

Jacques Derrida

Dissemination

Translated, with an Introduction and Additional Notes, by
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Translator's Introduction

All translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages.

—Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator"

What is translation? On a platter
A poet's pale and glaring head,
A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter,
And profanation of the dead.

—Vladimir Nabokov, "On Translating 'Eugene Onegin'"

Jacques Derrida, born in Algiers in 1930, teaches philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. His tremendous impact on contemporary theoretical thought began in 1967 with the simultaneous publication of three major philosophical works: *La Voix et le phénomène* (an introduction to the problem of the *sign* in Husserl's phenomenology; translated by David Allison as *Speech and Phenomena* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973]), *L'écriture et la différence* (a collection of essays on the problematics of writing in literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and anthropology; translated by Alan Bass as *Writing and Difference* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978]), and *De la grammatologie* (a sustained analysis of the repression of writing in Western theories of language and culture and a methodological and theoretical outline of a new "science" of writing; translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as *Of Grammatology* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974]).

Five years later, in 1972, came another tripartite Derridean biblioblitiz: *Positions* (a collection of interviews; translated by Alan Bass as *Positions* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981]), *Marges: de la philosophie* (a collection of essays in/on the "margins" of philosophy, linguistics, and literature [translation in preparation, University of Chicago Press]), and *La Dissémination*.

Since 1972, Derrida's work has continued to proliferate and diversify. *Glas* (a giant montage of textual grafts and hardworking wordplays in which Hegel and Genet are shuffled into each other from juxtaposed columns of print) appeared in 1974, followed, among numerous articles and short works, by a collection of critical essays on painting, *La Vérité en peinture* (1978), and, in 1980, by *La Carte Postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, an intriguing collection of essays that treat the psychoanalytical writings of Freud and Jacques Lacan, preceded by a pseudo-fictional, pseudo-autobiographical epistolary preface that hinges on a postcard depicting Plato dictating behind the back of a writing Socrates.

I. A Critique of Western Metaphysics

Best known in this country for having forged the term "deconstruction," Jacques Derrida follows Nietzsche and Heidegger in elaborating a critique of "Western metaphysics," by which he means not only the Western philosophical tradition but "everyday" thought and language as well. Western thought, says Derrida, has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs. evil, being vs. nothingness, presence vs. absence, truth vs. error, identity vs. difference, mind vs. matter, man vs. woman, soul vs. body, life vs. death, nature vs. culture, speech vs. writing. These polar opposites do not, however, stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. Hence, absence is the lack of presence, evil is the fall from good, error is a distortion of truth, etc. In other words, the two terms are not simply opposed in their meanings, but are arranged in a hierarchical order which gives the first term *priority*, in both the temporal and the qualitative sense of the word. In general, what these hierarchical oppositions do is to privilege unity, identity, immediacy, and temporal and spatial *presentness* over distance, difference, dissimulation, and deferment. In its search for the answer to the question of Being, Western philosophy has indeed always determined Being as *presence*.

Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics focuses on its privileging of the spoken word over the written word. The spoken word is given a higher value because the speaker and listener are both present to the utterance simultaneously. There is no temporal or spatial distance between speaker, speech, and listener, since the speaker hears himself speak at the same moment the listener does. This immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said. Whether or not perfect

understanding always occurs *in fact*, this image of perfectly self-present meaning is, according to Derrida, the underlying ideal of Western culture. Derrida has termed this belief in the self-presentation of meaning "Logocentrism," from the Greek word *Logos* (meaning speech, logic, reason, the Word of God). Writing, on the other hand, is considered by the logocentric system to be only a *representation* of speech, a secondary substitute designed for use only when speaking is impossible. Writing is thus a second-rate activity that tries to overcome distance by making use of it: the writer puts his thought on paper, distancing it from himself, transforming it into something that can be read by someone far away, even after the writer's death. This inclusion of death, distance, and difference is thought to be a corruption of the self-presence of meaning, to open meaning up to all forms of adulteration which immediacy would have prevented.

In the course of his critique, Derrida does not simply reverse this value system and say that writing is better than speech. Rather, he attempts to show that the very possibility of opposing the two terms on the basis of presence vs. absence or immediacy vs. representation is an illusion, since speech is *already* structured by difference and distance as much as writing is. The very fact that a word is divided into a phonic *signifier* and a mental *signified*, and that, as Saussure pointed out, language is a system of differences rather than a collection of independently meaningful units, indicates that language as such is already constituted by the very distances and differences it seeks to overcome. To mean, in other words, is automatically *not* to be. As soon as there is meaning, there is difference. Derrida's word for this lag inherent in any signifying act is *différance*, from the French verb *différer*, which means both "to differ" and "to defer." What Derrida attempts to demonstrate is that this *différance* inhabits the very core of what appears to be immediate and present. Even in the seemingly nonlinguistic areas of the structures of consciousness and the unconscious, Derrida analyzes the underlying necessity that induces Freud to compare the psychic apparatus to a structure of scriptural *différance*, a "mystic writing-pad."¹ The illusion of the self-presence of meaning or of consciousness is thus produced by the repression of the differential structures from which they spring.

Derrida's project in his early writings is to elaborate a science of writing called *grammatology*: a science that would study the effects of this *différance* which Western metaphysics has systematically repressed in its search for

1. See "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 196-231.

self-present Truth. But, as Derrida himself admits, the very notion of a perfectly adequate *science* or *-logy* belongs to the logocentric discourse which the science of writing would try, precisely, to put in question. Derrida thus finds himself in the uncomfortable position of attempting to account for an error by means of tools derived from that very error. For it is not possible to show that the belief in truth is an error without implicitly believing in the notion of Truth. By the same token, to show that the binary oppositions of metaphysics are illusions is *also*, and perhaps most importantly, to show that such illusions cannot simply in turn *be opposed* without repeating the very same illusion. The task of undoing the history of logocentrism in order to disinter *différance* would thus appear to be a doubly impossible one: on the one hand, it can only be conducted by means of notions of revelation, representation, and rectification, which are *the* logocentric notions par excellence, and, on the other hand, it can only dig up something that is really nothing—a difference, a gap, an interval, a trace. How, then, can such a task be undertaken?

II. Supplementary Reading

Any attempt to disentangle the weave of *différance* from the logocentric blanket can obviously not long remain on the level of abstraction and generality of the preceding remarks. Derrida's writing, indeed, is always explicitly inscribed in the margins of some preexisting text. Derrida is, first and foremost, a *reader*, a reader who constantly reflects on and transforms the very nature of the act of reading. It would therefore perhaps be helpful to examine some of the specific reading strategies he has worked out. I begin with a chapter from *Of Grammatology* entitled "That Dangerous Supplement," in which Derrida elaborates not only a particularly striking reading of Rousseau's *Confessions* but also a concise reflection on his own methodology.

Derrida's starting point is the rhetoric of Rousseau's discussions of writing, on the one hand, and masturbation, on the other. Both activities are called *supplements* to natural intercourse, in the sense both of conversation and of copulation. What Derrida finds in Rousseau's account is a curious bifurcation within the values of writing and masturbation with respect to the desire for presence.

Let us take writing first. On the one hand, Rousseau condemns writing for being only a representation of direct speech and therefore less desirable because less immediate. Rousseau, in this context, privileges speech as the more direct expression of the self. But on the other hand, in the actual

experience of living speech, Rousseau finds that he expresses himself much less successfully in person than he does in his writing. Because of his shyness, he tends to blurt out things that represent him as the opposite of what he thinks he is:

I would love society like others, if I were not sure of showing myself not only at a disadvantage, but as completely different from what I am. The part that I have taken of *writing and hiding myself* is precisely the one that suits me. If I were present, one would never know what I was worth.²

It is thus absence that assures the presentation of truth, and presence that entails its distortion. Derrida's summation of this contradictory stance is as follows:

Straining toward the reconstruction of presence, [Rousseau] valorizes and disqualifies writing at the same time. . . . Rousseau condemns writing as destruction of presence and as disease of speech. He rehabilitates it to the extent that it promises the reappropriation of that of which speech allowed itself to be dispossessed. But by what, if not already a writing older than speech and already installed in that place? (Pp. 141–42)

In other words, the loss of presence has always already begun. Speech itself springs out of an alienation or difference that has the very structure of writing.

It would seem, though, that it is precisely through this assumption of the necessity of absence that Rousseau ultimately succeeds in reappropriating the lost presence. In sacrificing himself, he recuperates himself. This notion that self-sacrifice is the road to self-redemption is a classical structure in Western metaphysics. Yet it can be shown that this project of reappropriation is inherently self-subverting because its very starting point is not presence itself but the *desire* for presence, that is, the *lack* of presence. It is not possible to desire that with which one coincides. The starting point is thus not a *point* but a difference:

Without the possibility of difference, the desire of presence as such would not find its breathing-space. That means by the same token that

2. Quoted in *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974]), p. 142. Page numbers in brackets following references to *Of Grammatology* refer to J. M. Cohen's translation of Rousseau's *Confessions* (Penguin, 1954), which I have sometimes substituted for the translation used by Spivak.

this desire carries in itself the destiny of its nonsatisfaction. Differance produces what it forbids, making possible the very thing that it makes impossible. (P. 143)

The same paradoxical account of the desire for presence occurs in Rousseau's discussions of sexuality. On the one hand, masturbation is condemned as a means of "cheating Nature" and substituting a mere image (absence) for the presence of a sexual partner. On the other hand:

This vice, which shame and timidity find so convenient, has a particular attraction for lively imaginations. It allows them to dispose, so to speak, of the whole female sex at their will, and to make any beauty who tempts them serve their pleasure without the need of first obtaining her consent. (P. 151 [109])

It is thus the woman's absence that gives immediacy to her imaginary possession, while to deal with the woman's presence would inevitably be to confront differance. Masturbation is both a symbolic form of ideal union, since in it the subject and object are truly one, and a radical alienation of the self from any contact with an other. The union that would perfectly fulfill desire would also perfectly exclude the space of its very possibility.

Just as speech was shown to be structured by the same differance as writing, so, too, the desire to possess a "real" woman is grounded in distance, both because the prohibition of incest requires that one's love-object always be a substitute for the original object, and because of the fundamental structure of desire itself. Rousseau's autobiography offers us a particularly striking example of the essential role of differance in desire. Faced with the possibility of a quasi-incestuous relation with the woman he called "Mama"—incest being the very model of the elimination of differance—Rousseau finds that his desire manifests itself in inverse proportion to Mama's physical proximity: "I only felt the full strength of my attachment to her when she was out of my sight" (p. 152 [107]). Not only does the enjoyment of presence appear to Rousseau to be impossible; it also could be fatal: "If I had ever in my life tasted the delights of love even once in their plenitude," he writes, "I do not imagine that my frail existence would have been sufficient for them. I would have been dead in the act" (p. 155).

Presence, then, is an ambiguous, even dangerous, ideal. Direct speech is self-violation; perfect heteroeroticism is death. Recourse to writing and autoeroticism is necessary to recapture a presence whose lack has not been preceded by any fullness. Yet these two compensatory activities are themselves condemned as unnecessary, even dangerous, supplements.

In French, the word *supplément* has two meanings: it means both “an addition” and “a substitute.” Rousseau uses this word to describe both writing and masturbation. Thus, writing and masturbation may *add* to something that is already present, in which case they are *superfluous*, AND/OR they may *replace* something that is *not* present, in which case they are *necessary*. Superfluous and necessary, dangerous and redemptive, the supplement moves through Rousseau’s text according to a very strange logic.

What Derrida’s reading of Rousseau sketches out is indeed nothing less than a revolution in the very logic of meaning. The logic of the supplement wrenches apart the neatness of the metaphysical binary oppositions. Instead of “A is opposed to B” we have “B is both added to A and replaces A.” A and B are no longer opposed, nor are they equivalent. Indeed, they are no longer even equivalent to themselves. They are their own difference from themselves. “Writing,” for example, no longer means simply “words on a page,” but rather any differential trace structure, a structure that *also* inhabits speech. “Writing” and “speech” can therefore no longer be simply opposed, but neither have they become identical. Rather, the very notion of their “identities” is put in question.

In addition to this supplementary logic in the text’s *signified*, the inseparability of the two senses of the word “supplément” renders any affirmation that contains it problematic. While Rousseau’s explicit intentions are to keep the two senses rigorously distinct—to know when he means “substitute” and when he means “addition”—the shadow presence of the other meaning is always there to undermine the distinction. On the level both of the signified and of the signifier, therefore, it is not possible to pin down the dividing lines between excess and lack, compensation and corruption. The doubleness of the word *supplément* carries the text’s signifying possibilities beyond what could reasonably be attributed to Rousseau’s conscious intentions. Derrida’s reading shows how Rousseau’s text functions *against* its own explicit (metaphysical) assertions, not just by creating ambiguity, but by inscribing a *systematic* “other message” behind or through what is being said.

III. Deconstruction

Let us now examine more closely the strategies and assumptions involved in this type of critical reading. It is clear that Derrida is not seeking the “meaning” of Rousseau’s text in any traditional sense. He neither adds the text up into a final set of themes or affirmations nor looks for the reality of Rousseau’s life outside the text. Indeed, says Derrida, there *is* no outside of the text:

There is nothing outside of the text [*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]. And that is neither because Jean-Jacques' life, or the existence of Mama or Thérèse *themselves*, is not of prime interest to us, nor because we have access to their so-called "real" existence only in the text and we have neither any means of altering this, nor any right to neglect this limitation. All reasons of this type would already be sufficient, to be sure, but there are more radical reasons. What we have tried to show by following the guiding line of the "dangerous supplement," is that in what one calls the real life of these existences "of flesh and bone," beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, *in the text*, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (Pp. 158–59; emphasis in original)

Far from being a simple warning against the biographical or referential fallacy, *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* is a statement derived from Rousseau's autobiography itself. For what Rousseau's text tells us is that our very relation to "reality" already functions like a text. Rousseau's account of his life is not only itself a text, but it is a text that speaks only about the textuality of life. Rousseau's life does not *become* a text through his writing: it always already *was* one. Nothing, indeed, can be said to be *not* a text.

Derrida's reading of Rousseau's autobiography thus proposes a "deconstruction" of its logocentric claims and metaphysical assumptions. Deconstruction is not a form of textual vandalism designed to prove that meaning is impossible. In fact, the word "de-construction" is closely related not to the word "destruction" but to the word "analysis," which etymologically means "to undo"—a virtual synonym for "to de-construct." The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or generalized skepticism, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification *within the text itself*. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not meaning but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. This, of course, implies that a text signifies in more than one way, and to varying degrees of explicitness. Sometimes the discrepancy is produced, as here, by a double-edged word, which serves as a hinge that both articulates and breaks open the explicit statement being

made. Sometimes it is engendered when the figurative level of a statement is at odds with the literal level. And sometimes it occurs when the so-called starting point of an argument is based on presuppositions that render its conclusions problematic or circular.

Derrida defines his reading strategy as follows:

The reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that the critical reading should *produce*. (p. 158; emphasis in original)

In other words, the deconstructive reading does not point out the flaws or weaknesses or stupidities of an author, but the *necessity* with which what he *does* see is systematically related to what he does *not* see.

It can thus be seen that deconstruction is a form of what has long been called a *critique*. A critique of any theoretical system is not an examination of its flaws or imperfections. It is not a set of criticisms designed to make the system better. It is an analysis that focuses on the grounds of that system's possibility. The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself. For example, Copernicus can be said to have written a critique of the Ptolemaic conception of the universe. But the idea that the earth goes around the sun is not an *improvement* of the idea that the sun goes around the earth. It is a shift in perspective which literally makes the ground move. It is a deconstruction of the validity of the commonsense perception of the obvious. In the same way, Marx's critique of political economy is not an improvement in it but a demonstration that the theory which starts with the commodity as the basic unit of economy is blind to what *produces* the commodity—namely, labor. Every theory starts somewhere; every critique exposes what that starting point conceals, and thereby displaces all the ideas that follow from it. The critique does not ask "what does this statement *mean*?" but "where is it being made from? What does it presuppose? Are its presuppositions compatible with, independent of, and anterior to the statement that seems to follow from them, or do they already follow from it, contradict it, or stand in a relation of mutual dependence such that neither can exist without positing that the other is prior to it?"

In its elaboration of a critique of the metaphysical forces that structure and smother difference in every text, a deconstructive reading thus assumes:

1. That the rhetoric of an assertion is not necessarily compatible with its explicit meaning.
2. That this incompatibility can be read as systematic and significant *as such*.
3. That an inquiry that attempts to study an object by means of that very object is open to certain analyzable aberrations (this pertains to virtually all important investigations: the self analyzing itself, man studying man, thought thinking about thought, language speaking about language, etc.).
4. That certain levels of any rigorous text will engender a systematic double mark of the insistent but invisible contradiction or difference (the repression of) which is necessary for and in the text's very elaboration.

But if the traditional logic of meaning as an unequivocal structure of mastery *is* Western metaphysics, the deconstruction of metaphysics cannot simply combat logocentric meaning by opposing some other meaning to it. Difference is not a "concept" or "idea" that is "truer" than presence. It can only be a process of textual *work*, a strategy of *writing*.

IV. Derrida's Styles

Early in "The Double Session," in the course of a discussion of the possible Hegelian or Platonic overtones of the word "Idea" in Mallarmé's writing, we read the following warning:

But a reading here should no longer be carried out as a simple table of concepts or words, as a static or statistical sort of punctuation. One must reconstitute a chain in motion, the effects of a network and the play of a syntax. (P. 194)

This warning applies equally well to Derrida's own writing, in which it is all too tempting to focus on certain "key" terms and to compile them into a static lexicon: *supplément*, *différance*, *pharmakon*, *hymen*, etc. Because Derrida's text is constructed as a moving chain or network, it constantly frustrates the desire to "get to the point" (see the remarks on the dancer's "points" in "The Double Session"). In accordance with its deconstruction of summary meaning, Derrida's writing mimes the *movement* of desire rather than its fulfillment, refusing to stop and totalize itself, or doing so only by feint. Some of the mechanisms of this signifying frustration include:

1. *Syntax*. Derrida's grammar is often "unspeakable"—i.e., it conforms to the laws of writing but not necessarily to the cadences of speech. Ambiguity is rampant. Parentheses go on for pages. A sentence beginning

on p. 319 does not end until p. 323, having embraced two pages of *Un Coup de dés* and a long quotation from Robert Greer Cohn. Punctuation arrests without necessarily clarifying.

2. *Allusions*. The pluralization of writing's references and voices often entails the mobilization of unnamed sources and addressees. All references to castration, lack, talking truth, and letters not reaching their destination, for example, are part of Derrida's ongoing critique of the writings of Jacques Lacan.

3. *Fading in and out*. The beginnings and endings of these essays are often the most mystifying parts. Sometimes, as in the description of Plato working after hours in his pharmacy, they are also cryptically literary, almost lyrical. It is as though the borderlines of the text had to be made to bear the mark of the silence—and the pathos—that lie beyond its fringes, as if the text had first and last to more actively disconnect itself from the logos toward which it still aspires.

4. *Multiple coherences*. The unit of coherence here is not necessarily the sentence, the word, the paragraph, or even the essay. Different threads of *Dissemination* are woven together through the bindings of grammar (the future perfect), "theme" (stones, columns, folds, caves, beds, textiles, seeds, etc.), letters (*or, d, i*), anagrammatical plays (graft/graph, semen/semantics, *lit/lire*), etc.

5. *Nonbinary logic*. In its deconstruction of the either/or logic of noncontradiction that underlies Western metaphysics, Derrida's writing attempts to elaborate an "other" logic. As he puts it in *Positions*:

It has been necessary to analyze, to set to work, *within* the text of the history of philosophy, as well as *within* the so-called literary text . . . certain marks . . . that *by analogy* . . . I have called undecidables, that is, unities of simulacrum, "false" verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics (the *pharmakon* is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplement* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor 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. . . . Neither/nor, that is, *simultaneously* either/or. . . .)³

3. *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 42–43.

Because Derrida's writing functions according to this type of "other" logic, it is not surprising that it does not entirely conform to traditional binary notions of "clarity."

V. Translation

To translate an author so excruciatingly aware of the minutest linguistic difference is an exercise in violent approximation. On the one hand, one must try to find an English equivalent not only for what Derrida *says* but also for the way in which his text *differs* from its own statements and from standard French usage. But on the other hand, these microstructural differences cannot be privileged at the expense of the text's power to *intervene* in the history of philosophy and criticism. Nonetheless, since Derrida's most striking intervention is precisely his way of reworking writing, I have generally tried to align my English with Derrida's disseminative infidelity to French rather than reduce his French to the statement of a thought *about* dissemination. Hence, every weapon available—from Latin to neologisms to American slang—has been mobilized to keep the juggling-puns in the air. The normal English equivalent of *n'avoir rien à voir avec*, for instance, is "to have nothing to do with." But since the literal meaning of the expression is "to have nothing to *see* with," Derrida sometimes uses it in the context of a discussion of "seeing." It was therefore necessary to resort to the colloquial use of "a damn sight" (meaning "a bit") and to translate *L'écriture . . . n' a rien à y voir. Elle a plutôt à (s')y aveugler* as "Writing . . . hasn't a damn sight to do with it. It has rather a blindness to do with it" (p. 135). Or again *médusée par ses propres signes* literally means "mesmerized by its own signs," but the word *médusée*, referring as it does to the Medusa, also implies "being turned to stone." Hence, the (doubtless related) contemporary sense of "getting stoned" has been called upon in rendering *médusée par ses propres signes* as "letting itself get stoned by its own signs" (p. 105). Or yet again, the expression *frayer avec* means "to associate with," but *frayer* alone means "to blaze a trail." Hence *un texte . . . avec lequel il faut frayer* becomes "a text one must make tracks with" (p. 270).

Syntax has been the greatest stumbling block. The "in fact" included in "nothing was any more, in fact, real" (p. 43), for example, has as its sole function the creation of ambiguity in the "any more" (which becomes both quantitative and temporal). In Mallarmé's *Mimique*, the comma after *qui le lit* serves to problematize the antecedent of *qui*. Hence, *le rôle, qui le lit, tout de suite comprend* can mean either "the role, whoever reads it instantly understands" or "the role, which reads him, instantly includes." I have attempted to render the ambiguity by translating this as "the role, the one that reads, will instantly comprehend."

Some justification may be in order regarding my rendering of the title of the opening essay of the book ("Hors livre, préfaces") as "Outwork, Hors d'œuvre, Extratext, Foreplay, Bookend, Facing, Prefacing" (see p. 1). Since no perfect equivalent presented itself, and since that essay, in its complex way of questioning the relations between "prefaces" and "books," is particularly difficult to follow, it seemed to me useful to conjugate out some of the ramifications of this "title" and to open *Dissemination* with a kind of miniaturized version of its strange textual logic.

Many of the word plays, alas, have been lost. While *fil*s (threads) is typographically identical to *fil*s (sons), "threads" does not sound anything like "sons" (the closest I could get was "filial filaments" [p. 84]). Yet it has been interesting to discover that, while many of these word plays were disappearing, others, just as pervasive, through a strange sort of sympathetic ink, kept appearing. One might almost believe, for instance, that, with its recurring emphasis on weaving and seeding, *Dissemination* had been waiting all along for the English homonymy between "sow" and "sew" to surface.

There is one passage in the book that I have been sorely tempted not to tackle: it is a letter written by Philippe Sollers to Derrida between the two halves of the "Double Session." The letter plays on Mallarmé's *Mimique*, whose text it transforms by twisting its graphic and phonic signifiers in such a way as to reveal surprising associations and unexpected intersections with the text of "The Double Session" into which it is inserted. To translate Sollers' letter, one must find an equivalent not for its words but for its *relation* to Mallarmé's *Mimique*. Hence, the translation is a fourfold process of transformation: the English version of the letter must relate to the English version of *Mimique* as the French version of the letter relates to the French version of *Mimique*, but *at the same time* the transformations wrought by the English version of the letter must produce results *analogous* to those produced in the French. "Meaning" here thus functions not as a primary focus but as a *constraint* on the translation of textual difference.

This fourfold system of relations is, indeed, paradigmatic of the difficulties involved in translating the whole of *Dissemination*. Just as Sollers' letter reproduces and reworks Mallarmé's *Mimique*, so Derrida's writing both employs and subverts the standard usage of French. In both cases, it is the transformational work rather than the "ideas" that must be rendered in translation. In addition, the word "translate" figures prominently *within* Mallarmé's text, just as the problematics of translation pervade all of Derrida's writings. I therefore here offer the following parallel texts in lieu of a theory of translation (see pp. xx–xxiii).

Mimique

Le silence, seul luxe après les rimes, un orchestre ne faisant avec son or, ses frôlements de pensée et de soir, qu'en détailler la signification à l'égal d'une ode tue et que c'est au poète, suscité par un défi, de traduire! le silence aux après-midi de musique; je le trouve, avec contentement, aussi, devant la réapparition toujours inédite de Pierrot ou du poignant et élégant mime Paul Margueritte.

Ainsi ce PIERROT ASSASSIN DE SA FEMME composé et rédigé par lui-même, soliloque muet que, tout du long à son âme tient et du visage et des gestes le fantôme blanc comme une page pas encore écrite. Un tourbillon de raisons naïves ou neuves émane, qu'il plairait de saisir avec sûreté: l'esthétique du genre situé plus près de principes qu'aucun! rien en cette région du caprice ne contrariant l'instinct simplificateur direct... Voici—"La scène n'illustre que l'idée, pas une action effective, dans un hymen (d'où procède le Rêve), vicieux mais sacré, entre le désir et l'accomplissement, la perpétration et son souvenir: ici devançant, là remémorant, au futur, au passé, *sous une apparence fausse de présent*. Tel opère le Mime, dont le jeu se borne à une allusion perpétuelle sans briser la glace: il installe, ainsi, un milieu, pur, de fiction." Moins qu'un millier de lignes, le rôle, qui le lit, tout de suite comprend les règles comme placé devant un tréteau, leur dépositaire humble. Surprise, accompagnant l'artifice d'une notation de sentiments par phrases point proférées—que, dans le seul cas, peut-être, avec authenticité, entre les feuillets et le regard règne un silence encore, condition et délice de la lecture.

Lettre de Sollers

“le 12 (minuit).

MIMIQUE, ou plutôt mi + mi + que, c'est-à-dire deux fois les moitiés plus l'indication ou l'intimation subjonctive de la subordination mimée; mi-mais? mais-qui? mimi à que(ue)? queue de mémé?

Le *si* lance et défie le texte en excès comme ce qui succède—dans l'après mi-dit—à la répétition du rire en écho mimé (rimé) l'arrivée d'or étant tout d'abord musique (or-chestre) et cela fait (si + or) = *soir* au milieu des rôles et du lustre qui ment—silence meurtrier, silence tué—

(*synodique*: temps qui s'écoule entre deux nouvelles lunes consécutives)—pas tant qu'il ne soient freinés—LIT/DES (il y en a *des* qui sont dans le *lit*) (scène primitive) (coup de dés)—queue déliant l'idée—

la scène ne rend pas illustre, sous le lustre, que lit le dés (ir)—

le vice est plus près des cieux que le rêve, sacré—ça crée en cédant au rêve—en s'aidant au rêve—pas de cadeau non plus (présent) apparent—le fantasma blanc—précédant, pro-

créant—
plissement du con, pénétration du père
(ô père)
per/pro
foutre futur passé glacé opéra—
mimère—

L'I mène—

Le MIME (neutre) est un demi-moi opéré, infini borné dans son unique stalle pur de toute fiction, un demi-lieu et un demi-dieu—

retour des règles—

mime/milieu = moins/millier

(qu'y le lit/qui le l'y) (lie)

très tôt en dépôt : s'y taire

lignes : phrases-points, que/con, sur-prise liée—

au temps cité, luxe du silence ferré : *un si lance en qu'or*—condiction d'hélice au regard feuilleté : dés lisses—”

Mimique

Silence, sole luxury after rhymes, an orchestra only marking with its gold, its brushes with thought and dusk, the detail of its signification on a par with a stilled ode and which it is up to the poet, roused by a dare, to translate! the silence of an afternoon of music; I find it, with contentment, also, before the ever original reappearance of Pierrot or of the poignant and elegant mime Paul Margueritte.

Such is this PIERROT MURDERER OF HIS WIFE composed and set down by himself, a mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to his soul. A whirlwind of naive or new reasons emanates, which it would be pleasing to seize upon with security; the aesthetics of the genre situated closer to principles than any!(no)thing in this region of caprice foiling the direct simplifying instinct . . . This—"The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action, in a hymen (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, *under the false appearance of a present*. That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror: he thus sets up a medium, a pure medium, of fiction." Less than a thousand lines, the role, the one that reads, will instantly comprehend the rules as if placed before the stage-boards, their humble depository. Surprise, accompanying the artifice of a notation of sentiments by unproffered sentences—that, in the sole case, perhaps, with authenticity, between the sheets and the eye there reigns a silence still, the condition and delight of reading.

Sollers' Letter

"the 12 (midnight)

MIMIQUE, or rather me + meek, that is, mimed self-effacement; mimicry—me, me cry?
crime, me? my mere key? mama's queue?

The sigh lends and dares the text in excess as that which follows—in the after-no one—the
repetition of l'after in a mimed (rhymed) echo, the coming of the golden ore being at first
music (*or*-chestra), the son or us, and then, amid the roles, the soul luxury of the lying lustre,
the sigh node, the sign ode, the synodical stillness, the killed ode—

(*synodical*: the interval between two successive conjunctions of a planet or the moon with the
sun)—not successive in conjunction with the son—

There are eyes between the sheets, eye-dice, I.D.'s, i-deas, "I" dies, the eyes dive between
the sheets (primal scene) (throw of (d)ice)

de-tail on a par(ent)

the poignant poll, the elegant pall

the scene makes illustrious, beneath the lustre, only the well red sheets of d's(ire)

(v)ice in the tain, out of the dream floe no gift (ap)parently (present) either—the phantasm
why—

flowing, foiling

the fillment of the full

father and father in

remembranes

the me(1)you of fuction

The high men

The I menses

the I's or/a thou's and

lesson a thousand lies, the one that reads

come, pretend the rules

be for the bored, their hymn bled Poe's story

sure prize? oh, then tent city

between the she and the I, the diction and the light of reading."

VI. Dissemination

In *Dissemination*, then, Jacques Derrida undertakes a finely (dis)articulated meditation on the problematics of presentation and representation in the history of Western philosophy and literature. The “pre-texts” for this inquiry are Plato’s *Phaedrus* (in “Plato’s Pharmacy”), Mallarmé’s *Mimique* (in “The Double Session”), Philippe Sollers’ *Nombres* (in “Dissemination”), and an encyclopedic array of prefaces and pseudonyms (in “Outwork”). These, of course, are only the most prominent figures in a text that combs the history of reading as well as that of writing for the threads with which to weave its signifying warp.

In the following remarks, I shall attempt to offer not a summary of the major themes and theses of *Dissemination* but rather a kind of roadmap that will detail some of its prominent routes and detours.

A. *Plato’s Pharmacy, or the Doctoring of Philosophy*

“Plato’s Pharmacy” takes off from the *Phaedrus*, a Platonic dialogue in which the function and value of writing are explicitly discussed. Socrates is taking a stroll with the handsome young Phaedrus, who holds, hidden under his cloak, the text of a speech by the sophist Lysias in which it is demonstrated that one should yield rather to a nonlover than to a lover. In the course of the dialogue, Socrates listens to Phaedrus read Lysias’ speech and then utters two speeches of his own. This exchange of discourses on love is followed by a discussion of speech, rhetoric, writing, seed sowing, and play, in the course of which Socrates recounts the myth of Theuth, the inventor of writing.

Socrates’ condemnation of writing and his panegyric to direct speech as the proper vehicle for dialectics and Truth have for centuries been taken almost exclusively at face value. “Platonism” can indeed be seen as another name for the history of strongly stressed metaphysical binarity. What Derrida does in his reading of Plato is to unfold those dimensions of Plato’s *text* that work against the grain of (Plato’s own) Platonism. Although Derrida does not make his procedures explicit, he can be seen to intervene along the following routes:

1. *Translation*. It can be said that everything in Derrida’s discussion of the *Phaedrus* hinges on the translation of a single word: the word *pharmakon*, which in Greek can mean *both* “remedy” *and* “poison.” In referring to writing as a *pharmakon*, Plato is thus not making a *simple* value judgment. Yet translators, by choosing to render the word sometimes by “remedy” and sometimes by “poison,” have consistently *decided* what in Plato remains

undecidable, and thus influenced the course of the entire history of "Platonism." When one recalls the means of Socrates' death, one begins to see just how crucial the undecidability between poison and remedy might be. But the notion of translation at work here cannot be confined to the exactitude or inexactitude of the rendering of a single "word." By focusing on the translation of *pharmakon*, Derrida strikes at the heart of philosophy itself:

We hope to display in the most striking manner the regular, ordered polysemy that has, through skewing, indetermination, or overdetermination, but without mistranslation, permitted the rendering of the same word by "remedy," "recipe," "poison," "drug," "philter," etc. It will also be seen to what extent the malleable unity of this concept, or rather its rules and the strange logic that links it with its signifier, has been dispersed, masked, obliterated, and rendered almost unreadable not only by the imprudence or empiricism of the translators, but first and foremost by the redoubtable, irreducible difficulty of translation. It is a difficulty inherent in its very principle, situated less in the passage from one language to another, from one philosophical language to another, than already, as we shall see, in the tradition between Greek and Greek; a violent difficulty in the transference of a non-philosopheme into a philosopheme. With this problem of translation we will thus be dealing with nothing less than the problem of the very passage into philosophy (Pp. 71–72).

Plato's "original" text is thus itself already the battlefield of an impossible process of translation.

2. *Anagrammatical texture.* Derived from Saussure's discovery of the anagrammatical dispersal of certain proper names in Latin poetry, this expression designates the systematic insistence of the word *pharmakon* and its relatives in Plato's text. Beginning with the passing mention of a mythical figure named "Pharmacia," and continuing through the word "pharmakeus" (sorcerer, magician), Derrida also notes the *absence* of the word "pharmakos," which means "scapegoat." In this way, a signifying chain belonging neither entirely to Plato's text nor entirely to the Greek language enables Derrida to reflect on the very relation between individual discourse and language itself.

3. *Lateral association.* By following all the senses of the word *pharmakon*, Derrida brings into play many other contexts in which the word is used by Plato, thus folding onto the problematics of writing such "other" domains as medicine, painting, politics, farming, law, sexuality, festivity, and family relations.

4. *Myth*. In amassing a detailed account of other Western myths of writing, Derrida shows the overdetermination of certain structures in the supposedly "original" Platonic myth of Theuth.

5. *Writing: literal and figurative*. Paradoxically enough, Plato resorts to the notion of "writing in the soul" in order to name the *other* of writing, the self-present Truth that speech—*not* writing—is designed to convey. This return of writing precisely as *what returns* throws the explicit opposition between speech and writing—and between literal and figurative—askew.

6. *Family scenes*. The insistence of a paternal and parricidal vocabulary leads Derrida to reflect both on the relations between paternity and language and on the ambiguities entailed by the fact that Plato, a son figure, is *writing*, from out of the death of Socrates, of Socrates' condemnation of writing as parricide.

B. The Double Session, or Mallarmé's Miming of Mimesis

Now shall we make use of this example to throw light on our question as to the true nature of this artist who represents things? We have here three sorts of bed: one which exists in the nature of things and which, I imagine, we could only describe as a product of divine workmanship; another made by the carpenter; and a third by the painter. . . .

We must not be surprised, then, if even an actual bed is a somewhat shadowy thing as compared with reality. . . .

Like ourselves, I replied; for in the first place prisoners so confined would have seen nothing of themselves or of one another, except the shadows thrown by the fire-light on the wall of the Cave facing them, would they? . . . And suppose their prison had an echo from the wall facing them? . . .

Suppose one of them set free and forced suddenly to stand up, turn his head, and walk with eyes lifted to the light. . . . They would laugh at him and say that he had gone up only to come back with his sight ruined; it was worth no-one's while even to attempt the ascent. If they could lay hands on the man who was trying to set them free and lead them up, they would kill him.

—Plato, *The Republic*, XXXV, XXV

Yes, Literature exists and, if you will, alone, excepting everything.

We know, captives of an absolute formula that, of course, there is nothing but what is. However, incontinent(ly) to put aside, under a pretext, the lure, would point up our inconsequence, denying the pleasure that we wish to take: for that *beyond* is its agent, and its motor might I say were I not loath to operate, in public, the impious dismantling of (the) fiction and consequently of the literary mechan-

ism, so as to display the principal part or nothing. But, I venerate how, by some flimflam, we project, toward a height both forbidden and thunderous! the conscious lacks in us (of) what, above, bursts out.

What is that for—

For play.

—Mallarmé, *La Musique et les Lettres*

In “The Double Session,” Derrida executes a kind of “pas de deux”—both a dance of duplicity and an erasure of binarity—with the history of a certain interpretation of *mimesis*. The classical understanding of *mimesis*, derived in part from Plato’s examples of the Bed and the Cave (which Derrida here calls the Antre), is fundamentally ontological: it involves either the self-presentation of a being-present or a relation of adequation between an imitator and an imitated. Alongside the mimetic hierarchies of Plato, Derrida has placed a short text by Stéphane Mallarmé, *Mimique*, in which, according to Derrida’s reading, what is imitated is not a referent or a reality but rather the very scheme of *mimesis* itself.

Simultaneously revealed and concealed behind a vast panoply of erudition, allusion, and wordplay, the following operations can be discerned in Derrida’s text:

1. *Shortsheeting Plato’s bed*. Into Plato’s catalogue of variously made beds, Derrida inserts Mallarmé’s short account of a Pierrot miming the murder of his wife. Writ(h)ing upon the conjugal sheets, the Mime plays both man and woman, pleasure and death, “in a hymen (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, *under the false appearance of a present*.” Through the syntactical ambiguities of *Mimique* and the double meaning of the word “hymen” (both “membrane” and, archaically, “marriage”) Derrida manages to show that the mime’s “operation” is a “perpetual allusion” to himself on the point of alluding, in which the difference between the imitator and the imitated is at once preserved and erased. The fact that the French word for bed, *lit*, can also mean “reads” is pivotal to this analysis, in which what Mallarmé calls the “desperate practice” of reading is so deeply embedded. “Reading,” indeed, is the last word of *Mimique*.

2. *Spelunking in the Antre*. Plato’s second mimetic paradigm, the cave, finds itself translated, through the homonymy between ANTRE (“cave”) and ENTRE (“between”), into various figures of penetration and articulation. The most important of these is the “hymen,” which, in signifying both membrane and marriage, designates both the virginal intactness of the

distinction between the inside and the outside and the erasing of that distinction through the commingling of self and other. Yet that alluringly foregrounded hymen—like the rest of the Derridean “lexicon” of double-edged words—is not indispensable:

What counts here is not the lexical richness, the semantic infiniteness of a word or concept, its depth or breadth, the sedimentation that has produced inside it two contradictory layers of signification (continuity and discontinuity, inside and outside, identity and difference, etc.). What counts here is the formal or syntactical *praxis* that composes and decomposes it. We have indeed been making believe that everything could be traced to the word *hymen*. But the irreplaceable character of this signifier, which everything seemed to grant it, was laid out like a trap. . . . It produces its effect first and foremost through the syntax, which disposes the “*entre*” in such a way that the suspense is due only to the placement and not to the content of the words. . . . It is the “between,” whether it names fusion or separation, that thus carries all the force of the operation. The hymen must be determined through the *entre* and not the other way around. . . . What holds for “hymen” also holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for all other signs which, like *pharmakon*, supplement, difference, and others, have a double, contradictory, undecidable value that always derives from their syntax. . . . (pp. 220-21)

The passage from Plato’s *antre* to Mallarmé’s *entre* is thus a passage from ontological semantics to undecidable syntax, from the play of light and shadow to the play of articulation.

3. *A Practice of spacing*. One of the first things one notices about “The Double Session” is its provocative use of typographic spacing. From the insertion of *Mimique* into an L-shaped quotation from Plato to the quotations in boxes, the passages from *Un Coup de dés* and *Le Livre*, the reproduction of Mallarmé’s handwriting, and the pages bottom-heavy with footnotes, it is clear that an effort is being made to call the reader’s attention to the syntactical function of spacing in the act of reading. Through such supplementary syntactical effects, Derrida duplicates and analyzes the ways in which Mallarmé’s texts mime their own articulation, include their own blank spaces among their referents, and deploy themselves consistently with one textual fold too many or too few to be accounted for by a reading that would seek only the text’s “message” or “meaning.” By thus making explicit the role of the materiality of space within the act of understanding, Mallarmé—and Derrida—demonstrate the untenability of the logocentric

distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, between ideality and materiality.

4. *A critique of the dialectics of reading.* The history of Mallarmé criticism prior to Derrida can be grouped into two general moments: the Hegelian/Platonic and the thematic/formalist. Derrida's reading of *Mimique* enables him to work out a far-reaching critique of both moments. By skewing the form/content division, tracing the proliferation of plays of the signifier, problematizing *mimesis*, and putting the text's materiality to work as an excess of syntax over semantics, Derrida puts in question the classical mentalist, expressionist presuppositions and procedures of the act of reading itself.

C. Dissemination, or the Recounting of Numbers

The ostensible subject of the essay entitled "Dissemination" is a novel by Philippe Sollers entitled *Numbers*. The novel presents itself as a series of 100 passages numbered from 1. to 4.100, in which the number preceding the decimal point varies cyclically from 1 to 4 and the number following the decimal point goes numerically from 5 to 100 after the first group of 1–4. The text of the novel is explicitly heterogeneous and discontinuous: quotations, parentheses, dashes, cuts, figures, and Chinese characters are only the most visible manifestations of continual textual upheaval. On the jacket of *Numbers*, Sollers presents the book in the following terms:

How can the contradiction between discourse and (hi)story be lifted? unless it be through an exit out of the representational scene that maintains their opposition? through a text whose orderly permutations open not upon some spoken expression, but upon the constantly active historical real?

Between the imperfect (sequences 1/2/3) and the present (sequence 4), which make up the square matrix that engenders the narrative and its reflection, is inscribed the textual work that destroys any spectacular or imaginary "truth." That destruction affects not only the hypothetical "subject" of the story—his/her body, sentences, and dreams—but also the story itself, which is overturned and gradually immersed in texts of various cultures. Writing thus begins to function "outside," to burn in a self-constructing, self-effacing, self-extending space according to the infinity of its production. Such a theater, having neither stage nor house, where words have become the actors and spectators of a new community of play, should also enable us to capture, across its intersecting surfaces, our own "time": the advent of

a dialogue between West and East, the question of the passage from alienated writing to a writing of the trace, through war, sex, and the mute, hidden work of transformation.

The novel printed here *is not* a printed novel. It refers to the mythical milieu that is now washing over you, slipping into you, out of you, everywhere, forever, as of tomorrow. It attempts to winnow out the movement of the depths, the depths that follow upon books, the depths of the thought of masses, capable of shaking the very foundations of the old mentalist, expressionist world, whose end, if one takes the risk of reading, is at hand. (My translation)

Among other challenges is "Dissemination" 's generalized citationality, which is particularly difficult to render in a translation. In keeping with the pattern set by the essay in French, "Dissemination" appears without footnotes. Quotations from *Numbers* are printed both in quotation marks and in italics. Quotations from other works by Sollers—*The Park*, *Drama*, *Logics*—are generally identified as such in the body of the text. Other authors cited but not always identified include such diverse figures as Claudel, Lautréamont, Robert Greer Cohn, Montaigne, Freud, Heidegger, Sophocles, Artaud, Hegel, and Marx.⁴ Mallarmé is a constant presence, but his texts—often modified before insertion—do not always appear in quotation marks. To take just one example: in the opening pages, a discussion of the word "therefore" is preceded by a modified quotation from Mallarmé's *Igitur* (= "therefore" in Latin), which reads: "The tale is thereby addressed to the reader's body, which is put by things on stage, itself." The original quotation reads: "Ce conte s'adresse à l'Intelligence du lecteur qui met les choses en scène, elle-même" ["This tale is addressed to the reader's *Intelligence*, which *puts things* on stage, itself."]. In changing "Intelligence" to "body," in making the reader into an *object* of the activity of things, and in leaving the word "elle-même" ["itself"] without a clear antecedent ("body" is masculine), Derrida gives us a clue to the type of transformation entailed by "Dissemination."

The multiplication of sources and the disappearance of proper names is a literal enactment of Mallarmé's insight into the "elocutionary disappear-

4. I have quoted from the following English translations of texts "cited": Philippe Sollers, *The Park* (trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith [New York: Red Dust, 1969]); Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being* (trans. W. Kluback and J. T. Wilde [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958]) and *Poetry, Language, Thought* (trans. Albert Hofstadter [New York: Harper & Row, 1971]); Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems* (trans. Paul Knight [Penguin, 1978]); Karl Marx, *Capital* (trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling [New York: International publishers, 1967]); Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (trans. David Grene) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (trans. Robert Fitzgerald) in *Greek Tragedies*, vols 1 and 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

ance of the author, who leaves the initiative to words." Yet the proper name does not remain entirely effaced in "Dissemination." It returns through the mouth of the other, as a textual effect. "Dissemination" cleverly enacts the name's return in the following passage:

Numbers thus has no proper, unified, present origin; no one, outside the mask or simulacrum of some very clever pseudonym, is entitled to the property rights or author's royalties . . . Authority and property still remain, though, as pretensions of the attending discourse and as dead surface effects. (Even though, if two specific emblems are taken into account, while the proper name of the author is disappearing in a constant equivocal motion of death and safe-keeping or salvation, the name is only in fact in hiding: it conceals itself behind the screen, behind "*the multiplication of screens as emblems of this new reign*" (1.25), or finds refuge, without ceasing to shine, a gem without air at the bottom of the book, the clasp, or the jewel-case, thanks to "*that writing that comprises a tangle of serpents, plumes, and the emblem of the eagle, which refers to the tensed force of the sun—a precious stone—a stone that must be reached if one wishes to go on behind the sun*" (2.34), behind death. A proper name, then, as it was once penciled at the theater, "always ready to regain control. An intact jewel [*joyau*] beneath the disaster." All you will have had to do, once this stone has been thrown out, is to go a bit further, behind the citing of the solar star [*l'astre solaire*] (sun = death = mirror) in order to glimpse a poisoned ring. Then an antidote and then the key. Which are all the same.) (pp.328–29)

The reader has probably divined behind the proliferation of solar imagery the pseudonym Sollers. But he has probably not seen in the "intact jewel" from Mallarmé a second name ready to regain control. Philippe Sollers' "real" name is Joyaux.

Both *Numbers* and "Dissemination" are attempts to *enact* rather than simply *state* the theoretical upheavals produced in the course of a radical reevaluation of the nature and function of writing undertaken by Derrida, Sollers, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and other contributors to the journal *Tel Quel* in the late 1960s. Ideological and political as well as literary and critical, the *Tel Quel* program attempted to push to their utmost limits the theoretical revolutions wrought by Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, and Heidegger.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that "Dissemination" operates at the very limits of intelligibility. Crucial metaphysical guideposts such as the notions of "first," "last," "here," "now," "I," "you," "unique," "repeated," "author," "reader," "matter," "mind," "beginning," "end," etc.

are fragmented, fictionalized, put in quotation marks. New linguistic and numerical logics are employed with baffling virtuosity. Through the pun linking "*Est*" ["East"] and "*est*" ["is"], for instance, "Dissemination" inscribes the West's orientation toward Being as a relation to the *Est* it both desires and shuns. And through its insistence upon squares, crossroads, and other four-sided figures, "Dissemination" attempts to work a violent but imperceptible displacement of the "triangular"—Dialectical, Trinitarian, Oedipal—foundations of Western thought. This passage from three to four may perhaps be seen as a warning to those who, having understood the necessity for a deconstruction of metaphysical binarity, might be tempted to view the number "three" as a guarantee of liberation from the blindness of logocentrism.

D. OUTWORK, or Disseminating Prefacing

This book begins with a denial both of the book and of the beginning. The opening sentence, "This (therefore) will not have been a book," written in the future perfect tense, marks itself as presentation ("this"), anticipation ("will"), negation ("not"), recapitulation ("have been"), and conclusion ("therefore"). The juxtaposition of the title (*Hors livre*, lit. "outside the book") and the opening sentence is thus designed to map out the play of anticipatory retrospection and internalized exteriority involved in that metalinguistic moment of self-reflection traditionally known as the *Preface*. Situated both inside and outside, both before and after the "book" whose "book-ness" it both promotes and transgresses, the preface has always inscribed itself in a strange warp of both time and space.

In writing a preface that deals with the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of prefacing, Derrida has raised the prefatory double bind to a higher degree. The fact that his preface at once prefaces *and* deconstructs the preface is perhaps an instance of the "systematic double mark" with which it deals. While the reader expects to read a preface to *Dissemination*, what he finds is the word "dissemination" disseminated here and there within a preface on prefaces.

The Book, the Preface, and the Encyclopedia are all structures of unification and totalization. Dissemination, on the other hand, is what subverts all such recuperative gestures of mastery. It is what foils the attempt to progress in an orderly way toward meaning or knowledge, what breaks the circuit of intentions or expectations through some ungovernable excess or loss.

The challenge here is to "present" dissemination in a disseminative way. In a sense, the very success of such an attempt would be a sign of failure. To

perfectly disseminate the exposition of dissemination would require a kind of textual mastery that would belong among the recuperative gestures that dissemination undercuts. It could perhaps be said, however, that the most compelling achievement of *Dissemination*, in the final analysis, lies precisely in its *inscription* of the ways in which all theoretical discourse—including its own—forever remains both belated and precipitous with respect to the textual practice it attempts to comprehend.

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I have attempted to refer to English editions of texts cited whenever possible. Where no reference to an English translation is given, however, the translation is my own. Brackets are generally my interpolations unless they occur within quotations, in which case they are Derrida's (e.g. p. 16). Footnotes preceded by the abbreviation TN are my translator's notes.

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