

## Portrait of the artist as an old dog

### *Of Rilke, Cézanne, and the animalisation of painting*

FILIPPO FIMIANI

[The critics] are seeing things that we cannot see, just as a dog bristles and whines in a dark lane when nothing is visible to human eyes.

Virginia Woolf

... animals are the depositories of the forgotten.

Walter Benjamin

Self-knowledge and self-fashioning, animality and humanity of the subject who criticises and analyses himself with autoscopic insight, with resentment and unfeeling reactions of aesthetic values, all these together represent the themes dealt with in a few paragraphs (18, 22, and 23) of the dissertation on "Guilt, Guilty Consciences and the Like" of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. The flexibly shaping nature of *Selbstbeobachtung*, the desire for a form of self-observation, is directed towards the "complete animal self." And this "beast within man" is tamed and rendered ineffectual in its drives and instincts, so that its wounds are livid moments of a hypertrophy of the values of good and beautiful, an overgrowth of the figure of his inner-most being, and of the fantasies of his mind and forms of art. *Bestialität der Idee* is thus a reactive symbolical and aesthetic activity of the evil conscience, projective and deadening exuberant response to that animality of *Selbst* which continues to endure—also as "the residue of a metaphor" and as remnant of an analogy.<sup>1</sup>

I will be concerned with these textual and metaphorical minutiae, with this minimal material leftover and the resistance to interpretation found in certain Rilkean writings. I will only examine, however, certain aspects and stances of this figure—one last time

with Nietzsche—*knöcherner*, bony as a dice that falls awkwardly on its corners, to describe it cutting through the grey mesh of the order of discourse and through the variegated web of the symbolization process. Indeed I will dwell on certain indexes of an *opacity of self-representation*, wherein the space of figurability of the subject is presented—space of a distortion process that sucks down the persuasive model dimension of the representation of self—and of a *formless plastic*, which imposes itself in a traumatic and stupefying way. I hope to show that it is all a matter of *material* and *non-metaphorical indexes* that direct Rilke and ourselves towards a recollection of the immemorial, together with survival and prolepsis, the subject's origin and destiny. These indexes yield neither to hermeneutics nor to historical quirks, both possibly issuing from the transitive and transparent dimension of representation in the direction of underlying horizons and institutions of sense. On the contrary, the *coup de main* and the risky methodology of my interpretation aim at the effects of a *latency* and of a *virtuality* of the image, their composite temporality, dense and intransitive, which require both *anamnesis* and ultimate recollection of that which finds no place in any recorded history.

1. On October 23, 1907, Rilke writes to his wife Clara yet again about Cézanne:

The object of the *Self-portrait with rose background*, is here intelligible in itself, and words so ill adapted to render pictorial data, before the subject represented, with which their real terrain begins, would prove correspondingly suitable for describing what is there.<sup>2</sup> It is a man who presents himself with his profile turned forward at forty-five degrees towards the right, engaged in the act of looking. His thick dark hair has fallen down unto his nape above his ears, so that the outline of his skull appears completely bare. It is drawn with extreme confidence, hard and yet round, its prominent forehead a single piece, and its solidity is to be noted even where, merging into form and

1. Cfr. F. Nietzsche, *Morgenröte*, § 25, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Kritische Studienausgabe hrsg. v. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 1988. Cfr. *Zur Genese der Dummheit* of T. W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1966), in T. W. Adorno *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. v. Rolf Tiedmann, Bd. III, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1984, p. 287. In *Mensch und Tier*, with Hegelian syntax, Adorno writes: "Art, morality and sublime love are masks of nature, in which it returns transformed and becomes, in its own antithesis, expression. [...] In its deformation, *Verzerrung*, appears its essence." *Ibid.*, pp. 295–296.

2. Ca. 1875, oil on canvas, 26 x 21 5/8" (66 x 55 cm), private collection, Venturi n. 286; cfr. S. Platzman, *Cézanne: The Self-portraits*, London, California University Press-Thames & Hudson, 2001.

surface, it becomes only the outermost of a thousand features. The solid structure of this skull pushed forward from within becomes even more pronounced in the corners of its eye sockets; yet it drops from there as if every single feature were hanging from it, rendering with incredible assurance and yet reducing it in the most primitive way the expression of wild astonishment into which children and country folk can lose themselves: only that the expressionless stupidity of his stooping has been replaced by the animal concentration which keeps a constant objective vigilance in his eyes, unfazed by any blinking. How great and incorruptible was that objectivity of his gaze, is confirmed almost movingly by the circumstance that he reproduced himself without explaining his expression in any way or appearing superior, with the fidelity and objectively-interested involvement of a dog seeing itself in a mirror and thinking: "there's a dog there too."<sup>3</sup>

The *ekphrasis* is not structured so much through a series of pauses in the narration as through points of intensity in a process, through phases and stages of a regressive and polysemic becoming of the portrait's subject, which is eventually reduced to the *most primitive*, anteceding the sovereign sign of expression, the face. Thus the epistemic prolepsis wherewith the proper description opens, or the statement of the referential status of the description of the painting's "what is it," finds its own term of reference only at the end, in the deictic statement "there's a dog there too," *Da ist noch ein Hund*. Even if in this utterance the reader is clearly inclined to note more the *fictio* than the denotative sense, though backed by the neutral and objectless construction, and to suspend the pact of credibility with the author: How could the animal be endowed with the capacity to discern and declare its own identity? Intrigued and made different by the avowed *literary distortion* by Rilke (to *Clara*, 12.X.1907), which affects the canine analogy, the reader could then infer the literary significance of the situation, and interpret it correctly as *topos* set in a cultural ambience and tradition.<sup>4</sup> The present tense of the statement which

concludes the Rilkean *ekphrasis*, directed by the durative preposition *noch*, would thus open to a genetic backtracking along literary institutions all the way up to Plato's *Republic*, where in fact it was a question of a "philosophical aptitude" of the dog and its nature endowed "with contrasting characters" (375d); and such a coexistence between aggressiveness and sociality, violence and language, war and commerce will be the nucleus of various reflections on the elementary dynamics of human social life, and the dog no less will represent the figure of the dialectic between tamedness and wildness, and between sublimation and instincts.<sup>5</sup>

And even in the Rilkean passages we find quite plainly sketched out, discreetly yet appropriately, a social portrait of the artist—Cézanne but also Rilke himself—*sub specie canis*, so to speak. In the letter dated October 23, we can clearly recognize the traits of a degradation of the political quality of man the animal, which drives him to the limits of his ethical principles and history, towards the minority, elementary, and inhuman states of the human, that is to say towards the infantile, the peasant, the bestial, the stupid, figures which mean the *animalischen und namenlosen Leben* of the 1902 text about Rodin.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Musil really understood better than anyone else this metamorphosis of human beings into "things or beings without a name."<sup>7</sup> Such animalisation of the artist would not only

5. The Guard of the Platonic city, Socrates states (Plato *Resp.* 376b), must be "by nature a philosopher, instinctively aggressive, and then also swift and strong." Behind Adorno's reflections there is the definitive parody of the Nietzschean aphorism entitled *Die Tier und die Moral: "everything we qualify by the name of Socratic virtue is animal"* (*Morgenröte*, § 26). The recurrent invective fired against the "canine species of men who allow themselves to be maltreated" (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, § 260), covers a deep closeness between Nietzsche and Valéry: both, in fact, record in the dog's look at man the principle, both anthropological and psychological, but "in a coarse" and elementary form, of the institution of the political—military and religious cult in history. Cf. P. Valéry, *Cahiers*, II, édition établie, présentée et annotée par J. Robinson, Paris, Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1974, pp.1341, 1493, and F. Nietzsche, *Nachgelesene Fragmente 1884* 26 [242].

6. R. M. Rilke, *Rodin* (1903–1907), in *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. v. Rilke-Archiv mit R. Sieber-Rilke und E. Zinn, Bd. VI, Frankfurt a.M., Insel-Verlag, 1965, p. 178. I am thinking of the animal silence for Adorno (Cf. M. Horkheimer-T. W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, cit., p. 263) and of creature-language bond, mute-mourning of *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, and of the essay on language by Benjamin; cf. B. Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History. Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels*, Berkeley, University of California University Press, 1998.

7. R. Musil, *Rede zur Rilke-Feier in Berlin am 16. Januar 1927*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, hrsg. v. A. Frisé, Bd. VIII, Hamburg, Rowalith Verlag, 1978, p. 1237.

3. R. M. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, hrsg. v. C. Rilke und H. W. Petzel, Frankfurt a.M., Insel, 1983. (I will indicate in the text only the dates of the epistolary). For a general picture, see H. Meyer "Rilke Cézannes Erlebnis," *Jahrbuch für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 2, 1954, pp. 69–202; K. Imm, *Rilkes Briefe über Cézanne*, Frankfurt a.M.-Bern, Lang, 1986; J. Le Rider, "Rilke et Cézanne. La poésie à l'école de la couleur," *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft* 12, 1992, pp. 109–117.

4. Cf. T. Ziolkowski "Talking dogs: The caninization of literature," in *Varieties on Literary Thematics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 86–122, with bibliography for the anthropological, folkloristic, and religious sources.

consecrate the artist's own ultimate humanity and his artistic nature, but also his relationship with himself and with other men, and, finally, with his own art. Indeed, in the letters to Clara, some of these social and existential markers introduce the analogy between the artist and the dog: Rilke, interpolating the first part of an essay by Emile Bernard that had just been published in the *Mercure de France* with the animal analogy, on October 8 (but also on the 13th) describes Cézanne as old and worn out, persecuted by young boys "who threw stones at him as though to a bad dog."

But only in part is the dog here, as in *Malte*, a "heraldic dog": that is to say the figure of a constant rewriting of himself and of others as a continuous meditation on the originality and descent of his own oeuvre. First, the dog is the textual instance of a genealogical interrogation about himself as author and as subject of a question regarding his own origin and destiny. It is in this sense, in fact, that the animal in the novel is often associated with the presence of ghosts, with returns in the present time of the family life of a past that never stops to go on, with the recording of a *genealogical heterotopy* within the domestic and social scene which, as imagery, does not cease to redouble the visible and utterable. The dog is thus a mythical forerunner and infernal intermediary, Cerberus or Nabis, the guardian of the boundary between familiar places and the limitless space of ghostly shadows, between the orderliness of the day and chaos of night. On the other hand, the last page of Malte's diary informs us that dogs, the companions and interlocutors of his relationship with infancy and death, are still alive, thus keepers and witnesses of a long duration much more than of a morsel of time in history, lost forever as soon as it was recorded.

Dogs are figures of *superstition* because they channel *survivals*. For example, the apparition of Christine Brahe, one of the ghosts that haunt the house of Ulsgaard, where Malte spent his childhood, appears with clearly mythological traits and her representation, her appearance, at the same time both childish and ancient, expressionist and tragic, enhances details and focuses overdetermined acts on the scene, indicators of the long endurance of symbols: her "grey head" recalls the head shrouded in shadow and devoid of strength, a mere casket of nothingness, in Homer (*Odyssey* XI 29, 49) and the *Aidos kunée* of Perseus narrated by Hesiod, the dog-skin helmet of Hades, which makes anyone who wears it invisible to the living, literally *no one*, dead in life—and in this sense, we find it again in the social outcasting of the artist-bohemian Cézanne, almost a

*Persée au XXème siècle*. And still an archaic figure is the sound of disquiet that the woman leaves behind: the whimpering of an old dog is in fact like a sound clue, unique yet recurring, of the infigurable, a sign of the *enargeia*, the force of flesh-and-bone that evidences the incorporeal, which recalls the barking of the dogs in Aeschylus's *Eumenides* (117, 189) and the shrill wailing, the uncanny clangour of the dead in Book XI of the *Odyssey* (605).

*Les morts ne sont nulle part et ne le seront jamais*, "the dead are nowhere and will never be," Proust annotated in the margin of *Bal de têtes* of his *Temps Retrouvé*, a staging, not by chance, of a resurgence of atavistic and animal biological features on the distorted faces of its characters. The place of Malte's present is streaked by such diachronies and atopies—by the wanderings of those for whom it is impossible to stay and inhabit since, as he says, the dead do not sit—that inscribe his remembering into a much more ancient lineage; even his putting into words, his figures and *topoi*, readopt old symbolic functions and forms, both classical and mythological, which, however, it will not do to date and reconstruct as sources of Rilkean writing, but rather to collect as repetitions and experiences of elementary and fundamental anthropological dimensions. On the other hand, and this is a most relevant point, Malte declares that what requires exercise of memory is *beyond* every filiation: it is an infancy which, Rilke will say when referring to Rodin in 1907, does not belong to anyone, which is a *before* that does not dissolve into any *afterwards*, and thus dislocates the linear and progressive temporality of memory especially because it transcends every individual psychic content and every private experience.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, manifested here are the symptoms of the inactive process of the figurability of melancholy, the removal of the process of mournful *introjection* that assimilates and appropriates absence, which finally gives it a place and a name, a double and a substitute in the theatre of Ego's ghosts: one may think, in fact, of the functions of *ersetzen*, of substituting—which are in the end the functions of representing as taking-the-place-of, as equivalents to—as in the comment on the self-portrait.

8. Benjamin will find a similar connection between the forgotten meta-individual, *das Vergessene*, and the prehistory of the underworld, *der Vorwelt*, in Kafka: cit. W. Benjamin, *Franz Kafka, Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages* (1931), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, cit., Bd. II-2, pp. 430–431.

In *Malte* the starting point is thus the realization of the dearth of experience which distinguishes the present time and marks the irreversible transition from European aristocracy to American democracy, from hunting to automobile, from sedentary practices associated with one's lineage and kinship to the mobile ones of tourism dictated by wealth and fashion, obsessively sought after by homeless individuals lacking inherited possessions and without dogs—a symbol of lineage prior to wealth—and, finally, without memories. Now, the diagnosis of the illness of modernity and of *décadence* is followed by a much more radical affirmation that regards the statute of experience as such, and turns our attention to both an aesthetic and anthropological level:

And it is not enough even to have memories. You must be able to forget them when they are numerous, and wait with great patience for them to return. Because memories in themselves *are not*. Only when they become in us blood, glance, or gesture, nameless and indistinguishable from us, only then can it happen that in a very rare occasion, the first word of a poem may detach itself from them and rise . . .<sup>9</sup>

This principle with Nietzschean overtones again relates the memory—forgetfulness dialectic to animality and is repropounded in the Rilkean novel in the question of the apprenticeship to seeing, not only as a specific task of the artist but of man generally.<sup>10</sup>

It concerns, in fact, the elementary principle of a *time ethic* that fully affects poetics and the subject—the *poietics* of self—and records them in an appropriately biological, natural, and involuntary temporality: the digestive paradigm, here as elsewhere of considerable heuristic value, clearly shows how in artistic creation it is a question of memory and forgetting, or of introjection and evacuation, of assumption and expulsion, and of sublimation.

2. On October 9, Rilke describes to Clara Cézanne how an old dog is still summoned, beaten, and made hungry by the work to be done and by the task that still awaits it. The animal's obedience and patience are here emblems of the artist's own doing, the aggressive and implacable *memento* which records how much there is still to be done and achieved *again and again*; in short, they are the projection *in figure form* of the never-

ending void of work and the insatiable hunger for painting.

Now, the food analogy allows us to clarify some of the premises and consequences of the identification between artist and animal, since it both perfects and removes the comparative regime of the *ekphrasis* of the October 23 letter from which we started and which we followed in *Malte*. Musil already warned us that in Rilke all is and is *not* metaphor. In my opinion, recourse to the animal model and paradigm removes every thematic and symbolic approach to the figure and is not simply functional to a reflection on one's "making"; it is not only the occasion for a poetics, but also concerns a more profound *genealogy of the subject matter* which, in an extreme way, is inscribed in a genealogical *poetics of the material* of art more than in a phenomenology of techniques and various types of praxis: that is to say the animal is a *figural place* of a process and thus of a certain temporality of the work which, however, removes the painting subject and puts his very formulation and self-knowledge out of play.

Thus Rilke writes a really extraordinary passage in the letter of October 22:

Everything has become a question of colours in their reciprocal relationships: one is concentrated against the other, and is reflected on itself. As in a dog's mouth various secretions are formed at the approach of different objects and are kept ready: quite willingly, they only transform [*unsetzen*] and corrective, they want to neutralize, thus intensifications or attenuations are generated within every colour, whereby each one survives on contact with another.

The simile between the artist's work and the animal's patience is not another occasion for poetological reflection and self-representation of the artist, but rather marks the emergence of a meditation on the material of art as such. Albeit comparing the pictorial technique with canine mastication, the palette and the setting out of the pigments on the canvas with the bony and slaving mechanics of chewing, of the *Drüsenwirkung innerhalb der Farbenintensität*, Rilke thus sketches a sort of myth of the *material origin of painting*. Picture is thus inscribed within a visceral regime, in a process of conversion and dislocation, assimilation and transformation, and change of state (all meanings of the verb used by Rilke: *unsetzen*) of the subject matter according to the complete scale of its substances. Here the transformation of the materials interests us not so much for the fact that it involves a change in the instruments, the possible object of a phenomenology of artistic techniques, as because it refers to a biological and natural dimension of the artist's body and of his

9. R. M. Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), in *Sämtliche Werke*, cit., Bd. V, pp. 721, 724.

10. Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, II § 1, and *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1884–5*, 40 [29], *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887–8*, 9 [64] and [110].

oeuvre, immediately recorded and indented in the world of life, and hence in its turn chewed up and assimilated. The dimension of the technique and subject matter of the work thus indirectly suggest to us the meeting point among artist, work of art, and world.

Rilke here affirms *the animality of painting as such*. It is not a question either of a reflection on themes or motives, on contents or forms, nor of nature stealing a march on the modern city, which *change plus vite, hélas!, d'un coeur d'un mortel*, ("which changes faster, alas, than the heart of a mortal"). Neither however, is it a matter of their being used for the purpose of a metamorphosis of the artist's attitude towards the world, or a change in his looking and artistic sense, which would in fact either be modelled on the animal or become it: the return into the bosom of nature, the immersion in and empathy toward the rhythm of life takes place in the painting as such, ignoring the subject matter completely. Learned at the school of Baudelaire and Hofmannsthal, and eventually formulated in the *Eighth Elegy*, for Rilke the look "without preference or rejection" is the look of painting; it is the practice of a seeing which, as in Kafka, is the sovereign assent of an animal attention, of an *animalesche Aufmerksamkeit*.<sup>11</sup> It is a stare, a fixed look which is not *die blicklose Blödigkeit*, not wide-eyed unblinking stupidity, but absolute transparency (and reversibility) between self and the Open, and thus between life and death and between present and past. It is, therefore, a look of radical passivity, the look of a lifeless organ. What affirms itself in the *poiesis* of the materiality of painting, is the "objective indifference of things represented" (as Rilke says to Elisabeth Taubmann on May 18, 1917). Franz Marc, also present in Paris during the very same months of 1907 and undoubtedly a regular visitor to and admirer of Cézanne's exhibition, will say that in

Cézanne, Van Gogh, or Signac "everything has become animal, the air, the very boat that floats on the water, and above all *painting itself*."<sup>12</sup>

An exceptional testimony of this *Animalisierung der Kunst*, of this animalisation of painting, is the excellent book by Peter Handke devoted to Cézanne. Shapes and colors, affirms the Austrian writer, disappear and the landscape decomposes into childish illegible scribble: in nature, nothing can be recognized, and above all it can no longer be defined, and, to say what overwhelms his sight, swallowing all the rest, to the authorial narrator there returns a fragment of a past tongue, a neutral interrogation in which bewilderment fades into stupidity: *was ist das?* What has swallowed the visible? The landscape, writes Handke, has become only a white flash of fangs and "the white inflorescences in the grass turns out to be animal teeth."<sup>13</sup>

It's a perfect literary description of the "incorporation of the seeing subject into the visible" philosophically analyzed by Merleau-Ponty.<sup>14</sup> It is a monstrous intertextual enlargement of the obsessions of Rilkean icons: here the dog is more than a demonic animal, and is more than a symbol of death and destruction, perhaps even hyperdetermined by *topoi* which refer to symbolical practices and narrations of archaic mentalities: it has become landscape and nature.<sup>15</sup> Returned as earth to earth, molded in a clay mass fresh as a new Golem or rather as the "unfeeling earth" of the *Iliad* (XXIV 54), the animal has itself finally become place and magic substance of the cyclical character of natural life, an amorphous undistinguished mass where the differences between organic and inorganic, between living and inanimate matter disappear. Thus once more we find just as in the Rilke of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, the telluric and chthonic dimension of confusion between life and death, between creation and destruction.<sup>16</sup> And in such a figural maelstrom, the

11. Cir. the letter dated 19.X.1907, transcribed in *Malte* (pp. 774–776); the reference to *La charogne*, to which Cézanne had also dedicated some drawings, is in the *Souvenirs* of Emile Bernard. In *Die Neue Rundschau*, in March 1907, had appeared *Der Dichter und diese Zeit*: immediately after describing him as a foreigner in his fatherland, as like a dog in the under-stair of the "house of time," the poet is said to be he who "cannot omit anything. He is not allowed to close his eyes on any being, any thing, any ghost, any phantom of the human brain. As if his eyes didn't have eyelids. [ . . . ] It is he who joins in himself the elements of time. [ . . . ] For him the present is in an indescribable way woven into the past: in the pores of his very body he feels the lived life in past days, the life of the ancients, who were never known, of parents and forefathers, of peoples passed away, of dead ages . . ." H. von Hofmannsthal *Gesammelte Werke*, hrsg. v. H. Steiner, *Prosa*, Bd. II, Frankfurt a.M., S. Fischer Verlag, 1976, pp. 244–245.

12. It deals with a letter dated 30.IV.1910 to the publisher Reinhard Piper, who was publishing the volume *Das Tier in der Kunst*; quoted by K. Lankheit, *Franz Marc. Sein Leben und seine Kunst*, Köln, Du Mont Schauberg, 1970, p. 44.

13. P. Handke, *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1980, p. 59.

14. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible, suivi de Notes de travail*, texte établi par C. Lefort, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 173, note. Emphasis mine.

15. E.g. the metallic noise, "the most threatening of all sounds, shout of war and of death together," the sparkling, the effect of mask and caricature of the human face etc. Cfr. P. Handke, *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, cit., pp. 52 *et passim*, 61, 111.

16. A dimension which Kafka too got from Bachelofen and which we became aware of after Benjamin and Deleuze.

image's present, despite the opposite intention of the narrating author, is the time of ghosts—and not only individual ones. The present of the "object for the eyes," of the *Augenstoff*, is in fact marked by an abysmal wound, by a geological fracture where, a detail invisible to the naked eye, they appear as obdurate and heterogeneous materials of time. A double arrow of the time is stated, something like an anachronism of the future. The present is marked by the return of a dimension both archaic and yet to come, by a void which at the same time betrays a failed act of symbolic ritualization, of the inscription of the invisible in the space of the social signs and of mourning, and a foreboding, an inevitable imminence and an unrepresentable destiny for the subject: "the recesses of sharp-edged kernel, we read almost at the end of *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, [. . .] turn out to be some ancient rock tombs, yet only empty ones."<sup>17</sup>

In Cézanne's painting, writes Handke, "almost everything has disappeared." In this sense it is the same conclusion as in Rilke's letter to Clara dated October 23, which we started from: "there's a dog there too," to suggest to us both the lasting and concessive tenor of the animal figure. This one, in fact, replaces and stems the *figurability of the subject*, its two-fold process: on the one hand, in that it is a centripetal movement and a fall towards the lower forms, indications of which are both the insistence on hanging and plunging to the bottom, sinking, pushing downwards of the facial features; on the other hand, as centrifuge melting away, vibratory and molecular, of the outline and limit of the figure on the vague tactile background, of the chromatic field by which the analytical touch of the "closer looking" is engulfed.<sup>18</sup> *Da ist noch ein Hund*: what there is *still and hitherto* in Cézanne's self-portrait, is perhaps an image-shield, a ghost, a hallucinatory threshold of symbolization opposed to enchantment, in the sense of an idol or a magic mask: it is the immediate presence of absence; beyond, there is unspeakable and invisible

chaos.<sup>19</sup> It may only be for a short while that the instantaneous appearance of the image manages to set itself up as a repository and as a detainment, as an intermediary and a substitute, *Behälter* and *Ersatz*, of this double *symptomatic movement of the figural* in which the basis and non-human content of the human figure is affirmed and made, in its undoing, being something like its geological skeleton.

It is something like an *under-mask*, like the lining of a non-face; precisely, Rilke writes of *die Unterlage* and *das Nichtgesicht*; something neutral and impersonal, without interiority, towards which every living creature tends and will return; something which Lacan will rediscover in the dream of Irma analysed by Freud and from which, I believe, Thomas Mann had already taken some of his main ideas.<sup>20</sup> In the great novel of 1924, *The Magic Mountain*, the body of Madame Chauchat, a sort of sickly nymph who is the object of the protagonist Hans Castorp's desire, is twice offered for radiography and *zoography*, for the photographic technique of medicine and the artistic amateurishness of the sanatorium doctor's painting. The radiographic plate and the painted canvas are for Mann *un portrait transparent*, a transparent portrait. Why? The term is certainly ironic in French—the language of gallant conversations but also the untranslatable language of dreams, in which Castorp finally faces Chauchat, her not-to-be-looked-at Medusa face. Nevertheless, the definition is perfectly accurate. Radiography and painting have to do with Madame Chauchat's "spectral quality." She was defined as "the latecomer"; and for a basic reason: both

19. I am thinking more particularly of Kéreny and Vernant—*"Figuration de l'invisible et catégorie psychologique du double: le kolossos,"* in *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*, Paris, Maspero, 1965, pp. 65–78.

20. T. Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (1924), in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. III, Oldenburg, S. Vischer Verlag, 1960, pp. 305–306. Cfr. J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre II. Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse. 1954–1955*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, p. 186: "Il y a là une horrible découverte, celle de la chair qu'on ne voit jamais, le fond des choses, l'envers de la face, du visage, les sécrétats par excellence, la chair dont tout sort, au plus profond du mystère, la chair en tant qu'elle est souffrante, qu'elle est informe, que sa forme par soi-même est quelque chose qui provoque l'angoisse. Vision d'angoisse, identification d'angoisse, dernière révélation du tu es ceci—*Tu es ceci, qui est le plus loin de toi, ceci qui est le plus informe.*" After Bataille's *Bouche* (1930), Lacan reminds Aurel Kolnai's *Der Ekel* (1929): "Le dégoûtant ne nous met pas sous les yeux un crâne dans son éternité sèche, mais cela même qui ne se trouve plus à l'intérieur du crâne, et dans sa puréfaction dégoûtante." I quote from the French translation by O. Cossé, prefaced by C. Margat, Paris, Agalma, 1997, p. 79.

17. P. Handke, *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, cit., p. 135.

18. *Bei näherem Hinsehen*, writes Rilke. He is unlikely to have read any of the categories *nähsicht-fernsicht* and *haptisch-optisch* of Riegl's *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*; certainly, Cézanne to Emile Bernard, on 25 July 1904, presented: "To make progress, there only exists nature, and the eye is trained on its contact. It becomes concentric by dint of looking and working. I mean that in an orange or an apple, in a ball or a head, there is a culminating point, and this point is the point nearest our eye, [while] the edges of the objects flee towards a centre situated on our horizon . . ."

painting and the limits of the interpretability of its temporality.

It is in this sense that I would like to return once more to the Rilkean definition (on October 15, 1907) of Cézanne's color as "totally primitive," *ganz primitiv*; a definition, one may note, that refers yet again to the digestive paradigm. On his part, Cézanne would have told Gasquet that color is "biological," and that the purpose of his painting would be analogous to the instinct of a farmer or of "a dog who knows what this piece of bread is only through [its] need." There is however, in Cézanne's argumentation, an unexpected shift: neither the farmer nor the dog—and we cannot help but note the same figures that crowded the Rilkean comment on the self-portrait—feel, know, see that the trees are green, and that such green is a tree, that this land is red and that these crumbling reds are hills. Neither the one nor the other feels, knows, nor sees "beyond their utilitarian unconscious . . ." A decisive shift, which at a stroke explodes the myth of the innocent eye of the animal as model for the artist and invalidates any relationship between automatism and artistic creation. This misleading shift, finally, reverses the heuristic value of the food metaphor, which for us is central: for the animal, seeing is acting, and, because devoid of useless perceptions, it feeds immediately on the surrounding world and the visible, by transforming it into signs of a need perfectly adequate to its reactions and physiological possibilities. The animal eye is ultimately organ of dominion and possession.

Now, the dog evoked by Cézanne and so often named by Rilke, who did not know these statements by the painter at the time he wrote his letters to Clara and composed the *Malte*, leads us straight to the heart of the late *Sonnets to Orpheus*, and allows us, in conclusion of this survey of animal imagery that these pages have tried to explore, to articulate a final and delicate, but no less extreme, passage.

We know in fact from a letter to Clara dated February 23, 1923 that the XVth of the first section of the *Sonnets* is addressed to a dog, apostrophized as the animal that "knows the dead," and senses and feels "the forces which threatened us." Why the dog *kennst die Toten*? The answer, decisive for our argumentation concerning the identification of painting but also of writing with digestive animality, we find in the earlier sonnets, especially the XIIIth and XIVth. Here we read that the fruits come from the earth, where the dead with their free mark and loose marrow fecundate and mold the clay of the soil. Food is thus "ambiguous substance," *die Zwischendieg*, the indifferent difference between life and

death. Almost an inverted eucharistic paradigm, the fruits die "in the mouth."<sup>25</sup>

Who knows what part the dead contribute to the earth and its fruits? The question remains unanswered. On the contrary, and the razor of judgment does not cut life from death in the flesh of the perceived and felt, nor in the substance of pigment or the grain of the spoken, life and death are assimilated and metabolized by the subject in his living body and in its expressions, in the facts and in the dialects of art, becoming them himself, so to speak, actualizing the potential of this oxymoronic coexistence of being and not being. Thus we rediscover, in the very substance of art—whether it be pigment or word, color or language—what Rilke writes about Rodin: nothing is in the state of inertia and easy repose, not even death, but all is unrest and undertow. Rilke's Orphic perspective assumes the viewpoint of a general economy of being as feeding cycle.

And yet the artist does not completely hold all the world as an animal, but translates and converts (*bekehren*, writes Rilke) this possession which is a being possessed, this closing up within oneself which outwardly is a haemorrhage, this wealth that is a poverty, this remembering that is a forgetting. The artist separates speaking from eating, and de-territorializes content and expression in the mouth: he does not *have* but *enjoys* the taste of fruit "which comes from afar" and anticipates his primitive destiny in the giddiness of a further memory and in the virtuality of the figural.

It is Valéry, author, among other things, of one of the sources of the Rilkean sonnet, who allows us to glean for a last time this temporality and economy at work in artistic activity. His preface to the French edition of Frazer's *The Fear of the Dead in the Primitive Religion*, begins thus: "L'Animal, sans doute, ne rumine pas l'idée de la mort. [. . .] C'est que rien d'inutile, rien de disproportionné n'apparaît dans la conduite de l'Animal. Il n'est à chaque instant que ce qu'il est."<sup>26</sup> *Ruminare*

25. Evident is the intertextuality from Valéry's *Le Cimetière marin* (1920) (e.g. "Comme le fruit se fond en jouissance, / Comme en délice il change son absence / Dans une bouche où sa forme se meurt . . .": P. Valéry, *Oeuvres I*, édition établie et annotée par J. Hytier, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," Paris, Gallimard, 1957, p. 148), and from Hofmannsthal's *Brief of Lord Chandos* (the "words which were discarded in the mouth as mouldy mushrooms . . .": H. von Hofmannsthal, *Ein Brief* (1902), in *Gesammelte Werke*, cit., p. 12). On eucharistic metaphor and cannibalism, M. Doueiri, *Histoire perverse du coeur humain*, trans. P.-A. Fabre, Paris, Seuil, 1996.

26. "The Animal without a doubt, does not ruminate the idea of death [. . .] Because nothing useless, nothing disproportionate appears in the behaviour of the Animal. At any moment, it is only what it is." I quote from the text of 1936: P. Valéry, *Oeuvres I*, cit., p. 958.

representations expose a repetition of something “primitive and childish” and, at the same time, an anticipation of the future work of decomposition. Both show at the same time a visual epanalepsis and visual prolepsis of a “shapeless, animal-like thing,” *ungestalt Tierschem*, like a jellyfish in motion. Through this double temporality of the representation, through this double step of repetition and deferment, it is the original, anthropologically founding dimension which is at the same time regressive and projective, archaic and futuristic, to be at once the origin and destiny, the womb and the tomb, the beginning and the end of the living.

It is in *Malte* that we find a description of this *figurability of the origin and of the destiny of the subject*: it is here that we find the horrific *skull-becoming of the face*, the *Kopf ohne Gesicht* feared in the letter on Cézanne’s self-portrait and ironically referred to in Mann’s novel. And actually, in a letter dated 8 September 1908 to Clara, Rilke writes that all he has written on Cézanne touches Malte quite closely and strongly, and permitted him to reach—and the syntagma is to be taken literally—“the edges of his figure,” *an den Grenzen seiner Gestalt*: Cézanne, affirms, “is no other than the primitive and lean success of what he [has] not yet reached in *Malte*.”

Once more, in the novel we find a becoming-animal of the ego in which, in fact, it is a question of a subversion of the limits of its being: it is a sort of plastic metonymic and aberrant process, since the psychic place, immaterial mold, and unconscious kernel outflows by hyperplasia and material contiguity, and digests and shapes the whole body of which it was appendix and crypt. Introduced by a stuttering and stammering of the tongue, the “great thing,” as Rilke calls it without qualifying it,<sup>21</sup> the lost thing of childhood returns and imposes itself, despite the wish and power of the subject, on that *nameless* process which we call, for want of a better term, remembrance or forgetfulness.<sup>22</sup> It returns, and now, writes Rilke, is there again:

Now it was there. Now it grew, feeding itself on me like a tumor, like a second head, and it was a part of me, even though it could not belong to me because it was too big. It was there [continues Rilke, removing, one must note, every metaphorical register] a huge dead animal that had once

been my arm or my leg when alive. [. . .] But the big thing gaped and grew before my face, like a hot bluish growth, it grew in front of my mouth and already over my last eye was the shadow of its contour.

What returns, transforms: latency is also a virtuality. Malte acknowledges literally a *survival*, an *Überleben*: he experiences the terrible reversibility of the fact that only something that can live can be dead, and vice versa.

Rilke here is very close to Nietzsche. But also to Benjamin: for him too the image is the cohabitation and tension of heterogeneous dimensions of time, of the origin with destiny; also for him, regression to the primitive is at the same time the affirmation of an ulterior memory, which does not pertain to the lived, to the experience: what resurfaces with a “new strength” sweeps along, like seaweed in a whirlpool, confused and floating memories of “lives which we would not have had any experience of,” in its wake carries debris and traces of an unrecoverable anachronism which is “newer than the time of loss.”<sup>23</sup>

3. In Rilke, therefore, the “primitive” dimension of Cézanne’s painting is in no way reducible to an expressive or formal connotation, nor to the history of styles and techniques. Here, Cézanne’s affirmations do not count, whether Rilke knew of them or not.<sup>24</sup> Much more deeply, the anachronism which obsesses his *ekphrasis* transcends the epistemological principle—established by Panofsky in the celebrated essay of 1932 *Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst*—according to which a work of art, foreign in time and in the habitual visual experience of the subject, must be articulated in the history of the style even prior to being described, that is to say, it must refer to the general picture of reference to knowledge and to the history of culture. The Rilkean writing never ceases to encounter the *opacity* of

21. R. M. Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, cit., pp. 712–713 and 764–765. Cfr. G. Didi-Huberman, “L’aiguille et le papillon, ou le dispositif du silence perçant,” *L’Inactuel* 5, 2000, pp. 201–214.

22. Cfr. F. Nietzsche, *Morgenröte*, § 126.

23. Rilke wrote: *Wie nasser Tang an einer versunkenen Sache*, “like a soaked seaweed around a submerged object.” This metaphor of the relationship between memory and absence—almost an embrace or a tentacular dance, like Gorgon’s hair—between recollection and the object is, in my opinion, quoted in *Immersion*, an unpublished poem written by Paul Celan in 1961: “*da // lieg ich, den / Seelen- / tang voller Namen / um mich-: ein / Ungetaufter, ein / Getauchter.*” “There // I lie, a / soul / seaweed, names all / around me—: an / unbaptized, a / submerged one.” Celan gave some lectures on *Malte* in the winter of 1969. Here I am just hinting at some issues which can be further developed: What does “to quote” mean in this context? What is the relationship between quotation and memory and oblivion?

24. Cézanne defines himself several times as “primitive” in testimonies read by Rilke, such as those of Bernard and Denis.



death. One last time we encounter the Rilkean dog and we may also recall that Benjamin refers to the *dormiens canis* of the celebrated *Melancholia I* of Dürer and associates this animal with *grübelnden Genius*, with the "ruminating" of the genius, of the philosopher and of the melancholic.<sup>27</sup>

To refer to the iconography studied by Saxl and Panofsky (and by Giehlow), does not, however, appear sufficient to me. It is not a question, in my opinion, of going deeply with the instruments of cultural hermeneutics into the poetological dimension of the animal figure, which is thus reduced to meditation on the idleness, on the *otium* of artistic praxis. For us, what is strikingly at work in the writings of Rilke, which we have tried to examine, is rather an "iconology of the material," which, in the perspective of a *genealogy of poetics* and with the support of a clinic of melancholy, allows us to re-articulate the question of the image and of memory, as that process of *incorporation* which always modifies anew the foreign and clandestine space of the image; witness the cranium below the face in Cézanne's self-portrait, and the passages in *Malte* on the subject's exteriorization of self.<sup>28</sup> The image is recorded *from within* in a memory which precedes the subject and his consciousness, in that memory of the blood which, Rilke tells Clara on October 8, "describes" the formless in him when he sleeps and dreams. Here memory is thus pure and simple biological passion, it is the elementary cyclicity of a worldless body—a succession of assimilation and excretion, blood circulation and cardiac and respiratory rhythm—precisely that "organic life" that in the *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* Bichat, read on the advice of Lou Salomé, had defined as the life of the "animal existant au-dedans."<sup>29</sup>

27. W. Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. v. R. Tiedemann und H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1980, Bd. I-1, pp. 319, 330 *et passim.*; also the animal of Kafka's short story *Bau is a bête philosophique*, because *grübeln*: cf. Id. *Franz Kafka*, cit., p. 430. Cf. E. Panovsky and F. Saxl, *Dürer's "Melancholia I."* *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg*, 2, 1923, after *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*. On the history of dogs narrated by Plinius, Linneus, and Ludwig Börne, see also W. Benjamin, *Wahre Geschichten von Hunden* (1930), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, cit., Bd. VII-1, pp. 243–249.

28. Cf. T. Ralf, *Die Sprache der Materialien. Anleitung zu einer Ikonologie der Werkstoffe*, München, Dt. Kunstverlag, 1994. On introjection and incorporation, N. Abraham and M. Torok, *L'écorce et le noyau*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978.

29. "The animal existing inside." I quote from X. Bichat, *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* (1800), Paris, Flammarion, 1994, p. 61 sgg.. Cf. R. M. Rilke, *Aus den Marginalien zu Bichat* (1909), in *Sämtliche Werke*, cit., Bd. V, pp. 1192–1198.

The history of culture confirms what the terminology had already suggested: *ruminant death*. This is what the critical dietetics of the philologist does, laborious and slow, his *Wiederkauen*, chewing over and over again, and I think a last time of that *philology of the subject* which, beginning with Nietzsche, articulates poetics and genealogy together, which in the linguistic and visual icons reactivates an *anamnesis* of that which does not belong to any memory.

Now it would be necessary to respond also to the need of revealing the *antagonistic historicity* of this *survival* in the organ of language.<sup>30</sup> And, further, it would be necessary to take account of this survival, which repeats a *material memory* of the immemorial, which, in the extreme, is affirmed as impossible testimony of what cannot be remembered in any history—as, Celan will say, "a morsel of unburied poetry" torn away with "teeth of writing."

And here the "secret of ruminating"<sup>31</sup> might force the critic's interpretation and the historian's memory to an inhuman and animalesque exercise—*just as a dog in a dark lane bristles and whines and bites something when nothing is visible to human eyes*, as Virginia Woolf says—to a practice, at the same time, biological and moral towards that which challenges the very idea of historicity.<sup>32</sup>

30. Reread *Kohldempfer* in *Minima Moralia* (1954): "Proletarian language is dictated by hunger. The poor mutters his words to become salivate with them. He expects from their objective spirit the valid nutrition that society refuses to give him: and his voice thickens, rounding his mouth which has nothing to chew. He takes revenge on his tongue by tormenting his body which he is not allowed to love, and repeating with impotent violence the offence that has been inflicted on him." T. W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, cit., Bd. IV, 1980, pp. 112–113. Of Celan, I quote respectively from *Atemwende* (1967), "Landshaft," and from *Schneepart* (1971), "Mit den Sackgassen."

31. I take the expression from W. Benjamin, *Jahrmaket des Essens* (1928), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, cit., Bd. IV-1, 2, p. 532; see also Id. *Essen* (1930), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, cit., Bd. IV-1, 1, pp. 374–381.

32. V. Woolf, "Walter Sickert," in Id. *The Captain's Death-Bed and other Essays*, London, Hogarth Press, 1950, p. 236, see also p. 243.

