

THE ORAL AND THE WRITTEN IN CHINESE AND WESTERN RELIGION

The question of the nature of language has always been a central one in philosophy, but rarely has it received as much attention as in this century: is language the exclusive preserve of human beings? does talk about God make sense? is it possible to eliminate the verb "to be" when translating propositions by means of symbolic logic? do words refer to things, or is that which is signified by a word itself already a sign? is language in the first place — as its etymology indicates (Fr. *langue*, from L. *lingua*) — "tongue", or does the written in fact precede the spoken? is language, in its essence, origin, and end a medium or a message? metaphoric or metonymic?

Each of these ways of formulating the question of language has in fact been a way of calling into question traditional Western answers. Each has been a window on the world. Each has been an invitation to free ourselves — not to mention the rest of the world — from the tyranny of our egocentric, ethnocentric, logocentric, moralistic, anthropomorphic — in a word, monotheistic — past. Thus has the question of language become, in our century, a special form of the Jewish question.

Strangely enough, the work of calling into question has not infrequently been the work of Jews: *The Slayers of Moses* is the title of a recent book by Susan Handelman that treats of four such questioners, three of whom — Freud, Derrida, and Bloom — are, or were, themselves Jewish. Strangely, and then again, not so strangely, for as Handelman shows, Christianity, in replacing the Hebrew *davar* — "both thing and word" (32) — with the Greek *logos* — "the intelligible structure or makeup of a thing" (8) — became, at least as far as its theology is concerned, a species of Greek philosophy, that is, of pagan idealism: it gave up the very essence of Jewish thought, in which "the universal was demoted, and the particular given primacy" (29). Where the "Rabbinic mode" is metonymical, Christian thought is metaphorical (55). Time gives way to space (36), and the letter is eclipsed by the spirit, for the substitutive sacrifice of the Christ is God's last word, as the incarnation had been His first.

If anthropology has played the leading role in revealing to us our ethnocentrism and psychology our egocentrism, if Buddhism has proved the chief challenge to monotheism, Sinology has had an altogether unique place in the uncovering of our logocentrism. It owes this place, in the end, neither to the age nor to the continuity of its essentially autonomous tradition, but to the fact that it is the civilization of the written sign, the civilization, indeed, in which writing first came into being not to "record human speech" but to "communicate with the spirits" (Vandermeersch, 473, 477; cf. Gernet, 1959, 36). According to Vandermeersch, "the most archaic prototypes

of Chinese characters must have been emblematic monograms of spiritual protectors”, and early writing “must have been simply talismanic, that is, composed of juxtaposed or imbricated graphs without any articulation of a linguistic nature” (477, 479). Words which came later to mean “to speak” and “to declare” originally represented, the first, *yüeh*^a, “a sacred object used to present mystic writings” and the second, *kao*^b, “a ceremony of *written* proclamation to the spirits” (475). Both the object and the ceremony remain of fundamental importance in Taoism.

The object, as Vandermeersch suggests, must have been much like “the incense burner in which, still today, sticks of incense are presented” (475). Burning of incense, of course, is the most basic act of all forms of Chinese religious practice, and its purpose is to enter into communication with the spirits. Indeed, the very word for “spirit(s)” in Chinese, *shen*^c, is originally a picture of the volutes of incense smoke curling upwards. But it is only in Taoism that these volutes retain their primeval value as *configurations of energy*, that is, written signs: “One stick of heart-incense”, murmurs the modern priest over three sticks of incense at the outset of the central ritual in the three-day sequence of the Offering (*chiao*^d):

One stick of heart-incense, for the exclusive worship of the Three Pure Ones. Spirals of smoke form seal-characters and penetrate the void on high. Thousand perfected ones, ten thousand saints, come one and all to observe the court of the incense burner: quickly, quickly, in accord with the order of the Heavenly Worthy of the Seal-characters Formed by the Smoke of the Incense.

(Ōfuchi, 704b)

Thus the volutes of smoke constitute a written sign which is a divine name and, as such, at once a proclamation (*kao*) and an order (*ming*^e).

The word *ming*, order, mandate, originally referred to the prayer or incantation uttered by the diviner; in it he stated the purpose of a given act of divination. By extension, it also referred to the written record — inscribed on the oracle bones — of the orally expressed intention (Vandermeersch, 288 ff.). The citation above from the modern ritual shows that this spoken command is, in the first place, an intention in the heart. This intention exteriorizes itself simultaneously in the written sign of the smoke and in the explanatory words of the priest. But if, in order to be realized, the intention must be given this double expression, oral and written, it is clearly the oral which is here being added, by way of explanation, to the written, and not, as we are accustomed to viewing the relationship of these two modes of expression, the other way around (the “deconstruction” of this prejudice is Derrida’s main objective: see especially Pt. I, ch. 2, of *De la grammatologie*).

It is worth noting here that Chinese possesses two words for “intention”, *chih*^f and *i*^g. *Chih* “is composed of a heart and a footprint, signifying the trace left by a process of reflection”, and *i* is composed of the characters for heart and sound, signifying the “articulation of the discourse of the heart” (Vandermeersch, 270). In the earliest document of Chinese literary criticism, the *Greater Preface to the Book of Odes*, the word *chih* is referred to as that which lies at the origin of, and is expressed in, poetry.

The word *i* has been used for the last 1500 years in Taoist ritual to designate a written document which gives a full description of the ceremony being performed and which is read aloud at each ritual. In modern Taoist ritual, a shortened form of this “intention”, addressed to the Jade Emperor, the head of the pantheon, is burned during the “Presentation of the Memorial” (*chin-piao*^h) on the last day of the Offering. This shortened form is written in tiny characters because, once burned and so transferred — like the incense — into the realm of the spirits, they will be many times magnified. Chinese characters may thus be seen as entities which occupy space, just as speech takes time.¹

As entities which occupy space and whose first function is communication with the gods, it is hardly surprising that “real writing” is originally “sky writing” (*t’ien-wen*ⁱ, celestial patterns, “constellations”; cf. Robinet, 29 ff.). Among the many texts in the Taoist Repository (*Tao-tsang*^j) which describe the origin and end of these patterns, an early fifth century text called *The Esoteric Sounds of the Heavens* (*Chu-t’ien nei-yin*^k [TT 97]) is particularly interesting for our purposes. We read there how, after three days and three nights of total obscurity, “like that before the era Lung-han” (3. 1a), that is, before the beginning of cosmic time, “celestial characters one meter square suddenly flared up in the five directions” (3.2a). These characters are described in the first place as “patterns of light” so brilliant they blind the eye. They are also sounds, whose commingling produces “stanzas of the grotto”; these verses

give expression to the mysteries of the heavens and sing the praises of the illumination of the Great Whole on high; in the middle, they inform (*li*^l) all spontaneous energies and save all students of immortality; below, they save the living and wrest the souls of the dead from the Long Night.

(3.3b)

All hymns sung in Taoist ritual are, in essence, such “stanzas of the grotto”: they are audible signs which point ultimately back to their silent emergence as “celestial patterns” in the womb of space at the beginning of time. This same priority of the written over the oral sign is given yet another expression in the construction of the Taoist altar: the fundamental act in this construction is the placement of each of the five “real writings” referred to above in its appropriate location in the sacred area (*t’an*^m). This act is seconded each time by the pronunciation of an incantation which is simply the oral form — the description — of the writ just placed.

1. Handelman, 36, summarizing the thought of Thorlief Boman: “Hebrew thinking moves in time while the Greeks take space as their dominant thought form.” Handelman adds: “The space-time polarity may be compared to our previous distinction between Greek and Hebrew thought in terms of seeing and hearing.” It is important to add that Greco-European time, influenced by geometry and “determined by the solar cycle”, is rectilinear, while the Jewish, like the Chinese year is “based on a lunar cycle ... Hebrew time is conceived in terms of rhythmic alternation, based on the phases of the moon”. Hebrew time is in this regard very much like Taoist time.

Among the many other examples of the fundamental importance in Taoism of the written as opposed to the oral sign, we may mention the fact that the Taoist himself, whether a mere adept (see *Lao-chün chung-ching*ⁿ [TT 1168] 1.5a) or an officiant in Taoist ritual (*Wu-shang pi-yao*^o [TT 1138] 38.2b; cf. Lagerwey, 131), is not infrequently designated by the word *chao*^p, which originally meant the cracks that appeared on the turtle shell when it was subjected to the fire in the divination process (note that the Taoist practice of burning documents is the same process in reverse). These cracks, the response of the spirits to the diviner's charge, constituted in effect the most ancient form of Chinese text.

As such, like Taoist "real writings", they remind us that the original Chinese text is not linear and does not constitute a book.² Unlike the "emblematic monograms" — the proto-characters on Chinese pottery³ — cracks on oracle bones and Taoist real writs do not represent — they do not stand in the place of or refer to — something outside themselves: they are disclosures of patterns (*wen*^q), revelations of structures (*li*^l). The word *li* plays, in the history of Chinese philosophy, a role comparable to that of the word *logos* in Western. Originally, it referred to the lines in a piece of jade, and "to reason", *li*, therefore, was defined as "working jade".⁴

As Vandermeersch goes on to show in considerable detail, this distinctively Chinese attention to patterns — to embedded, as opposed to surface structures — led to the development of a science of patterns. He distinguishes this "morphological" from our Western "teleological" approach to things: where the teleological approach regulates behavior in terms of an ideally conceived final state, "morphologic proceeds from like to like in search of informing structures hidden beneath superficial appearances".⁵ Parallel to the body of knowledge which the science of patterns produces there develops a science of appropriate actions, of rituals.

2. Cf. Derrida, 127: "Writing in the narrow sense — and especially phonetic writing — is rooted in a past of non-linear writing which had to be overcome ... A war set in, and all that resisted linearization was repressed." On this past of non-linear writing, see Février, 9 ff.

3. On which, see Cheung Kwong-yue.

4. Vandermeersch, 269, citing Hsü Shen. He goes on to cite, 270, Tai Chen, as follows: "Reason, *li*, is the name of the imperceptible demarcation discovered by profound research and from which develops a separation. That is why we speak of 'distinctive reasons', *fen-li*^r. In the body tissues of living beings, there are the 'muscle reasons', *chi-li*^s, the 'flesh reasons', *tsou-li*^t, and the reason of the lines [on the skin], *wen-li*^u. To cut these tissues, there is a line where one may cut without leaving loose edges: that is what we call the 'reason-line', *t'iao-li*^v."

Cf. Derrida, 96: "Origin of the experience of space and time, this writing which differentiates, this tissue of the trace makes it possible for the difference between space and time to articulate itself ... It is from this original possibility of articulation one must start. Difference is articulation". Derrida summarizes his concept of difference/articulation/trace with the word *brisure*, fracture, fault, etc.

5. Vandermeersch, 271. Clearly, morphology is a metonymic, as teleology is metaphoric science. Note that Derrida, 123, refers to "logocentric teleology" as a "pleonasm".

One of the Chinese words for ritual, used by both Taoists and Confucians, is *i*^w; generally glossed by its homophone meaning “appropriate”, it refers especially to the “exterior gestures prescribed in the ceremonies” (Vandermeersch, 269). The standard Confucian word is *li*^x, also explained by a homophone meaning “shoe”, “by transposition, into the domain of moral conduct (*démarche morale*), into the domain of action, of the need for a form which holds the foot and thus protects it from the risk of sprain in walking” (*démarche physique*).⁶ Taoist ritual, like Confucian, is a *démarche*, a process, a method. But as it is a process designed to regulate the cosmos as a whole and not just human behavior, its rites are not proprietary and moral but cosmological. The word used conjointly with *i* to refer to “ritual” in Taoism, therefore, is not *li*, but *k'o*^y, class, grade. It refers to the fact that the function of Taoist ritual is to classify — and reclassify — all energies in the cosmos according to their deep structures (cf. Schipper, 92).

As a *démarche* based on a science of morphological classification, Taoist ritual is only marginally concerned with texts, that is, with texts written in linear writing. Such texts do exist for each individual ritual, and they are in fact treated with a great deal of respect, not to say hidden jealously from profane eyes.⁷ But the ritual text, when compared with the ritual — the *démarche* — itself, does not even deserve the name scenario: to produce such a scenario, one must collate at least four types of manuscript — for the ritual, the hymns, the documents, and the “secret instructions”⁸ — *in accord with oral tradition*. The scenario does not exist except insofar as it is interiorized by the performing priest, that is, insofar as he has learned to play the various instruments, sing, dance, recite, etc. The text of the ritual is thus an “archi-text”, written in “archi-writing” (Derrida, 89) composed as much of gestures, postures, and attitudes as it is of linear text. It is a choreography, a graphic dance expressed in the very “pluri-dimensional symbolic” terms repressed by the linear text (Derrida, 128).

It is in this context that we must, therefore, understand the importance of oral transmission in Taoism:

6. Vandermeersch, 268. The spontaneous and bivalent use of the word *démarche* — gait, step, procedure — is worth noting here. In like manner Derrida, 90, describes his concept of “trace” as requiring a *parcours*, “journey”, lest the trace become, like the voice before it, another indication of presence: “In order to wrest the concept of trace from the classic scheme which would relate it to a presence or an original non-trace, and which would thereby make of it an actual trace, we must speak of an original, an archi-trace, even though we know that this concept destroys its own name and that, if all begins with the trace, there can most emphatically not be any original trace.” We will see later that Derrida’s rejection of the “original trace” is a rejection of the Lacanian doctrine of the phallus as the original or “transcendent signifier”.

7. Like most Taoist books ritual manuscripts are a “treasure” which must be transmitted only to worthy recipients (cf. Robinet, 37 ff.; Schipper, 84–85).

8. Ofuchi, 234–711, gives such a scenario for the ritual repertoire of a single Taoist priest in modern Taiwan.

Duke Huan was in his hall reading a book. The wheelwright P'ien, who was in the yard below chiseling a wheel, laid down his mallet and chisel, stepped up into the hall, and said to Duke Huan, "This book Your Grace is reading — may I venture to ask whose words are in it?"

"The words of the sages", said the duke.

"Are the sages still alive?"

"Dead long ago", said the duke.

"In that case, what you are reading there is nothing but the chaff and dregs of the men of old! ... I look at it from the point of view of my own work. When I chisel a wheel, if the blows of the mallet are too gentle, the chisel slides and won't take hold. But if they're too hard, it bites in and won't budge. Not too gentle, not too hard — you can get it in your hand and feel it in your mind. You can't put it into words, and yet there's a knack to it somehow. I can't teach it to my son, and he can't learn it from me ... So what you are reading there must be nothing but the chaff and dregs of the men of old."

(*Chuang-tzu* 13.7; tr. Watson, 152—153)

"The end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book" (Derrida, 129). We may add that, to the great chagrin of students of Taoism, most of the books in the Taoist Repository are "but the chaff and dregs of the men of old", barely comprehensible as they come to us, stripped of all oral tradition. Taoism is the religion, not of the Book, but of the Text.

It is therefore also the religion of the body. Where, as in the West, the oral has been given priority over the written,

writing, the letter, the sensible inscription have always been considered as the body, as matter, exterior to the soul, the breath, the word (*verbe*), and the logos.⁹

In Taoism also, the breath (*ch'i*) is inside and the body out: the breath animates the body (like the Hebrew *ruah*, *ch'i* means both "breath" and "breath of life, spirit"), which is already by Lao-tzu said to be "a source of great trouble" (ch. 13). But the aim of all the many forms of Taoist practice, whether individual or liturgical, is to transform the material into a spiritual body, that is, into the body of the Tao.¹⁰ This body,

9. The passage continues: "The problem of the body and the soul is undoubtedly derived from the problem of writing, to which it seems, inversely, to lend its metaphors.

"Writing, sensible matter, and artificial exteriority: a 'vestment' ... Saussure even considers it a vestment of perversion ...: 'Writing hides language from view: it is not a vestment but a travesty'" (Derrida, 52).

10. As Schipper, 137, says, it is no "mere metaphor" when the Taoists speak of the human body as being "the image of a state". It is no mere metaphor because, like the state and, ultimately, like the "body of the Tao", that is, the universe itself, it is a specific structure, it is a "configuration of energy", a text. All Taoist "hygiene" is designed, first to preserve and then to integrate this text into the universal context. Thus the title of the largest collection of Taoist hagiography is "Universal mirror of the perfected and the immortal who, through the ages, have embodied the Tao" (*t'i-tao*²²: *TT* 296).

Cf. Vandermeersch, 293, the enumeration of the four ways of reading the cracks in the

product of a “symbolic vision” — product also of an internal vision (*nei-kuan*^{ad}) — is a mountain (Schipper, 142, 148), that is, a cave, a cave filled with cloud-characters, lit by the light of real writs, and filled with the sound of their music: it is the Taoist Repository. Taoist breath is used not to speak¹¹ but to write:

Now close your eyes and dwell on the Eight Powers. Stones give birth to divine animals. Their sounds have no beginning, and they are hard to capture. The Unique Breath builds up mountains of earth that do not cave in. Write your name in the Celestial River: it will be transmitted orally forever. This is called the mysterious light: you are immortal.

(*Jen-niao shan ching-t'u*^{ae} [TT 434] 5a)

That Taoism, as religion of the text, is the inheritor of the most archaic form of *official* Chinese religion should by now be clear. I say “official” because, as we have seen, Taoism is inconceivable without literacy, without reference to the *scribal* tradition of the diviner (cf. Vandermeersch, 473 ff.). The tandem of king and diviner described by Vandermeersch, moreover, is precisely the same tandem that operates throughout Chinese political history: the emperor and his “advisor” (see Seidel). It would seem that the other half of this tandem was a medium, for from the reign of Wen-wu Ting on, when the king expresses (*yüeh*^a) the divinatory decision, he is said to do so “metapsychically”, *juo*^{af}, that is, in trance:

As Kāto Jōken has shown masterfully, with a great wealth of philological proof, this character, paleographically composed of a pictogram of an individual whose body is twisted, whose hair is on end, and who is stretching out his hands to heaven, represents someone who is in communication with the spirits.

(Vandermeersch, 485)

What the king expressed in this state — and Vandermeersch suggests it must have been *uttered* “in ordinary speech, for he had certainly not studied the language of the diviners” — was then written down by the diviner, acting as scribe. But this

carapace of the turtle in order to divine the future (according to the *Chou-li*^{ab}): the most general and therefore most important category was the over-all shape, called the “body” (*t'i*^{ac}), that is, “the figure formed by the two vertical and horizontal lines ..., the name of which is *chao*^P.”

If, in the civilization of the written sign, the body is a positive value, the opposite is true in the civilization which gives priority to speech; thus Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène* (91), describes Husserl's views as follows: “Writing is a body that expresses something only when one is actually pronouncing the verbal expression which animates it, thereby temporalizing its space ... The body of the word as such expresses something only when it is animated (*sinnebelebt*) by an act of meaning (*vouloir-dire; bedeuten*) which transforms it into spiritual flesh (*geistige Leiblichkeit*). But only the qualities of spirituality (*Geistigkeit*) and vitality (*Lebendigkeit*) are independent and original.” Cf. above, n. 9, Derrida's remarks concerning the “problem of body and soul”, and *La voix*, 37.

11. *Chuang-tzu*, 13.6 (152), comments on *Lao-tzu* 56 that, “It is because in the end [words] are not sufficient to convey truth that ‘those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know’.”

relationship, the relationship between medium and scribe, is the cornerstone of Chinese popular religion:

Every vital cult has its "infants" — the name given to those who are possessed by and interpret on behalf of the gods, to mediums ... His logorrhea is a discourse occasionally interrupted by improvised songs. The content of this noble discourse is beyond the understanding of those who have come to put their questions to him. That is why his "impresario" stands next to him and acts as interpreter ... In fact, this assistant is none other than the medium's master. It is almost always he who taught the medium the techniques of ecstasy.

(Schipper, 67, 69)

Not all mediums engage in logorrhea; some "write", whether with a divine chair, brush, or stick (DeGroot, 1295 ff.). But their "characters", too, require interpretation (cf. Elliott, 143) — hardly surprising in light of the fact that they are normally illiterate (cf. Jordan, 66).

These last facts bring us full circle in our survey of the relationship between the oral and the written in Chinese religion. They show, better even than the more complicated facts of Taoism, that in Chinese religion — in all forms of Chinese religion — the written has priority over the oral. The medium is an "infant", an illiterate, a mere puppet in the hands of his master. His natural medium, of course, is oral, but so powerful is the prestige of the written sign — "symbol of a reality as unique and singular as itself" (Gernet 1963, 38) — that even the illiterate medium will on occasion "write". He may even cut his *tongue* and use its blood to give special efficacy to symbols that are ultimately of Taoist provenance (cf. Elliott, 56): as in Hebrew culture, blood, like breath, is synonymous with life-force and the soul and, as such, has unique redemptive power.

What must we conclude? — first, that Derrida is absolutely right when he says (64) that

the language system associated with writing that uses a phonetic alphabet is the system in which a logocentric metaphysics that determined the sense of being as presence arose. This logocentrism, this period of the full word, always put in parenthesis, suspended, and repressed, for reasons having to do with its very essence, all free reflection on the origin and status of writing.

This free reflection was carried on in the civilization of the written sign, especially in Taoism. We have seen with what power and clarity this reflection acted to preserve the unity of what was split asunder in our culture, to wit, "the unity of gesture and speech, of the body and language, of the tool and thought, prior to the articulation of their originality" (127). We have also seen that this preservation of the "pluri-dimensional" symbolic richness of the "archi-text" left a space for difference and deferral (*différance*) that our culture, dominated by a fixed text embodying the divine will, did not.

We must also agree with Derrida when he admits, in a note (129), that "linear writing did indeed constitute ... the instrument of analysis from which emerged philosophical and scientific thought." *Phonetic* linear writing, we might add and, in

adding it, begin to demarcate ourselves from him, for the facts of the Chinese case do not altogether justify his unalloyed joy at the prospect of recovering that “writing which is the play in language ..., this game, thought of as the absence of the transcendental signified” (73), that is, self-identity, truth, presence — in a word, YHWH, for there can be no transcendental signified if there is no transcendental signifier.

Derrida is right in thinking that this transcendental signified cannot be signified, for this reason:

Desire is an effect in the subject of that condition which is imposed on him by the existence of the discourse, to make his need pass through the defiles of the signifier.

(Lacan, in Wilden, 114)

Derrida's view that the written sign precedes, underlies, and renders possible speech also echoes a fundamental Lacanian notion, to wit, that the human being first enters the world of language by way of vision, by way of the *image*, for the child, unlike the chimp, recognizes itself in a mirror, and that before it begins to talk.¹² This primordial “insignifier”, this first self-image, this first identification of self in an other, this constituent case of mistaken identity,¹³ is the first substitution — metaphor — and, as

12. The idea that man is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) would also seem to accord priority to the image, as these words of Paul would seem to grant it ultimacy: “For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face” (I Corinthians 13:12). It would then be precisely because union with the Alpha and the Omega is to be ruled out during our metonymic “sojourn” here below that the second commandment (Exodus 20:4) forbids the making of “graven images”. The fact that there is, in Jewish mysticism, “no trace of mystic union between the soul and God” is, in turn, the result of this fundamental taboo, which “keeps the Creator and His creature separate” (Scholem, 69). These two fundamental aspects of Jewish existence, the original taboo and the consequent metonymy, come to expression in “the two most obvious and creative manifestations of Jewish Rabbinic thought, the haggadah and the halacha, the Law and narration” (Scholem, 41). Derrida's thought is Jewish in both its preference for the metonymic and its rejection of any “original trace”. But his style, at once apodictic and enigmatic, is a parody of Biblical prophecy, a parody which reveals his own desire to supplant the original (cf. Handelman, 173 ff.). Once again, thus, the medium proves more powerful than the message, the form than the content, for this parody of a style is the symptom of Derrida's participation in the murder of the God who used to speak through the prophets of his people: the Name that was originally not to be “taken in vain” (Exodus 20:7) has now simply been “passed off in silence”. With it, of course, disappears the moral *démarche* of atonement to which we will refer at the end of this essay (cf. Gaster, 148; concerning the annual pronouncement of the Name of God over the scapegoat: “This utterance of the otherwise ineffable name was, in a sense, the high point of the entire service”). Thus, in typically pagan fashion, does Derrida seek to replace the truth of sanctity and community with that of individual philosophical inquiry.

13. Thus Wilden, 135: “It suffices to comprehend the mirror stage as an *identification* in the full sense of the term in analysis — that is, the transformation produced in the subject when he assumes an image. This first image of the self as a *separate entity* (identity) is the basis of all later

such, the first fracture (cf. Derrida, 96, on *la brisure*), the first fall into the exile of desire: "Man desires insofar as he is other."¹⁴

Thus "laid open", thus split asunder, the child is ready to begin talking. But his speech — which will be his first and most important tool in his attempt, now, to *master* what has become an alien environment (cf. the game of *fort-da* described by Freud, 9—10) — will remain "empty", imaginary — the instrument of his primary narcissism — as long as he does not accede, via acceptance of castration, to the symbolic order:

The Symbolic father is to be distinguished from the Imaginary father ... to whom is related the whole dialectic of aggressivity and identification. In all strictness the Symbolic father is to be conceived as "transcendent", as an irreducible given of the signifier. The Symbolic father — he who is ultimately capable of saying "I am who I am" — can only be imperfectly incarnate in the real father. He is nowhere.¹⁵

identifications, hence the model for the super ego ... But the important point is that this form situates the instance of the self from before its social determination, in a fictional line." The image is therefore productive of the Imaginary Order, as the sign is later of the Symbolic Order.

14. Wilden, 115. Cf. 100: "The first effect of the *Image* which appears in human beings is an effect of alienation in the subject. It is in the other that the subject identifies and even senses himself at first". This primordial alienation is the origin of desire, which is above all a desire to be One once again, as one had been before separation from the mother. It is because desire is therefore a desire to *return* to non-difference that psychoanalysis views it as totalitarian and insists on the acceptance of castration — associated, of course with the Name of the Father — as the condition of psychic health (see Wilden, 191). Still faithful to the Biblical tradition, psychoanalysis then projects fulfilment of the ineradicable desire for Unity into the future, that is, converts it into the eschatology of the "full word" (the Pauline "face-to-face"). Psychoanalysis ceases utterly to be Biblical, of course, when it seeks to locate the "Truth" in "that chapter of my history which is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood" and when it pretends to "accompany the patient right up to the ecstatic limit of 'You are that', where is revealed to him the cipher of his mortal destiny" (Lacan, in Wilden, 21, 23). Biblical truth, as we have already suggested, is invariably truth which embodies itself in acts — the "full word" is an act — which contribute to community and sanctity. Taoism, we might add, is the religion of the "return to the Mother" by means of such practices as "embryonic breathing" (Schipper, 167—174, 206). As such, it has as much to teach of the morphological route to community and sanctity — Unity — as Biblical religion has of the teleological. It also has on its conscience the same "Constantinian" compromises with totalitarian political power as Christianity, which likewise made these compromises in the name of "incarnate" Unity.

15. Wilden, 271. Handelman, 158, concludes: "In Lacanian terms, the rejection of the Name-of-the-Father is the rejection of the entire symbolic order, the order of psychic health and maturity." To which we must add that the reduction of the Father to his Name, insofar as it occults the biological father — "the symbolic father is ... the dead father" (Palmier, 81) — and thus isolates the individual from his real — as opposed to his unconscious — history, constitutes one more instance of psychoanalysis' one-sided approach to the "social fact". On the Biblical God as "God of the fathers", see the essay by that name in Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Anchor, 1968).

Here it is that Lacan and Derrida part ways: for Lacan, the subject, by analysis of his psychic history in the “talking cure”, can gain access to the “full word”¹⁶; for Derrida, this is a “phallogocentric doctrine of the signifier”.¹⁷ For Derrida, “the thing itself is a sign”, and “once there is meaning, there can only be signs” (Derrida, 72, 73): without actually getting there, Derrida, in his enthusiastic embrace of the metonymic “indefiniteness of reference” (72), is on the way to Chuangtzuian revelry in the “fragmented body” of the dream world.¹⁸ But in refusing to recognize the phallus as the first signifier in the Symbolic order, the signifier which, unlike the image in the mirror, gives access to real difference and thereby, within the symbolic matrix of language, to reality itself, and to the possibility of judgment, however provisional,¹⁹ Derrida falls prey to the temptation of metonymy:

Metonymy represents the connection of “word to word” in the signifying chain, or the combination of signifier to signifier (S...S’), and represents the subject’s desire ... From its first appearance in Freud, displacement is represented as the most appropriate means used by the unconscious to foil the censorship.

(Wilden, 113)

But having made common cause this far with Lacan and, as Handelman repeatedly says, the “Rabbinic mode” (157–162), we must now part ways with the former, though not with the latter, for brilliant as the Lacanian analysis may be, it neglects entirely what no Rabbi could ever dream of neglecting, to wit, the social fact: the people. Psychoanalysis gives altogether new focus to the ancient Hebrew light on the genesis of human personality, on man as his history and his language, but its complicity with the fundamentally antinomian and antisocial prejudices of our age is far too entire to be acceptable to any student of the Bible, that is, to any Rabbi.

For if the “unpronounceable name” translated only as the enigmatic “I am what (or who) I am” (Handelman, 156, 157), it would indeed be a new form of reification, of idol-worship (Handelman, explaining Derrida’s views, 163). But that name also translates as “I will be that I will be” or even “I will cause (you) to become”:

16. On this concept, see Lacan, in Wilden, 9–27.

17. Cited in Handelman, 164. Cf. Derrida, 102: “The fracture marks the impossibility for a sign — for the unity of signifier and signified — to produce itself in the plenitude of the present and of absolute presence. That is why there is no full word.” Derrida calls this psychoanalytic doctrine phallogocentric because it is based on the idea that the phallus is the primordial sign in that it signifies that which distinguishes definitively the child’s parents and thereby, via the ensuing “Oedipal phase”, points the way to entry into the Symbolic Order (cf. Kristeva, 44).

18. On the concept of the *corps morcelé*, see Wilden. Among the many passages in which Chuang-tzu celebrates what seems to terrify psychoanalysis as the ultimate phantasm we may recall the famous paragraph at the end of chapter 2, in which “he didn’t know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou” (tr. Watson, 49).

19. On the relationship between the symbolic order and the “possibility of judgment”, see Kristeva, 41.

In the grammatical structure of the word Yahveh, God is not "being" alone. He is the *power* of being. The word is constructed according to the causative form of the verb *to be* ..., in the future tense, implying that God should be understood in terms of both the power to be (causing to be) and the power to become ...

God is the power calling life into ever-greater being. In grammatical parlance, we say that the past tense is the "perfect" and the future tense is the "imperfect", in that he is the power of becoming — he is future-oriented, goal-directed, always in process, and generating the same dynamic in his creatures who reflect his image.

(Spiro, 73)²⁰

What this means, according to traditional Jewish and Christian interpretation, is that the emergence of human personality, however this does in fact occur, is *created, willed, and hence normative*,²¹ even if it is at the same time experienced as a fall and an exile. It is created, that is, good, because, according to the Biblical tradition, it prepares man, in his fallen condition as signified, to recognize his origin and end, that is, to receive the word of God:

Accordingly, the essential act of prophecy involves two persons: God who acts and is always outside of man, and man who passively receives his word.

(Kaufmann, 99)

It prepares man, in other words, to be a *medium*, an instrument of the divine will. In other words, it prepares him to become a *member* of a body — a people — rather than an autonomous and self-sufficient individual. From the beginning, therefore, God's Word comes to Abraham as a *promise*, a promise to give him a land, that is, the possibility of making a living, and to make of his descendants a great people. The Bible is the history of the first thousand years of the driving power of that promise.

We must insist here on the fact that, like the word that transits through the Chinese medium, the word of God to his prophet is a spoken word. We are now talking of man's access to speech, *beyond* the written sign, beyond "iconicity" (cf. Handelman, 17):

The evolution of human society and the "hominization" of the world ... can thus be understood in a basic, though by no means an exclusive sense, as a triumph of voice, of the word, through which man comes to an understanding of actuality and through which he constructs human society. For the word, as we have seen, is not only the repository of intelligibility and intelligence; it is also the basic agent holding society together. The word, which is essentially sound, unites not just one man and another; it forms men into groups. It is the expression and incarnation of community.

(Ong, 310)

20. Cf. Mussner, 139 ff., on "the discovery of the future" in Judaism. Note the spontaneously teleological character of the language of this American rabbi.

21. The notion that the "will of God" is normative, fundamental to both Judaism and Calvinism, is precisely what Derrida is ultimately attacking in *La voix et le phénomène*: see above, n. 10. The rejection of the divine *vouloir-dire* must ultimately lead to the typically Greek, that is, pagan rejection of history as a "series of accidents" without direction or meaning.

The spoken word opens man not only to community, thus, but also to “acutality”, that is, reality:

Jespersen and others make explicit what we all know from experience and daily observation: children do not achieve thinking by themselves. They learn to think as they are introduced into the use of words which are far older than they themselves and far older than their teachers, and which belong not to them but to everybody. This fact is strikingly underlined by the plight of congenitally deaf children ... Left unattended, the congenitally deaf are far more intellectually retarded than the congenitally blind.

(Ong, 141, 142)

It goes without saying that this opening up of the child to rational thought processes — and thereby, as Piaget has shown, to a capacity for moral behavior as well as to objectively existing reality (not a reality of objects) outside itself — is the precondition for the eventual emergence of modern science. At the very time that modern science first began to emerge, as Derrida himself mentions, there occurred a veritable rash of metaphorical references to the “book of nature” (Derrida, 28). Although Derrida does not like this metaphor,²² Western readiness to read this new “book” was dependent on its long acquaintance with the Book, for from it the West had learned to think of God’s word as something which not only comes to man but also expresses itself, as silent speech, in nature.²³

And this brings us to our final point: the Jews were — some still are — unconditional in their adherence to the letter of the law. No Rabbi could ever accept the standard Christian view, based on Paul, that “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (II Corinthians 3:6; cf. Ong, 138, and Handelman, 85 ff.). Why? — because, once

22. We should point out here that China gives the lie here to Derrida: if ever there was a pneumatological society, it was China. In Taoism, as we have seen, the “real writ” — Derrida’s “gramme” or “trace” — is a configuration of breath, *pneuma*.

23. Psalm 19 gives this notion of general revelation its classic expression: “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, And night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language; Their voice is not heard.” The contemplation of nature in the first half of the psalm leads spontaneously to the praise of the equally divine moral and social law in the second half. The Lord’s Prayer follows an identical line of reasoning when it asks, “Thy will (!) be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We must insist here on the fact that, for all the verbal bias of its language, the Bible obviously does not think of the “word” as synonymous with “speech”, anymore than Taoism, for all the scriptural bias of its language, thinks of “reality” as written words. Both, in fact, seek, using the fundamental metaphors of their cultures, to point to the origin of meaning itself, and both provide modes of action — rituals — by means of which one can “come to terms” with this Origin. Both, finally, conceive of and act out this “coming to terms” — this “composition” — as an alliance, a marriage of heaven and earth. Both, of course, also remain profoundly “imprinted” — different — by virtue of their espousal, the one of a verbal, the other of a scriptural notion of language. On the Taoist “teaching without words”, see Schipper, ch. 10; on the “creative word of God”, see Mussner, 99, 130.

again, the Hebrew mind accepts and even embraces history: the people of the Book are also the people of history (Handelman, 36). History, their history, made of them “one of the peoples actually possessing the alphabet, at a time when the alphabet was new and rare” (Ong, 14). In spite of the “massive oral underpinnings” of the Bible (Ong, 21) the Teaching (Torah) — a history of God’s word at work in human time and space — came to be written down. As in Taoism, this writing down of the Teaching did not put an end to the oral tradition, to “reading between the lines” (Handelman, 40; Derrida, 130), but unlike in Taoism, what continued to be read was not an archi-text, but a Book, the transcription of words in time (history): letters.

The words that come in time to the Chinese medium simply pass through him: he is utterly abject, a tool in the hands of his master. His trance, his divine frenzy, is infantile.²⁴ And yet, without his speech, there was, in traditional China, no presence and no community. Literacy, whether Taoist, Confucian, or Hebrew, saves from the frenzy of possession. But whereas Taoist literacy trains its eye on the interior, on the archi-text which exists only insofar as the human subject exists, whereas Taoist literacy is therefore intensely subjective and even solipsistic²⁵ — this helps explain why organized Taoist communities proved, in Chinese history, to be short-lived phenomena —, Hebrew literacy dealt with a text which had objective — literal — existence.²⁶ The revelation — rendering public — of this text, moreover, was regularly reenacted in the reading of the Torah in the synagogue (“gathering place”), and the annual cycle of readings climaxed, at least since the eleventh century, in the festival of “rejoicing in the Law”:

The whole ceremony is really a mystical imitation of the wedding service, and symbolizes that marriage of Israel to the Law which the ancient exegetes read into the Biblical Song of Songs and which served as one way of expressing the Covenant relationship.

(Gaster, 100)

24. Cf. the remarks of Ong., 131–132, on the “confused excitement, with disorganizing amounts of anxiety, fear, and hostility” which Marvin Opler has shown to characterize non-literate cultures: “Individuals in these cultures tend far more than do literates to break out in frenzied rages which often lead to indiscriminate slaughter”. This reminds us that, in contrasting Biblical religion with Taoism, we are contrasting two different modes of *literate* culture.

25. Thus *Lao-tzu* 20 says, “I alone am different from others and value being fed by the mother”, and ch. 25 reads, “There is a thing confusedly formed, born before heaven and earth. Silent and void, it stands alone and does not change” (Lau, 77, 82). Cf. Ong, 126: “The silencing of words portends in some way withdrawal into oneself ... Because it consists of silent words, writing introduces a whole new set of structures within the psyche: communication which lacks the normal social aspect of communication, etc.” At the same time, of course, writing can be every bit as curative as — and good deal cheaper than — the “talking cure”.

26. Thus Ong, 47: “An alphabetic culture ... is likely to regard the literal meaning ... as something altogether wholesome ... The rich suggestiveness of Chinese characters favors a sense of a fuller meaning lying much deeper than the literal.”

Thus did the letter — the consonant, rather, reanimated by the breathing in of vowels in accord with the oral tradition — live again in the public place. Hebrew names, like Taoist, “are not conventional, but intrinsically connected to their referents”; unlike Taoist words, however, they are not symbols carved out of the archi-text, they are expressions of reality itself:

Though *davar* means both *thing* and *word* in Hebrew, it is crucial to point out that ... *reality* is a far more appropriate word to use than *thing*, for it does not evoke the same connotations as do *substance* and *being* ...

The Hebrew word was not just an arbitrary designation, but an aspect of the continuous divine creative force itself ... *Davar* is not simply *thing* but also *action*, *efficacious fact*, *event*, *matter*, *process*. The *word of God* was more than the act of saying; it was a creative force, an instrument capable of enacting realities, a concentration of power — and in this sense a *thing*.

(Handelman, 32)

“For the Rabbis”, as in Taoism, “the primary reality was linguistic” (Handelman, 4), that is, spiritual, pneumatological: significant. But in the one case, this primary reality (Unity) was to be jealously guarded (*shou-i*: see Schipper, ch. 8); in the other, Unity was itself jealous, jealous to be recognized and served, that is, to be public and published:

That is why we hope, oh Lord our God, very soon to see the glory of your power dissipate error and impiety, destroy idols, and prepare the universe for the reign of the Almighty ... “And the Eternal shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall the Eternal be recognized as ONE, and his name shall be ONE” (Zachariah 14:9).

(*Prières*, 38)

And on that note we might conclude, for it summarizes all the fundamental distinctions we have tried to set forth thus far: whatever the final conclusions of anthropologists and psychologists concerning the priority of the oral or the written in the development of language in the species and in the individual, within the limits of the period for which it is possible to speak meaningfully of the written sign, first, articulate speech also existed and, second, the oral bias of Biblical religion proved more efficacious than the written bias of Taoism in the creation of community and in the promotion of *public* standards of accountability. The supreme modern goods of science and democracy are inconceivable without reference to this principle, for the first requires publication of knowledge and communal verification and the second depends on the rule of law — human rights — and popular sovereignty.²⁷

And yet. Not yet²⁸: we cannot leave the matter there, for that is not the whole of the story, nor is it the end. In the West, over time, the voice of prophecy fell silent. It

27. Popular sovereignty, that is, the recognition of the people’s right not only to express their *will* but to have their *way*. Once again, we must express our profound mistrust of Derrida’s rejection of the *vouloir-dire*.

28. On the “ecclesiastical triumphalism” that has characterized Christianity because it tended to forget the tension between the “already” and the “not yet”, see Mussner, 386 ff.

was first consigned to scripture, then Scripture was closed, and finally Scripture was broken in two. The Cross, the rending of the veil, the breaking of the bread, and, finally, in a floodtide of visions, prophecies, wars, and anathemas, the shift to Greek — these were the signs of the break: so many *brisures*, so many signs. It is the marriage of Greek to Hebrew — of the aural to the visual, the communal to the solitary, the internal to the superficial, the creative/redemptive Act to eternal/substantive Logos — that engendered new forms, first of religious life — among them, we may single out the contemplative²⁹ — and then of social: science, democracy, capitalism. These latter, of course, emerged fully only after yet other breaks: the Renaissance first, with its recovery of classical Antiquity, and then the Reformation, which involved a return to the Hebrew, as opposed to the Greek canon of Scripture. The origin of this latter break was in large part technical: typography (cf. Ong, 272). Its symptoms were the translation of the Bible into the vernacular and the ideal of universal literacy. Its trace — its indelible footprint and inscription — was literalism.

Henceforth, the word was no longer Torah to be interpreted; it was no longer sacrament to be adored: it was the Word of God to be preached.³⁰ Henceforth, the word was irrevocably severed from the thing,³¹ and the creative will of God became his arbitrary selection of the few. Henceforth, the West had taken on its characteristic modern shape, with on one side science, studying what it imagined to be pure objects endowed with “primary qualities” and susceptible of quantification, and on the other side theology, to which was left the meager portion of the “secondary qualities” of “mere metaphors”, *sola scriptura*: a house divided against itself. In the end, of course, this combination of scientific and theological literalism, having first degenerated into sectarianism, begat liberalism, and liberalism begat the death of God, and the death of God begat the Holocaust.³² Thus did two millennia of denial of the letter, that is, of

29. Thus Ong, 180: “It is informative to note how much of the literature concerned with the Word as the Person of Jesus, from patristic times on, has veered away from considering the Word in terms of sound to consider the Word in terms of knowledge-by-vision — the Word (or Son) as the ‘image’ of the Father”. The importance of the visual — “observation” — to the rise of science is discussed by Ong as well (219–220).

30. At the same time, we must insist on the fundamental unity of the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish practices of the word: for all three, in the end, it is a positive, that is, creative and redemptive *act*.

31. The positive aspect of this separation must also be underlined: “‘Greek philosophy more or less begins’, writes Hans-Georg Gadamer, ‘with the insight that a word is only a name, i.e., that it does not represent true being’” (Handelman, 3). This insight, of course, also lies behind Calvin’s doctrine of a-substantiation, concerning which a modern Catholic theologian writes: “The genius of Calvin was to have restituted to the Holy Spirit a role concerning which, *in the realm of the Eucharist*, the West had long since fallen silent” (Gustave Martelet, *Résurrection, eucharistie et genèse de l’homme* [Paris, 1972], 158). We recall here that the word “spirit” is the translation of the Hebrew *ruah*, “breath”.

32. As it might seem rather outrageous to link, however indirectly, liberal theology with the

time, end in an attempt to exterminate scientifically the people who begged to defer: civilization and its discontents.

The history of modern China is every bit as tragic, and its tragedies, likewise, are rooted in millennia of rupture and denial. As in the child of Lacanian doctrine, the first rupture occurs with the appearance of the written sign itself; as in the West, this rupture becomes a definitive social rupture when the written sign is linearized. Thenceforth, the characteristic shape of traditional China begins to emerge: on the one side, the people who embrace linearization; on the other, the people, who resist it. They resist it because it spells for them the end of their autonomy. The time of this autonomy, according to *Lao-tzu* 80, was the time when people wrote only with knotted ropes,³³ when they “knew their mothers but not their fathers” (*Chuang-tzu*, 327): the time of Perfect Unity (*Chuang-tzu*, 172).

By the fourth century B.C., the parties to the divorce had clearly identified themselves: from that time on we speak of Confucianists and Taoists. Both belong to the civilization of the written sign, but they belong now in very different ways: the

Holocaust, we may recall, first, that no less a person than Ernst Troeltsch dismissed Judaism as a “national religion associated with a particular country and concerned with tasks presented by a particular type of civilization — in the case of the Jews primarily with questions of national loyalty and national aspiration” (“The Place of Christianity among the World Religions”, in *Christianity and other Religions*, ed. by John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite [Great Britain: Collins, 1980], 20). Little better is Adolf von Harnack, who “wrote the fatal phrases: ‘To reject the Old Testament in the 2nd century was a fault that the Church at large legitimately refused; to keep it in the 16th century was a destiny which the Reformation could not yet escape; but for Protestantism to keep it since the 19th century as a canonical document is the result of ecclesiastical and religious paralysis’” (cited in Mussner, 422). By contrast, the neo-Orthodox theologian Karl Barth writes: “Let no pagan Christian in any case, just because he belongs to the Church, glorify himself at the expense of *anyone* who belonged or belongs to Israel, be it Judas Iscariot himself. Whatever may have happened or is happening, this people is the holy people of God ... The Israelites are all holy as neither pagans, however wonderful, nor pagan Christians, even the best, can ever be of themselves” (cited in Mussner, 224–225).

The same contrast is still visible today in attitudes toward Israel: liberals of all stripes, but especially Christian liberals, tend to be pro-Palestinian, while fundamentalists are often rabidly pro-Israel. This is not “just another political question”: it is in fact the old problem of the letter and the spirit. Those who read the Bible for what they take to be its spirit measure the Israelis against that spirit and find them wanting; those who, however naively, cleave to the letter, cannot forget all the “prooftexts” which speak of God’s promises to Israel, not to mention those that link the “endtime” to the return of the Chosen People to Israel. Rather than naming names, we may simply note that it has always been the particular characteristic of liberalism, in the manner of pagan idealism, to seek to isolate “the essential basis of Christianity” and “the common ground in the Divine Spirit” of “the great spiritual religions” (Troeltsch, 27, 30, 26). It goes without saying that extraction of the essence of “the great world religions” (26), like more physical forms of vampirism, leads to death.

33. On writing with knots, see Février, 20 ff.

written sign of the Confucians has become increasingly oral, that is, phoneticized and linear. They use it to write down songs and logia, to write history, and even to reason, that is, discourse (*Rede*). Their chief virtues, therefore, are moral and social: *ch'eng*^{ag}, sincerity (a character composed of the graphs for “speech” and for “accomplish, carry out”), and *hsin*^{ah}, trust (a “man” standing by his “word”). They will eventually develop the discourse of Chinese rationalism, of *li*ⁱ, the deep structure which informs *ch'i*^z, matter which has not yet become totally inert like Greco-Christian matter, but matter-energy which, nonetheless, has ceased to be the focus of interest. The degree to which Confucianism remains a philosophy of the civilization of the written sign, however, may be seen in the fact that the great scientific achievement of Confucian rationalism is the “scrutiny of signs” (*ko-wu*^{ai}): *wu*, in Chinese, came to mean “thing”, but it originally meant “banner, sign”, and Confucian “scrutiny of signs” proved in practice to be primarily the “scrutiny of written patterns” (*ko-wen*^{ai}), that is, philology.

On the other side of the Great Divide, the Taoists, inheritors not of the notational but of the divinatory function of the scribe, founded their practice of the “real writ” on the certitude that “one who knows does not speak, and one who speaks does not know” (*Lao-tzu* 56). Some of the most brilliant reasoning in the entire history of world philosophy — reasoning based clearly on the assumption that words are speech — comes to the same conclusion, namely, that words cannot convey truth:

Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed (“indefiniteness of reference”: see above), then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn't there?

(*Chuang-tzu*, 39)

It is in a similar vein that Chuang-tzu concludes his justly famous conversation on epistemology with the logician Hui-tzu:

Chuang Tzu said, “Let's go back to your original question, please. You asked me *how* I know what fish enjoy — so you already knew I knew it when you asked the question. I know it be standing here beside the [river] Hao.”

(*Chuang-tzu*, 189)

He knows, that is, by the force of the evidence: I see, therefore I know.

As Confucianism will become increasingly aural, ending (?) with Mao Tse-tung's flirtation with phonetic transcription, so will Taoism become increasingly visual: where Lao-tzu still spoke of the ideal person as “saintly”, *sheng*^{ak}, a character containing the graphs for “ear” and for “to receive”, Chuang-tzu already will speak of her/him as “real”, *chen*^{al}, a character whose central element is the eye. To the “real person” (*chen-jen*^{am}) corresponds the “real writ” (*chen-wen*^{an}), and the real person will be someone who, having “blocked the openings and shut the doors” (*Lao-tzu* 56), “contemplates within” (*nei-kuan*^{ad}) the “internal landscape” (Schipper, 143) which is the “real self” (*chen-wu*^{ao}: *Lao-chün chung ching*ⁿ [TT 1168] 1.7b), that is, his own particular inscription (*chao*^p) in the womb of eternity. When not “looking”, he will be “walking the Way” (*hsing-tao*^{ap}) or “circulating his breath” (*hsing-ch'i*^{aq}), that is, engaging in a form of

action which is “negative” (*wu-wei*^{ar}), that is, not “positive”, not teleological but morphological: conforming his *démarche* to the archi-text.³⁴ That is why the Taoist priest, from the sixth century down to the present day, is called a “real person” (Lagerwey, 162; Ōfuchi, 504b ff.)

The Confucian/Taoist divorce proceedings took nearly two millennia: we may fix the act of divorce to sometime in the 13th–14th centuries, setting the date of the founding of the Ming (1368) as the outer limit. In the meanwhile, both had undergone, in profoundly different ways, the “Buddhist conquest”. Buddhism, coming from a civilization with an alphabet, a civilization utterly addicted to the discourse, had an overwhelmingly oralizing and rationalizing impact on Chinese culture. Buddhism provoked the first purely phonetic use of characters, both for purposes of transcription and of “spelling” (the *fan-ch’ieh*^{at} system). It introduced the practice of religious propaganda, that is, spreading the word by preaching and scripture-copying. As is well known, printing was invented in China five centuries before Gutenberg as a means of multiplying, first Buddhist images, and then Buddhist books. Gernet (*Les aspects économiques du bouddhisme*) and others have detailed the rationalizing effect Buddhism had on the Chinese economy.

Even Taoism, reeling from Buddhist blows to the body, began to “moralize” its rituals, eschatologize its cycles, engage in public debates, produce windy treatises for monastic recitation, collect its scriptures into giant repositories, and extol the copying and dissemination thereof. If Taoism adopted Buddhist practices in what was at best a marriage of reason (*fang-pien*^{au}) — they remained bitter rivals —, Confucianism espoused its principles in a marriage of desire: the result was Sung neo-Confucianism, with its basic ontological distinction between the physical (*hsing erh-hsia*^{av}) and the metaphysical (*hsing erh-shang*^{aw}). The spatial nature of this distinction reminds us that Buddhism, for all its orality, shared the visual prejudice of pagan idealism in general: like Greco-Christianity, therefore, it engendered an iconography, an architecture, and a mode of celibate (singular), contemplative life. In this regard, Buddhism confirmed and deepened the visual bias of the civilization of the written sign.

And tomorrow? — tomorrow is already here in the global village of the electronic age. Tomorrow is already here in the end of the book and the return of the repressed:

The enigmatic model of the *line* is precisely what philosophy could not see as long as its eyes were open to the interior of its own history. That night slips away a little at the time that linearity, which is not the loss or the absence but the repression of pluri-dimensional

34. Note how Schipper, 224–225, describes this *démarche*: “The taboos of a structural order — those related to spatial orientation .. are the first ones mentioned; but it is also indispensable to understand the secrets of *tun-chia*^{as}, the hidden periods Thanks to the *tun-chia*, the adept will not only find the fault, the crack in the carapace which will enable him to slip inside (the primordial universe), but he will also be able to be absorbed to the point of invisibility, that is, to become himself a part of the landscape.”

symbolic thought, loosens its oppressive grip because it begins to sterilize the scientific and technical economy it long favored.

(Derrida, 128)

Tomorrow is already here, too, in the emancipation of the Jews, their reappearance on the stage of history, and their return to Israel — a return which does not put an end to the diaspora. Tomorrow is already here, finally, in the rediscovery of Taoism and in the recovery, through archaeology and anthropology, of human pre-history. Never has the past been so present as in this today which is already tomorrow.

And tomorrow. What will tomorrow bring? — it will bring nothing good if it denies the past, if it continues to hurtle forward into the future without carefully scrutinizing the traces of the past: the oracle of the future lies waiting to be read in the cracks of the past. On that condition, and on that condition only, will the Eternal be recognized as One, and his name be One. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”³⁵:

This is fast that I prefer: loose the bonds of vice; smash the yoke of impiety; share your bread with the hungry; give hospitality to the unfortunate and the persecuted; cover the nudity of the poor; do not be insensitive to the suffering of your fellow man; break the chains of slavery; deliver the oppressed.

Then, o my people, your star will shine like the dawn, and your prosperity will grow rapidly; your virtue will march before you, and the glory of the Lord will follow you. Invoke him then, and the Lord will answer you; cry unto him, and he will say, “Here I am”.³⁶

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35. This is the beginning of the Shema, Judaism's “profession of faith” which is at the heart of every service. Itself a citation from Deuteronomy 6:4, it is the basis of the first half of Jesus' summary of the Law in Mark 12:29 (the scribe who asked him for the summary left satisfied).

36. *Prières*, 244. This part of the Yom Kippur service is based on Isaiah 58:6—9.

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a 曰
 b 告
 c 神
 d 醮
 e 命
 f 志
 g 意
 h 進表
 i 天文
 j 道藏
 k 諸天内音
 l 理
 m 壇
 n 老君中經
 o 無上秘要
 p 兆
 q 文
 r 分理
 s 肌理
 t 腠理
 u 文理
 v 條理
 w 儀禮
 x 禮科
 y 科
 z 氣

aa 體道
 ab 周禮
 ac 體
 ad 内觀
 ae 人鳥山經圖
 af 若
 ag 誠
 ah 信
 ai 格物
 aj 格文
 ak 聖
 al 真真
 am 真真 人
 an 真文
 ao 真吾
 ap 行道
 aq 行氣
 ar 無為
 as 遁甲
 at 反切
 au 方便
 av 形而下
 aw 形而上
 ax 大淵忍爾
 ay 中國人の宗教禮儀