These are the boundaries, separations, and barriers established between humans, as well as between humans and the divine, which the land surveyor wants to put into question.

The interpretation according to which K. wants to be accepted by the castle and settle in the village seems, then, all the more erroneous. K. does not know what to make of the village as it is, and even less so of the castle. What the land surveyor is concerned with is the border that divides and conjoins the two, and this is what he wants to abolish or, rather, render inoperative. Where this border actually passes, no one seems to know. Perhaps it does not really exist but passes, like an invisible door, within every human being.

Kardo is not only a term in land surveying; it also means the hinge of a door. "A hinge [*cardo*]," Isidore of Seville's etymology tells us, "is the place on which the door [*ostium*] swings and moves. It is so called after the Greek word for heart [*apo tes kardias*], because as the heart of man governs everything, so the hinge holds and moves the door. Whence the proverb: *in cardinem esse*, 'to find oneself at a turning point.'"[33] "The door [*ostium*]," Isidore continues (with a definition that Kafka could have subscribed to without any reservation), "is that which impedes one from entering."[34] The *ostiarii*, the doorkeepers, "are those who, in the Old Testament, impede the entrance of the impure into the Temple."[35] The hinge, the turning point, is where the door that obstructs access is neutralized. And if Bucephalus is the "new advocate," who studies the law only on the condition that it no longer be applied, then K. is the "new land surveyor," who renders inoperative the limits and the boundaries that separate (and at the same time hold together) the high and the low, the castle and the village, the temple and the home, the divine and the human. What would happen to the high and the low, the divine and the human, the pure and the impure, once the door (that is, the system of laws, written and unwritten, that regulate these relationships) is neutralized? What would happen, in the end, to that "world of truth" (to which the canine protagonist dedicates his investigations in the story that Kafka wrote when he definitively interrupted the composition of the novel)? This is just how much the land surveyor is allowed to catch a glimpse of.

§ 4 On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living among Specters

In the inaugural address at the University Institute of Architecture in Venice, delivered in February 1993, Manfredo Tafuri evoked the "cadaver" of Venice in no uncertain terms. Recalling the battle waged against those who proposed to host the World's Fair in the city, he concluded, not without a note of sadness: "The problem was not whether it was better to put makeup and lipstick on the cadaver, thus making it look so ridiculous that even children would have mocked it; nor was it what we—the powerless defenders, the disarmed prophets—ended up with, that is, a cadaver liquefying before our very eyes."[1]

Almost two decades have passed since this implacable diagnosis, penned by a person with ample authority and competence, whose accuracy no one could possibly challenge in good faith (not even the mayors, architects, ministers, and the rest who, then as today, had and have, in Tafuri's words, the "indecency" to continue to doll up and undersell the cadaver). To the careful observer this actually means, however, that Venice is no longer a cadaver, that if it somehow still exists, it is only because it has managed to move beyond the state that follows death and the consequent decomposition of the corpse. This new state is that of the specter, of the dead who appears without warning, preferably in the middle of the night, creaking and sending signals, sometimes even speaking, though in a way that is not always intelligible. "Venice is whis-

pering," Tafuri writes, though he adds that such whispers are an unbearable sound to the modern ear.

Those who live in Venice attain a certain familiarity with this specter. It suddenly appears during a nocturnal stroll when, crossing a bridge, one's gaze turns a corner alongside a canal immersed in shadows, as a glimmer of orange light is switched on in a distant window, and an observing passerby on another bridge holds out a fogged-up mirror. Or when the Giudecca Island almost seems to gurgle as it drains rotten algae and plastic bottles onto the Zattere promenade. And it was yet again the same specter that—thanks to the invisible echo of a final ray of light, indefinitely lingering over the canals—Marcel saw enshrouded within the reflections of the palazzos in their ever-darkening obscurity. And prior still, this specter appears at the very origins of this city, which was not born, like almost every other city in Italy, as a result of the encounter between late antiquity in its decline and new barbarian forces but rather as a result of exhausted refugees who, abandoning their riches behind them in Rome, carried its phantasm in their minds, to then dissolve it into the city's waters, streaks, and colors.

What is a specter made of? Of signs, or more precisely of signatures, that is to say, those signs, ciphers, or monograms that are etched onto things by time. A specter always carries with it a date wherever it goes; it is, in other words, an intimately historical entity. This is why old cities are the quintessential place of signatures, which the flâneur in turn reads, somewhat absentmindedly, in the course of his drifting and strolling down the streets. This is why the tasteless restorations that sugarcoat and homogenize European cities also erase their signatures; they render them illegible. And this is why cities—and especially Venice—tend to look like dreams. In dreams the eyes of the dreaming person seize on each and every thing; each and every creature exhibits a signature that signifies more than its traits, gestures, and words could ever express. Nonetheless, those who stubbornly try to interpret their dreams are still at least partly convinced that they are meaningless.

Similarly, in the city, everything that has happened in some lane, in some piazza, in some street, on some sidewalk along a canal, in some back alley is suddenly condensed and crystallized into a figure that is at once labile and exigent, mute and winking, resentful and distant. Such figure is the specter or genius of the place.

What do we owe to the dead? "The work of love in recollecting the one who is dead," Kierkegaard writes, "is the work of the most disinterested, free, and faithful love."[2] But it is certainly not the easiest. The dead, after all, not only ask nothing from us, but they also seem to do everything possible in order to be forgotten. This, however, is precisely why the dead are perhaps the most demanding objects of love. We are defenseless and delinquent with respect to the dead; we flee from and neglect them.

Only in this way can one explain the Venetians' lack of love for their city. They do not know how to love it, nor are they capable of loving it, since loving the dead is difficult. It is much easier to pretend that it is alive, to cover its delicate and bloodless members with some makeup and rouge in order to exhibit it to the tourists who pay an admission price. In Venice the merchants are to be found not in the temple but in the tombs, where they offend not only the living but even more so the cadaver (or rather what they believe to be a cadaver, though without being able to confess it). But this cadaver is actually a specter, that is to say (if the merchants are aware of its existence), the most nebulous and subtle entity, and thus as distant from a cadaver as one can imagine.

Spectrality is a form of life, a posthumous or complementary life that begins only when everything is finished. Spectrality thus has, with respect to life, the incomparable grace and astuteness of that which is completed, the courtesy and precision of those who no longer have anything ahead of them. It is creatures of this kind that Henry James learned to perceive in Venice (in his ghost stories he compares them to sylphs and elves). These specters are so discrete and so elusive, that it is always the living who invade their homes and strain their reticence.

But there is also another type of spectrality that we may call larval, which is born from not accepting its own condition, from forgetting it so as to pretend at all costs that it still has bodily weight and flesh. Such larval specters do not live alone but rather obstinately look for people who generated them through their bad conscience. They live in them as nightmares, as incubi or succubi, internally moving their lifeless members with strings made of lies. While the first type of spectrality is perfect, since it no longer has anything to add to what it has said or done, the larval specters must pretend to have a future in order to clear a space for some torment from their own past, for their own incapacity to comprehend that they have, indeed, reached completion.

Ingeborg Bachmann once compared language to a city, with its ancient center, its more recent and peripheral boroughs, and finally the encircling beltway and its gas stations, which are also an integral part of the city. The same utopia and the same ruin are contained in our city and in our language, and we have dreamt and lost ourselves in both; indeed, they are merely the form that this dream and this loss take. If we compare Venice to a language, then living in Venice is like studying Latin, like trying to pronounce every word, syllable by syllable, in a dead language; learning how to lose and rediscover our way in the bottlenecks of declensions and unexpected openings of supines and future infinitives. It must be remembered, though, that one should never declare a language dead provided that it still somehow speaks and is read; it is only impossible—or nearly impossible—to assume the position of a subject in such a language, of the one who says "I." The truth is that a dead language, just like Venice, is a spectral language that we cannot speak but that still quivers and hums and whispers in its own special way, so we can eventually come to understand and decipher it, albeit with some effort and the help of a dictionary. But to whom does a dead language speak? To whom does the specter of language turn? Not to us, certainly, but not even to its addressees from another time, of whom it no longer has any recollection. And yet, precisely for this reason, it is as if only

now, for the first time, that this language speaks, a language the philosopher refers to (though without realizing that he has thus bestowed it with a spectral consistency) by saying that *it* speaks—not we.

Venice is therefore the true emblem of modernity, even if in a completely different sense from the one evoked by Tafuri at the end of his inaugural address. Our time is not new [*nuovo*] but last [*novissimo*], that is to say, final and larval. This is what we usually understand as posthistory or postmodernity, without suspecting that this condition necessarily means being consigned to a posthumous and spectral life, without imagining that the life of the specter is the most liturgical and impervious condition, that it imposes the observance of uncompromising rules of conduct and ferocious litanies, with all their special prayers for dawn, dusk, night, and the rest of the canonical hours.

Hence the lack of rigor and decency of the larval specters who live among us. All peoples and all languages, all orders and all institutions, all parliaments and all sovereigns, the churches and the synagogues, the ermines and the gowns, have slipped one after another, inexorably, into a larval condition, though they are unprepared for and unconscious of it. And so writers write badly, since they need to pretend that their language is alive; parliaments legislate in vain because they need to simulate a political life for their larval nations; religions are deprived of piety because they no longer know how to bless the tombs and feel at home among them. This is the reason why we see skeletons and mannequins marching stiffly and mummies pretending to cheerfully conduct their own exhumation, without realizing that their decomposed members are leaving them in shambles and tatters, that their words have become glossolalic and unintelligible.

But the specter of Venice knows nothing of any of this. It no longer appears to the Venetians or, of course, to the tourists. Perhaps it appears to beggars who are chased away by brazen administrators, or to rats who anxiously cross from lane to lane with their

muzzles to the ground, or to those rare people who, like exiles, try to lucubrate on this often avoided lesson. Since what the specter argues, with its choirboy-like voice, is that if all the cities and all the languages of Europe now survive only as phantasms, then only those who have understood these most intimate and most familiar deeds, only those who recite and record the discarnate words and stones, will perhaps be able one day to reopen that breach in which history—in which life—suddenly fulfills its promise.

§ 5 On What We Can Not Do

Deleuze once defined the operation of power as a separation of humans from what they can do, that is, from their potentiality. Active forces are impeded from being put into practice either because they are deprived of the material conditions that make them possible or because a prohibition makes them formally impossible. In both cases power—and this is its most oppressive and brutal form—separates human beings from their potentiality and, in this way, renders them impotent. There is, nevertheless, another and more insidious operation of power that does not immediately affect what humans can do—their potentiality—but rather their "impotentiality," that is, what they cannot do, or better, can not do.[1]

That potentiality is always also constitutively an impotentiality, that every ability to do is also always already an ability to not do, is the decisive point of the theory of potentiality developed by Aristotle in the ninth book of the *Metaphysics*. "Impotentiality [*adynamia*]," he writes, "is a privation contrary to potentiality [*dynamis*]. Every potentiality is impotentiality of the same [potentiality] and with respect to the same [potentiality]" (1046a30–31). "Impotentiality" does not mean here only absence of potentiality, not being able to do, but also and above all "being able to not do," being able to not exercise one's own potentiality. And, indeed, it