



## Interview: Jacques Derrida

G. Scarpetta; J. L. Houdebine; Jacques Derrida

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# interview/ Jacques Derrida

## positions\*

\*This interview was conducted by J.-L. Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta, editors of the review *Promesse*, which published the French text in November, 1971. Notes and references were added to the transcribed texts by Derrida and by the editors of *Promesse*; those of the editors will be indicated by a parenthetic (EN). Where French terms or expressions are especially important or difficult to translate, the original is included in parenthesis.

J.L. Houdebine: To open this conversation, we could perhaps consider an insistent point in this text which has kept on being written and read in one place or another for some years now—we could perhaps consider this “word” or “concept” *différance* “which is literally [. . .] neither a word nor a concept”; and thus recall the lecture given in January, 1968 and printed in *Théorie d'ensemble*, where you spoke of the clustering of the different directions that your research had taken until then, of the general system of their economy, and even recognized the possibility, with respect to the “effectiveness of this thematics of *différance*,” of its being “eclipsed” (*relevée*), since it should “lend itself, if not to its replacement, to its submergence in a chain that it will have never actually governed.”

Could you then specify, at least as an introduction to this exchange, where your work, whose considerable import within the ideological arena of our time has immediately become apparent, seems to be leading, how you envisage the development of this general economy which is visible in three recent texts, which may be symptoms of a new differentiation of the cluster: your reading of *Nombres* of Sollers in “La Dissémination,” then “La Double Séance,” and finally “La Mythologie blanche”?

Jacques Derrida: The motif of *différance*, when indicated by a silent *a*,<sup>1</sup> does not, in fact, work either as a “concept” or simply as a “word.” I had tried to show that. That does not keep it from producing conceptual effects and verbal or nominal concretions, which are, moreover, and this is not immediately apparent, both imprinted and disrupted by the angle of this “letter,” by the incessant workings of its strange “logic.” The “cluster” that you recall is a point of historical and systematic intersection; it is especially the structural impossibility of closing this network, of stopping its fabrication, of tracing a margin around it which would not be a new mark. No longer able to rise up as a master-word or master-concept, barring relationship to the theological, *différance* is caught up in a process that it propels through a chain of other “concepts,” other “words,” other textual configurations; and perhaps I will have occasion to indicate later on why various “words” or “concepts” have subsequently or simultaneously imposed themselves; and why it was necessary to give them emphatic value (for example, those of *gramme*, *réserve*, *entame*, *trace*, *espacement*, *blanc* [*sens blanc*, *sang blanc*, *sans blanc*, *cent blancs*, *semblant*],<sup>2</sup> *supplément*, *pharmakon*, *marge-marque-marche*, etc.). By definition the list has no taxonomic limit; and by no means does it constitute a lexicon.

First, because these are not *atoms*, but points of economic condensation, necessary stations along the way for a large number of marks, for somewhat more effervescent crucibles. Then their effects do not only turn back upon themselves through a sort of closed self-excitation, they spread themselves in a chain over the theoretical and practical whole of a text, each time in a different way. I note in passing that the word “*relevée*” in the statement which you quoted, does not have in that context the more technical meaning which I reserve for it in translating and interpreting the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Were there a definition of *différance*, it would be precisely the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian sublation everywhere that it is operative.<sup>3</sup> The stakes here are enormous. I emphasize the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, as a certain Hegelian discourse interprets it, for it is self-evident that the double meaning of *Aufhebung* could be written in other ways. Whence its closeness to all the operations which are carried out against the dialectical speculation of Hegel.

What interested me at that moment, what I am trying to pursue along other paths now, at the same time as a “general economy,” is a sort of *general strategy of deconstruction*. This latter should avoid both simply neutralizing the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing*, while upholding it, in the closed sphere of these oppositions.

Thus it is necessary to put forward a double gesture, whose unity is at once systematic and, as it were, set aside from itself, a split writing, i.e., in it-

<sup>1</sup>“It offers itself through a mute mark, through a tacit monument, I will even say through a pyramid; I am referring here not only to the form of the letter when it is printed in capitals, but to a text in Hegel’s Encyclopedia where the body of the sign is compared to the Egyptian Pyramid.” (“*La Différance*,” in *Théorie d'ensemble*, Paris: Seuil, 1969; p. 42). This allusion is developed in an essay written at about the same time (“*Le puits et la pyramide*, Introduction à la sémiologie de Hegel,” in *Hegel et la pensée moderne*. Paris: PUF, 1968) which also opposes the discourse of the logos which draws entirely-spoken truth from the bottom of a well to the writing which marks itself, older than the truth, upon the forehead of a monument. (EN)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. “*La Double Séance*,” in *La Dissémination*. Paris: Seuil, 1972. (EN)

<sup>3</sup> De la grammatologie. Paris: PUF, 1966; p. 40; “*De l’économie restreinte à l’économie générale*,” in *L’Écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil, 1965. (EN)

self multiplied, what I called in "La Double Séance" a *double science*.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, to pass through a phase of *inversion* (*renversement*). I insist constantly and strongly on the necessity of this phase of inversion which some may have sought to discredit too quickly. To accede to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms controls the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), holds the superior position. To deconstruct the opposition is first, at a given moment, to overthrow the hierarchy. To neglect this phase of inversion is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of the opposition. It is then to move too quickly, without keeping a hold on the previous opposition, to a *neutralization* which, *in practice*, would leave the previous sphere intact, would entail giving up all means of actually *intervening* there. We know what the practical effects (especially *political*) of movements leaping *immediately beyond* the opposition, and of protests in the simple form of *neither/nor*, have always been. When I say that this phase is necessary, the word *phase* may not be the most rigorous one. It is not a question here of a chronological phase, of a given moment or of a page that one might turn someday simply in order to pass on to something else. The necessity of this phase is structural and it is therefore that of an interminable analysis: the hierarchy of the dual opposition always reconstitutes itself. Unlike authors whose death is known to occur before their demise, the moment of inversion is never a silent interval (*temps mort*).

This being said—and now on the other hand—to be content with this phase is to go on operating on the terrain and within the system which have been deconstructed. Therefore it is necessary, through this double writing, which is stratified, unbalanced (*décalée*) and unbalancing, to mark the gap between the inversion which brings down the superior position while reconstructing its sublimating or idealizing genealogy, and the irruptive emergence of a new "concept," a concept which no longer allows itself, never allowed itself to be understood in the previous regime. If this gap, this *biface* or bi-phasing can no longer be inscribed except in a bifocal (*bifide*) writing (and its first implication is a new concept of writing which *both* provokes an inversion of the hierarchy speech/writing along with the whole system which adjoins it, *and* allows for the dissonant emergence of a writing inside of speech, thus disorganizing all the received order and invading the whole sphere of speech), it can no longer be marked except in a textual sphere that I shall call *grouped*: ultimately, it is impossible to *take bearings* (*faire le point*) there; by definition a unilinear text, a *punctual position*,<sup>5</sup> an operation signed by a single author cannot put this gap into practice.

Henceforth, in order to mark this gap more clearly (*La Dissémination*, the text which bears this title, since you are questioning me on this subject, is a systematic and playful exploration of "gap" [*écart*], *carré*, *carrure*, *carte*, *charte*, *quatre*, etc.), it was necessary to analyze, to put to work, *in* the text of the history of philosophy as well as *in* the so-

called "literary" text (for example that of Mallarmé), certain marks, shall we say (I noted some of these earlier, there are many others), which I called *by analogy* (I emphasize this) undecidables, i.e., simulative units, "false" verbal, nominal or semantic properties, which escape from inclusion in the philosophical (binary) opposition and which nonetheless inhabit it, resist and disorganize it, but *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever occasioning a solution in the form of speculative dialectics. (The *pharmakon* is neither the cure nor the poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplément* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither an accident nor an essence, etc.; the *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc.; the *gramme* is neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation, etc.; *l'espace* is neither space nor time; the *entame* is neither the [marred] integrity of a beginning or a simple cut nor simply the secondary state. Neither/nor is at once *at once* or *rather or rather*; the *marque* is also the *marginal* limit, the *marche*, etc.) In fact, it is against the incessant reappropriation of this simulative activity in a Hegelian type of dialectics (which goes so far as to idealize and "semanticize" this *work-value*) that I am attempting to channel the critical enterprise, Hegelian idealism consisting precisely in *lifting up* the binary oppositions of classical idealism, of resolving their contradiction in a third term which turns up to "*aufheben*," to deny while uplifting, while idealizing, while sublimating in an anamnestic interiority (*Errinerung*), while *interning* difference in a presence to itself.

Since it remains a question of elucidating a relationship to Hegel—a difficult task which, in large measure, still lies ahead of us and which remains in some respects interminable, at least if it is pursued rigorously and scrupulously—I have tried to distinguish difference (of which the *a* marks, among other traits, the productive and conflictual character) from Hegelian difference. And I have tried to do so just at the point where Hegel, in the great *Logic*, determines

<sup>4</sup>Cf. also "La Différance," p. 58; "Les Deux Ecritures," "L'écriture et l'économie générale," "La Transgression du neutre et le déplacement de l'*Aufhebung*," in *L'écriture et la différence, as well as the text on Bataille*, p. 385 ff., "Ousia et grammé, Note sur une note de Sein und Zeit" (about the "fissures" of the "metaphysical text": "two texts, two hands, two looks, two listenings." "The relationship between the two texts [. . .] can in no way be read in the form of presence, supposing that something may ever be read in such a form" (pp. 256-57). As for this "double register in grammatologie," an interview with Julia Kristeva, in *Information sur les sciences sociales*, VII-3, 1968, especially p. 148. (EN)

<sup>5</sup>On position and punctuality, cf. "La parole soufflée," in *L'écriture et la différence*, p. 292. On the critique of punctuality, cf. *La Voix et le phénomène*. Paris: PUF, 1962, and "Ousia et grammé." (EN) I will add that the signature is set aside, from (of) itself.

difference as contradiction<sup>6</sup> only in order to be able to resolve it, to interiorize it, to sublimate it, according to the syllogistic process of speculative dialectics, in the presence to itself of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis. Differance must serve to indicate (in an almost absolute point of proximity with Hegel, as I believe I have emphasized here and elsewhere:<sup>7</sup> everything is at stake here, and most decisively in what Husserl called “subtle nuances” or what Marx called “micrology”) the breaking-point with the system of the *Aufhebung* and speculative dialectics. This conflictuality of differance,<sup>8</sup> which cannot be called contradiction unless it is painstakingly dissociated from that of Hegel, never allowing itself to be totally sublated, marks its effects in what I call the text in general, in a text which is not contained within the shelter of the book or library and which disallows control by a referent in the classical sense, by a thing or a transcendental signified which would regulate all of its movement. As you can readily see, it is not for the sake of appeasement or reconciliation that I more willingly employ the mark “differance” than the system of difference-and-contradiction.

So in effect—and I continue to pursue your question—into this open chain of differance, of the *supplément*, of *écriture*, of the *gramme*, the *pharmakon*, the *hymen*, the motif, or if you prefer, the concept, the impulse to generality called *dissémination* inserted itself. This occurred, as you know, through the movement of a sort of co-operative reading of Sollers’ *Nombres* in the text from *Critique* that you mentioned. *Dissémination* ultimately has no meaning and cannot be channeled into a definition. I will make no attempt at that here and prefer to refer to the working of the texts. If it is not possible to summarize dissemination, the seminal differance, in its conceptual tenor, it is because the force and the form of its disruption *break through* the semantic horizon. The concern with semantic polyvalence (*polysémie*) or with thematic polyvalence (*polythématisme*) doubtless represents progress in relation to the linearity of a monosemic writing or reading, anxious to take hold of some dominant sense, of the *principal* signified, indeed of its major referent. Nevertheless the organization of *polysémie* as such takes place within the implicit horizon of a unitary summation of meaning, indeed of a dialectics—Richard speaks of a dialectics in his thematic reading of Mallarmé; Ricoeur as well, in his *Essai sur Freud* (and the hermeneutics of Ricoeur, his theory of polyvalent meaning, has a great deal of affinity with thematic criticism, as Richard admits) speaks of a teleological and totalizing dialectics which should allow, at a given moment, however distant, for collecting the totality of a text in the truth of its meaning, thereby constituting the text as *expression*, as *illustration*, and annulling the open and productive displacement of the textual chain. Dissemination, on the contrary, by producing a non-finite number of semantic effects, does not allow itself to be reduced either to a present of simple origin (*La Dissémination*, *La Double Séance*, *La Mythologie blanche* are practical re-stagings of all the false starts, beginnings, incipits, titles, exergues, fictitious pretexts, etc.: de-capitations) or to an eschatological presence. It

marks an irreducible and *generative* multiplicity. The *supplément* and the turbulence of a certain lack break down the limit of the text, exempt it from exhaustive and enclosing formalization or at least prohibit a saturating taxonomy of its themes, of its signified, of its intended meaning (*vouloir-dire*).

Here we are *playing*, of course, upon the fortuitous resemblance, upon the purely simulative kinship between *seme* and *semen*. They are in no way interconnected by meaning. And yet, in this skidding and this purely external collusion, the accident does produce a sort of semantic mirage: the deviance of the intended meaning, its reflective effect (*effet-reflet*) in writing sets a process in motion.

Given this energizing system of the surplus (and of the) lack, I have tried not to formalize it in the neutrality of a critical discourse (I have said why an exhaustive formalization, in the classical sense, is impossible<sup>9</sup> and *La Double Séance* is a de-constructive “critique” of the notion of “criticism”) but to re-write, inscribe and reactivate its schemata. It is a matter of re-marking, in *La Dissémination* as well as in *La Double Séance*, (these two texts are quite inseparable) a nervure, a fold, an angle which interrupt totalization: in a certain place, the form of which is clearly delineated, no series of semantic valences can any longer be brought to a close or gathered all together. Not that it opens onto an inexhaustible richness of meaning or onto the transcendence of a semantic excess. By this angle, this fold, this folding under (*re-pli*) of an undecidable, a mark marks both the marked and the mark, the re-marked place of the mark. The writing which, at this

<sup>6</sup>“Difference in general is already contradiction in itself” (“Der Unterschied überhaupt ist schon des Widerspruch an sich”), II, 1 cg. 2C. In no longer allowing itself simply to be subsumed in the generality of logical contradiction difference (a process of differentiation) allows for a differentiating account of the heterogeneous modes of conflictuality, or, if you wish, of contradictions. If I have more often spoken of conflicts of forces than of contradictions, it is first of all out of a critical mistrust of the Hegelian concept of contradiction (Widerspruch) which, in addition, as its name indicates, is made to be resolved within dialectical discourse, in the immanence of a concept capable of its own exteriority, and to have its outside-itself (hors-de-soi) present-to-itself (auprès-de-soi). To reduce differance to difference is to linger far behind this debate, the ellipsis of which is forged, for example, in a formula such as this: “Scriptio contradiction to re-read” (“La Dissémination,” p. 403 and “La Pharmacie de Platon,” p. 182, in *La Dissémination*). Thus defined, the “undecidable,” which is not contradiction in the Hegelian form of contradiction, situates, in a rigorously Freudian sense, the unconscious of the philosophical opposition, the unconscious insensitive to contradiction, insofar as it belongs to the logic of speech, of discourse, of consciousness, of presence, of truth, etc.

<sup>7</sup>“La Différance,” p. 59.

<sup>8</sup>On the irreducibly conflictual character of differance and of the alterity which is inscribed in it, cf., among many other passages, *La Différance*, p. 46. As for the relationship to dialectics, cf. for example *L’Ecriture et la différence*, p. 364.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *L’Ecriture et la différence*, passim. “La Différance,” pp. 50-51. “La Mythologie blanche,” passim. (EN)

moment, re-marks itself (something quite other than self-representation) can no longer be included in the list of themes (it is not a theme and under no circumstance can it become one), it must be subtracted (hollow) from it and added (relief) to it. The hollow is the relief, but the lack and the surplus can never be stabilized in the fullness of a form or an equation, in the fixed correspondence of a symmetry or of a homology. I cannot resume here the work carried out in these two texts upon the fold, the blank, the hymen, the margin, the lustre, the column, the angle, the square, the air, the supernumerary, etc. It always has, among others, this theoretical result: a criticism focused on simple content (thematic criticism, whether of a philosophic, sociological, or psychoanalytic style, which would take the theme, manifest or hidden, full or empty, to be the substance of the text, to be its object or *its illustrated truth*) can no more take the measure of certain texts (or rather the structure of certain textual stages) than a purely formalist criticism which is concerned only with the code, with the pure play of the signifier, with the technical alignment of a text-object, and which neglects the genetic effects or the inscription ("historical," if you wish) of the text being read and of the new text that it writes itself. These two insufficiencies are rigorously complementary. They cannot be defined without a deconstruction of classical rhetoric and its implicit philosophy: I initiated the deconstruction in *La Double Séance* and tried to systematize it in *La Mythologie blanche*. The critique of formalist structuralism is undertaken beginning with the first texts of *L'Écriture et la différence*.

*G. Scarpetta*: To clarify further the historic circumstances of this conversation, we might also recall that meeting which was held at Cluny in April 1970, since, even without attending it, you were constantly present (quoted or questioned in occasionally very contradictory contributions) at this colloquium whose object was to discuss the relationship between "literature and ideologies."

*J.-L.H.*: In the framework of this question raised by Scarpetta, and because it was discussed at Cluny, allow me to return to the problem of Heidegger. In the text already cited, "La différence," you refer to "the unby-passable (*incontournable*) Heideggerian meditation": in what way does this meditation, such as it actually unfolds at the heart of our own era, seem to you "unby-passable"? Moreover, since you designate this meditation "unby-passable" only in the very movement of passing beyond it, could you specify some of the reasons which prompted you not to stop there at all?

*J.D.*: You are right to refer to this colloquium, the *acta* of which I have just read. It seems to me that a very important event is in question here, an event which is both theoretical and political. As for the relationship between "literature" and "ideology," we have here a considerable elucidation as well as numerous statements which, I believe, will allow us to make some headway.

Your questions are many and difficult. Where does one begin? Should I return to what implicated me? Do you think that is still necessary?

*J.-L.H.*: Perhaps that would enable us to clear up

certain misunderstandings and, as you have just said, perhaps "make some headway."

*J.D.*: Fine. Naturally, I was not seeking to bring up at this point references to my work which were made during the course of a discussion which, fortunately, included many other issues and in which, as you know, I greatly regretted not being able to participate directly. If I answer your question, it is above all in order to make some clear distinctions among the questions or objections addressed to me. Some of them, such as those of Christine Glucksmann, are obviously meant, without any confused or impotent aggressiveness, to encourage reading and discussion. I will respond to them shortly; in fact, I shall do this each time an exchange occurs under those conditions, assuming that I am at least in a position to contribute something to it. With reference to other statements which I thought backward or regressive, I will merely go back over certain points—moreover elementary ones.

I note in passing that I learned, having read it at least twice, that my "thought" (I am quoting, of course) was "in constant evolution." Is that not cause for satisfaction?<sup>10</sup> Of course these statements issue from a source which knows perfectly well when and at what juncture to await this "evolution" and by what eschatology to measure it. I would profit enormously from these encouragements, well-wishing in one case, sententious in another, if the value of "evolution" had not always struck me as suspect in all that it takes for granted (is it Marxist, for instance?) and especially if I had not always been deeply suspicious of "thought." No, it is rather a question of textual displacements whose direction, form and necessity have nothing to do with the "evolution" of "thought" nor with the teleology of discourse. A fairly long time has elapsed, if you will bear with me, since I hazarded the following sentence, that is to say, since I *wrote* it, for the silent operation of italics and quotation marks should not be abstracted from what is written, as happens too often (and instead of examining merely the content of thoughts, one should analyze as well the way in which texts are made): "*In a certain sense, 'thought' means nothing.*"<sup>11</sup> "Thought" (quotation marks: the word "thought" and that which is called "thought") means nothing. It is emptiness given the substance of a highly derivative ideality: the effect of a difference of forces, the illusive autonomy of a discourse or a consciousness whose hypostasis must be deconstructed, whose "causality" must be analyzed, etc. This would be a first reading. Secondly, the sentence may be read as follows: if thought there be (there is, and it is just as suspect, for similar critical rea-

<sup>10</sup> *I am all the more delighted in that, it appears (but I don't believe a word of it), the contrary is already being thought in another place. I don't believe it because that would amount to surveying theoretical renewals like rainfall, even to desiring to establish a season of theoretical prices (which would after all represent a certain idea of what production and consumption would be worth in this area). That would amount in fact to a vulgarly empirical misunderstanding of the textual system, of the necessity, the forms and the time of its development.*

<sup>11</sup> De la grammatologie, p. 142. (EN)

sons, to deny the imperative of all “thinking”) then that which we persist in calling thought, and which will designate, for example, the deconstruction of logocentrism, means nothing, no longer proceeds ultimately from “meaning” (*vouloir-dire*). Wherever it occurs, “*thought*” means nothing.

I thus come to Christine Glucksmann’s subtle reservation: “an excessively linear conception of history as history of meaning (*sens*),” “a conception of latent history [. . .] which seems to underestimate, if not to obliterate, the struggle between materialism and idealism” (p. 240). Must I recall that, from my first published texts, I have attempted to systematize deconstructive criticism precisely in opposition to the authority of meaning (*sens*) as a *transcendental signified* or as *telos*, in other words against history ultimately understood to be history of meaning (*sens*), history in its logocentric, metaphysical, idealistic representation (I will return to these terms in a moment), going so far as to include the complex imprints it was able to leave on Heideggerian discourse? I would not care to dwell on that point nor provide references for it: the remark which I have just formulated may be read on every page. I could therefore be blamed for being too insistent, even monotonous, but I fail to understand how I can be attributed the view of history as “history of meaning (*sens*).” Actually, the root of this misunderstanding would appear to lie in the attempt to represent me as the owner of what I am analyzing, namely a metaphysical notion of history as ideal, teleological history. Since this notion is much more widespread than one might believe, and certainly extends well beyond philosophies labeled “idealist,” I am very much on my guard against the notion of history; and the signs of this mistrust, to which we will doubtless have cause to return, may have given rise to the misunderstandings of a first reading.

As for linearity, you know very well that it is not my strong point.<sup>12</sup> I have always associated it specifically with logocentricity, phonocentricity, semanticism and idealism. Not only have I never believed in the absolute autonomy<sup>13</sup> of a history such as the history of philosophy, in the sense of a conventional Hegelianism, but I have regularly attempted to restore philosophy to its place upon a scene which it does not control and which classical historians of philosophy, in the university and elsewhere, often have deemed somewhat inflexible. That is why I was unaccustomed to the reproaches hinted at by Christine Glucksmann.

“. . . to underestimate, if not to obliterate, the struggle between materialism and idealism”? On the contrary, it interests me greatly, and for quite a long time its importance has been impossible to overestimate. I am even very interested in certain forms of so-called “mechanistic” materialism, from which there is doubtless still much to be gleaned. I probably have had nothing particularly new or original to offer in this area. In such instances, I have little to say and that is doubtless the source of complaint. You see, what appeared necessary and urgent to me in our particular historical situation was a broad delineation of the limits and of the conditions for emergence of philosophy or metaphysics, of all that supports them and all that they support, i.e., what-

ever is included (and I cannot discuss this at greater length here) under the heading, which I suggested in *De la grammatologie*, along with the plan for *deconstruction*, of *logocentrism*. Logocentrism subtends a powerful historical and systematic unity which first must be established as such if one chooses not to go on mistaking the moon for green cheese everytime someone claims to have discovered certain emergencies, breaks, splits, mutations, etc.<sup>14</sup> Logocentrism is *also*, fundamentally, an idealism. It is the matrix of idealism. Idealism is its most direct representation, its most consistently dominating force. And the dismantling of logocentrism is simultaneously—a *fortiori*—a deconstitution of idealism or spiritualism in all their various forms. It is not really a question of “obliterating” the “struggle” against idealism. Now, of course, the concept of logocentrism is a broader one than that of idealism, and acts as a ground which absorbs the overflow of idealism. It is also broader than that of phonocentrism. Logocentrism forms a system of predicates, certain of which can always be encountered in philosophies which *claim* to be non-idealist, indeed anti-idealist. Working with the concept of logocentrism is thus a delicate and sometimes disquieting undertaking.

Should we now say something about the other category of objections presented at the Cluny colloquium? Since I have already expressed my views on this and because I find the formula rather comical, I will not go back again to the question of the “rejection of history” which I am said to espouse (p. 230). Neither can I take up again, line by line,

<sup>12</sup> Among numerous other passages, cf. *De la grammatologie*, the entire first part, passim (and for example: “The enigmatic model of the line is thus the very one which philosophy could not see while its eyes were open to the inside of its own history. This darkness is dissipated a little at the moment when linearity — which is not the loss or the absence but the repression of pluridimensional symbolic thought — loosens its oppression because it has begun to sterilize the technical and scientific economy which it has long favored. For a long time in fact its possibility has been structurally interdependent with that of economy, of technique and of ideology. This solidarity appears in the processes of hoarding, accumulation, capitalization, sedentarization, hierarchization, formation of ideology by the class of those who write or rather who dispose of scribes” [pp. 128-29]. Cf. also Ousia et grammè, especially in fine (“A writing exceeding everything that the history of metaphysics has included in the line, in its circle, in its time and in its space”). (EN)

<sup>13</sup> But it is true that I am very interested in the history of philosophy, in its “relative autonomy.” That appears to me indispensable: theoretical criticism is also a “discourse” (that is its specific form) and if it must be articulated rigorously on a more general practice, it must take into account the most powerful, the most extended, the most durable, the most systematic discursive formation of our “culture.” It is on this condition that empirical improvisation, false discoveries, etc., will be avoided, and that deconstruction will take on a systematic character.

<sup>14</sup> I allow myself to refer on this point to *La Mythologie blanche*, in *Poétique* 5, p. 18, and “*Le Puits et la pyramide*,” in *Hegel et la pensée moderne*. Paris: P.U.F., 1962; pp. 28-29.

all those propositions whose disorder, I must admit, has disconcerted me. To cite one example, "Derridean grammatics are 'modeled,' in their broad outlines, on Heideggerian metaphysics, which they attempt to 'deconstruct' by substituting for the 'presence of the logos' the anteriority of a trace: his grammatics become onto-theology relying upon the trace as their 'basis,' 'foundation' or 'origin'" (p. 225). How can one pattern oneself after that which one is deconstructing? Can one speak in such simple terms of the Heideggerian metaphysics? But especially (because these first two eventualities are not absurd in and of themselves, even if they are so under the circumstances) have I not tirelessly repeated—and I would go so far as to say demonstrated—that the trace was neither a base nor a foundation, nor an origin and that in no case can it give rise to a manifest or concealed onto-theology? It is true that this confusion, which consists in leveling criticisms against my texts while simply forgetting that those criticisms were first discovered in and borrowed from these very texts, had already been at least feigned by readers slightly more alert, if not better disposed.

I have never said, moreover, that the "Saussurian method" (*démarche*) was, either in its principle or in its entirety, "logocentric" or "phonocentric."

My task as a reader does not take this form (when I attempt to decipher a text, I do not constantly wonder whether I will end up by answering with a categorical *yes* or *no*, as is done in France during specific eras in history, and in general on Sundays). Saussure's text is no more homogeneous than any other text. I have, in fact, analyzed in it a "logocentric" and "phonocentric" stratum (which had not been sifted out and whose ramifications are considerable), but it was in order to show immediately that this stratum constituted a contradiction in Saussure's scientific undertaking, as it can be read and as I took it into account. I cannot go through that demonstration again here.<sup>15</sup>

I have never identified writing with myth, either directly or indirectly, notwithstanding what people would like to believe, for reasons which remain to be seen. I refer, in this instance, to the notion of writing as I have tried to delineate it. Inversely, I have sometimes been concerned with the movement by which philosophy excluded writing from its domain or from the domain of scientific rationalism in order to keep it in an outside realm which sometimes took the form of *myth*. It is this operation which I examined, in particular as it appears in *La Pharmacie de Platon*, in an investigation which required new approaches and could proceed neither from *mythology*, of course, nor from the *philosophical* concept of science.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, it is a matter of deconstructing, in practice, the *philosophic* opposition between philosophy and myth, between *logos* and *mythos*. That can be done, in practice, and, I emphasize, textually, only in accord with the approaches of an *other* writing process, with the risks that this entails. The lack of understanding which we are discussing is one of them. I fear that the risks will become still more acute.

*Debasement (abaissement)*, the debasement of writing: it was obviously not a question, since it

would contradict the entire context, of raising writing up from what I myself considered to be its debasement. The debasement is precisely the *representation* of writing, of its situation *within* the philosophical hierarchy (high/low). And yet, I am charged with the fault which I denounce, as if people were less in a hurry to criticize me or to debate me than first to adopt my position in order to do so. Thus this value of a debased or fallen state had to do with what philosophy (and all that relates systematically with philosophy) thought it was doing, intended to do, in working from the standpoint of life present-to-itself in its logos, of ontological fullness, or of origin: precisely that against which the deconstructive operation is defined. And the notion of "fall," which is the exact complement of "origin," has been a constant target in *De la grammatologie* and elsewhere. As a result, I have never used for my purposes the theme of a supralapsary writing which would have descended by some original sin into the fallen and degraded sphere of history. That being too obvious for anyone who even begins to read, I will not dwell upon it and I will turn once again to my relationship to Heidegger.

I maintain, as you recalled in your question, that Heidegger's text is of extreme importance, that it constitutes an unprecedented, irreversible advance and that we are still very far from having exploited all its critical resources.

That being said—besides the fact that, for all sorts of reasons and, I believe, in many respects, what I write does not, let us say, *resemble* a text of Heideggerian lineage (I cannot analyze this asimilarity at any length now)—I have indicated, very explicitly, and it can be verified, in all the essays I have published, a *divergence* in relation to the Heideggerian problematics. This divergence is related in particular, to those notions of *origin* and *fall* which we have just been discussing. Among other instances I have analyzed it in regard to time, "the transcendental horizon of the question of being," in *Sein und Zeit*, that is to say, at a strategically decisive point.<sup>17</sup> This same divergence also comes into play, correlatively, with respect to the value of *own* (*propre*), (property, belonging, appropriation, etc., the entire family of *Eigentlichkeit*, *Eignen*, *Ereignis*) which is perhaps the most persistent and difficult thread of Heidegger's thought. I can now specify in

<sup>15</sup>Cf. In particular *De la grammatologie*, p. 65 ff., and *Sémiologie et grammatologie (interview with Julia Kristeva)*, in *Information sur les sciences sociales*, VII, 3, p. 148.

<sup>16</sup>I may be allowed to recall here that my first published text concerned in particular the problem of writing as a condition of scientificity (introduction to *L'Origine de la géométrie*, by Husserl, Paris, P.U.F., 1962).

<sup>17</sup>After a quotation from a passage of Heidegger on *Fallen and Verfall*: "Now is the opposition of the ordinary and the derivative not properly metaphysical? Is not the search for the archie in general, whatever the precautions with which one surrounds this concept, the essential operation of metaphysics? Supposing that one can remove it, in spite of strong suppositions, from any other provenance, is there not at least some Platonism in *Verfallen*? Why establish as a fall the passage from one

passing that I also have criticized quite explicitly this value of ownership and of original authenticity, and indeed one might even say that I began at that point: thus one might wonder at my relentlessness or monotony but one cannot, in all seriousness, make me say the opposite ("Grammatology, the general science of the 'arch-trace' [*l'archi-trace*] is then presented as an explication of the myth of origins; a quest not for 'historic origins,' but for the *original*, the true, for the *authentic etymon*, always already there, which obscures it" [E. Roudinesco, p. 223]. Here the misreading appears to be flagrant.) Wherever the values of property, of proper meaning, of proximity to self, of etymology, etc., have appeared necessary in regard to the body, consciousness, language, writing, etc., I have attempted to analyze the wish and the metaphysical assumptions which were at work. Not only can one already observe that at work in *La Parole soufflée* (1965) but everywhere else as well. *La Mythologie blanche* systematizes the criticism of etymologism in philosophy and in rhetoric.<sup>18</sup> Naturally, to get back to Heidegger, without a doubt the most crucial and difficult question is still that of meaning (*sens*), of the present and of presence. I proposed, very roughly, in *Ousia et grammè*<sup>19</sup> a problematics, or rather, a sort of reading grid for Heidegger's text from this standpoint. It is an enormous task and work in this area will never be simple. As I can formulate only summary impressions in an interview such as this, I often have the feeling that the Heideggerian problematics is the "deepest" and "strongest" defense of what I am trying to question under the heading *thought of presence*.

Fortunately we have moved away from the analogical confusion busily intent upon 1. reseating the grammatological deconstruction, without further inquiry, upon (to put it succinctly) a fabricated Heideggerianism of which clearly nothing has been understood; 2. convincing us that *there is nothing* more in Heidegger than the German ideology of the period between the two world wars: a reduction symptomatic of a certain way of reading; 3. insinuating that Heidegger is cautious with regard to psychoanalysis only because it is "Jewish" in nature. (This would lead one to think, by atmospheric contagion [an element for analysis like any other] that whoever keeps on reading Heidegger carefully remains suspect in that regard. The insistence with which that assertion continues to be made [cf. *L'Humanité* of September 9, 1969, and the double protest which followed, published eight days later in *Tel Quel*, no. 39, and fully developed in *Tel Quel*, no. 40] will eventually oblige me to take cognizance of what must be still an all too visceral anti-semitism.) To conclude, there is in all this a self-perpetuating drift, a fascinated projection which takes an ever more slanderous turn. I have been listening to this type of discourse for a long time now, with a certain more or less wavering attention. And this while observing a certain silence. One not to be abused.

Allow me then to abandon these doctors of scientific geneologies or ideological affiliations. Students will learn from them that for Heidegger, dialectics is essentially Jewish (p. 189) and that Plato is heir to the Stoics and the Epicureans ("The Science

of letters [simple elements] or *grammatikè technè*, founded by the Stoics and the Epicureans, taken up again by Plato, viewed theoretically by Aristotle" [p. 221]).<sup>20</sup> So you see, what appears to me to be lacking in such a "*problematics of the narrative*" is the ability to reflect that which constitutes its own thesis as one which cannot be narrated (*inénarrable*). Would Borges have put his name to such a singular tale? Alas . . .

G.S.: Perhaps we could return to what you said about history. I am thinking of the text in *De la grammatologie* where you say: "The word 'history' has doubtless always been associated with the linear pattern of the unfolding of presence." Can you envisage the possibility of an historical concept which would escape from "the linear patterns of the unfolding of presence?" Would there be, according to you, the possibility of what Sollers calls, for example, "monumental history"? That is, a history no longer conceived as "linear patterns" but as a practical series which would be stratified, differentiated, contradictory, a history which would be neither monistic nor historic?

J.D.: Of course. Although one must be wary, and I repeat this, of the *metaphysical* concept of history. It is the concept of history as a history of meaning (*sens*) to which we referred several moments ago: a history of meaning producing itself, developing itself, fulfilling its promises. In a linear sense, as you were saying: in a straight or circular line. Moreover, that is why the "closure of metaphysics" could never take the form of a *line*, i.e., the form which philosophy attributes to it, in which it recognizes *itself*. Above all the closure of metaphysics is not a circle surrounding a homogeneous field, homogeneous to itself on the inside, and thus on the outside as well. The limit has the form of faults (*failles*) always different from one another, of divisions whose mark or scar is borne by all philosophic texts.

The metaphysical character of the concept of history is not only linked to linearity, but also to an entire *system* of implications (teleology, eschatology, a sublating and internalizing accumulation of mean-

*temporality to another? And why qualify temporality as authentic — or proper (eigentlich) — and inauthentic — or improper — as soon as all ethical preoccupation has been suspended? One could multiply these questions surrounding the concept of finitude, from the starting point in the existential analytic (l'analytique existentielle) of the Dasein, justified by the enigmatic proximity to itself or the identity with itself of the questioning agent (5), etc. If we have chosen to look into the opposition which structures the concept of temporality, it is because the entire existential analytic leads back to it" (Ousia et grammè, pp. 254-5). (EN)*

<sup>18</sup> Poétique 5, pp. 2-8. And the whole summation of note 7 in "La Double Séance," *La Dissémination*, pp. 207-08.

<sup>19</sup> Ousia et grammè, p. 256 ff. (EN)

<sup>20</sup> Of the two communications to which I refer here, the one from which I extract this last quote is not, in spite of so many contradictions and uncertainties (to be credited to scholastic training), the more insufficient of the two, it seems to me. Honesty requires me to recognize this and to avoid amalgamating them.

ing, a certain type of traditionalism, a certain concept of continuity, of truth, etc.). It is therefore not an accidental predicate which could be discarded by a sort of local ablation, without a general shift in the organization, without putting the system itself to work. I have doubtless had occasion to speak rather hastily of a "metaphysical concept." But I have never believed that there were concepts which were *metaphysical in themselves*. Moreover, no concept is itself,<sup>21</sup> and consequently in itself, metaphysical, outside of the overall textual operation in which it is inscribed. That explains why, while formulating some reservations with regard to the "metaphysical" concept of history, I *very often* use the word "history" in order to reinscribe its scope<sup>22</sup> and to create another notion or another conceptual chain of "history": a history which is indeed "monumental, stratified, contradictory"; a history which, in addition, implies a new logic of *repetition* and of *trace*, since history could scarcely be envisaged without that.

It is necessary, nonetheless, to recognize that the notion of history, owing to the force of predicates whose system I referred to above, can always be reappropriated by metaphysics. For example, one must first distinguish between general history and the general concept of history. The whole indispensable body of criticism put forward by Althusser with regard to the "Hegelian" concept of history and to the notion of expressive totality, etc., aims to show that there is not one single history, which would be a general history, but rather histories *different* as to their kind, their rhythm, their mode of inscription, unbalanced, differentiated histories, etc., I have always subscribed to that, as I have to the concept of history which Sollers calls "monumental."<sup>23</sup>

I raise another kind of question: on the basis of what minimal semantic kernel can one still label as "histories" those types of heterogeneous, irreducible histories? How can we determine what is this minimum which they must have in common if it is not by pure convention or by pure confusion that the common name of history is conferred upon them? It is here that the question of the system of essential predicates which I raised earlier reappears. Socrates asks what science is. The answer comes: there is this science, and that one, and then again that one. Socrates insists on having a simple (*pauvre*) answer, cutting short the empirical enumeration, which would tell him something about the scientificity of science, why these different sciences are called *sciences*. But precisely, in inquiring about the historicity of history, about that which allows us to call histories those histories which cannot be reduced to the reality of a general history, we are not returning to a Socratic type of question. Rather, it is a matter of showing that there is no escape from the risk of metaphysical reappropriation, that it happens very quickly, as soon as the question of concept and meaning is raised, or the question of the essentiality which necessarily governs it. As soon as the question of the historicity of history is raised (and how can it be avoided when one is dealing with a pluralistic or heterogeneous notion of history?) one is induced to respond with a definition of essence, of quiddity, to reconstitute a system of essential predicates, and one

is led merely to rearrange the semantic grounds of the philosophic tradition — a philosophic tradition which always gets back ultimately to an understanding of historicity precisely on an ontological basis. From then on, it is necessary not only to ask what is the "essence" of history, the historicity of history, but what is the "history" of "essence" in general. And if one wishes to mark a break between some "new view of history" and the question of the essence of history (as with that of the concept which it governs), or the question of the history of essence and the history of the concept, ultimately of the history of the meaning of being, you can see the work which remains to be done.

That being said, a simple and instantaneous mutation, such as the striking of a name from our vocabulary, can no more be effected for the concept of history than for any other concept. It is necessary

<sup>21</sup>Cf. "La Différance," p. 49.

<sup>22</sup>An example: "If the word 'history' did not contain in itself the motif of a final repression of difference, one could say that only differences can be from the outset, and through and through, 'historical.' What is written as difference will thus be the movement of play which "produces," through what is not simply an activity, these differences, these effects of difference. That does not mean that the difference which produces differences exists, before them, in a present which is simple and unmodified in itself, in-different. Difference is the non-full, non-simple "origin," the structured and different origin of differences. The name origin thus is no longer suitable. [...] Retaining at least the schema if not the content of the requirement formulated by Saussure, we will designate by difference the movement through which language, or any code, any system of references in general constitutes itself "historically" as a tissue of differences. "Constitutes itself," "produces itself," "creates itself," "movement," "historically," etc. having to be understood beyond the metaphysical language from which they are taken with all their implications. It would be necessary to show why the concepts of production, like those of constitution and of history, remain from this point of view accomplices of what is in question here, but that would take me too far afield today — toward the theory of the representation of the "circle" in which we appear to be enclosed — and I only utilize them here, like many other concepts, on account of their strategic convenience and in order to set into motion the deconstruction of their system at the point which is currently the most decisive." "La Différance," pp. 50-51; cf. also, for example, "La Double Séance," pp. 9-10. On the dissymmetry of their deconstruction, cf. especially notes 18 and 19.

<sup>23</sup>In my improvised response, I had forgotten that Scarpetta's question also named historicism. Of course, the critique of historicism in all of its forms appears to me to be indispensable. What I first learned from this critique in the work of Husserl (from Philosophy as a Rigorous Science to The Origin of Geometry: this critique is always directed at Hegel, either directly or through Dilthey) who, to my knowledge, was the first to formulate it under this name and from the point of view of a theoretical and scientific exigency (especially mathematic), appears to me to be valid in its argumentative schema, even if in the last analysis it leans upon an historical teleology of truth concerning which we have to revive the question. This question would be: can one criticize historicism in the name of something other than

to elaborate a strategy of textual work which, at every moment, borrows an old word from philosophy so as immediately to mark it off (*démarquer*) from philosophy. I alluded to this a little while ago in speaking of a double gesture or double stratification. It is necessary, on the one hand, to *invert* the traditional concept of history, and at the same time, to make the *divergence*, to make sure that it cannot, owing to the inversion and through simple conceptualization, be *reappropriated*. A new conceptualization must be produced, of course, but with the full realization that conceptualization itself, and on its own, can reintroduce what one would want to "criticize." That is why this task cannot be a purely "theoretical" or "conceptual" or "discursive" one; I mean the working of a discourse governed entirely by essence, meaning (*sens*), truth, intent (*vouloir-dire*), consciousness, ideality, etc. What I call *text* is also what "in practice" inscribes and extends beyond the limits of such a discourse. There is such a general text wherever (i.e., everywhere) this discourse and its order (essence, meaning, truth, intent, consciousness, ideality, etc.) are exceeded (*débordés*), i.e., wherever their occurrence is reset in the position of a mark within a chain, and it is the structurally necessary illusion of that discourse to want and to believe that it governs that chain. This general text, to be sure, is not limited, as one might have initially understood, to written marks on a page. Its writing lacks, moreover, any external boundary, except for a certain *re-mark*. Writing on a page, and then "literature," are particular types of this re-mark. They must be examined in their specificity and, at a new cost, if you wish, in the specificity of their "history," and in their articulation with the other historical regions of the general text.

That is why, in brief, I so often use the word "history," but so often as well with quotation marks and precautions which have led some people to suppose ( I am going to use abusively this formula which would make me like another one: "the happiness of expression") a "refusal of history."

truth and science (value of universality, omni-temporality, infinity of value, etc.); and what becomes of science when one has called into question the metaphysical value of truth, etc.? How to reinscribe the effects of science and of truth? This summary recall in order to draw attention to the fact that in the course of our conversation Nietzsche's name was not pronounced. Is this by chance? For what we are discussing at this very moment, as for all the rest, this is for me, as you know, a very important reference. Finally, it goes without saying that it is not in any case a question of carrying on a discourse against truth or against science (that is impossible and absurd, like all heated accusations on this subject). And when one analyzes truth value systematically as *homiosis* or *adequatio*, as *certitudo* of the cogito (Descartes, Husserl), or as *certitudo* opposed to truth on the horizon of absolute knowledge (The Phenomenology of the Mind), or finally as *aletheia*, *unveiling* or *presence* (Heideggerian repetition), it is not in order to return naively to a relativist or skeptic empiricism (cf. in particular *De la grammatologie*, p. 232, and "La Différance," p. 145). I will repeat, then, leaving to this proposition and to the form of the verb all their disseminating powers: truth is necessary ("il faut la vérité"). To those who mystify (themselves) by having it too easily on their lips or in their lapel. That is the law. Paraphrasing Freud, who says it of the present/absent penis (but it is the same thing), one must recognize in truth "the normal prototype of the fetish." How could one get along without it?