In order to truly understand what is at stake in the ethical turn that affects aesthetics and politics today, we must first precisely define the meaning of the word ‘ethics’. Ethics is indeed a fashionable word. But it is often taken as a simple, more euphonious translation of the old word ‘morals’. Ethics is viewed as a general instance of normativity that enables one to judge the validity of practices and discourses operating in the particular spheres of judgement and action. Understood in this way, the ethical turn would mean that politics or art are increasingly subjected today to moral judgements about the validity of their principles and the consequences of their practices. There are those who loudly rejoice about such a return to ethical values.

I do not believe that there is so much to rejoice about, because I do not believe that this is actually what is happening today. The reign of ethics is not the reign of moral judgements over the operations of art or of political action.
On the contrary, it signifies the constitution of an indistinct sphere where not only is the specificity of political and artistic practices dissolved, but also what was actually the core of the old term morals: the distinction between fact and law, what is and what ought to be. Ethics amounts to the dissolution of the norm into the fact—the identification of all forms of discourse and practice under the same indistinct point of view. Before signifying a norm or morality, the word *ethos* signifies two things: ethos is the dwelling and the way of being, the way of life corresponding to this dwelling. Ethics, then, is the kind of thinking which establishes the identity between an environment, a way of being and a principle of action. The contemporary ethical turn is the specific conjunction of these two phenomena. On the one hand, the instance of evaluating and choosing judgement finds itself humbled before the power of the law that imposes itself. On the other hand, the radicality of this law that leaves no other choice is nothing but the simple constraint stemming from the order of things. The growing indistinction between fact and law brings about an unprecedented dramaturgy of infinite evil, justice and redemption.

Two recent films depicting the avatars of justice in a local community can help us understand this paradox. The first is *Dogville* by Lars von Trier (2002). The film tells the story of Grace, the alien girl who, in order to be accepted by the citizens of the small town, places herself in their service, submitting herself first to exploitation, and then to persecution when she tries to escape them. This story transposes the Brechtian fable of Saint Joan of the Stockyards who wanted to impose Christian morality in the capitalist jungle. But the transposition is a very good illustration of the gap between the two epochs. The Brechtian fable was set in a universe in which all notions were divided in two. Christian morality proved ineffective in combatting the violence of the economic order. It had to be transformed into a militant morality, which took as its criterion the necessities of the struggle against oppression. The right of the oppressed was therefore opposed to the right that was the accomplice of oppression, defended by the strike-busting policemen. The opposition of two types of violence was therefore also that of two morals and two rights.

This division of violence, morality, and right has a name. It is called politics. Politics is not, as is often said, the opposite of morals. It is its division. *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* was a fable about politics that demonstrated the impos-