, but a laughing affirmation of life that does not let itself be overcome by the negative logic—the doubly negative or dialectical logic—of this double denegation.

Here is, I think, were I to risk formalizing it in such a dry, cold, abstract form, Sarah Kofman’s logic, the one that is insistently working through and over her entire oeuvre: a laughing affirmation as an art of life that does not let itself be overcome by the negative logic: the doubly negative or dialectical logic—of this double denegation.

Or if you prefer, here is what happens to what we assume can be called desire: desire denies, like crazy [le désir dément].

It denies negation through or beyond denegation. That is its madness, but also the only chance of living desire. A denial of negativity—that is
the signature: a "not to deny" that in the very end denies negativity. This energy gives to the signature that concerns us here its singular form.

It is not a question of an end of melancholy, not necessarily, not only, but of another relationship, this time affirmative, to the melancholy that is endured, traversed, analyzed, thought through, set to work, set up for failure or frustrated in the setting to work. Forgive me for citing the dedication that Sarah wrote to me in 1985 in my copy of Mélancolie de l'art; I will do it quickly, for it consists of just one word, a playful and lightly ironical adverb: "For Jacques, melancholically."

Before the diagnosis, after the diagnosis of the diagnosis, before and after the lesson on the Lesson, before and after Sarah Kofman's diagnosis of the diagnosing attitude of the doctors, of the anatomical gaze and medical knowledge, the little word là comes up, meaning at once here [ici] and over there [là-bas], right there, between here and over there, between da and fort. It comes up, right there [là], three times. Three times to speak of the presence of the dead person or of the corpse stretched out right there, of the corpse of man's body [corps], of a man's body—and not a woman's.

Three times right there [là]: the same number of times as the word life.

And the whole lesson on the Lesson questions and teaches this here [cela], this right there [ce là], this being-right-there of the body [corps] or of la corpse in the corpus of the work of art.

It is often said (but we do not have the time to reopen or dissect this question here) that what risks being left out or unthematized in Sein und Zeit, and in Heidegger more generally—and it is perhaps in light of this sign that we might ask why Sarah Kofman never really shared so many of her closest friends' interest in Heidegger—what seems to be lacking, so the hypothesis goes, on the surface of Sein und Zeit and in the analysis of being-there [être-là], would be an attention to the original being of the corpse, which is neither a living Dasein nor a Vorhandensein nor a Zuhandensein. Beyond the original responsibility that obligates us before the dead, and first of all before the corpse, the original being-there of the body of the other who has died (this strange responsibility that is perhaps the first and the ultimate, the extreme responsibility, the source of every other) seems to require, like the animal, and then like the living in general, an

other, a fourth (categorical or existential) concept. And then there would be that other possible evasion in Heidegger, the one having to do in fact with art, with fictionality or the simulacrum, with the "for laughs" in the work of art, and singularly so in painting, and in particular in its relationship to the unconscious—yet a third reason, perhaps, why Heidegger appears to have had so little appeal for Sarah Kofman, not to mention sexual difference, which, like the corpse, is consigned to a certain silence in Sein und Zeit—and not to mention, especially, the rest, a more than suffocating rest, the worst, what took place over there [là-bas], in 1942, near Rue Ordener. Between Rue Ordener and Rue Labat.

What is at stake here is indeed the being-right-there (here and over there) of the corpse. Three times the adverb là [Translators' Note: like the musical note "la"]) comes to set the tone. Three times it comes to localize both the body of death and its taking-place in the work, the work of art, its representation, as we say, in a painting, although it is already, as dead, framed or displayed in the anatomical exhibition, which is also a work or operation between the eye and the hand; gaze, surgery, dissection.

So here are the three làs, and then voilà, there it is, a gift of modesty, only a veil there [un voile est là] to veil the sex, the being-right-there of (the) sex, that is to say, sexual difference:

And with this dissimulation of the body, its fragility, its mortality, comes to be forgotten, even though it is exhibited in full light by the pale cadaves that is right there [là], purely and simply lying there, naked (only the sex is modestly veiled), in the most absolute anonymity. (My emphasis)

What is most remarkable here is the insistence on anonymity, on the loss of the name in the being-right-there of the corpse; it is as if death cut the name off in the midst of life, severed the name from the living one who bore it, and this would be precisely its work as death, the operation proper to it; as if death separated the name and the body, as if it tore the name away from the body, as if, as a result, everywhere the name were detached from the body—and this happens to us all the time, especially when we speak, write, and publish—we were attesting, right there, to death, as if we were witnessing to it, all the while protesting against it:

Those around him seem to be unmoved by any feelings for him, for someone who, just a short time ago, was still full of life, had a name [and Sarah takes
pleasure in recalling in a note the child, the little boy, under the name of this corpse: "According to the account, the cadaver is that of a recently hanged man, identified by name and nickname as Abrian Adriaenz, called the kid, Het Kind], was a man just like them. Their gazes display neither pity, nor terror, nor fright. They do not seem to identify with the cadaver stretched out there. They do not see in it the image of what they themselves will one day be, of what, unbeknownst to themselves, they are in the process of becoming. (My emphases)

In other words, this there, this right there, which they hold at a distance to disrupt an identification that they unconsciously fear, is also, right here, the place of their unbeknowing, to wit, that which they are here and now unwittingly in the process of becoming—according to the process of life and the process of art, two processes to which they are, in all the senses of this word, exposed, three times exposed without knowing it: exposed to gazes or looks when they believe themselves to be looking; exposed as mortals, as living beings destined to die; and exposed in the painting as a work of art and by the work of art.

They do not see in it the image of what they themselves will one day be, of what, unbeknownst to themselves, they are in the process of becoming.

They are not fascinated by the cadaver, which they do not seem to see as such.

They are thus seen not seeing, and, visible as nonseeing, visible as blinded, they are being diverted, distracted from the fascination for that thing there, diverted by the distracting distance of this right there; and this distraction is their very position of objective knowing or learning, their very gaze, their point of view, and their doctoral objectivation:

... and their solemnity is not the sort that can be awakened by the mystery of death.

They have before them not a subject but an object, a purely technical instrument that one of them manipulates in order to get a hold on the truth of life. The dead man and the opening of his body are seen only insofar as they provide an opening onto life, whose secret they would hold. The fascination is displaced....

A moment ago, we were told that they are not fascinated, not fascinated by the cadaver, but that did not mean that they are not fascinated at all: they have simply turned from one fascination to another, the fascination simply being displaced:

... and with this displacement, the anxiety is repressed, the intolerable made tolerable, from the sight of the cadaver to that of the book wide open at the foot of the deceased, who might now serve as a lectern.

This opening of the book in all its light points back to the opening of the body. For the book alone allows the body to be deciphered and invites the passage from the exterior to the interior. It is this book (and the opening it provides onto the science of life and its mastery) that attracts the gazes, much more even than does the point of the scissors that has begun to peel away the skin from the body stretched out there. (My emphasis)

"The fascination is displaced." I suggested earlier that the statement "they are not fascinated" still implies fascination. The repression of fascination is a repression fascinated by what it represses, and which it simply submits to a topical translation, to a change of place, in a play between the here and the over there. In the text by Blanchot that I mentioned a moment ago, which also ends with an analysis of "fascination," the place of the cadaver is not simply situated "over there." It makes of the here an over there, so that the cadaver becomes in the first place a cadaver of the here, thus reminding us of a "distance" "in the heart of the thing." The distance does not happen to the thing, as if it could also sometimes, by accident, not happen to it. No, "here the distance is in the heart of the thing" (my emphasis).6

The cadaverous presence establishes a relation between here and nowhere. The quiet that must be preserved in the room where someone dies and around the deathbed gives a first indication of how fragile the position par excellence is. The cadaver is here, but here in its turn becomes a cadaver: it becomes "here below" in absolute terms, for there is not yet any "there above" to be exalted.

(It would be necessary to follow the consequences of this discourse on the "aid of the remote" that brings to idealization, to the "idealism" of art, "no guarantee other than a cadaver"—and on "the cadaverous resemblance" as wandering and haunting: not the "unreal visitation of the ideal," but the spectrality of the deceased, his wandering over there, restless, beyond any sojourn, far from any dwelling.)
This would be another way of saying that the science of life, along with the book, along with the corpus and the corporation, do indeed fascinate, and let themselves be fascinated, and so displace attention, and replace, repress, deny, and divert, distracting one from death as much as from life, to be sure, but always in the name of life. These are at once symptoms and affirmations of a life that, in the end, as the unconscious that it is, does not know and does not want to know death, wants not to know it, actively wanting this before reactively doing so.

Here is a lesson, then, concerning what we do, in place of death, when we write or read books, when we talk about one book in lieu of another. Sarah points a finger at these doctors, denouncing them to some extent, for having suddenly become indifferent, all taken up by the book, apparently "unmoved by any feelings for him, for someone who, just a short time ago, was still full of life, had a name, was a man just like them"—and whom the book of science, just like the effect of the corpse, returns to anonymity.

When she writes "had a name, was a man just like them," I do not know if in naming this link between name and man [homme], she names in man homo or vir. One and the other, one or the other, the slash between and or, and/or between or and.

Sarah is not content simply to situate the singular occurrence [instance] of the book in this Anatomy Lesson. She sketches out a history of the book in the work of art, particularly in the pictorial corpus of Rembrandt. Each book has, in some sense, a pictorial genealogy. It is not enough just to decipher, in the thematic content of a painting, the role or meaning of an element like the book wide open at the foot of the deceased has there, with respect, that is, to the other spectators or gazes in the painting ("the anxiety repressed," "the intolerable made tolerable," and so forth). One must also inscribe this power of the book, like a metonymy, in the series of books that haunt the corpus of Rembrandt, the whole artistic oeuvre of Rembrandt. (I insist, all too briefly of course, on this necessity, in order to recall what should here be our law: to take into account, each time we evoke a theme or motif in the work of Sarah Kofman, the intertwining threads that weave and displace the insistence on a motif in the long series of books, each very different but each bearing in itself the metonymic reference to all the others, in what is a sort of open quasi system, a coherent network that is nonetheless without closure, at once consistent and structurally interminable, an incomplete—incompletatable seriality.)

Sarah Kofman submits to this law, this law of respect for the work and the art of Rembrandt, when she relates this book to all of Rembrandt’s painted books and then to a history of the book in the West. It is a matter of clarifying the link between the internal analysis of this work, in its singularity, and what in this work “communicates” (this is her word) with the interpicturality of the works of Rembrandt with regard to the book, so as to evoke all the painted books, which are also paintings to be read, written about, and deciphered:

The book of this Lesson, which, on its own, balances out the rest of the painting, communicates with the many other books found in Rembrandt’s paintings: for example [only one example, for lack of time, just as we here can cite only one or another example among all her works and books], with that held open by Jan Six (in Jan Six Standing at the Window [1647]), who is depicted leaning against the opening of a window, his back turned to it, thereby suggesting that only the book provides a true opening onto the world and access to knowledge. (My emphasis)

This library or gallery of books within Rembrandt’s art gallery is itself reinscribed, as we come to see, in a larger library. Without getting lost in it, Sarah in some sense depicts, by giving it to be read, this library en abyme, which includes the Book, the Bible, within the book of science, but also the book of science within the Bible, as all the former did was supplement or supplant the latter, coming in its place, occupying its space, serving in place of a Bible for which it is still the substitute or metonymy:

It [the book of Rembrandt, the whole book of Rembrandt] can also be compared with the one found in the Minerva at the Hague Museum; there, too, the book is open and luminous, supported by a closed book (the equivalent of the feet of the cadaver), while a draping droops downward, symbolizing the dispelling of darkness through knowledge.

And just as she is about to draw a double lesson, what she calls the “lesson of this Anatomy Lesson,” her own lesson, Sarah Kofman makes a gesture that I would regard as a sort of initialing. It is like the short stroke, the economic signature that was always hers, the logic of a testimonial idiom: her affirmation, her protestation in the name of life. She ends up affirming the triumph of life, as Shelley would have said, not the triumph of death but the triumph over death—not through a denegation regarding
Though uncompromising in her analysis of a speculation, this ruse of the speculative whose economy remains in the service of occultation and repression, indeed of sublimation or denegation, Sarah Kofman nonetheless detects in it the work of art, that is to say, art's work. She does so in order both to have some fun with it and to subscribe to it, to laugh at it but also to approve in it, to love, affirm, and repeat in it, the affirmation of art. She decipherers in it, or once again sees in it, the invincible triumph of life. This becomes clear when the word life gets drawn into a strange syntax: not illusory life or, as she says, "life of an illusion," the "religious illusion of a glorious body," which she had just mentioned, but life again, the life of the speculative, insofar as it remains, even in its function of occultation or illusion, the nonillusory life of an illusion, manifesting, affirming, and still holding on to life, carrying it living right to its limit.

The subject denies [dément]—denegation, and that is perhaps the logic of protestation, of a protestation that says not(t) without illusion, that says not without illusion, no without illusion to the illusion and the denegation of death, no to a death conspired or conjured away. ("Conjuring Death" is the title of this last text on the Anatomy Lessons, which shows, in short, the body or corporation of doctors as the gathering of a conspiring or a conspiracy [conjuration]: the body of the corporation is the body of a conspiracy, the oath, intrigue, and plot of a social body that will do anything to conjure away death.) But this no to conjuring death is not spoken in the name of death; it speaks still in the name of life, of the work of art and of the book of life. It is inscribed in the book of life, in the book of the living, there where, it is crazy to deny it, it denies like crazy [ça dément]—in the name of a life that knows that the name of life, as we have said, is not life. Yes, not(t) without any illusion.

Some might consider my granting such a privilege to this last text, to the reaffirmation of the work of life as work of art, to be a stratagem on my part, a ruse to conjure away death in my turn, and, through this ruse, which I do not deny, a sort of protestation against her death: a protestation, which is to say a sort of testimony so as to attest to what was in her a constant protestation. A lesson in protestation. In nonnegative protestation. But also a lesson in the fact that "protestation" will have been, I now realize as I listen to all the resonances of this word, the privileged mode, the most constant and most common tonality of our face-to-face encounters.

Throughout our entire friendship, during decades of work and shared concerns, we protested, sometimes even against one another, right up until the end, and I catch myself still protesting. I catch myself still making scenes before her, as I said earlier, and I smile over this, while smiling to...
her, as if over a sign of life in reconciliation. And when it comes to scenes, I have to say that I will never be able to make as many as she; I will never catch up.

I began with the end; I would now like to end with the beginning. "Some twenty years apart," as I emphasized and repeated earlier when quoting her on the two works of Rembrandt that bear the title The Anatomy Lesson.

Some twenty years apart.

Had I the time, I would tell you how I reread today what worked, for more than twenty years, as this protestation of life devoted to art and laughter. More than twenty years ago, Sarah came to see me for the first time, already in order to tell me, among other things, that she protested or objected to something I had ventured in "Plato's Pharmacy." Everything thus began with this scene. When, after becoming friends, we chose together, or so I thought, the title of her first book, The Childhood of Art, I did not understand or recognize what I understand better today, after having read Smothered Words (between Blanchot and Antelme, in the wake of Auschwitz), and Rue Ordener, Rue Labat, namely, that this first book—so rich, so sharp, so perfectly lucid in its reading of Freud—was also the childhood of the art, the child's play, of Sarah Kofman. An autobiographical anamnesis, an autobiogriffure. All the places—of the father, of the mothers, of the substitution of mothers, of laughter and life as works of art—were there already acknowledged, rigorously assigned.

Because I do not want to keep you too long, and because it is impossible for me to develop here all the necessary analyses, I will cite just a couple of passages. They will at least give you some indication of the direction in which I would have gone, the sides I would have taken. I select these quotes while underscoring at the same time a thematics of the gift, but of the gift of life, a gift that seems to run throughout all of Sarah's work, the gift of a life that is, in truth, given again, given back [redonnée].

I would like, in conclusion, to pause in the vicinity of this gift given back, not far from a joke and from Pourquoi rit-on?, published midway, about ten years ago.

But what does it mean "to give back" when we are talking about life? In what way might a giving imply a giving back, as if giving back came before giving, in a reaffirmation of the gift that does not amount to returning the gift but to giving it once more? Perhaps also to accepting, by affirming, by reaffirming, the given gift: yes, yes to the gift received. And perhaps to forgiveness as well. And what if this question held that of art in reserve? What would art have to do—with what would it have in view or give to be viewed, give to live or give to laugh—with protestation? And with the gift of the gift? With the gift given back? Perhaps with forgiveness?

Already in the introduction to The Childhood of Art, Sarah asks the question of the gift and announces that she will develop it further in the final chapter. She asks the question of the gift for art as a gift bestowed by life, where psychoanalysis at once admits its limits and introduces "a radically new conception" (CA, 5):

[Freud] acknowledges just as openly the limits of psychoanalysis, which are repeated in all his works. Completely outside its province are the "esthetic appreciation of a work of art" or of the artist's formal procedures on the one hand, which properly belong to aestheticians, and on the other, the explanation of the artistic "gift," genius, and the possibility of creation. . . . What lies this side of it—the gift, genius—remains a mysterious enigma that absolutely escapes all scientific knowledge. By virtue of this gift, the artist is an inexplicable being, exceptional and favored by the gods. Does Freud accept this theological and ideological conception of the artist? That is the question. But does the claim that the "gift" cannot be explained by psychoanalysis amount to an affirmation that it is, by its very nature, mysterious? For Freud, it is biological science that should take up the problem where psychoanalysis leaves off, for it is life that bestows "gifts." . . . But does this substitution of life for God repeat differently the same ideological conception of art, or does it introduce a radically new conception? (CA, 4–5)

While providing an elaborate answer to this question of the gift, and of the gift as the gift of life, the gift of life given by life, The Childhood of Art underscores in passing that Jokes (to which I will turn in a moment to conclude) "leads to the second moment in Freud's procedure, which is begun in the truly pivotal essay on Gradiva" (CA, 24).

In the course of lifting one mask after another (the word unmasking coming up with great frequency), and of treating the question of the mask and of the veil between Nietzsche and Freud, especially around sexual difference, modesty, and its unveilings—veilings, this book recalls the gift at each moment, the reaffirmation of the gift in the act of giving back. The reaffirmation of the gift, no less or earlier than the restitution of the gift.
I shall select just a single example of this. The scene of the gift also opens up the scene of laughter [rire] or of the smile [sourire], of the smile of the mother. Can we not reread these pages here and there, between here and there, between, so to speak, Rue Ordener and Rue Labat? Would we not see a little girl laughing and smiling through all these disasters, disasters one does not survive, that one can at the very most only survive? (Need I specify, as I am about to smile at this smile, that no feeling of familiarity can ever come to interrupt an abyssal vertigo? Those close to us remain absolutely unknown to us, unreachable, farther away even for being "close": right up until the end, up until the end beyond all knowledge.)

When Freud, talking about the smile of the Mona Lisa, speaks of what led Leonardo da Vinci to "a glorification of motherhood" that consists in "giving back (wiederzugeben) to his mother the smile that he had found in the noble lady,"[10] Sarah comments, distinguishing the giving back from the restitution of a first giving out:

The term to "give back" is obviously very ambiguous here, and seems to imply that the mother initially possessed the smile. However, the context [attention to the context and to the order of reasons in the text is always taken into consideration with an impeccable sense for the law of the text] makes it clear that "to give back" means to give for the second time in a work of art, the St. Anne. For St. Anne is but another symbolic substitute for the mother. The "gift" is as unconscious as the memory of his mother sparked by the sight of Mona Lisa. What must be understood is that the production of the first work was the occasion for a return of the repressed, which allowed Leonardo to express clearly the fantasies of his childhood history. That is why the second painting [here again there is a second painting] was necessary: it repeats [the smile of the first, even more than twenty years in advance, already to be roaming about Rue Ordener, Rue Labat. For we there read this about one of the great figures for Sarah Kofman—herself a great reader of "The Sandman"—the figure of her almost homonymous Hoffmann: "When he [Hoffmann] was three years old, his father left the family and never came back to it [auprès d'elle: the feminine pronoun elle refers to the family here, though], so the storyteller's relation to his father was always one of the painful aspects of his affective life" (CA, 97, translation modified).

And we could continue with the first words of Rue Ordener, Rue Labat: "Of him all I have left is the fountain pen. . . . As it turned out, we never did see my father again."[12]

Rather than multiplying conjectures and conjunctions of this type from the final chapter of The Childhood of Art concerning "the artistic 'gift'" (CA, 149) (this is a subtitle and the word "gift" is in quotation marks), I will simply situate what is repeatedly underscored about this "gift" of the artist attributed by Freud to a "kindly nature" (CA, 150). This economy of the gift reckons always with a figure of nature, one of the three figures of woman (the mother, the companion, and the corruptor of death). Nature is here called "the earth, characterized as a nurturing mother" (CA, 152). We could reread and relate this entire analysis to that found in "Damned Food" (published in Manger, 1980), "Damned food! And twice damned!"[13] little Sarah finds herself caught, and for life, between the excesses of the "you must eat" of the mother and the "you must not eat everything" of the father.

Indeed, you must eat. I have already taken up too much of your time.
Introduction

Instead of spending the time we really ought to around the final pages of The Childhood of Art (around what is said there about laughter, about the enigma of art as life, about artistic life, about what Nietzsche calls “laughing at oneself” [CA, 224 n. 14], about the phrase “one can either cry or laugh” on the next-to-last page [CA, 173], about the world that, for Nietzsche as for Freud, plays “an innocent ‘child’s game’ guided by chance and necessity,” when “the true art is the art of life” [CA, 174]), I rush toward a scene at the table, and toward laughter, as is often done in the most difficult moments of mourning.

Sarah dedicated a copy of her text “Damned Food” to me in 1980 by circling the title of the volume, Manger [Eating], in order to write the words “in the hopes of Eating together.”

Six years later, on New Year’s Day 1986, the dedication to Pourquoi rit-on? Freud et le mot d’esprit still spoke of the table. It read: “For Jacques and Marguerite, recalling the good Jewish jokes we once peddled at table, and hoping we can do it again one day.”

Now, what is the last word of this great book that says both everything and the rest about laughter, as well as about the apotropaic economy of laughter according to Freud? It is, precisely, the “last word.” The book ends in this way: “By way of conclusion, let’s give laughter the last word” (PR, 198).

But right before this last word on the last word comes a Jewish joke, a sort of postscriptum. It is a joke we had once told each other. Here is the postscriptum:

Finishing this book today, September 25, the day of Yom Kippur, I cannot resist peddling [this word was already used, recall, in the dedication, which was itself alluding to a subsection of the book entitled Peddling, whose subtitle is The Economic Necessity of the Third; and I recall that my last conversation with Sarah must have more or less directly concerned, at the time it was interrupted, a story about the peddling of history and the economic necessity of the third] this Jewish joke told by Theodor Reik [who has written much on the Great Atonement and the song of Kol Nidre]: “Two Jews, long-standing enemies, meet at the synagogue on the day of the Great Atonement. One says to the other [by way of forgiveness]: ‘I wish you what you wish me.’ And the other replies, giving tit for tat: ‘See, you’re doing it again!’ ” (PR, 198)

An unfathomable story, a story that seems to stop in its tracks, whose movement consists in interrupting itself, in paralyzing itself in order to refuse any future, an absolute story of the unsolvable, a vertiginous depthlessness, an irresistible whirlwind that draws forgiveness, the gift, and the giving back of forgiveness right to the abyss of the impossible.

How does one acquit oneself of forgiving? Must not forgiveness exclude all acquittal, all acquittal of oneself, of the other? To forgive is certainly not to discharge a debt. Neither one’s own, nor the other’s. That would be to repeat the evil, to countersign or consecrate it, to let it be what it is, unalterable and identical to itself. No adequation is here appropriate or tolerable. So what then?

As I said, we must have told this Jewish joke to each other, and probably while eating. And we must have agreed that it was not only funny but memorable, unforgettable, precisely insofar as it treats this treatment of memory called forgiveness. There is no forgiveness without memory, surely, but neither is there any forgiveness that can be reduced to an act of memory. And forgiving does not amount to forgetting, especially not. A joke “for laughs,” no doubt, but what about it makes us laugh, laugh and cry, and laugh through our tears or our anxiety?

It is no doubt first a matter of its economy, an economy powerfully analyzed by Freud, and then by Sarah Kofman questioning Freud. In fact, in the chapter “The Three Thieves,” in the subsection “Peddling: The Economic Necessity of the Third,” a note also speaks of forgiveness. It speaks of the economy of “pleasure given by the superego, the forgiveness that it in some sense grants, bringing humor close to the maniacal phase, since, thanks to these ‘gifts,’ the diminished ‘I’ finds itself if not euphoric, at least lifted back up” (PR, 104, my emphasis).

Without venturing any further in this direction, let me keep for the moment to a rough analysis of this Jewish joke: two enemies make the gesture to forgive one another, they feign to do so “for laughs,” but by inwardly reopening or pursuing the hostilities. In the process, they admit to this inexpiable war and blame one another for it reciprocally, as if in a mirror. That the admission should be made by way of a symptom rather than a declaration changes nothing as far as the truth is concerned: they have not disarmed; they continue to wish one another ill.

I will thus venture to say this, to address to you something that once again concerns laughter, art “for laughs” and the art of laughter, and to address this to you as if to Sarah, to Sarah in me. Allegorically, what these two Jews come to experience and what makes us laugh is indeed the radical impossibility of forgiveness.
A Jew, a Jew from time immemorial, and especially in this century, Sarah knew this and lived it better than any of us here, better in the worst of ways, for she was also someone who was put to the test of the impossibility of forgiveness, its radical impossibility.

Who, in fact, could give us the right to forgive? Who could give whom the right to forgive on behalf of the dead, and to forgive the infinite violence that was done to them, depriving them of both a grave and a name, everywhere in the world and not only at Auschwitz? And thus everywhere that the unforgivable would have taken place?

But the impossibility of forgiveness—let us not hide this from ourselves—must still be thought differently, right down to the most radical root of its paradox, in the very formation of a concept of forgiveness. What a strange concept! Because it does not resist the impossibility of what one would wish to conceive in it, because it explodes or implodes upon contact with it, a whole chain of concepts goes down with it, even the concept of the concept, which is now put to the test of its own essential precariousness and finitude, its own deconstructability.

The impossibility of forgiveness gives itself to be thought as, in truth, its only possibility. Why is forgiveness impossible? Not just difficult for innumerable psychological reasons, but absolutely impossible? Simply because what is to be forgiven must be and must remain unforgivable. If forgiveness is possible, if there is forgiveness, it must be a forgiveness of the unforgivable—that is the logical aporia. If we had to forgive only what is forgivable, even excusable, venial, as we say, or insignificant, we would not really be forgiving. We would be excusing, forgetting, or erasing, but we would not be giving our forgiveness. If, through some transformation, the fault, the evil deed, the crime, were attenuated or extenuated to the point of venality, if the effects of the wound were to hurt less, or were perhaps even to come with a certain pleasure attached, then the very thing that becomes forgivable is exonerated and can do without any forgiveness. Forgiving the forgivable thus forgives nothing; it is not a forgiving.

In order to forgive, then, one must forgive the unforgivable, an unforgivable that remains unforgivable, the worst of the worst: an unforgivable that resists every transformation of the I or of the other, every alteration, every historical reconciliation that might come to change the conditions or circumstances of the judgment. Whether as remorse or repentance, the eventual purification of the guilty party has no place here. In fact, it is not a question of forgiving a guilty party, a subject subject to transforming himself above and beyond the fault, but of forgiving the fault itself—which must remain unforgivable so that there can even be a question of appealing on its behalf for some forgiveness. But isn’t forgiving the unforgivable impossible in all good logic? If forgiveness must thus remain impossible, then it must do the impossible; it must be put to the test of its own impossibility by forgiving the unforgivable—and thus be put to the test, indeed become one with the test, of this aporia or this paradox: the possibility—if it is possible, if there is any—of the impossible. And the impossibility of the possible.

Here is perhaps a condition that forgiveness shares with the gift. Beyond the formal analogy, this might also mean that the condition of impossibility of the one is fixed on the other, the gift on forgiveness, or forgiveness on the gift. Not to mention the fact that one must also be forgiven for the gift (which cannot but risk doing harm, doing evil, for example, in giving death) and that a gift perhaps remains the most unforgivable thing in the world. Doesn’t the question that one day became imperative to me (“What does it mean to give in or to the name of the other [au nom de l’autre]?”; “Who knows what we are doing when we give in or to the name of the other?”)4—in order to suggest that this is perhaps the only chance for the gift—doesn’t this question let itself be translated into forgiveness? If I forgive in my name, my forgiveness expresses something of which I myself am capable, and this decision (which is then no longer a decision) is but the deployment of my potential, my power, the potential energy of my aptitudes, predicates, characteristics, and so on. Just as I cannot decide—decide, as we say, in my own name—so I cannot forgive in my own name, but only in the name of the other, there where I alone am capable of neither deciding nor forgiving. I must thus forgive what I do not have to forgive, what I do not have the power to give or to forgive: I must forgive beyond myself. That this is done in the name of the other in no way exonerates my freedom or my responsibility—quite the contrary.

The impossibility of the possible, the possibility of the impossible—that is a definition that resembles the one often given to death, particularly since Heidegger. And there is nothing fortuitous in this. We must think this affinity between this impossibility called death and the one called forgiveness, between the gift of death and the gift of forgiveness as the possibility of the impossible. The impossible for me, for a “me,” for what is “mine” or proper to me in general.
For where is forgiveness more impossible, and thus possible as impossible, than beyond the border between the living and the dead? How can the living forgive the dead? What meaning and what gift would there be in a forgiveness that can no longer hope to reach its destination, except within oneself, the other being welcomed or taken in as a narcissistic ghost within the self? And reciprocally, how can the living hope to be forgiven by the dead or by a specter within them? The consequences of this logic can be followed out ad infinitum.

And you know, I bet that this insurmountable limit—surmounted, nonetheless, as insurmountable, in the setting free of what is insuperable in the unsurmounted—is indeed the line that our two Jews have crossed—with or within the confession, though without repentance, of their reciprocal accusation. To admit to, to share, to entrust to one another this insurmountable test of the unforgivable, to deem oneself unforgivable for not forgiving, is perhaps not to forgive—since forgiveness appears impossible, even when it takes place—but to sympathize with the other in this test of the impossible.

Here it is, then—the ultimate compassion.

It is to tell the other, or to hear oneself tell the other, and to hear the other tell you: you see, you're doing it again, you do not want to forgive me, even on the day of the Great Atonement, but me too, me neither, a "me" neither, we are in agreement, we forgive ourselves for nothing, even when it takes place—but to sympathize with the other in this test of the impossible.

But I want to imagine that these two Jews in their infinite compassion for one another, at the very moment when they conclude that they do not know how to conclude, at the very moment when they recognize that they cannot disarm, just as life itself never disarms, I want to believe that these two Jews have forgiven one another, but without telling one another. At least they have spoken to one another, even if they haven't said that they forgive one another. They have said to one another, in silence, a silence made up of tacit understanding, where misunderstanding can always find a place, that the forgiveness granted implies neither "reconciliation" (Hegel) nor "the work itself," "the profound work" of discontinuous time, a time that is delivered or that delivers us from continuity through the interruption of the other, with a view to the "messianic triumph" "secured against the revenge of evil" (Levinas).

For here is the last aporia of forgiveness, the most artistic perhaps, the most gifted to make us laugh like crazy, and I confide it to you, as well as to Sarah, to Sarah in me, to Sarah between you and me, in order to end today.

On the one hand, when you forgive someone (for the worst possible wound, for example, or, more simply still—something that can redouble or compound it to the point of perversity—for the evocation or recollection of a wound), well, above all you must not tell them; the other must not hear, and you must not say, that you forgive—not only so as not to recall the (double) fault but so as not to recall or show that something has been given (forgiven, given as forgiveness), given back in return, something that deserves some gratitude or that risks obligating the person forgiven. In the end, nothing is more vulgar and impolite, indeed injurious or wounding, than obligating someone by telling them "I forgive you," which implies "I give you," and so already opens up a scene of recognition or gratefulness, a transaction of gratitude, a commerce of thanks that destroys the gift. One must thus keep quiet, keep forgiveness quiet wherever it takes place, if it takes place. It is this silence, this inaudibility, that is called death or that death allows. As if one could forgive only the dead (or at least make as if the other were dead ["for laughs"], in the situation of never again being there to hear or to receive forgiveness), as if one could forgive only the dead by making as if one were oneself dead (as if one were in fact not forgiving at all, as if one did not let it be known or, even, did not know it oneself). From this point of view, two living beings cannot forgive one another and declare that they forgive one another as living beings. One would have to be dead in order to believe forgiveness possible. The two Jews had the profundity, the rigor, the honesty to acknowledge this. Better yet, to declare it.

But on the other hand, and inversely, what would a silent forgiveness be, a forgiveness that goes unnoticed, unrecognized, that is granted unknowingly to the one who receives it? What would forgiveness be when the
person forgiven knows nothing about it? This would no longer be forgiveness. Such a silence in forgiveness would be just as harmful as that which the silence had meant to avoid. Wouldn’t a forgiveness that addresses the other only when dead (once dead, and even if their specter survives “in me”) be little more than a theatrical display, a pitiful simulacrum, at most a phantasm aimed at consoling oneself for not having known how to forgive in time? A reconciliation with oneself that would be of no concern to me”) be little more than a theatrical display, a pitiful simulacrum, at most what kind of forgiveness could come from the dead? It is true that this forgiveness of the dead by the dead, from one shore of death to the other, is the one to which we most often have recourse, our lives being made up of this, a spectral and phantasmatic recourse, a process of forgiveness, a historical forgiveness in place of a forgiveness that must remain irreducible to History, a forgiveness that gets lost in forgetting and whose nature is altered through excuse and venality as soon as true forgiveness, from one living being to another, the forgiving of the unforgivable, remains forbidden. A priori and thus forever forbidden.

So what then? To do exactly what is always forbidden, forbidden forever? To forgive there where it is forbidden, where it is possible because it is impossible? And even worse, to do what is forbidden on the day of the Great Atonement? There is no worse sin, no more dangerous profanation, so close to the moment when God writes you—or else does not—into the book of the living.

Let us recapitulate this properly scandalous aporia, the one at which we cannot help but stop when we stumble upon it: impossible, possible only as impossible, an impossible concept of the impossible that would begin to resemble a flatus voce if this were not what we desire most in the world—indeed just as impossible as forgiving the unforgivable—forgiveness remains impossible in every way: between two living beings, between one dead and one living, or one living and one dead, or between two who are dead. It is possible, in its very impossibility, only at the invisible border between life and death (for as we have seen, one can forgive only there where the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven are not there to know it), but this scandalous border does not let itself be crossed or surmounted: neither by what is living nor by what is dead.

Nor even, though this might be the unlocatable place over which all these questions keep vigil, by a corpse [une corse]. At what moment does Abraham reawaken the memory of his being foreign in a foreign land? For Abraham does indeed recall that he is destined by God to be a guest (gér), an immigrant, a foreign body in a foreign land (“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house,” “your offspring shall be guests in a land that is not theirs”). Presenting himself as a foreigner who has no home, keeping watch over the body of the dead, his dead, Sarah (the woman who laughs when told she is to have a child and then pretends not to have laughed”), Abraham requests a place for her. A final dwelling, a final resting place. He wants to be able to give her a burial place worthy of her, but also a place that would separate her from him, like death from life, a place “in front of me,” says one translation, or “out of my sight,” says another. And for this—you know the scene—he wants to pay, this husband of Sarah, the woman who laughs; he insists on it, he wants at all costs that this not be given to him. In fact, Abraham had himself also laughed upon hearing the same news, the news of the belated birth of Isaac. (Vishkhak: he laughs: Isaac, the coming of Isaac, makes them both shake with laughter, one after the other; Isaac is the name of the one who comes to make them laugh, to laugh about his coming, at his very coming, as if laughter should greet a birth, the coming of a happy event, a coming of happiness, a coming to laugh: come-laugh-with-me.) The moment having come to laugh was also the moment when Elohim named Sarah. He gave her a new name, deciding that Abraham, who had himself just received another name (changed from Abram to Abraham), would no longer call her Sarai, my princess, but Sarah, princess. So what, then? Comment s’en sortir [How to get out of this]? To this question in the form of an aporia, I know of no satisfying answer. Not even crazed laughter.

Nothing is given in advance for an act of forgiveness, no rule, no criterion, no norm. It is the chaos at the origin of the world. The abyss of this nonanswer or nonresponse would be the condition of responsibility—decision and forgiveness, the decision to forgive without any concept, if there ever is any. And always (in) the name of the other.

(Last vertigo, last sigh: to forgive (in) the name of the other—is this only to forgive in their place, for the other, in substitution? Or is it to forgive the other their name, to forgive what is in their name, what survives the corpse, to forgive the name of the other as their first wrongdoing?)

The answer must each time be invented, singular, signed, and each time only one time like the gift of a work, a giving of art and of life, unique and, right up until the end of the world, played back.
Introduction

Given back. To the impossible, I mean right up to the impossible. This is what Sarah Kofman gives me to think about today, in the overflowing of memory, there where she remains for me unique, and where I want to believe that this reaffirmation of life was hers, right up to when the time came, to when it became time, right up to the end.

TRANSLATED BY PASCALE-ANNE BRAULT AND MICHAEL NAAS