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## The Book to Come

A question of "good sense," first of all, and of sense: the meaning of à *venir* in "the book to come" does not go without saying. But the word *book* is as difficult to define as the question of the book, at least if the wish is to grant it a sharp specificity, and to cut it out in its irreducibility, at the point where it resists so many neighboring, connected, and even inseparable questions.

For instance, to go to the closest connection: the question of the book, and of the history of the book, should not be conflated with that of writing, or the mode of writing, or the technologies of inscription. There are books, things that are legitimately called books. But they have been and still are written according to systems of writing that are radically heterogeneous. So the book is not linked to a writing.

Nor is it appropriate to conflate the question of the book with that of technologies of printing and reproduction: there were books both before and after the invention of printing, for example.

And the question of the book is not the question of the work. Not all books are works. On the other hand plenty of works, even literary or philosophical works, works of written discourse, are not necessarily books.

Finally, the question of the book should not be conflated with that of supports. Quite literally, or else metonymically (but we will continually be concerned with these figures of the book, with these metonymical, synecdochic, or simply metaphorical movements), it is possible, and this has certainly been done, to speak of books that have the most different kinds of

support-not just the classical ones but the quasi immateriality or virtuality of electronic and telematic operations, of "dynamic supports" with or without screens. We cannot be sure that the unity and identity of the thing called "book" is incompatible with these new tele-technologies. In fact this is what we have to debate.

What then do we have the right to call "book" and in what way is the question of *right*, far from being preliminary or accessory, here lodged at the very heart of the question of the book? This question is governed by the question of right, not only in its particular juridical form, but also in its semantic, political, social, and economic form-in short, in its total form. And the question of the book, as we shall see, is also that of a certain totality.

So all these preliminary distinctions are indispensable even though, as we are well aware, the problematic of the book as an elaborate set of questions in itself involves all the concepts that I have just distinguished from the book: writing, the modes of inscription, production, and reproduction, the work and its working, the support, the market economy and the economics of storage, the law, politics, and so on.

I will start again from round about the question of the book with the different but related question of the "support." This is the question that comes to mind when we are interested in the current process, in its future, and in what is transforming the present form of what we call book.

Here and now we are speaking in a place that is still, essentially, a future place that has barely been inaugurated and that we are already, or still, call "library," *bibliothèque*.

Even before its proper name, before its national and French proper names (Bibliothèque *nationale de France* and *François Mitterrand*), this precinct bears an ordinary name, *bibliothèque*. This beautiful name is entitled in more than one way to be a title. As we know it means the place where the book (*biblion*) is dealt with. The book is dealt with as a question, and books are dealt with in certain ways-the open history of this treatment and these ways is, we know, immense, complicated, multiple, convoluted. I will say something about this in a moment.

I mentioned the Greek word *biblion* not to sound scholarly, or even-it's too easy-to explain the word *bibliothèque*. I spoke Greek to observe in passing that *biblion* has not always meant "book" or even work. ("Work" is something else again, which will perhaps take us, in a

little while, to the margins of a serious problem, that of the future relationship between on the one hand the form *book*, the model of the book, and on the other hand a work in general, an *oeuvre*, an opus, the unity or body of an oeuvre marked out by a beginning and an end, and so a totality: assumed to be conceived and produced, and indeed signed by an author, a single identifiable author, and offered up for the respectful reading of a reader who doesn't meddle with it, doesn't transform it on the inside-in what we now call an "interactive" way.)

But does any oeuvre, be it literal or literary, have as its destiny or essential destination only a "bookish" incorporation? This must be one of the very many questions that await us. *Biblion*, which didn't initially or always mean "book," still less "oeuvre," could designate a support for writing (so derived from *biblos*, which in Greek names the internal bark of the papyrus and thus of the paper, like the Latin word *liber*, which first designated the living part of the bark before it meant "book"). *Biblion*, then, would only mean "writing paper," and not book, nor oeuvre or opus, only the substance of a particular support-bark. But *biblion* can also, by metonymy, mean any writing support, tablets for instance, or even letters: post. A bibliophile (*bibliophoros*) is someone who carries the letters (which aren't necessarily books or works). He's a sort of postman or else a scrivener-the secretary, the lawyer, the clerk of the court.

The extension of these metonymies pushed *biblion* toward the meaning of "writing" in general (in that it was no longer reducible to the support but came to inscribe itself right on the papyrus or tablet, without however being a book: not all writing is a book). Then – new extension – it was pushed toward the "book" form that is what interests us this evening, and which already has a long and complicated history from the volumen, the papyrus scroll, to the *codex*, in which notebooks are bound to boards placed over them.

Already in Greek, *bibliotheke* means the slot for a book, books' place of deposit, the place where books are put (*poser*), deposited, laid down (*reposer*), the entrep~twhere they are stored: a *bibliophylakion* is the deposit or warehouse, the *entrepôt*, for books, writings, nonbook archives in general; and the *bibliopoleion* is the bookstore or *librairie*, a name, often given to the *bibliothèque*, and that has been kept, of course, in English ("library").

As to the kinds of treatment these places have in store, let me just stress the traditional words I had to use to describe them, and which are all leads to follow for future reflection. These are the verbs *poser*, *déposer*, *re-*

*poser*, and *entreposer*. Like the presence of the Greek *tithenai* ("to put") in, *bibliotheke*, they all Point up the act of *putting*, depositing, but also the act of immobilizing, of giving something over to a stabilizing immobility, and so to the statute, to the statutory and even state institution, which alerts us to all the institutional, juridical, and political dimensions that we must also debate. Setting down, laying down, depositing, storing, warehousing—this is also receiving, collecting together, gathering together, consigning (like baggage), binding together, collecting, totalizing, electing, and reading by binding. So the idea of *gathering together*, as much as that of the immobility of the statutory and even state deposit, seems as essential to the idea of the book as to that of the library. And since the question of the future that we have been asked to consider this evening concerns the book as much as the library, I imagine that there will be no surprise in rediscovering these motifs of the *thetic* position and the collection: of the gathering together that is statutory, legitimate, institutional, and even state or national.

Let me mention in passing that all these motifs are themselves collected together in the question of the *title*. Can we imagine a book without a title? We can, but only up to the point when we will have to name it and thus also to classify it, deposit it in an order, put it into a catalog, or a series, or a taxonomy. It is difficult to imagine, or at any rare to deal with, with a book that is neither placed nor collected together under a title bearing its name, its identity, the condition of its legitimacy and of its copy-right. And in connection with titles, it happens that the name of this place, Bibliothèque, gives its title to a place which, as it already does, will more and more in the future have to collect together (in order to make them available to users) texts, documents, and archives that are further and further away from both the support that is paper and the *book* form.

This is in truth the question that we are being asked this evening. "What about the book to come?" Will we continue for long to use the word library for a place that essentially no longer collects together a store of books? Even if this place still houses all possible books, even if their number continued to hold up, as I think can be envisaged, even if for a long time books still represented the majority of texts produced, nonetheless the underlying tendency would be for such a place increasingly to be expected to become a space for work, reading, and writing that was governed or dominated by texts no longer corresponding to the "book" form: electronic texts with no paper support, texts not corpus or opus-not finite

and separable oeuvres; groupings no longer forming texts, even, but open textual processes offered on boundless national and international networks, for the active or interactive intervention of readers turned coauthors, and so on.

If we still say library or *bibliothèque* to designate this kind of place to come, is it only through one of those metonymic slippages like the one that led to the Greek noun *biblion* being kept, or the Latin noun *liber*, to designate first of all writing, what is written down, and then "the book" – even though at the beginning it meant only the papyrus bark or even part of the living bark of a tree?

Still thinking, under a preliminary head, about titles, or copyright brands, the title chosen for this exchange, as it can be read on the posters, says very precisely: "On the Book to Come." The title does not say "The Book to Come," but " On the Book to Come." As you know, the expression *the book to come* has a long history. It was already a book title, hence a title printed on the cover of a book, the book by Maurice Blanchot entitled, in 1959, *Le Livre à venir*, *The Book to Come*.

Now *Le Livre à venir*, the title, is printed *on* the book, on *Le Livre à venir*, and this *mise en abyme*, a structure that libraries have always favored, takes off once more by itself, when you think that this title, *Le Livre à venir*, printed on *Le Livre à venir*, is also to be found or found again in *Le Livre à venir*, hence within a book, of course, enveloped, gathered up, folded into a book that deals with the book.

More than once, at least three times *en abyme*: for the expression "the book to come," *le livre à venir*, appears inside an article entitled "The Book to Come," which itself gives its title to the book in which it is collected with numerous other articles. Its first subsection is called "*Ecce Liber*," and if there had been time we ought to have read this text very closely, specifically with regard to the questions that concern us this evening. For this quotation *en abyme* is already taking us, at least if we want to follow its genealogy, into a whole French library, from Blanchot to Mallarmé. That is why I would like to insist-only a very little, given the shortage of time on this quotation of a quotation, even before getting going on the urgent and thorny question we have been asked to consider of the "book to come." A question trembling all over, not only with that which disturbs the historical sense of what we still call a book, but also with what the expression *to come* might imply – namely more than one thing, at least three things:

1. That the book as such has – or doesn't have – a future, now that electronic and virtual incorporation, the screen and the keyboard, online transmission, and numerical composition seem to be dislodging or supplementing the *codex* (that gathering of a pile of pages bound together, the current form of what we generally call a book such that it can be opened, put on a table, or held in the hands). The *codex* had itself supplanted the volume, the *volumen*, the scroll. It had supplanted it without making it disappear, I should stress. For what we are dealing with is never replacements that put an end to what they replace but rather, if I might use this word today, restructurations in which the oldest form survives, and even survives endlessly, coexisting with the new form and even coming to terms with a new economy~which is also a calculation in terms of the market as well as in terms of storage, capital, and reserves.

2. That if it has a future, the book to come will no longer be what it was.

3. That we are awaiting or hoping for an *other* book, a book to come that will transfigure or even rescue the book from the shipwreck that is happening at present.

This word *shipwreck*: before here connoting the abyss, the ghost, or the return of some feared catastrophe, happening now or to come, it plunges us back into a singular work that was and was not a book, Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés...* [A Throw of the Dice], around which Blanchot wrote an essay entitled "The Book to Come," inside which one reads the expression *the book to come*, which also happens to be the title of the collection or *recueil* – another word that points in the direction of binding and gathering, but first of all toward welcome or *accueil* (Mallarmé designates the reader as a "guest").

Let me again emphasize the word *recueil*. The linearity with which book writing is so often associated already receives a blow [coup], and it wasn't the first, in all the marine, abyssal, ghostly, numerical, or numerological figures of this "coup de dés," to the extent that I couldn't read this text out loud, in the linear successiveness of a temporality, without destroying the differentiated sizes of the letters and the typographical distribution of a spacing that no longer respects the division and irreversibility of pagination, and where I'm barbarically selecting a few figures as I would do, and indeed have done, on my computer:

NEVER

[ ... ] FROM THE DEPTHS OF A SHIPWRECK

THOUGH IT BE

that

the Abyss [...]

corpse by the arm

separated from the secret it withholds

rather

than play

as a hoary maniac

the game

in the name of the waves [...]

shipwreck this

pertaining to man

without vessel

Nuptials

from which

the veil of illusion sprung up against their haunting

like the ghost of a gesture

will falter

will fall

madness [...]

bitter prince of the reef

*IT WAS*  
*born of the stars*

*THE NUMBER*

WERE IT TO EXIST [...]

WERE IT TO BEGIN AND WERE IT TO CEASE [...]

WERE IT TO BE NUMBERED [...]

WERE IT TO ILLUMINE [...]

# CHANCE

*Falls*  
*the feather*  
*rhythmical suspension of disaster*  
*to be buried*  
*in the original spray*  
*whence formerly its delirium sprang up to a peak*  
*withered*  
*by the identical neutrality of the abyss [...]*

NOTHING

of the memorable crisis  
or might  
the event    have been accomplished in view of all results    null  
human

WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE  
an ordinary elevation pours out absence

BUT THE PLACE  
some splashing below of water as if to disperse the empty act  
abruptly which otherwise  
by its falsehood  
would have founded  
perdition

in these latitudes  
of indeterminate  
waves  
in which all reality dissolves [...] <sup>1</sup>

At the risk of outrageously mistreating the *quotation* or the *presentation*, allow me to insist on *Un Coup de dés...* as a way of saluting and paying tribute to Mallarmé, and this unique book, *and* the exemplary respect shown by the old Bibliothèque nationale in the rue Richelieu in its treatment of his manuscript, his original editions, and his very difficult printing.

What account should we take this evening of the meditation that

Blanchot dedicates to Mallarmé in *The Book to Come?* To Mallarmé, which is to say also to the author of *Quant au livre* [As to the Book], which includes "Le Livre, instrument spirituel" (which we should reread closely, especially with regard to folding, meaning the folding of the codex and to this sacralization, the "quasi-religious," as Mallarmé puts it, and which we should have much more to say about).

It's in the text that begins with the famous "proposition": "A proposition that emanates from me.... I claim it ... in brief means, that everything, in the world, exists to end up in a book"; or again "admitted the volume includes no signatory,"<sup>2</sup> and that says so much on the folds, folding, and folding back of paper where it gives rise, gives place, a sacred place, sometimes a place of burial, a dwelling or a tomb:

Now-

Folding is, in relation to the large printed sheet, a sign, quasi-religious: that does not strike so much as its compression, in thickness, offering the minuscule tomb, surely, of the soul.<sup>3</sup>

In the discussion we will surely have to come back to this religiosity, to this quasi sacrality, more precisely to this quasi resacralization that, with all the political issues it involves, has marked the entire history of technologies of inscription and archiving, the entire history of supports and printing methods-as if each stage, in a technological transformation, seemed the one to desacralize, democratize, secularize, defetishize, throughout an interminable history of Enlightenment or Reason (before and beyond the *Aufklärung*); but as though each stage, all the same, was also inescapably accompanied by a sacred or religious reinvestment. For it is obvious, for instance, that if our generation is suffering from seeing the book yield ground in the face of other supports, other modes of reading and writing, this is partly because, inevitably, it has resacralized everything connected with the book (its time, its space, its rhythm, starting from the ways it is handled, the ways it is legitimated, even the body, the eyes, and the hands bent around it, the quasi-priestly sociality of its producers, interpreters, and decision makers, in all their institutions of selection and legitimation); and this, despite the fact that this resacralized and refetishized book has been an element of secularization and democratization, with its phonetic writing, for instance, and then its modes of printing and reproduction.

Roger Chartier's extremely detailed, full analysis in *Les Représentations de l'écrit* makes this point. This democratization / secularization is a process that both Vico and Condorcet, among others, tried to take into account. In *Of Grammatology*, more than thirty years ago, I tried to analyze some other examples of this techno-political history of literature.

Let me leave on one side the questions of fetishization, of sacralization, of surplus value from increasing rareness, in order to return to one of the themes that Blanchot privileges in "the book to come," in *The Book to Come* – in the article on "the book to come" in the book called *The Book to Come*.

This really is about the project of a Book to come and not about the book's being-*past* that we have just started speaking about. Blanchot's meditation is inscribed between *Un Coup de dés...* and the Book project, the project of the Work (with a capital letter) as Book – it took up a lot of his time and we have his notes for it. In it, Blanchot privileges the double antinomic motif of division and gathering (this semantics of the collection, of binding, the vocabulary of *colligere* I was discussing just now). The subtitle of this part is "Gathered Through Dispersion." And that is the beginning of the question of the future, of the book to come. Its past has not yet reached us, we have yet to think it:

I will not assert that *Un coup de dés* is the Book, an assertion that the Books specifications would deprive of all meaning.... It has the essential quality of the Book: present with this lightning-stroke that divides it and gathers it back together, and yet it is extremely problematic, so much so that even today for us, so familiar (we think) with A that is not familiar, it continues to be the most unlikely work. It could be said that we have assimilated Mallarmé's work more or less readily, but not *Un coup de dés*. *Un coup de dés* implies a completely different book from the book that we have: it makes us feel that what we call "book" according to the traditional Western usages, in which the gaze identifies the act of comprehension with the repetition of linear back-and-forth motions, is justified only in the facilitation of analytic comprehension.<sup>4</sup>

What I would like to do here, before concluding, and with a view to setting out for discussion some interconnected propositions, even if this means coming back to them later to back them up, is first of all to formalize a central motif, in Blanchot's *The Book to Come*, concerning Mallarmé. This central, organizing motif is on the one hand a tension, one that is constitutive of *The Book to Come* as Mallarmé projects it. This is the *tension between gathering and dispersion*, a tension which, on the other hand, without being resolved, gets into a circular form, into the circulation of the circle.

Here are some lines on the subject of this motif of putting into circulation a dispersal that is gathered together or linked to itself.

*Un Coup de dés* orients the future of the book both in the direction of the greatest dispersion and in the direction of a tension capable of *gathering* infinite diversity, by the discovery of more complex structures. The mind, says Mallarmé, following Hegel, is "*volatile dispersion*." The book that collects the mind thus collects an extreme capacity for rupture, a limitless anxiety, one that the book *cannot contain* [my emphasis: the book contains what it can't contain, it is both bigger and smaller than what it is, like any library in fact], one that excludes all content from it, all limited, defined, and complete sense. It is a movement of diaspora that must never be repressed but instead preserved and welcomed as such into the space that is projected from it and to which this movement only responds, a response to an indefinitely multiplied void where dispersion takes on the form and appearance of unity. Such a book, always in movement, always on the verge of scattering, will also always be gathered in all directions, through dispersion itself and according to the division that is essential to it, which it makes not disappear, but appear, maintaining this dispersion so the book can accomplish itself there.

*Un Coup de dés* was born from a new understanding of literary space...<sup>5</sup>

To this insoluble tension (for what can a dispersion be once it is gathered together as such? what can be the "as such" of a division that gathers and assembles and links division itself?), Blanchot brings a formulation, if not a solution, that, even if the word dialectics is not actually mentioned, remains dialectical—and it is no accident that the name Hegel, as you have heard, enters in at this place and at this time.

This Hegelian formulation is that of a circle, a circular *becoming* whose effect would be not to annul tension but to displace it and bring it into a becoming full of meaning: "The Book is thus, subtly, affirmed in the *becoming* that is perhaps [the word perhaps—the last word in the chapter will play a role that I cannot dwell on here] its meaning, a meaning that might be the very becoming of the circle. The end of the work is its origin, its new and old beginning: it is its possibility opened one more time, so that the dice thrown once again can be the very throw of the masterful words."<sup>6</sup>

Well, if I may mention it, that is the point some thirty years ago where I thought I had to make a diagnosis or could make a prognosis, in *Of Grammatology*, under the heading "The End of the Book," at the risk of seeing myself accused, quite absurdly, of wishing for the death of the book and pressing for it. What I then called "the end of the book" came at the close of a whole history: a history of the book, of the figure of the book,

and even of what was called "the book of nature" (Galileo, Descartes, Hume, Bonnet, Von Schubert, and so on).<sup>7</sup> In speaking of the ongoing "end of the book," I was referring to what was already in the offing, of course, and what we're talking about tonight, but mainly I meant the onto-encyclopedic or neo-Hegelian model of the great total book, the book of absolute knowledge linking its own infinite dispersion to itself, in a circle.

Now what is happening today, what looks like being the very form of the book's to-come, still as the book, is on *the one hand*, beyond the closure of the book, the disruption, the dislocation, the disjunction, the dissemination with no possible gathering, the irreversible dispersion of this total codex (not its disappearance but its marginalization or secundarization, in ways we will have to come back to); but simultaneously, *on the other hand*, a constant reinvestment in the book project, in the book of the world or the world book, in the absolute book (this is why I also described the end of the book as interminable or endless), the new space of writing and reading in electronic writing, traveling at top speed from one spot on the globe to another, and linking together, beyond frontiers and copyrights, not only citizens of the world on the universal network of a potential universitas, but also any reader as a writer, potential or virtual or whatever. That revives a desire, the same desire. It re-creates the temptation that is figured by the World Wide Web as the ubiquitous Book finally reconstituted, the book of God, the great book of Nature, or the World Book finally achieved in its onto-theological dream, even though what it does is to repeat the end of that book as to-come.

These are two fantasmatic limits of the book to come, two extreme, final, eschatic figures of the end of the book, the end as death, or the end as *telos* or achievement. We must take seriously these two fantasies; what's more they are what makes writing and reading happen. They remain as irreducible as the two big ideas of the book, of the *book* both as the unit of a material support in the world, and as the unity of a work or unit of discourse (a book in the book). But we should also perhaps wake up to the necessity that goes along with these fantasies.

And I will only point out the necessity of this law, by way of a dry conclusion in four remarks, or four vanishing points that would be worth developing interminably. I utter them or send them telegraphically, to cast them into the discussion like little dots, elliptical dots or throws of the dice.

1. *The playful and the serious*. How can one speak seriously about the book (assuming that one has to be serious, in other words also be governed by the idea of knowledge- circular and pedagogical-that is only one dimension of the book as encyclopedia, the other one being the dimension of play, chance, and literature, which will always raise the question of whether, as a throw of the dice, it includes or lets itself be included by the encyclopedia)? We will only be able to speak seriously about these two fantasies of the book to come if we neutrally give up any kind of eschatological teleology, in other words any kind of evaluation, whether pessimistic or optimistic, reactionary or progressive. So we should on the one hand give up any lamentation, pointless and powerless in any case, that would come along to tell us in the face of the inevitable: "What's befalling us is the death of the book- catastrophe. We must at all costs save the book from this death that threatens us, the death of everything we have held sacred, of everything to which our cultures and our truths and our revelations, and our modes of legitimation, and so on, are indissociably attached." In fact – let's be serious – we know that the book isn't simply going to disappear. For any number of reasons, it is not even certain that in terms of volume its market production is not destined to remain stable, and even to increase, and in a mediatized market that we should also speak about seriously. I would like to come back to this point in the discussion. On the other hand, we should analyze the retention of the model of the book, the liber – of the unit and the distribution of discourse, even its pagination on the screen, even the body, the hands and eyes that it continues to orient, the rhythm it prescribes, its relationship to the title, its modes of legitimation, even where the material support has disappeared (the new electronic journals, based in universities across the world, generally reproduce the traditional formats, editorial norms, criteria of evaluation and selection – for better and for worse) .

There is, there will therefore be, as always, the coexistence and structural survival of past models at the moment when genesis gives rise to new possibilities. What is more, you can love more than one thing at a time, and not give anything up, as with the unconscious. I'm in love with the book, in my own way and forever (which sometimes leads me, paradoxically, to find that there are too many of them and not at all "not enough"); I love every form of the book and I see no reason to give this love up. But I also love-this is the fate of my generation, of just this one generation the computer and the TV. And I like writing with a pen just as much,

sometimes just as little, as writing with a typewriter – mechanical or electric – or on a computer. A new economy is being put in place. It brings into coexistence, in a mobile way, a multiplicity of models, and of modes of archiving and accumulation. And that's what the history of the book has always been. We must be vigilant in resisting this catastrophe-minded pessimism, apart from the fact that it reveals the pointless temptation to oppose the inevitable development of technologies whose advantages, as well, are obvious, not just in terms of efficiency and economy but also ethically and politically. But we must also be wary of a progressivist – and sometimes "romantic" – optimism, ready to endow the new distance technologies of communication with the myth of the infinite book without material support, the myth of universalist transparency, of communication that is immediate, totalizing, and free of controls, beyond all frontiers, in a sort of big democratic village. The optimism of a new *Aufklärung* ready to sacrifice, even burn on its altar, all the old books and their libraries – which would be another form of barbarity. The truth of the book, if I may put it like that, at any rate its *necessity*, resists – and dictates to us (this is also the seriousness of a "must") that we should resist both these fantasies, which are only the flipside of each other.

2. *Another politics of restructuring.* For in what I dare not call the "restructuring in progress" that is neither a death nor a resurrection, we can also trust in the conservative, even fetishistic impulse. Interminably, it will reinvest the book threatened by this "restructuring" of culture and knowledge. This fetishism will sanctify – sanctify once again – the book, the aura of culture or the cult of the book, the body of the book and the body used to the book, the time, the temporality, and the spacing of the book, the habitus of the love of the book that will be revalorized and overvalued exactly according to the possibility of its becoming scarce, not to say commercially secondary or in decline. This fortunately incorrigible fetishism will even protect the signs of post-book technologies threatened by more advanced technologies.

3. *The right to books.* Between the two fantasies I have just mentioned, the turbulence and impasses have, as always, a juridical and ethical-political form. If everything symbolized by the World Wide Web can have a liberating effect (in relation to controls and all forms of policing, and even the censorship exercised by the machines of power – of the nationstate, the economy, the universities, and publishing), it is all too obvious that that only advances by opening up zones without rights, "wild" areas,

areas of "anything goes" (ranging from the most dangerous, politically speaking, to the most insignificant and the most inept, the worst that could come and fill in, paralyze, or break up space). A difficult question in a war for rights and power that was already ongoing at the time of the booles domination, but is obviously taking on new forms and new rhythms. They must be recognized, analyzed, and treated as fairly as possible.

4. Finally, we could speak of a *secondarization of the second* itself, whatever the unprecedented singularity of an ongoing mutation. It is true that this mutation leaves nothing outside itself on earth and beyond earth, in humanity and beyond humanity. This mutation we can call monstrous: as such, at least, and where "it's changing," it has no model and no norm to reproduce. Nevertheless, we know and we can say that what is changing the face of everything on the face of the world in this way is but a little fraction of a fraction of a second in a history which has been transforming the relationship of the living organism to itself and its environment, both progressively and through sudden mutations-the relationship of the face, for instance (since I have just mentioned what is changing the face of everything on the face of the world), the relationship of the head, the eyes, the mouth, and the brain to the rest of the body, to standing up, to the hand, to time and speed, and so on.

It is that much more vertiginous, but we do know it: what we are living through and talking about – at too much length, please forgive me – occupies the time and place of a miniscule comma in an infinite text.

That breathes or lives like the whisper of a tiny and almost invisible punctuation mark in what perhaps does not even make a history.

A history, at the very least, which does not hold fast, a history which cannot be maintained, a history which is no longer held in the hand, now.<sup>8</sup>

It no longer obeys the finger and the eye, as a book would. Might it ever have done so?

## CHAPTER 2: THE BOOK TO COME

This piece introduced a discussion with Roger Chartier and Bernard Stiegler that took place at the new Bibliothèque nationale de France [French National Library], also known as the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand, on March 20, 1997.

1. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Coup de dés (A Throw of the Dice)* (1897), in *Collected Poems*, trans. and with a commentary by Henry Weinfield (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 124-45.

2. Mallarmé, "Le Livre, instrument spirituel" (The Book, Spiritual Instrument) (1895), in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard: Pléiade, 1979), p. 318.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

4. Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come* (1959), trans. Charlotte Mandel (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003), P. 234; trans. mod.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-35; trans. mod.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967), trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 16.

8. In French there is a play here on the word *maintenant*, "now," which is literally "hand-holding," from *main* (hand) and *tenir* (hold). *Maintenir* ("maintain"), in the previous sentence, is etymologically the same: to maintain is to hold with the hand.-Trans.

