



Interview: Jacques Derrida

Jacques Derrida; J.-L. Houdebine

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interview/ Jacques Derrida

positions*

* This is the second half of a two-part interview (see *Diacritics II*, 4).

J.-L. Houdebine: These initial developments place us at once on the different axes along which your work has developed; they put us as well in a position to specify the theoretical historical locus from which we are led to put forth our questions, with the understanding that your work itself calls forth our own locus of questioning.

Let us very briefly determine this locus as that of materialist dialectics, of materialist dialectical logic, the general economy of which is articulated on the basis of the conceptual series "matter (that is, heterogeneity irreducible with respect to the subject-meaning [*sujets-sens*])/contradiction/conflict of opposites, unity-inseparability-convertibility of opposites in the process of their transformation, etc.," this conceptual series, which Althusser has done so much to have us reread, being necessarily caught up in an economy whose double register appears fundamentally in that *dual unity* which Sollers noted recently: historical materialism/dialectical materialism (*Tel Quel*, 43, "Lénine et le matérialisme philosophique").

First outline of a question: what relationship do you perceive between this economy of a dialectical materialist logic and the one which you have set forth on the basis of a problematics of *writing*?

Let us try to delimit an initial territory, still quite vast, of the question, since we will doubtless have occasion to come back to it constantly in the course of this exchange (several problems can already be discerned in this question, and the course we will follow will probably be a sort of star-shaped course based on intersections and reprobings of questions and answers): if it is clearly evident—and all that you have just said confirms this—that between these two types of economies a certain number of points of intersection or at the very least of convergences can be specified, in particular on the basis of your deconstruction of the problematics of the sign as arising from a fundamental logocentrism, from a philosophy of consciousness or of the originary subject, then perhaps one should now raise the problem of the status of these points of intersection and/or these strategic convergences.

And for example, in this movement through a deconstruction of logocentrist discourse, we sense that an encounter is inevitable with the materialist text, which is certainly, in our area of civilization, the historical text, which has long been submerged and repressed by logocentrist discourse (idealist, metaphysical, religious) taken as the discourse of a dominant ideology in its different historical forms. Would you agree with us on the necessity of this encounter? And could you tell us why that necessity has been noted until now in your work either

in a marginal manner, as a regional question (I am thinking especially of several notes in "La double séance," which, moreover, bear witness at the same time to the necessity in which you found yourself at the moment to settle strategically—and one would have to say even politically—the implications of your discourse), or else in an elliptical manner, as in that passage of "La différance" where, speaking of the calling into question of "consciousness in its self-assured certainty," you refer to Nietzsche and to Freud, while leaving in suspension (but this suspension is itself perfectly readable) the reference to Marx, and with Marx to the dialectical materialist text? But it is true, with Marx as with Engels and Lenin, that this calling into question of the self-assuredness of consciousness does not, strictly speaking, "originate in the motif of difference" and that another general economy comes into play here (began to come into play a long time ago), in accord with the conceptual series briefly enunciated earlier and to which one would have to add here the Marxist concept of "ideology."

J. Derrida: Naturally, I cannot reply to these questions in a word. Where to begin? There is what you call this "encounter" which has seemed to me indeed, for a long time, absolutely necessary. You may well imagine that I was not completely unconscious of it. That being granted, I persist in believing that there is no benefit, theoretical or political, to be derived from pursuing the contacts or the articulations as long as their conditions are not rigorously elucidated. In the long run that could only result in dogmatism, confusion, opportunism. To impose such prudence upon oneself is to take seriously the Marxist text, its difficulty, its heterogeneity as well as the decisive importance of what is at stake historically.

So where to begin? If one wanted to be schematic—but it is really only a schema—what I have attempted can also be recorded as a "critique of idealism." Thus it goes without saying that nothing, in dialectical materialism, at least insofar as it carries out this critique, provokes on my part the least reticence, and in this connection I have never formulated any reservations.

The "lacunae" to which you alluded, and do me the justice of believing this, are explicitly calculated to mark the loci of a theoretical elaboration which, from my standpoint in any case, is *yet to come*. And they are in fact lacunae, not objections, they have a wholly specific and deliberate status, dare I say here a certain efficacy. When I say *from my standpoint*, I mean this: between the work which I am attempting, work which is limited but which has its field and its armature (*arêtes*), and which is only possible within a situation which is very determined historically, politically, theoretically,

etc., between this work and let us say the whole text, the whole Marxist conceptuality, the juncture cannot be *immediately given*. To believe it would be to efface the specificity of the fields and to limit their *effective* transformation. Now in the two cases, it is a question, let us say for the sake of brevity, of "fields" which inscribe the possibility and the opening of their practical transformation. And when I say "*yet to come*," I am still thinking, especially, of the relationship of Marx to Hegel, and of those questions which we were discussing earlier (dialectics, difference, contradiction, etc.). In spite of the immense tasks which have already been carried out in this area, a decisive elaboration has not yet been accomplished. This is due to necessary historical reasons which will only be susceptible to analysis precisely in the course of elaboration.

In what I have begun to propose, I am trying to take into account certain recent acquisitions or determined incompletions, in the order of philosophy, of semiology, of linguistics, of psychoanalysis, etc. Now we cannot consider Marx's text, or Engels', or Lenin's as a full-blown elaboration which one should simply "apply" to the current conjuncture. I am confident that in saying this, I am advancing nothing contrary to "Marxism." One is not to read these texts according to a hermeneutic or exegetic method which would seek in them a finished message (*signifié*) beneath a textual surface. The reading is transformative. I think that that would be confirmed by certain statements of Althusser. But this transformation does not take place in just any way at all. It demands some reading protocols. Why not say so bluntly: I have not yet found any which satisfy me.

No more than I have treated the text of Saussure, the text of Freud or any other text as a homogeneous volume (it is this motif of homogeneity, the theological motif *par excellence*, which must definitely be destroyed), have I taken up the text of Marx, of Engels or of Lenin as if it were a homogeneous critique. In their relationship to Hegel, for example. And the way in which they have themselves reflected and formulated the differentiated or contradictory structure of their relationship to Hegel has not appeared to me, rightly or wrongly, to be sufficient. Thus I will have to analyze what I consider to be a heterogeneity, conceptualize its necessity, the rule for decoding it, while taking into account simultaneously the decisive steps forward which have been taken by Althusser and those who followed him. All this raises many questions, and I will be able to tell you nothing today which is not legible in the lacunae or the notes to which you were referring, at least for whoever wishes to pursue their logic. The questions relate especially to the general economy whose traits I have tried to sketch with Bataille as a starting point. It goes without saying that if, and to the extent to which, in this general economy, matter designates, as you were saying, radical otherness (I will specify: with respect to the philosophical opposition), what I write could be considered "materialist."

As you can well imagine, things are not so simple as that. It is not always in *the* materialist text (is there such a thing, *the* materialist text?), nor in every materialist text, that the concept of matter has been defined as absolute outside or radical heterogeneity. I am not even sure that there can be a "concept" of the absolute outside. If I have made little use of the word "matter," it is not, you know, through a mistrust of the idealist or spiritualist sort. It is because, in the logic or the phase of inversion, this concept has too often been reinvested with "logocentric" values, associated with those of thing, of reality, of presence in general, perceptible presence for example, of substantial plenitude, of content, of referent, etc. Realism or sensualism, "empiricism," are

modifications of logocentrism (I have greatly emphasized the fact that "writing" or "text" could not be reduced *either* to the perceptible or visible presence of the graphic or the "literal"). In short, the signifier "matter" appears problematic to me only at the moment when its reinscription would not avoid making of it a new fundamental principle, when by a theoretical regression, one would reconstitute it as a "transcendental signified." The transcendental signified is not merely the recourse of idealism in the narrow sense. It can always turn up to reassure a metaphysical materialism. It then becomes an ultimate referent, according to the classical logic implied by this value of referent, or an "objective reality" absolutely "anterior" to any marking activity, a semantic content or a form of presence guaranteeing from the outside the movement of the general text (I am not sure that Lenin's analysis, for example, never yields to this operation, and if it does so as a strategy, one must first, we must first re-elaborate—in a transformative writing—the rules of this strategy. Then no reservation would stand.). This is why I will say of the concept of matter neither that it is a concept which is metaphysical in itself nor that it is a concept which is non-metaphysical in itself. That will depend on the work which it occasions, and you know that I have constantly insisted, with respect to the non-ideal exteriority of writing, of the gram, of the trace, of the text, etc., on the necessity of never separating them from the *work*, itself a value to be rethought outside its Hegelian connection. What is heralded here, as I have tried to indicate in "La Double Séance" (double science, double sense, double scene), is again the operation of double-marking or re-marking. The concept of matter must be marked twice (the others also): in the deconstructed field²⁴ (this is the phase of inversion), and in the deconstructing text, outside the oppositions in which it was held (matter/mind, matter/ideality, matter/form, etc.). Through the play of this separation between the two markings, it will be possible to carry out at the same time a deconstruction by inversion and a deconstruction by positive displacement, transgression.

Rigorously reinscribed in the general economy (Bataille)²⁵ and in the double writing of which we were speaking earlier, the insistence on matter as the absolute outside of opposition, the materialist insistence (in contact with what "materialism" has represented as a force of resistance in the history of philosophy) appears necessary to me. This necessity varies in degree according to the place, the strategic situation, the points of practical and theoretical advancement. In one *very determined* field of the most current situation, it seems to me that it can have the function of preventing the necessary generalization of the concept of text, its extension with no simply external limit (which also assumes this removal from the metaphysical opposition), from leading, under the influence of very specific interests, of reactive forces motivated to cause the work to stray into confusion, from leading, then, to a definition of a new interiority to itself, of a new idealism, if you like, of the text. For it is necessary to prevent the indispensable critique of a certain naive relationship to the signified or to the referent, to the meaning or to the thing, from being fixed in a suspension, or even in a pure and simple suppression of meaning and reference. I think I have taken precautions in this respect, in the propositions which I have put forward. But it is true, proof is not lacking, that that is never sufficient. What we need is to determine *in another way*, according to a differential system, the *effects* of ideality, of signification, of meaning and of reference. (It would be necessary to reserve a systematic analysis for this word "effect" which is in such common use today, a fact which is not insignificant,

²⁴ To resume what marks it inside the deconstructed field, I will again cite Nietzsche: "Let us give up the notion of 'subject' and of 'object,' then that of 'substance' and eventually that of its various modifications, for example 'matter,' 'mind,' and other hypothetical beings, eternity and the 'immutability of matter,' etc." See also his *Unzeitgemässe*, 2.

²⁵ I will allow myself to recall here that the texts to which you have referred (in particular "La Double Séance," "La Dissémination," "La Mythologie blanche," but also "La Pharmacie de Platon" and a few others) are expressly situated in relation to Bataille and propose explicitly a reading of Bataille.

and for the new concept which it marks in a still rather imprecise manner. Its occurrence is multiplied precisely because of this active indetermination. A concept in the process of constituting itself produces at first a sort of effervescence which can be localized in the work of nomination. This "new" concept of *effect* borrows its features at once from the opposition cause/effect and from the opposition essence/appearance [effect, reflection] *without nevertheless reducing itself to these oppositions*. It is this margin of irreducibility which should be analyzed.)

Of course, to reconsider the problem of meaning and reference, it is essential that we be still more prudent. The "dialectics" of the same and the other, of the outside and the inside, of the homogeneous and the heterogeneous is, you know, extremely *devious* (*retorse*).²⁶ The outside can always become an "object" again in the subject/object polarity, or the reassuring "reality" of the outside-of-text (*hors-texte*), and there is sometimes an "inside" as disturbing as the outside can be soothing. One must not, in the thrust of the critique of interiority and subjectivity, fail to recognize this.²⁷ Here we are within an extremely complex logic. The improvised speech of conversation cannot be substituted for work with the text (*travail textuel*).

J.-L.H.: At this point another question can be considered; we had planned to bring it up later, but your last response in a way calls for it now. Within this general strategic regulation of your work, the fundamental logic of which you have just recalled for us, and in particular with respect to this double marking (inversion/transgression of the deconstructed philosophical field), you have in effect been led to consider a certain type of textual work, with respect to which the problem of the status of your own discourse might be raised. I mean by this that, by comparison with what we are accustomed to in traditional philosophy, you are clearly doing something most unusual in working on Mallarmé, Artaud, Bataille, and Sollers: it is no longer a question of an esthete's pastime, of a commentary mirroring a certain "poetic beauty," as has been the case in France on numerous occasions. Precisely as a function of all that you have just specified, notably as regards the necessity of this encounter with the materialist text, could you now proceed to define the relation of your work with the so-called "literary" textual work which plays so important a role in your reflection?

G. Scarpetta: Let me sharpen the question which has been just asked: in a text like "La Dissémination," you describe perfectly well the *practice* of Sollers, both as production and at the same time as that which exceeds production, a practice of non-production, "the operation of cancellation, discounting, and a certain textual zero"; what you indicate there seems to me quite important: Sollers' text, the break that he effects within a "literary" signifying field is accomplished through this double register of production and non-production, with neither one of the two terms being privileged with respect to the other. I would like to know if a discourse like your own seems to you to partake of such a logic.

J.D.: I am tempted to respond very quickly: yes. In any case that is what I would like to do. I have attempted to describe and explain how writing carried within itself structurally (counted-discounted) the process of its erasure and cancellation, all the while showing the *remains* of this erasure, by means of a logic which would be very hard to summarize here. I would say that I have attempted to do this *more and more*, following a rule of growing complexity, generalization, or accumulation. This has not failed to provoke, in regard to the latest publications which you were recalling, resistances or objections from the best disposed of readers.

²⁶ On this subject, and notably on the paradoxes of dissymetry and alterity, cf. for example "Violence et métaphysique" in *L'Écriture et la différence*.

²⁷ Nor constitute the heterogeneity of "matter" as a transcendent entity, whether it be that of the Law, of the Great Exterior Object (the constitutive and consoling severity of the paternal agency) or that of the Element (appeasing and/or cruel) of the mother (consider what Freud says about the well-known relation mother/matter in a passage of the Introduction to Psychoanalysis in which he also brings out that which, while going through it, is not reduced to the variation of linguistic, verbal signifiers [cf. the final part of "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" (this article will appear in translation in a forthcoming issue of *Yale French Studies*. "French Freud: A Structural Study of Psychoanalysis"—TN]). That does not imply that matter has no necessary relation to these agencies, but it is a relation of written concatenation, a game of substituting differential marks which also relate it to writing, and moreover to death, to the phallus, to excrement, to the child, to semen, etc., at least to the part of all that which cannot be sublated—and thus requires that we make of it neither a new essential definition of the being of the existent (l'être de l'étant), the center of a new ontology, nor a new example of these master-words, those that Marx, for example, criticized definitively in German Ideology.

Yes, then, for the "double register." The fact remains that this did not emerge *first* within the so-called "literary" field, but took root in texts belonging in a certain manner to the "history of philosophy." What has pushed me in this direction is the conviction that if one does not elaborate a general—theoretical and systematic—strategy of philosophical deconstruction, there will be a continuous risk that textual irruptions will fall back into mere excess or empirical testings, and, sometimes simultaneously, into the classic forms of metaphysics (*classicité métaphysique*). Now that is what I wanted to avoid. But I am not overlooking the fact that this *first* entails running an inverse or symmetrical risk. Simply put, in spite of all the signs of "prudence" that I have been amassing since the beginning of our discussion, I believe that certain risks have to be taken.

I cannot "speak" the writing (*l'écriture*) or, as it used to be called, the "composition" of the texts in question; that is the last thing that an interview could hope to capture. I will only note that the effects of the theoretical theses that I have judged necessary to include have often concealed this texture; and the reverse has also occurred. On my part this is as deliberate as possible.

Yes, it is unquestionable that certain texts classified as "literary" have appeared to me to provide openings or make entries on the most advanced horizon: Artaud, Bataille, Mallarmé and Sollers. Why? At least for the reason that induces us to suspect the name "literature" and that which subordinated the concept of "literature" to the "belles-lettres," to the arts, to poetry, to rhetoric, and to philosophy. These texts effect in their very movement the manifestation and practical deconstruction of the commonly accepted *representation* of literature. It is understood that well before these "modern" texts, a certain "literary" practice could have worked against this model, against this representation. But it is from these latest texts, from the general configuration which can be noticed in them, that one can best reread, without retrospective teleology, the law of the earlier fissures.

Certain texts, then, and among them those to which you have just alluded, have seemed to me to mark and to organize a structure of resistance to the philosophical conceptuality which might have claimed to dominate them, to understand them, either directly or through the derived categories of this philosophical stock—those of traditional esthetics, rhetoric, or criticism. For example, the values of meaning or of content, of form or of signifier, of metaphor/metonym, of truth, of representation, etc., at least in their traditional form, are no longer able to account for certain very specific effects. This is what I have attempted to point out concerning *Nombres* (and earlier fiction) of Sollers, concerning *Mimique* (and a complete network of other writings) of Mallarmé; and I have done so while asking again the most general question of "truth" in its relation to that equally general question of "literarity" (*littérarité*). The explicit formulation of the question of "literarity" was, I believe, a decisive step forward in this half-century, beginning notably with the Russian formalists (not simply as a result of their work, but by dint of a set of historical necessities, the most immediately determinate being a certain transformation of literary practice itself). The emergence of this question of literarity has made it possible to avoid a certain number of reductions and misunderstandings which will always tend to resurface (thematicism, sociology, historicism, and psychologism, in their most deceptive forms). Hence the necessity of formal and syntactic work. Nevertheless a symmetrical reaction or reduction could now be in the making: it would consist, as a measure of protection, in isolating the formal specificity

of the literary which would then have its own essence and truth, which would no longer even have to be articulated with other theoretical or practical fields. Hence the movement that I have sketched in "La Double Séance":²⁸ marking a certain mistrust with regard to the motif of "literarity" while at the very same time opposing its stubborn insistency to the whole of what I call *mimetologism* (not *mimesis* but a specific interpretation of it). Everything passes through this chiasma, all writing is caught up in it—practices it. The form of the chiasma, of the χ , interests me greatly, not as a symbol of the unknown, but because there is there, as *La Dis-sémination* emphasizes, a sort of fork (*fourche*) (the series *carrefour*, *quadrifurcum*, *grille*, *clai*, *clé*, etc.). It is unequal besides, one of its points extending its reach further than the other: the figure of the double gesture and of the intersection of which we were just talking.

Thus, in answer to your question, I will say that my texts belong neither to the "philosophical" register nor to the "literary" one. They communicate, then, at least I hope so, with other texts which, as a result of having effected a certain break, are no longer called "philosophical" or "literary" except according to a sort of paleonymy (*paléonymie*). The question of paleonymy: what is its strategic necessity (and why is an operation which refuses in the last analysis to be commanded by a teleo-eschatological horizon still termed *strategic*? Up to what point is this refusal possible and how does it *negotiate* its effects? Why must it negotiate them right up to the effect of this *why* itself? Why should *strategy* refer to the *play* of the stratagem rather than to the hierarchical organization of means and ends? etc. These questions cannot be reduced that quickly), what is, then, the "strategic" necessity which sometimes requires that an *old name* be preserved in order to initiate a new concept? With all the reservations imposed by the traditional distinction between the name and the concept, one ought to be able to begin to describe this operation: aware of the fact that a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept but the system of predicates defining the concept, the conceptual structure *centered* on such and such a predicate, one proceeds: (1) to the setting-aside (*prélèvement*) of a reduced predicative trait, which is held in reserve and limited within a given conceptual structure (limited for some motivations and relations of force which are to be analyzed) *named* x ; (2) to the de-limitation, the grafting, and the controlled extension of this predicate which was set aside, the name x being maintained as a *tool of intervention* (*levier d'intervention*) in order to maintain a hold on the former organization which it is effectively a question of transforming. Setting-aside, grafting, extension: you know that this is what I called, according to the process that I have just described, *writing*.

J.-L.H.: Continuing the star-shaped course of our journey, let us go back then to a problem which was already raised in an earlier question, and which was raised again quite clearly with regard to what you have just said concerning the question of the "old name." In what you have just formulated, I will note that it is perfectly correct that the materialist text, in the history of its repression (*refoulement*), has not been sheltered from the dangers implied by every form of simply inverting the dominant idealistic discourse. This materialist discourse has thus assumed a metaphysical (this is to say, mechanistic, non-dialectical) form, remaining a prisoner of the paired oppositions of the dominant (idealistic, metaphysical) discourse. And it is inside these pairs that this materialist discourse effects inversions by means of a known tactic, that is, by means of a movement that this

²⁸ Tel Quel, 41; pp. 6, 10, and 35.

(mechanistic) materialism is incapable of mastering thoroughly.

But you have pointed out yourself that in the enactment of a strategy, this inversion *is not nothing* (it does not exhaust itself in a pure mirroring relation), that its result (like the result of every incidence of a contradiction) "is not equal to zero"; this inversion, "which is not doing," is itself caught up within a history, the differentiated history of materialism and of dialectics, in which the articulation and efficacy of politics over ideology is necessarily implied.

On the other hand, it is a fact that in its dialectical form, such as it was possible for this form to be elaborated from Marx to Lenin, after Hegel, the materialist text cannot be reduced to the reverse of an (idealistic) position inside of one and the same metaphysical pair. On the contrary, as Sollers has indicated in his "Lénine et le matérialisme philosophique" (*Tel Quel*, 43), the materialistic text is in a *dissymmetric* position with respect to the idealistic discourse whose linear pairings the materialistic text oversteps (*excède*).

Now, concerning an aspect of the present discussion, and notably this matter of "old names": do you not think that the same situation holds for the concept of *contradiction* as for the concept of the *unconscious* when you are led to define the Freudian unconscious as a mark of an "alterity" (*altérité*) which is definitively removed from every process of presentation by which we would call upon the unconscious to show itself in person," and that thus, if Freud gives to this "alterity" "the metaphysical name of unconscious," the concept thus designated, as it functions within the economy of Freudian theory and practice, escapes, strictly speaking, from a metaphysical reduction. Is it not the same, then, for *contradiction*, a "metaphysical name" if one thinks of its inclusion in the Hegelian dialectic insofar as the last can be considered as overdetermined by the teleological movement of *Aufhebung*? But that which is designated by the thus-named concept, in the economy of a materialist dialectic, no longer has anything to do, strictly speaking, with notably metaphysical discourse; indeed it might even be necessary to call into question the designation "metaphysical name" applied to the concept of contradiction, even as the concept is inscribed in Hegel:

a) because all metaphysical thinking (logocentrist, in effect) has continuously and explicitly passed itself off as a repression-suppression (*refoulement-répression*) of contradiction, a suppression-repression which, in a very important historical movement, the Hegelian dialectic breaks down and opens up (onto its repressed-suppressed [*refoulé-réprimé*]) according to a movement of which dialectical materialism constitutes historically the point of inversion (*renversement*) and of displacement onto another terrain;

b) because the contradiction, the reflection of the contradiction, is indeed the fundamental motif of a materialist text, repressed and suppressed (ideologically and politically) for centuries, and whose already mentioned difficulties of elaboration cannot make us forget that in its dialectical foundation the text *exceeds* metaphysical discourse (it is not fully entrapped in this discourse) insofar as that which has been termed "mind" or "consciousness" is conceived, by materialism, as one of the forms of matter (since Lucretius, for example, who spoke of the "corporeal nature of the soul and mind"). Matter itself, taken as a philosophical concept, is fundamentally defined by its "unique" property," said Lenin, "of *being an objective reality*, existing outside of our consciousness," or to take up a recent formulation which operates within the sphere of a dialectical materialist analysis of signifying practices (*pratiques sig-*

nifiantes), as being that which "is not the meaning," that "which is without meaning, outside of it, and in spite of it" (Kristeva), that radical heterogeneity (matter/meaning) defining itself in a single stroke "as the ground of the contradiction."

But certainly, then, one would have to ask you to specify what could be the status of the "différance" and the status of the logic which is implied by it, in relation to *contradiction*, of which we recall, in order to permit henceforth the shifting of the discussion toward other questions, that Kristeva defined it in that same text ("Matière, sens, dialectique," *Tel Quel*, 44) as a "matrix of significance (*signifiance*)."

J.D.: I cannot give you a response here which differs in principle from the one I have ventured concerning the concept of "matter." I don't believe that there is a "fact" which permits us to say: in the Marxist text, the contradiction, the dialectic escapes from the metaphysical dominance. On the other hand, you say, quoting Lenin, the "unique property" of "being an objective reality, of existing outside of our consciousness." Each element of this proposition presents, as you recognize, serious problems. It is necessary to examine all of the sediments in this proposition which are received from the history of metaphysics. If this proposition were, in the last analysis and in this sole form, fully in control of the philosophical text of Lenin, the proposition itself would not convince me of its break with metaphysics. Now, everywhere and insofar as the motif of contradiction would actually function in a textual study, outside of speculative dialectics, and taking account of a new problematic of meaning (can one say that it was elaborated in Marx or Lenin? And would it be anti-Marxist to doubt it? Are there not enough historical necessities to explain and justify this?), I subscribe to it. You see, once again, I don't believe that one can speak, even from a Marxist point of view, of a homogeneous Marxist text which instantly liberates the concept of contradiction from its speculative, teleological, and eschatological horizon: If one wants to rediscover the point of what you are calling the "repressed" of philosophy, notably as it concerns matter and contradiction, it is necessary not only to go back to Marx, at least to a whole stratum of the text which he opened, but very much farther, as Marx himself knew. We have to go back to the so-called "Greek materialist," proceeding through very difficult problems of reading and "translation" which do not allow any ready anticipation of the results in our lexicon. In a certain manner, we are just in the first halting stages of such a return. In "La Double Séance," I limited myself to referring, in a few discrete points, to the Democritean "*rhythmos*" (at once writing and rhythm), an important term, it seems, in a system that Plato doubtless wanted to reduce to silence by "ontologizing" it.²⁹

As long as this work, which supposes an itinerary of immense as well as meticulous reading, has not been done, and that will require a lot of time, there will be a fundamental indeterminacy in this field. Not that all scientific activity hangs on a philological discovery. But the strategic choice of the signifiers (what we are arguing about here) cannot be completely independent of these historical readings.

J.-L.H.: I feel that I am in complete agreement with you on this point, and I didn't wish at all to pretend that there was, insofar as the concept of contradiction is concerned, a thoroughly homogeneous Marxist text. I was only wondering if one couldn't consider that in every materialist position, at its core (and that is why I

²⁹ In addition to the analyses of Benveniste which I cited in "La Double Séance," the studies and teaching of H. Wissman and J. Bollack have also guided me in this area.

recalled the verse of Lucretius which points to the "corporeal nature of the soul and the mind"), there is, inscribed in a structurally necessary manner, the double motif of "matter" and "contradiction"? It was this which led me, then, to put to you again, but from a different angle, the question of the relation between the logic derived from this double register "matter"/"contradiction" and the logic implied in the motif of "différance": a relation rendered necessary by the very fact that your work can be conceived, as you have emphasized, as a critique of idealism. And the question itself is necessary insofar as the two types of logic do not overlap exactly. For example, do you conceive at present in your work, whose economy you are developing in such a way that the concept of contradiction does not appear, the possibility of a relation to that economy involving the motif "matter/contradiction"?

J.D.: The concept of contradiction is not located in the forefront for the reasons which I was just indicating (connection with Hegel: "The good man requires some time to be digested," Engels, concerning Hegel, in a letter to C. Schmidt of 11/1/1891). But as to the heart of the question, or rather to the gap (*l'écart*) which constitutes the concept and the effects of contradiction (différance and conflict, etc.), what I have written seems quite explicit.

J.-L.H.: Perhaps then we would be able to clarify the sense of our question by posing it on a more precise level.

G.S.: In "La Parole soufflée," for example, you speak of the relation of Artaud to metaphysics; you insist both that Artaud appeals to the metaphysical system and at the same time jars it, destroys it, exceeds it in his practice. Does not this practice of shock, overflow, destruction, seem to you to be ascribable to a logic of contradiction, stripped of its speculative investments?

J.D.: Yes, why not? Provided that the concept of contradiction is defined with the necessary critical precaution, elucidating its relation or non-relation to the *Logic* of Hegel. That's quickly said, of course. (I speak about contradiction and dialectics from this point of view in one of the texts on Artaud.)

J.-L.H.: Since we are led to speak again of Hegel, perhaps this would be the time to bring up another question, blending in an earlier question concerning the relation between your work and the "literary" text, that is to say, between your work and a certain type of signifying operation (*fonctionnement signifiant*). I am thinking particularly of your study "Le Puits et la pyramide: Introduction à la sémiologie de Hegel": what, among other things, makes the text of Hegel fascinating is that one finds in it both this process of "reappropriation of meaning" carried to its highest degree of dialectical complexity (you are thus led to write in the *Grammatologie*: "Hegel, the last philosopher of the Book") and also that practice of a signifying logic, attentive to its own inscription in language, upon the stage of language (and you add: Hegel, the "first thinker of writing"). In comparison with Hegel, then, what is it that seems to you to belong to the process of Hegelian dialectics as such? What is the status of "writing" in Hegel? And if you effect, in comparison with him, an "infinitesimal and radical displacement," is it that you are effecting this displacement by moving into an entirely external area (but he is "the first thinker of writing"), and if not, what is it within Hegelianism that could assume for you the role of what the Marxist text has been able to name, for its part, the "rational kernel" of the Hegelian dialectic?

J.D.: To respond rather quickly, I will say: never into an area that is completely, or simply, exterior. But your question is very difficult. We will never be finished with

the reading and rereading of the Hegelian text, and in a certain manner, I am doing nothing except attempting to explain myself on that point. For I believe that the Hegelian text is necessarily fissured; that it is more and something other than the circular closure of its representation. It does not reduce to a content of *philosophemes*; it necessarily produces as well a powerful operation of writing, a remainder of writing which must be re-examined in its strange relation with the philosophical content, in the movement by which it exceeds what it means to say (*vouloir-dire*) and lets itself be sidetracked, turned around, repeated outside of its identity to itself. One can find in this respect some very interesting indications, though doubtless insufficient, in Feuerbach, who has at least raised the problem of Hegel as *writer*, the problem of a certain *contradiction* (that is his word) between the writing of Hegel and his "system." I cannot get involved in this here, but I will do so in a text to appear this winter.

And all of this, the whole question of the "rational kernel" (is it in these terms that the question should be formulated today? I am not sure), cannot in fact be elaborated without studying in *particular* the reading of Hegel by Marx, by Engels and by Lenin, among others, in the *Cahiers sur la dialectique* which merit textual attention—a very specific type of reading which had not so far been attempted, but which is now becoming much more accessible (this is the principle of your text in *Théorie d'ensemble*, of the texts of Sollers and Christine Glucksmann on Lenin in *Tel Quel*, and, in a general sense, of the work of the *Tel Quel* group—an occasion for me to recall here my repeatedly demonstrated solidarity and support which, as you know, dates back five or six years). What is Lenin doing when he writes, alongside a Hegelian statement, "read" (interpret? transform? translate? understand?)? Follow out all the "metaphors" by which Lenin attempts to determine the relation of dialectical materialism with Hegelian Logic, "metaphors" which at first glance are incompatible with one another ("genius," "foreboding," "system," inversion and decapitation, also genetic or organic development of the "germ" or "seed"). Taken singly they would be insufficient, but in their active "contradiction," they produce a totally different effect. There are many others as well,³⁰ and this written proliferation of figures, of which each one, taken alone, would sometimes leave us on this side of Hegel, but which taken together, propel each other forward, opens onto the practical and theoretical task of a new definition of the relation between the logic of dialectical materialism and Hegelian logic. It contributes as well to the general re-examination of the historical space which I will call for convenience "*after-Hegel*," and at the same time it contributes to the new questions on writing, on philosophical writing, on the scene of writing and philosophy. This can be done only by re-inscribing these texts in their force as writing (*force d'écriture*) and in posing, for the example which concerns us, the problem of the language of Lenin, of the historical setting in which he wrote, of the very precise situation (*situation*) and political strategy which govern the formation of his texts, etc.

J.-L.H.: Of course this leads us to pose other questions. Throughout your work you have been led to rely—for example, through a reading of texts such as those of Mallarmé or Artaud, but also in all of the *Grammatologie*—on a concept like that of the signifier, a concept put forth by linguistics that you strategically reinscribe within another chain (différance/writing/trace), in relation to which you place this concept in a

³⁰ Cf. "La Mythologie blanche," notably p. 3.

position of dependence. A complex dependence, nevertheless, since in your own text another chain is also signaled by the concept of the signifier, one which does not reduce (at least in my opinion) to the first chain: the exteriority-heterogeneity of the signifier (you speak as well of the *body*, of a "writing of the body") in relation to the direct apprehension of the signified according to the classical theme of metaphysics, in the immediate proximity of a consciousness to itself. Thus to the motif of difference as the "possibility of conceptuality, of the process and of the conceptual system in general" must be joined another motif by which this "possibility" is itself defined as never referring back to a transcendental Ego (the unity of an "I think"), but on the contrary as inscribing itself in a radical exteriority to the subject, which "becomes a *speaking* subject only by interacting with the system of linguistic differences," or which "becomes a *signifier* (in general, by word or some other sign) only by inscribing itself in the system of differences." Now these "differences," you also say, did not "fall from the sky," are "no more inscribed in a *topos noetos* than pre-stamped into the wax of the brain"; these differences would even be "from the beginning, and thoroughly, historical," "if the word 'history' did not carry in itself the motif of a final suppression of difference."

Several questions might then be posed:

a) What has then become of these "differences" which, in effect, have not "fallen from the sky"? What can this "free-play (*mouvement de jeu*) which produces them" designate, in the eyes of a "history" which is ultimately impugned as a "final suppression of difference," if one thinks that the motif of *heterogeneity* cannot be conceived in relation to the single theme of spacing (*espacement*), to the extent that the double moment (it is the movement of a contradiction) of a *difference* (emptiness, spacing) and of the *position* of an *alterity* is implied in the motif of heterogeneity. Cannot one think that these "differences," here taken as linguistic differences, as types of linguistic signifier, can always be traced to what Lacan calls the *symbolic*, and therefore that they are by essence in league (and not only in a factual manner, as the phenomenal drift of a "difference" or "free-play which produces them") with the *social practice* in the area of its modes of signifying productions (of its languages)?

b) Hence, the second question: What relation can you envisage between a problematic of writing, such as you have defined it, and the problematic of the signifier as it has been developed by Lacan, where the signifier "represents the subject for another signifier"?

J.D.: Firstly, I do not see very clearly why the notion of spacing, at least as I make use of it, is incompatible with the motif of heterogeneity.

J.-L.H.: No, I did not say that; let me rephrase the question: Is the motif of heterogeneity entirely covered by the notion of spacing? With *alterity* and *spacing*, are we not in the presence of two moments which are not identical to each other?

J.D.: In effect, these two concepts *do not signify exactly* the same thing; that being said, I believe that they are absolutely indissociable.

J.-L.H.: I'm in complete agreement; I was saying in the explanation of my question that they were dialectically, that is to say contradictorily, linked.

J.D.: *Spacing* designates *nothing*, nothing existent, no presence at a distance; it is the index of an irreducible outside, and at the same time the index of a *movement*, of a displacement which indicates an irreducible alterity. I do not see how one could dissociate these two concepts of spacing and alterity.

J.-L.H.: But let me repeat: it is not at all a question of

dissociating these two concepts. If you want, let us bring out the impact of this question in a more specific domain, suggested in my previous questioning: that of the status of these differences which "have not fallen from the sky," these linguistic differences. . . .

J.D.: Not only linguistic.

J.-L.H.: Granted; but spacing as such, in the strictest sense, cannot by itself account, *for example*, for the system of linguistic differences in which a subject is obliged to constitute himself.

J.D.: Agreed. It is obvious that the concept of "spacing," by itself, can't account for anything, no more than any other concept. It can't account for the differences—the different terms—among which is included spacing, a term which nevertheless delimits them all. But to expect of this concept an explanatory principle of all determined spaces, of all different terms, would be to accord it a theological function. Spacing is at work, no doubt, in all domains, but precisely insofar as they are different domains. And its operation is different in each case, articulated differently.³¹

As for the recourse I occasionally have to the concept of the signifier, it too is deliberately ambiguous. A double inscription again. (The *breakthrough* in deconstruction, which is not a voluntary decision or an absolute beginning, doesn't occur just anywhere, nor in an absolute elsewhere. As a breakthrough it takes off according to lines of force and pressures of breakage which may be situated in the discourse to be deconstructed. The *topographical* and *technical* determination of the most necessary places and equipment [primers, grips, levers, etc.] in a given situation depends on a historical analysis. Which is pursued within the general movement of the field, and is never exhausted by the conscious calculation of a "subject.") On the one hand, the signifier is a positive lever: I thus define writing as the impossibility for a chain to stop at a signified (*signifié*) which does not restart the chain as a result of the term's already *having been placed* in a position of signifying substitution. In this phase of reversal, the pole of the signifier is opposed, through insistence, to the dominant authority of the signified. But this necessary reversal is also insufficient, I need hardly repeat. I have thus regularly noted the turn through which the word "signifier" brings us back or keeps us within the logocentric circle.³²

As for the other aspect of the same question, which concerns a specific and difficult text, I'll try to explain my position, at least briefly, in an indicative, programmatic mode. Here as well, whether it be the discourse of psychoanalysis in general or of Lacan, nothing is a given, nor homogeneous.

Concerning the notion of the signifier, I have already told you what I think is involved. The same is the case for those of *representation* and *subject*.

In specifying the point at which we are now situated, without dealing with it at length ("La Double Séance" deals precisely with point, length, castration and dissemination) but without evading a question which cannot be summed up in three discreet notions, in specifying the coordinates then of what my "position" on this matter might be, is it not useful to recall first of all that since *De la grammatologie* (1965) and "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" (1966) all my texts have inscribed what I shall call their psychoanalytic "import"? From which it does not follow that all the earlier texts did not as well ("Force et signification," "Violence et métaphysique," "La Parole soufflée," etc.). The question is thus raised on each occasion. Explicitly, expressly, but also by arranging, *in the writing itself and in the conceptual framework*, the defined blank space or interval of play required by the *still impending* theoretical articu-

³¹ On rereading this passage of our interview, I see that in specifying "not only linguistic" (which is merely to recall what I've insisted on relentlessly), I theoretically answered the whole of your question, which presupposed explicitly that differences were "linguistic differences, kinds of a linguistic signifier."

I would specify that spacing is a concept which includes as well—though not only—a sense of productive, positive, generative force. As dissemination, as difference, it includes a genetic dimension, it is not simply the interval, the space constituted between two (which is what *espacement* also means in common usage), but spacing (*espacement*), the operation or in any case the movement of separation. This movement is inseparable from the temporization—temporalization (cf. "La Différance")—and from the difference, the conflicts of force which are at work. It marks that which departs from itself, interrupts every identity with self, every punctual gathering to self, every homogeneity with self, every interiority to self (cf. *La Voix et le phénomène*, p. 96). Which is why I couldn't quite see—I still can't see—how or why you insisted on separating it—to be brief—from the motif of the *eteron*. Of course, the two motifs don't overlap absolutely, but then no concept overlaps with any other; that's the law of spacing. Needless to say, had I only repeated the single word spacing endlessly, you would have been entirely right. But my insistence on the other (*autre*) and a number of others has been no less frequent. Spacing means as well, precisely, the impossibility of reducing a chain to one of its links or of privileging in it absolutely one—or the other. Finally I should recall that difference (is) above all not a substance, an essence, a cause, etc., which could result in a "phenomenal derivative."

³² Cf. for instance *De la grammatologie* ("Le Programme," "Le Signifiant et la vérité," "L'Être écrit," particularly p. 32, n. 9), "Sémiologie et grammatologie," "La Double Séance," II, p. 26.

lation between the new general question of *gramme*—and of the specificity of each text (a question which at the time was much discussed)—and the question of psychoanalysis. In each text, as may be verified, I endeavor then to prevent—concerning this indispensable articulation—what I consider to be *new* theoretical and practical premises from closing the problematic in advance, from being clouded by hasty importations without rigorous status, in brief, from being invalidated in principle by subsequent results (all of which remains, of course, *always* possible: which is why I said “I endeavor.” It may be said in passing that this scheme is valid as well, *mutatis mutandis*, for the relation between grammatology and Marxism). At the time the effort was to undertake—practically and theoretically—to produce these new modes of articulation, to fracture so hermetic an enclosure: that which shelters the question of writing (in general, philosophical and literary writing in particular) from psychoanalysis, but as well that which so frequently blinds psychoanalytic discourse to a certain structure of the scene of texts.

Today I would thus outline a work program for myself, at least for what I can anticipate of it, in the field of *La Dissémination* (in the text which bears that title and of which we may say that its explicit “themes” are column, cut [*coupure*], blow [*coup*], hymen, castration, in their relation to *two*, *four*, a certain oedipal trinity, dialectic, sublation, the “East” [*est*], presence, etc., and to the whole of the questions which have interested me elsewhere), in “La Pharmacie de Platon” (ditto) and in “La Double Séance” (more directly in the bearing of notes 8, 9, 10, 53, 55, 61, etc., but *practically* everywhere). Since this appears in those texts and in “La Mythologie blanche,” for whoever would read it, the most general title of the problem would be: castration and mimesis. At this point, I can only refer to those analyses and their consequences.

The concept of castration is in fact inseparable, in this analysis, from that of dissemination. But the latter locates the *more and less* which resists indefinitely—and as well is resisted by—the effect of subjectivity, subjectivation, appropriation (sublation, sublimation, idealization, reinteriorization, *Erinnerung*, signification, semantization, autonomy, law, etc.), what Lacan—and thus do I answer your question—calls the order of the “symbolic.” Escapes it and disorganizes it, causes it to skid off course, marks it with its writing, with all the risks that may entail, without all the same being able to be conceived under the categories of the “imaginary” or the “real.” I have never been convinced of the necessity of that triad of notions. Its pertinence, in any event, lies *within* the very systematics I have called into question.³³ Were you really to investigate it from this point of view, dissemination would be not only the possibility for a mark to *exfoliate* (*se déliter*; see the play of this clinical word in “La Pharmacie de Platon,” “La Dissémination” and “La Double Séance”). The force—of repetition, thus of automaticity and of exportation—which allows it to break its bonds to the unity of a signified which would not be without it, to burst that *clasp* (*agrafe*) and to undo the quiltwork (*édredon*) of the “symbolic” (I believe I’m quoting here a barely capped [*capitonné*] passage of Lautréamont on *eider-down*, I’ll have to check). It is as well the possibility of deconstructing (such is the general opening of a practical-theoretical deconstruction which is not invented in a single day) or, if you prefer, of unstitching (*découdre*, whence the *en-découdre*—fray, strife—of “La Pharmacie de Platon”) the symbolic order in its general structure and in its modifications, in both general and specific forms of sociality, “family,” or culture. The effective violence of disseminating writing. A *marking* effraction

³³ Your question on “what Lacan calls the symbolic” invites a general response, an explanation of principle, if not, since this is not the place, a detailed explanation. Having accepted for the first time the rules of an interview and the declarative mode, I shall not avoid it. I know, moreover, that certain of my friends, for reasons which are at times contradictory, have regretted my neutrality on this subject. And so, here we go, schematically.

In the texts I’ve published until now, the absence of any reference to Lacan is, in fact, almost complete. This is justified not merely by the acts of hostility in the form or with the intent of reappropriation, which, ever since the appearance of *De la grammatologie* in *Critique* (1965) (and even earlier, I am told), Lacan has proliferated, directly or indirectly, in private or in public, in his seminars, and, since that date, I was soon to discover upon reading, in almost every one of his texts. Such moves corresponded each time to the argumentative schemes analyzed precisely by Freud (*Traumdeutung*) and concerning which I have shown (*Grammatologie*, “*Pharmacie de Platon*,” “*Le Puits et la pyramide*”) that it regularly informs the accusations brought against writing. I refer to the argument of the “cauldron” which proliferates, for the needs of the cause, incompatible assertions (1. Devalorization and dejection: “it’s worthless” or “I disagree.” 2. Valorization and reappropriation: “moreover, all that belongs to me; I’ve been saying it for years”). This tensing of the discussion—which I have regretted—was not without significance and called, there as well, for an attentive silence. I would perhaps not

have maintained such silence had I not in addition felt so authorized for reasons of a historical-theoretical nature (which is the difference with the lesser case we spoke about above).

A brief resume, then:

At the time of my first publications, Lacan's *Ecrits* were not yet bound and published. By the date of *De la grammatologie* and "*Freud et la scène de l'écriture*," I had read only "*Fonction et champ*" and "*L'Instance de la lettre*" (quoted in "*La Parole soufflée*"). Assured of the importance of this problematic in the domain of psychoanalysis, I detected as well a certain number of major strands which kept it on the near side of the critical questions I was in the process of formulating, and in that logocentric, indeed phonological field I was undertaking to delineate and to solicit. These strands were, among others, the following:

1. A telos of living speech, the "full word" (*parole pleine*) in its essential link (and, occasionally, in its effects of incantatory identification) with the Truth. We might reread here in all the amplitude of its resonances the chapter on "*The Empty Word and the Full Word in the Psychoanalytic Realization of the Subject*": "I might as well be categorical: in psychoanalytical anamnesis, it is not a question of reality, but of Truth, because the effect of a full Word is to reorder the past contingent events by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, just as they are constituted by the little liberty through which the subject makes them present." (p. 256), "*The origin of truth in speech*," "*the truth of that revelation*" in "*present speech*" (*ibid.*) and numerous other propositions of this type. Despite a number of elliptical and rhapsodic variations, I have not since encountered any rigorous questioning of this value of truth in its most pertinent historical and architectonic place.

Now this critical questioning, at precisely the point in which it concerns the link between living speech, truth, and presence (cf., among other places, *De la grammatologie*, p. 18) is what I was engaging in explicitly at the time.

2. Under the rubric of a return to Freud, a massive recourse to Hegelian conceptual schemes (more precisely to that of *The Phenomenology of Mind* as read at the time, and without any articulation with the system of the Logic or Hegelian "semiology") and to Heideggerian conceptual schemes (concerning *Alētheia*), always defined as "revelation," "veiling/unveiling"; concerning the presence and Being of being; concerning *Dasein* once more become the subject! (p. 318). I would be the last to consider this a regression in itself, but the absence of any theoretical and systematic explanation of the status of these importations (and of several others) seemed to me to smack, shall we say, of those philosophical tricks condemned at the end of *L'Instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient* and, echoing Freud, in *Scilicet I*. To declare later on that such crucial loans from *The Phenomenology of Mind* were "didactic," or that the oft invoked vocabulary of transcendental phenomenology and Husserlian idealism ("intersubjectivity," for instance) were to be received with an "epoché," to solve such problems in a sentence seems to me a little too easy.

Now both in teaching and in what I was publishing at the time, I was questioning explicitly, from the critical point of view, you know, the textual systematics of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. In gauging the wiles of their procedures, I understood that they could not be combined in that fashion. Freud neither.

3. A number of spritely allusions to the authority of phonology and more precisely to Saussurean linguistics. This is the most specific part of Lacan's work: based on the Saussurean sign and concerning it. With the implications and the consequences you know of, writing is thus reduced to the system of hearing-oneself-speak, at that point of idealizing self-affectation in which it is internalized, sublated and assumed by voice, responds to it, finds its present in it, becomes phonetized since it is "always [. . .] phonematic, and phonetic, as soon as it is read" (*Ecrits*, p. 470).

Now I was in the process of elaborating a series of critical questions on this subject, concerning in part the effects of phonologism in the psychoanalytic domain and the complexity of Freud's science in this respect ("*Freud et la scène de l'écriture*").

4. An attention to the letter and the written according to Freud, of course, but without any specific interrogation concerning the concept of writing as I was attempting to evolve it at the time and concerning the oppositions and conflicts which need then be deciphered. I return in a moment to the decisive problem of "literature."

I'll pass over the connotations of Lacan's discourse and the numerous indices of a restoration of the "signifier" and of psychoanalysis in general in a new metaphysics (whatever interest it may have as such) and in the space I determined at the time under the name of logocentrism, and particularly of phonologism. I'll pass over as well numerous traits which seem to me, in, of course, an extremely complex and at times contradictory way, to anchor Lacan's undertaking in the philosophical underpinnings of the post-war period (much rereading to be done from this point of view. Follow up the words "being," "authentic," "true," "full"). It would be absurd to see here a contingent or personal limitation and, once more, its historical necessity is undebatable. It is simply that at the time I'm referring to, I perceived—and certain others with me—other urgencies. I'll pass over, finally, the rhetoric, Lacan's "style": its effects, at times remarkable, at times as well (in relation to a certain thrust and a certain "program" of the period) anachronistic (I'm not saying: untimely), seemed

to me to be governed by the delay of a scene, which conferred upon it, I have no doubt, a certain necessity. (I refer to what might require a certain style in dealing with the psychoanalytic establishment; such is Lacan's argument.) In relation to the theoretical difficulties which interested me, I detected above all an art of evasion. The liveliness of ellipsis seemed to me too often to help avoid or envelop various problems (the most significant example has since been given to me in a delightful play of "homonyms" which allows Lacan to drown the historical-theoretical difficulty concerning the determination of truth as *adequatio rei et intellectus*, as it governs the entire discourse on "*La Chose freudienne*" and concerning which it may be wondered, in the absence of any explanation, according to what mode it cohabits with truth as revelation—that is, presence—which structures the whole of the *Ecrits*). I realize that this entails a great deal of lucidity in the determination of the difficulties and the dangers. It is perhaps even a necessary moment in the preparation of a new problematic: provided that the evasion doesn't wax too speculative and that we not be taken (in) by the sumptuous performance of procession (*défilé*) and parade.

Even if they are far from exhausting Lacan's work (which I'm sure of), these reservations were already important enough for me not to seek a guarantee through reference to a discourse so different in its nodal points, in its mode of elocution, its place, its aims, its presuppositions, from the texts I was proposing. Such references would only have resulted in increasing confusions in a field which is far from lacking them. They also risked compromising the possibility of a rigorous articulation, which perhaps was yet to be constructed.

Should I then, on the contrary, have declared at the outset my disagreement and engaged an explicit debate? Aside from the fact that the form of that debate seemed to me published in its premises (available to whoever was prepared to read it and assume the consequences), such a declaration seemed to me inopportune, at the time, for a number of reasons.

1. Since the whole of the *Ecrits* were published in the meantime, I had not only to get to know them but to engage, given what I have just said about Lacan's rhetoric, in a labor which promised to be out of proportion with what my first readings allowed me to expect of it (I read while writing: slowly, taking pleasure in prefacing at length each term). This is, of course, not a sufficient reason for renunciation—I might have been wrong in my anticipation—but perhaps for preferring to answer during a period of time (I'm speaking of a fairly short span, three or four years) requests I considered more urgent and in any event, from my point of view, as having priority.

2. If I had objections to formulate (but debate does not necessarily take the form of disagreement, it can give way to a disimplication, a displacement which is more complex), I knew already that they would have nothing in common with those which were current at the time. Here again, I insisted on avoiding confusion and on doing nothing to limit the propagation of a discourse whose critical effects seemed to me, despite what I've just recalled, necessary within an entire domain (which is why, be it confirmed in passing, I did what I could to prevent Lacan's teaching at the *Ecole Normale* from being interrupted). I would allude here to what I've said elsewhere on insistence, gap, and inequalities of development.

3. In the interval, I esteemed that the best contribution or theoretical "explanation" consisted in pursuing my work, according to its specific directions and requirements, whether or not that work, along certain axes, converged with that of Lacan and even, I don't at all exclude this, more than with any other today.

Since then? Since then, I've reread those two texts and I've read others, almost all, I think, in the *Ecrits*. Specifically in the last few months. My first reading was, on essentials, for the most part confirmed. In particular, to return to a point whose central status you'll recognize, concerning the identification of truth (as unveiling) and speech (of the Logos), Truth—cut off from knowledge—is constantly determined as revelation, non-veiling, that is: necessarily as presence, the presentation of the present, "Being of being" (*Anwesenheit*) or, in a more literally Heideggerian mode, as the unity of veiling and unveiling. The reference to the results of Heidegger's progress is often explicit in this form ("the radical ambiguity indicated by Heidegger to the extent that truth means revelation," p. 166, "that passion for unveiling which has an object: the truth," p. 193, etc.). That the ultimate signified of this speech or logos is posited as a lack (non-being, absent, etc.) changes nothing in this continuum and remains, moreover, strictly Heideggerian. And if it is indeed necessary to recall that there is no metalanguage (I would say rather that there is no extra-text, if not a certain angle of remark, *Grammatologie*, p. 227, *passim*). It should not be forgotten that the most classical metaphysics and onto-theology can very easily adjust to that, above all when that proposition takes the form of "I, the truth, speak" or "That is even why the unconscious which tells it, the truth about truth, is structured like a language" (pp. 867-68). Above all, I would not say that this is false. I repeat simply that the questions I asked bore upon the necessity and presuppositions of that continuum.

And then I've become quite interested in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.'" An admirable expedition, I say so without artifice, but which seems to me, in rushing to find in it the "illustration" of a "truth" (p. 12), to misperceive the paper, the

of the "symbolic." Need all possibility for disorder and disorganization of the symbolic from the force of a certain exterior, need all which *forces* the symbolic participate in the specular (the "imaginary"), even in a "real" determined as "impossible"? In schizophrenia or psychosis? In that case, what consequences must be drawn?³⁴ Such is the breach which interests me under the title of dissemination.

I am not saying that the "symbolic" (to continue using a word whose choice has always perplexed me) *is not in fact constituted*, does not constitute the solidity of an *order* (it is the order of philosophy as well) and that it is not structurally required to constitute and reconstitute itself endlessly (language, law, "intersubjective triad," "intersubjective dialectic," speaking, etc.). But dissemination designates that which can no more be integrated therein than it forms that order's *simple* exterior under the categories of failure or the impossible (the imaginary or the real): even if from within the snug interior of the "symbolic," one has every reason to be taken in by its deceptive *resemblance* with those two forms. What one misses in that case is perhaps not a fiction (and that concept remains to be analyzed) but a simulacrum: a structure of duplicity which feigns and duplicates the dual relation, interrupts with greater effectiveness, more "reality" (as may be measured by the effects of reaction), both the specular (which must then be rethought) or the private (*propre*), and the "symbolic," no longer can be mastered in a problematic of speech, of lying and truth. The effective violence and *unconscious* effects of the simulacrum.

Lapidarily: dissemination figures that which *does not come back* to the father. Neither in germination nor in castration. Attempt to control the turns of that proposition, and in making your way, as you proceed (*en marchant*), you will find (*mark*) and lose (*margin*) the limit between polysemy and dissemination.

Is not writing—dissemination—taking into account castration (with the entirety of its system and according to the strange arithmetic you recalled a moment ago) by putting into play its position as transcendental sig-

functioning or fictioning of Poe's text, and its links to others, let us say the breadth of a scene of writing which is played out therein. To that breadth, its cypher neither equaled nor unveiled by any speaking truth, Lacan's discourse is no more than any other totally closed. Such is the heterogeneity I spoke of in beginning. The question is not of giving signs of it, of being open or closed to it, of speaking of it a little or a lot, but of knowing how and how far to administer its scene and the chain of its consequences. A fundamentally traditional reading of Poe's text, then, which in the last analysis is hermeneutic (semantic) and formalist (according to the schema criticized in "La Double Séance" and which we summarized above): which is what I will attempt to demonstrate—since I can't do it here—through a patient analysis of both texts, which will then be inserted, when I have the time, in a work I'm preparing. No doubt productive in many respects, this misreading seems to me systematically determined by the limitations I evoked a moment ago under the rubric of logocentrism (logos, living speech, "true speech," truth as the opposition veil/non-veil, etc.). It is perhaps not strictly a misreading of the "literary" (although that is for me—as you know—a fruitful test, particularly in decyphering Lacan's discourse) and it is not, I repeat, a matter of protecting the literary from the assaults of psychoanalysis. I would even suggest the opposite. It is a question of a certain turn of writing indicated indeed under the name of "literature" or "art," but which may be defined only within a general deconstruction which resists (or is resisted by) not psychoanalysis in general (quite the contrary) but a certain capacity or determined pertinence of the psychoanalytic concepts one calls into play at a certain stage of their development. From this point of view, certain literary texts have an "analytic" and deconstructive capacity greater than certain modes of psychoanalytic discourse which apply to them their theoretical apparatus—a specific stage of their theoretical apparatus—with its insights but also with its presuppositions, at a given moment of its elaboration. Such would be the relation between the theoretical apparatus underlying the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (you are aware of the decisive place Lacan accords it at the entrance to the *Écrits*), Poe's text, and, no doubt, several others.

That's all for today. I offer this note to the various moves whose circuit is, as of now, more or less known.

³⁴ Have I not indicated here the principle of a reply—according to what you earlier termed a certain star—to your last question?

I would specify briefly that, unless one admits what dissemination thus represents, one would be forced to treat the "symbolic" and the tripartite division imaginary/symbolic/real as the unmodifiable element of a transcendental structure or ontology (cf. *De la grammatologie*, p. 90).

These questions relative to psychoanalysis are practically and theoretically indissociable—the psychoanalysts often say so—from analytic "experience" and "practice," and thus also—the psychoanalysts rarely emphasize it—from the "core" of the "analytic situation," no set of procedures here seems to me to be inviolate, established, irreversibly given as guaranteed by "science." And the condemnation of American psychoanalysis, however well-justified, should not be an overly effective distraction. This is a very complex question, but it will be subjected, in its basic elements, to an inevitable historical transformation.

nified or signifier (for there may also be a transcendental signifier, for example, the phallus as correlate of a primal signified, castration and desire for the mother), ultimate recourse of all textuality, central truth or truth of the final instance, semantically replete definition which may not be substituted for that generative (disseminating) void in which the text is cast? Dissemination *affirms* (I'm not saying produces or constitutes) a substitution without end, it neither stops nor oversees the play ("castration—in play of forever").³⁵ With all the risks but without the metaphysical or romantic pathos of negativity. Dissemination "is" that *angle* of play in castration which is not signified, may be constituted as neither signified nor signifier, is no more present than representable, no more reveals itself than it conceals itself. It thus has in itself neither truth (adequation or unveiling) nor veil. This is what I've called the graphics of hymen, which is no longer subject to the opposition veil/non-veil.³⁶

G.S.: I would like to ask you next what relationship you establish between dissemination and the death instinct. J.D.: The most necessary relationship. Starting with *Audelà*, with *Das Unheimliche* (which is extraordinarily difficult to read through), and with everything related to it in preceding and subsequent texts, it is necessary to reconstruct a logic which, in many respects, seems to contradict, or in any case to subject to an extraordinary complication, all of Freud's explicit and "regional" discourse on "literature" and on "art." I have often referred to the "death impulse," to a certain dualism and to a certain concept of repetition, and to the two texts that I have just mentioned, in particular in "La Différance" and in "La Double Séance." All of that calls for (and I am working on this now) an elaboration which relates a new concept of repetition (one which is operative, but not continuously, in Freud) to the value of *mimesis* (and not, of course, of mimetologism, representation, expression, imitation, illustration, etc.).

G.S.: This could lead us then to articulate another question on what one might call the "subject of writing": to the extent that you indicate, for example, that the "subject of writing" does not exist, if one means by that a master-subject, and that it would be necessary to understand by "subject of writing" the system of relationship between the textual layers themselves, how might one reconsider this problem of the "subject of writing" on the basis of the concept of dissemination, and also on the basis of what is articulated there, that is of the dialectic between sublimation and death instinct?

J.D.: As you recall, I have never said that *there was no* "subject of writing."³⁷ Nor have I ever said that there

was no subject. After the questions which were prompted by the lecture on différance,³⁸ I was obliged to recall this in responding to Goldmann, who was also much concerned with the subject and was anxious to find out what had become of it. It is only necessary to reconsider the problem of the effect of subjectivity as it is produced by the structure of the text—of what I designated a moment ago as the general text, its "block," and not just the linguistic text. That effect is doubtless inseparable from a certain relationship between sublimation and death instinct, from a movement of interiorization-idealization-sublation-sublimation, etc., thus from a certain repression. And it would be foolish to refuse to recognize this movement, still more so to direct some moral or political "condemnation" against its necessity. Without this movement—or with that movement alone, moreover—there would actually be neither "subject," nor

³⁵ "La Dissémination," in *La Dissémination*, p. 336.

³⁶ "La Double Séance," in *La Dissémination*, p. 293.

³⁷ "The subject of writing does not exist if one means by that some sovereign solitude of the writer. The subject of writing is a system of relations between the layers: the magic block, the psychic, society, the world. Within this scene, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject cannot be found" ("Freud et la scène de l'écriture," in *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 335.) (EN)

³⁸ A discussion published in the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* (January 1968).

"history," nor "symbolic," etc. Thus one would have to reexamine all these concepts in what appears more and more to be their concatenation (I am not saying their overlapping or their identity). I can say no more on the spur of the moment, unless you make your question more specific.

G.S.: For example, must one admit a radical cleavage between "subject of writing" and what Lacan calls "subject" as "effect of the signifier," as produced in and by the signifier, or on the contrary, should the two notions, can they, be reconciled?

J.D.: There is certainly a "relationship" between these two definitions of the "subject." In order to analyze it, one would in any case have to take into account what was said earlier about dissemination and the "symbolic," about the gram and the signifier, etc.

J.-L.H.: One last question, if you are willing, which is subtended by the overall development of your work. You write, in one of your first published texts, "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" (1966: *Tel Quel*, 26), while challenging the pretensions of a sociology of literature—and we are quite in agreement with you—that "the sociality of writing as drama requires an entirely different discipline."

How would you delimit today this entirely different discipline? What would be its relationship with a semiotics or a semanalysis (*sémanalyse*) which are being developed on a base of dialectical materialist logic? This would necessarily involve, as the final extension of our questioning, the relationship between the "concept" of writing and the Marxist concept of "practice," and particularly that of *signifying practice*, such as it has been constituted as an object of knowledge, specifically, for semiotics and a semanalysis based on the logic of dialectical materialism, this latter base also being specified from the standpoint of psychoanalysis, whose intervention is absolutely necessary as soon as one approaches the field of signifying practices. But we should doubtless speak also about the retro-action of the modern text on analytic procedures themselves, about the *excess*—in relation to a certain knowing, scientific logic—which is implied in this contemporary textual practice.

As a final aspect of the question, which may open onto a sort of provisional conclusion to this discussion, how do you conceive today of this overall process (*processus*) (which it is quite hard to imagine except in the form of a contradictory, dialectical process [*procès*]) and its efficacy on the current ideological scene, what it is capable of transforming, its possible limits, its future?

J.D.: In the phrase which you used, the word "drama" was a quote, you recognized this, and even a double quote.

Let us start, for example, with the concept of practice. To define writing, gram, difference, text, etc., I have always insisted on this value of *practice*. Consequently, whenever a general theory is elaborated, from this viewpoint, a general theory-practice of "signifying practice," I have always subscribed to the task thus defined. I suppose that you are referring to the work of Julia Kristeva.

It is also evident that in the field of a deconstruction of philosophical oppositions, the opposition *praxis/theoria* must first be analyzed and can no longer simply govern our definition of practice. For this reason, too, systematic deconstruction can be neither a simply theoretical nor a simply negative operation. It will be necessary to be on guard indefinitely against the "re-appropriation" of the value of "practice."

Now what can be the "effectiveness" of all this work, of all this deconstructive practice, on the "current ideological scene"? I can only respond in principle here, and make one point. This work *seems* to find its point of departure in limited fields, defined as fields of "ideology" (philosophy, science, literature, etc.). So it seems that there is no cause to expect from it a disproportionate historical efficacy, an immediately general efficacy. Its effectiveness, however certain, nonetheless remains limited, relayed, articulated, postponed according to complex networks. But inversely what is perhaps being reconsidered now is the form of closure which is called "ideology" (a concept which should doubtless be analyzed in its function, its history, its source, its transformations), the form of the relationships between a transformed concept of "infrastructure," if you wish (the *general text* of which would no longer be the "effect" or the "reflection"), and a transformed concept of the "ideological." If what is at issue in this work is a new definition of the relationship of a *determined* text or of a signifying chain to its exterior, to its referential effects, etc. (see above), to "reality" (history, the class struggle, production relationships, etc.), we can no longer be content with the old demarcations nor even with the old concept of regional demarcation. What is emerging in the current upheaval is a re-evaluation of the relationship between the general text and what used to be thought of, in the guise of reality (historical, political, economic, sexual, etc.), as the simple designatable exterior of language or of writing, whether this exterior was in the position of simple cause or of a simple accident. The effects of this upheaval, which are simply "regional" in appearance, have thus at the same time a non-regional opening, destroy their own limits and tend to articulate themselves, according to new modes, without any presumption of sovereignty, with the general scene.