

Jacques Derrida (1967)

Of Grammatology

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2 Linguistics and Grammatology

Writing is nothing but the representation of speech; it is bizarre that one gives more care to the determining of the image than to the object.
- J.-J. Rousseau, Fragment inédit d'un essai sur les langues.



The concept of writing should define the field of a science. But can it be determined by scholars outside of all the historico-metaphysical predeterminations that we have just situated so clinically? What can a science of writing begin to signify, if it is granted:

1. that the very idea of science was born in a certain epoch of writing;
2. that it was thought and formulated, as task, idea, project, in a language implying a certain kind of structurally and axiologically determined relationship between speech and writing;
3. that, to that extent, it was first related to the concept and the adventure of phonetic writing, valorised as the telos of all writing, even though what was always the exemplary model of scientificity — mathematics — constantly moved away from that goal;
4. that the strictest notion of a *general science* of writing was born, for nonfortuitous reasons, during a certain period of the world's history (beginning around the eighteenth century) and within a certain determined stem of relationships between “living” speech and inscription;
5. that writing is not only an auxiliary means in the service of science and possibly its object — but first, as Husserl in particular pointed out in *The Origin of Geometry*, the condition of the possibility of ideal objects and therefore of scientific objectivity. Before being its object, writing is the condition of the epistémè.
6. that historicity itself is tied to the possibility of writing; to the possibility of writing in general, beyond those particular forms of writing in the name of which we have long spoken of peoples without writing and without history. Before being the object of a history — of an historical science — writing opens the field of history — of historical becoming. And the former (*Historie* in German) presupposes the latter (*Geschichte*).

The science of writing should therefore look for its object at the roots of scientificity,. The history of writing should turn back toward the origin of historicity. , A science of the possibility of science? A science of science which would no longer have the form of logic

but that of *grammatics*? A history of the possibility of history which would no longer be an archaeology, a philosophy of history or a history of philosophy?

The *positive* and the classical sciences of writing are obliged to repress this sort of question. Up to a certain point, such repression is even necessary to the progress of positive investigation. Beside the fact that it would still be held within a philosophising logic, the onto-phenomenological question of essence, that is to say of the origin of writing, could, by itself, only paralyse or sterilise the typological or historical research of *facts*.

My intention, therefore, is not to weigh that prejudicial question, that dry, necessary, and somewhat facile question of right, against the power and efficacy of the positive researches which we may witness today. The genesis and system of scripts had never led to such profound, extended, and assured explorations. It is not really a matter of weighing the question against the importance of the discovery; since the questions are imponderable, they cannot be weighed. If the issue is not quite that, it is perhaps because its repression has real consequences in the very content of the researches that, in the present case and in a privileged way, are always arranged around problems of definition and beginning.

The grammatologist least of all can avoid questioning himself about the essence of his object in the form of a question of origin: "What is writing?" means "where and when does writing begin?" The responses generally come very quickly. They circulate within concepts that are seldom criticised and move within evidence which always seems self-evident. It is around these responses that a typology of and a perspective on the growth of writing are always organised. All works dealing with the history of writing are composed along the same lines: a philosophical and teleological classification exhausts the critical problems in a few pages; one passes next to an exposition of facts. We have a contrast between the theoretical fragility of the reconstructions and the historical, archaeological, ethnological, philosophical wealth of information.

The question of the origin of writing and the question of the origin of language are difficult to separate. Grammatologists, who are generally by training historians, epigraphists, and archaeologists, seldom relate their researches to the modern science of language. It is all the more surprising that, among the "sciences of man," linguistics is the one science whose scientificity is given as an example with a zealous and insistent unanimity.

Has grammatology, then, the right to expect from linguistics an essential assistance that it has almost never looked for? On the contrary, does one not find efficaciously at work, in the very movement by which linguistics is instituted as a science, a metaphysical presupposition about the relationship between speech and writing? Would that presupposition not binder the constitution of a general science of writing? Is not the lifting of that presupposition an overthrowing of the landscape upon which the science of language is peacefully installed? For better and for worse? For blindness as well as for productivity? This is the second type of question that I now wish to outline. To develop this question, I should like to approach, as a privileged example, the project and texts of Ferdinand de Saussure. That the particularity of

the example does not interfere with the generality of my argument is a point which I shall occasionally — try not merely to take for granted.

Linguistics thus wishes to be the science of language. Let us set aside all the implicit decisions that have established such a project and all the questions about its own origin that the fecundity of this science allows to remain dormant. Let us first simply consider that the scientificity of that science is often acknowledged because of its phonological foundations. Phonology, it is often said today, communicates its scientificity to linguistics, which in turn serves as the epistemological model for all the sciences of man. Since the deliberate and systematic phonological orientation of linguistics (Troubetzkoy, Jakobson, Martinet) carries out an intention which was originally Saussure's, I shall, at least provisionally, confine my-self to the latter. Will my argument be equally applicable a fortiori to the most accentuated forms of phonologism? The problem at least be stated.

The science of linguistics determines language — its field of objectivity — in the last instance and in the irreducible simplicity of its essence, as the unity of the *phonè*, the *glossa*, and the *logos*. This determination is by rights anterior to all the eventual differentiations that could arise within the systems of terminology of the different schools (language/speech [*langue/parole*]; code/message; scheme/usage; linguistic/logic; phonology/phonematics/phonetics/glossematics). And even if one wished to keep sonority on the side of the sensible and contingent signifier which would be strictly speaking impossible, since formal identities isolated within a sensible mass are already idealities that are not purely sensible), it would have to be admitted that the immediate and privileged unity which founds significance and the acts of language is the articulated unity of sound and sense within the phonic. With regard to this unity, writing would always be derivative, accidental, particular, exterior, doubling the signifier: phonic. “Sign of a sign,” said Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel.

Yet, the intention that institutes general linguistics, is a science remains in this respect within a contradiction. Its declared purpose indeed confirms, saying what goes without saying, the subordination of grammatology, the historico-metaphysical reduction of writing to the rank of an instrument enslaved to a full and originarily spoken language. But another gesture (not another statement of purpose, for here what does not go without saying is done without being said, written without being uttered) liberates the future of a general grammatology of which linguistics-phonology would be only a dependent and circumscribed area. Let us follow this tension between gesture and statement in Saussure.

The Outside and the Inside

On the one hand, true to the Western tradition that controls not only in theory, but in practice (*in the principle of its practice*) the relationships between speech and writing, Saussure

does not recognise in the latter more than a narrow and derivative function. Narrow because it is nothing but one modality among others, a modality of the events which can befall a language whose essence, as the facts seem to show, can remain forever uncontaminated by writing. “Language does have an oral tradition that is independent of writing” (*Cours de linguistique générale*). Derivative because *representative* signifier of the first signifier, representation of the self-present voice, of the immediate, natural, and direct signification of the meaning (of the signified, of the concept, of the ideal object or what have you). Saussure takes up the traditional definition of writing which, already in Plato and Aristotle, was restricted to the model of phonetic script and the language of words. Let us recall the Aristotelian definition: “Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words.” Saussure: “Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second *exists for the sole purpose of representing* the first”. This representative determination, beside communicating without a doubt essentially with the idea of the sign, does not translate a choice or an evaluation, does not betray a psychological or metaphysical presupposition peculiar to Saussure; it describes or rather reflects the structure of a certain type of writing: phonetic writing, which we use and within whose element the epistémè in general (science and philosophy), and linguistics in particular, could be founded. One should, moreover, say *mode*, rather than *structure*; it is not a question of a system constructed and functioning perfectly, but of an ideal explicitly directing a functioning which in fact is never completely phonetic. In fact, but also for reasons of essence to which I shall frequently return. To be sure this factum of phonetic writing is massive; it commands our entire culture and our entire science, and it is certainly not just one fact among others. Nevertheless it does not respond to any necessity of an absolute and universal essence. Using this as a point of departure, Saussure defines the project and object of general linguistics: “The linguistic object is not defined by the combination of the written word and the spoken word: *the spoken form alone constitutes the object*”.

The form of the question to which he responded thus entailed the response. It was a matter of knowing what sort of word is the object of linguistics and what the relationships are between the atomic unities that are the written and the spoken word. Now the word (*vox*) is already a unity of sense and sound, of concept and voice, or, to speak a more rigorously Saussurian language, of the signified and the signifier. This last terminology was moreover first proposed in the domain of spoken language alone, of linguistics in the narrow sense and not in the domain of semiology (“I propose to retain the word *sign* [*signe*] to designate the whole and to replace concept and *sound-image* respectively by signified [*signifié*] and signifier [*signifiant*]”). The word is thus already, a constituted unity, an effect of “the somewhat mysterious fact ... that 'thought-sound' implies divisions”. Even if the word is in its turn articulated, even if it implies other divisions, as long as one poses the question of the relationships between speech and writing in the light of the indivisible units of the “thought-sound,” there will always be the ready response. Writing will be “phonetic,” it will be the outside, the exterior representation of language and of this “thought-sound.” It must necessarily operate from already constituted units of signification, in the formation of which it has played no part.

Perhaps the objection will be made that writing up to the present has not only not contradicted, but indeed, confirmed the linguistics of the word. Hitherto I seem to have maintained that only the fascination of the unit called word has prevented giving to writing the attention that it merited. By that I seemed to suppose that, by ceasing to accord an absolute privilege to the word, modern linguistics would become that much more attentive to writing and would finally cease to regard it with suspicion. ...

It is clear that the concepts of stability,, permanence, and duration, which here assist thinking the relationships between speech and writing, are too lax and open to every uncritical investiture. They would require more attentive and minute analyses. The same is applicable to an explanation according to which “most people pay more attention to visual impressions simply because these are sharper and more lasting than aural impressions. This explanation of “usurpation” is not only empirical in its form, it is problematic in its content, it refers to a metaphysics and to an old physiology, of sensory faculties constantly, disproved by science, as by the experience of language and by the body proper as language. It imprudently makes of visibility the tangible, simple, and essential element of writing. Above all, in considering the audible as the natural milieu within which language must naturally fragment and articulate its instituted signs, thus exercising its arbitrariness, this explanation excludes all possibility,, of some natural relationship between speech and writing at the, very moment that it affirms it. Instead of deliberately dismissing the notions of nature and institution that it constantly uses, which ought to be done first, it thus confuses the two. It finally and most importantly contradicts the principal affirmation according to which “the thing that constitutes language [*l'essentiel de la langue*] is . . . unrelated to the phonic character of the linguistic sign”. This affirmation will soon occupy us; within it the other side of the Saussurian proposition denouncing the “illusions of script” comes to the fore.

What do these limits and presuppositions signify? First that a linguistics is not *general* as long as it defines its outside and inside in terms of *determined* linguistic models; as long as it does not rigorously distinguish essence from fact in their respective degrees of generality. The system of writing in general is not exterior to the system of language in general, unless it is granted that the division between exterior and interior passes through the interior of the interior or the exterior of the exterior, to the point where the immanence of language is essentially exposed to the intervention of forces that are apparently alien to its system. For the same reason, writing in general is not “image” or “figuration” of language in general, except if the nature, the logic, and the functioning of the image within the system from which one wishes to exclude it be reconsidered. Writing is not a sign of a sign, except if one says it of all signs, which would be more profoundly true. If every sign refers to a sign, and if “sign of a sign” signifies writing, certain conclusions — which I shall consider at the appropriate moment will become inevitable. What Saussure saw without seeing, knew without being *able* to take into account, following in that the entire metaphysical tradition, is that a certain model of writing was necessarily but provisionally imposed (but for the inaccuracy in principle, insufficiency of fact, and the permanent usurpation) as instrument and technique of

representation of a system of language. And that this movement, unique in style, was so profound that it permitted the thinking, within *language*, of concepts like those of the sign, technique, representation, language. The system of language associated with phonetic-alphabetic writing is that within which logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence, has been produced. This logocentrism, this *epoch* of the full speech, has always placed in parenthesis, suspended, and suppressed for essential reasons, all free reflection on the origin and status of writing, all science of writing which was not technology and the *history of a technique*, itself leaning upon a mythology and a metaphor of a natural writing. It is this logocentrism which, limiting the internal system of language in general by a bad abstraction, prevents Saussure and the majority of his successors from determining fully and explicitly that which is called “the integral and concrete object of linguistics”

But conversely, as I announced above, it is when he is not expressly dealing with writing, when he feels he has closed the parentheses on that subject, that Saussure opens the field of a general grammatology. Which would not only no longer be excluded from general linguistics, but would dominate it and contain it within itself. Then one realises that what was chased off limits, the wandering outcast of linguistics, has indeed never ceased to haunt language as its primary and most intimate possibility. Then something which was never spoken and which is nothing other than writing itself as the origin of language writes itself within Saussure's discourse. Then we glimpse the germ of a profound but indirect explanation of the usurpation and the traps condemned in Chapter VI. This explanation will overthrow even the form of the question to which it was a premature reply.

The Outside Is the Inside

The thesis of the *arbitrariness* of the sign (so grossly misnamed, and not only for the reasons Saussure himself recognises) must forbid a radical distinction between the linguistic and the graphic sign. No doubt this thesis concerns only the necessity of relationships between specific signifiers and signifieds within an allegedly natural relationship between the voice and sense in general, between the order of phonic signifiers and the content of the signifieds (“the only natural bond, the only true bond, the bond of sound”). Only these relationships between specific signifiers and signifieds would be regulated by arbitrariness. Within the “natural” relationship between phonic signifiers and their signifieds in general, the relationship between each determined signifier and its determined signified would be “arbitrary”.

Now from the moment that one considers the totality of determined signs, spoken, and *a fortiori* written, as unmotivated institutions, one must exclude any relationship of natural subordination, any natural hierarchy among signifiers or orders of signifiers. If “writing” signifies inscription and especially the durable institution of a sign (and that is the only

irreducible kernel of the concept of writing), writing in general covers the entire field of linguistic signs. In that field a certain sort of instituted signifiers may then appear, “graphic” in the narrow and derivative sense of the word, ordered by a certain relationship with other instituted — hence “written,” even if they are “phonic” — signifiers. The very idea of institution — hence of the arbitrariness of the sign — is unthinkable before the possibility of writing and outside of its horizon. Quite simply, that is, outside of the horizon itself, outside the world as space of inscription, as the opening to the emission and to the spatial distribution of signs, to the *regulated play* of their differences, even if they are “phonic.”

Let us now persist in using this opposition of nature and institution, of *physis* and *nomos* (which also means, of course, a distribution and division regulated in fact by law) which a meditation on writing should disturb although it functions everywhere as self-evident, particularly in the discourse of linguistics. We must then conclude that only the signs called natural, those that Hegel and Saussure call “symbols,” escape semiology as grammatology. But they fall *a fortiori* outside the field of linguistics as the region of general semiology. The thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign thus indirectly but irrevocably contests Saussure's declared proposition when he chases writing to the outer darkness of language. This thesis successfully accounts for a conventional relationship between the phoneme and the grapheme (in phonetic writing, between the phoneme, signifier-signified, and the grapheme, pure signifier), but by the same token it forbids that the latter be an “image” of the former. Now it was indispensable to the exclusion of writing as “external system,” that it come to impose an “image,” a “representation,” or a “figuration,” an exterior reflection of the reality of language.

It matters little, here at least, that there is in fact an ideographic filiation of the alphabet. This important question is much debated by historians of writing. What matters here is that in the synchronic structure and systematic principle of alphabetic writing — and phonetic writing in general — no relationship of “natural” representation, none of resemblance or participation, no “symbolic” relationship in the Hegelian-Saussurian sense, no “iconographic” relationship in the Peircian sense, be implied.

One must therefore challenge, in the very name of the arbitrariness of the sign, the Saussurian definition of writing as “image” — hence as natural symbol — of language. Not to mention the fact that the phoneme is the *unimaginable* itself, and no visibility can *resemble* it, it suffices to take into account what Saussure says about the difference between the symbol and the sign in order to be completely baffled as to how he can at the same time say of writing that it is an “Image” or “figuration” of language and define language and writing elsewhere as “two distinct systems of signs”. For the property of the sign is not to be an image. By a process exposed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Saussure thus accumulates contradictory arguments to bring about a satisfactory decision: the exclusion of writing. In fact, even within so-called phonetic writing, the “graphic” signifier refers to the phoneme through a web of many dimensions which binds it, like all signifiers, to other written and oral signifiers, within a “total” system open, let us say, to all possible

investments of sense. We must begin with the possibility of that total system.

Saussure was thus never able to think that writing was truly an “Image,” a “figuration,” a “representation” of the spoken language, a symbol. If one considers that he nonetheless needed these inadequate notions to decide upon the exteriority of writing, one must conclude that an entire stratum of his discourse, the intention of Chapter VI (“Graphic Representation of Language”), was not at all scientific. When I say this, my quarry is not primarily Ferdinand de Saussure's intention or motivation, but rather the entire uncritical tradition which he inherits. To what zone of discourse does this strange functioning of argumentation belong, this coherence of desire producing itself in a near-oneiric way — although it clarifies the dream rather than allow itself to be clarified by it — through a contradictory logic? How is this functioning articulated with the entirety of theoretical discourse, throughout the history of science? Better yet, how does it work from within the concept of science itself? It is only when this question is elaborated if it is some day — when the concepts required by this functioning are defined outside of all psychology (as of all sciences of man), outside metaphysics (which can now be “Marxist” or “structuralist”); when one is able to respect all its levels of generality and articulation — it is only then that one will be able to state rigorously the problem of the articulated appurtenance of a text (theoretical or otherwise) to an entire set: I obviously treat the Saussurian text at the moment only as a telling example within a given situation, without professing to use the concepts required by the functioning of which I have just spoken. My justification would be as follows: this and some other indices (in a general way the treatment of the concept of writing) already give us the assured means of broaching the de-construction of *the greatest* totality — the concept of the *epistémè* and logocentric metaphysics — within which are produced, without ever posing the radical question of writing, all the Western methods of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation.

Now we must think that writing is at the same time more exterior to speech, not being its “image” or its “symbol,” and more interior to speech, which is already in itself a writing. Even before it is linked to incision, engraving, drawing, or the letter, to a signifier referring in general to a signifier signified by it, the concept of the *graphic* [unit of a possible graphic system] implies the framework of the *instituted trace*, as the possibility common to all systems of signification. My efforts will now be directed toward slowly detaching these two concepts from the classical discourse from which I necessarily borrow them. The effort will be laborious and we know a priori that its effectiveness will never be pure and absolute.

The instituted trace is “unmotivated” but not capricious. Like the word “arbitrary” according to Saussure, it “should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker”. Simply, it has no “natural attachment” to the signified within reality. For us, the rupture of that “natural attachment” puts in question the idea of naturalness rather than that of attachment. That is why the word “institution” should not be too quickly interpreted within the classical system of oppositions.

The instituted trace cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a

structure of reference where difference appears as *such* and thus permits a certain liberty of variations among the full terms. The absence of another here-and-now, of another transcendental present, of another origin of the world appearing as such, presenting itself as irreducible absence within the presence of the trace, is not a metaphysical formula substituted for a scientific concept of writing. This formula, beside the fact that it is the questioning of metaphysics itself, describes the structure implied by the “arbitrariness of the sign,” from the moment that one thinks of its possibility *short of* the derived opposition between nature and convention, symbol and sign, etc. These oppositions have meaning only after the possibility of the trace. The “unmotivatedness” of the sign requires a synthesis in which the completely other is announced as such without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity — within what is not it. *Is announced as such*: there we have all history, from what metaphysics has defined as “non-living” up to “consciousness,” passing through all levels of animal organisation. The trace, where the relationship with the other is marked, articulates its possibility, in the entire field of the entity [*étant*], which metaphysics has defined as the being-present starting from the occulted movement of the trace. The trace must be thought before the entity. But the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself as self-occultation. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself. This formulation is not theological, as one might believe somewhat hastily. The “theological” is a determined moment in the total movement of the trace. The field of the entity, before being determined as the field of presence, is structured according to the diverse possibilities-genetic and structural — of the trace. The presentation of the other as such, that is to say the dissimulation of its “as such,” has always already begun and no structure of the entity escapes it.

That is why the movement of “unmotivatedness” passes from one structure to the other when the “sign” crosses the stage of the “symbol.” It is in a certain sense and according to a certain determined structure of the as such” that one is authorised to say that there is yet no immotivation in what Saussure calls “symbol” and which, according to him, does not at least provisionally — interest semiology. The general structure of the unmotivated trace connects within the same possibility, and they cannot be separated except by abstraction, the structure of the relationship with the other, the movement of temporalisation, and language as writing. Without referring back to a “nature,” the immotivation of the trace has always become. In fact, there is no unmotivated trace: the trace is indefinitely its own becoming-unmotivated. In Saussurian language, what Saussure does not say would have to be said: there is neither symbol nor sign but a becoming-sign of the symbol.

Thus, as it goes without saying, the trace whereof I speak is not more *natural* (it is not the mark, the natural sign, or the index in the Husserlian sense) than cultural, not more physical than psychic, biological than spiritual. It is that starting from which a becoming-unmotivated of the sign, and with it all the ulterior oppositions between physis and its other, is possible.

In his project of semiotics, Peirce seems to have been more attentive than Saussure to the irreducibility of this becoming-unmotivated. In his terminology, one must speak of a

becoming-unmotivated of the symbol, the notion of the symbol playing here a role analogous to that of the sign which Saussure opposes precisely to the symbol:

Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of mixed nature; the symbol parts of them are called concepts. If a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. *Omne symbolum de symbolo*. [*Elements of Logic*, Hartshorne and Weiss]

Peirce complies with two apparently incompatible exigencies. The mistake here would be to sacrifice one for the other. It must be recognised that the symbolic (in Peirce's sense: of “the arbitrariness of the sign”) is rooted in the non-symbolic, in an anterior and related order of signification: “Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs.” But these roots must not compromise the structural originality of the field of symbols, the autonomy of a domain, a production, and a play: “So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. *Omne symbolum de symbolo*.”

But in both cases, the genetic root-system refers from sign to sign. No ground of nonsignification — understood as insignificance or an intuition of a present truth — stretches out to give it foundation under the play and the coming into being of signs. Semiotics no longer depends on logic. Logic, according to Peirce, is only a semiotic: “Logic, in its general sense, is, as I believe I have shown, only another name for semiotics (semeiotike), the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs.” And logic in the classical sense, logic “properly speaking,” nonformal logic commanded by the value of truth, occupies in that semiotics only a determined and not a fundamental level. As in Husserl (but the analogy, although it is most thought-provoking, would stop there and one must apply it carefully), the lowest level, the foundation of the possibility of logic (or semiotics) corresponds to the project of the *Grammatica speculative* of Thomas d'Erfurt, falsely attributed to Duns Scotus. Like Husserl, Peirce expressly refers to it. It is a matter of elaborating, in both cases, a formal doctrine of conditions which a discourse must satisfy, in order to have a sense, in order to “mean,” even if it is false or contradictory. The general morphology of that meaning (*Bedeutung*, *vouloir-dire*) is independent of all logic of truth.

The science of semiotic has three branches. The first is called by Duns Scotus *grammatica speculative*. We may term it pure grammar. It has for its task to ascertain what must be true of the representamen used by every scientific intelligence in order that they may embody any meaning. The second is logic proper. It is the science of what is quasi-necessarily true of the representamina of any scientific intelligence in order that they may hold good of any object, that is, may be true. Or say, logic proper is the formal science of the conditions of the truth of representations. The third, in imitation of Kant's fashion of preserving old associations of words in finding nomenclature for new conceptions, I call *pure rhetoric*. Its task is to ascertain the laws by which in every scientific intelligence one sign gives birth to another, and especially one thought brings forth another. [Peirce]

Peirce goes very far in the direction that I have called the de-construction of the

transcendental signified, which, at one time or another, would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign. I have identified logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence as the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for such a signified. Now Peirce considers the indefiniteness of reference as the criterion that allows us to recognise that we are indeed dealing with a system of signs. What *broaches* the movement of *signification* is what makes its interruption impossible. *The thing itself is a sign.* An unacceptable proposition for Husserl, whose Phenomenology remains therefore — in its “principle of principles” — the most radical and most critical restoration of the metaphysics of presence. The difference between Husserl's and Peirce's phenomenologies is fundamental since it concerns the concept of the sign and of the manifestation of presence, the relationships between the re-presentation and the originary presentation of the thing itself (truth). On this point Peirce is undoubtedly closer to the inventor of the word phenomenology: Lambert proposed in fact to “reduce *the theory of things* to the theory of *signs*.” According to the “phaneoroscopy” or “Phenomenology” of Peirce, *manifestation* itself does not reveal a presence, it makes a sign. One may read in the *Principle of Phenomenology* that “the idea of *manifestation* is the idea of a sign.” There is thus no phenomenality reducing the sign or the representer so that the thing signified may be allowed to glow finally in the luminosity of its presence. The so-called “thing itself” is always already a representamen shielded from the simplicity of intuitive evidence. The representamen functions only by giving rise to an interpretant that itself becomes a sign and so on to infinity. The self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly and is always on the move. The property of the representamen is to be itself and another, to be produced as a structure of reference, to be separated from itself. The property of the *representamen* is not to be *proper* [*propre*], that is to say absolutely proximate to itself (*prope*, *proprius*). *The represented* is always already a *representamen*.
Definition of the sign:

Anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, this interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum. . . . If the series of successive interpretants comes to an end, the sign is thereby rendered imperfect, at least. [*Elements of Logic*]

From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs. Which amounts to ruining the notion of the sign at the very moment when, as in Nietzsche, its exigency is recognised in the absoluteness of its right. One could call play the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of ontotheology and the metaphysics of presence. It is not surprising that the shock, shaping and undermining metaphysics since its origin, lets itself be *named as such* in the period when, refusing to bind linguistics to semantics (which all European linguists, from Saussure to Hjemslev, still do), expelling the problem of meaning outside of their researches, certain American linguists constantly refer to the model of a game. Here one must think of writing as a game within language. (The *Phaedrus* condemned writing precisely as play — *paidia* — and opposed such childishness to the adult gravity [*spoudè*] of speech), This play, thought as absence of the transcendental signified, is not a play in *the* world, as it has always been defined, for the purposes of containing it, by the philosophical tradition and as the

theoreticians of play also consider it (or those who, following and going beyond Bloomfield, refer semantics to psychology or some other local discipline). To think play radically the ontological and transcendental problematics must first be seriously exhausted; the question of the meaning of being, the being of the entity and of the transcendental origin of the world — of the world-ness of the world — must be patiently and rigorously worked through, the critical movement of the Husserlian and Heideggerian questions must be effectively followed to the very end, and their effectiveness and legibility must be conserved. Even if it were crossed out, without it the concepts of play and writing to which I shall have recourse will remain caught within regional limits and an empiricist, positivist, or metaphysical discourse. The counter-move that the holders of such a discourse would oppose to the precritical tradition and to metaphysical speculation would be nothing but the worldly representation of their own operation. It is therefore *the game of the world* that must be first thought; before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world.

From the very opening of the game, then, we are within the becoming-unmotivated of the symbol. With regard to this becoming, the opposition of diachronic and synchronic is also derived. It would not be able to command a grammatology pertinently. The immotivation of the trace ought now to be understood as an operation and not as a state, as an active movement, a demotivation, and not as a given structure. Science of “the arbitrariness of the sign,” science of the immotivation of the trace, science of writing before speech and in speech, grammatology would thus cover a vast field within which linguistics would, by abstraction, delineate its own area, with the limits that Saussure prescribes to its internal system and which must be carefully re-examined in each speech/writing system in the world and history.

By a substitution which would be anything but verbal, one may replace *semiology* by grammatology in the program of the *Course in General Linguistics*:

I shall call it [grammatology] Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of [that] general science . . . ; the laws discovered by [grammatology] will be applicable to linguistics.

The advantage of this substitution will not only be to give to the theory of writing the scope needed to counter logocentric repression and the subordination to linguistics. It will liberate the semiological project itself from what, in spite of its greater theoretical extension, remained governed by linguistics, organised as if linguistics were at once its center and its telos. Even though semiology *was in fact more general and more comprehensive than linguistics, it continued to be regulated as if it were one of the areas of linguistics. The linguistic sign remained exemplary for semiology, it dominated it as the master-sign and as the generative model: the pattern [patron].*

One could therefore say that signs that are wholly arbitrary realise better than the others the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become *the*

master-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system (italics added).

Consequently, reconsidering the order of dependence prescribed by Saussure, apparently inverting the relationship of the part to the whole, Barthes in fact carries out the profoundest intention of the *Course*:

From now on we must admit the possibility of reversing Saussure's proposition some day: linguistics is not a part, even if privileged, of the general science of signs, it is semiology that is a part of linguistics. [*Communications*]

This coherent reversal, submitting semiology to a “translinguistics,” leads to its full explication a linguistics historically dominated by logocentric metaphysics, for which in fact there is not and there should not be “any meaning except as named” (*ibid.*). Dominated by the so-called “civilisation of writing” that we inhabit, a civilisation of so-called phonetic writing, that is to say of the logos where the sense of being is, in its telos, determined as parousia. The Barthesian reversal is fecund and indispensable for the description of the *fact and the vocation of signification* within the closure of this epoch and this civilisation that is in the process of disappearing in its very globalisation.

Let us now try to go beyond these formal and architectonic considerations. Let us ask in a more intrinsic and concrete way, how language is not merely a sort of writing, “comparable to a system of writing” — Saussure writes curiously — but a species of writing. Or rather, since writing no longer relates to language as an extension or frontier, let us ask how language is a possibility founded on the general possibility of writing. Demonstrating this, one would give at the same time an account of that alleged “usurpation” which could not be an unhappy accident. It supposes on the contrary a common root and thus excludes the resemblance of the “image,” derivation, or representative reflexion. And thus one would bring back to its true meaning, to its primary possibility, the apparently innocent and didactic analogy which makes Saussure say:

Language is [comparable to] a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore *comparable to* writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems (italics added).

Further, it is not by chance that, a hundred and thirty pages later, at the moment of explaining phonic *difference* as the condition of linguistic value (“from a material viewpoint”) he must again borrow all his pedagogic resources from the example of writing:

Since an identical state of affairs is observable in writing, another system of signs, we, shall use writing to draw some comparisons that will clarify the whole issue.

Four demonstrative items, borrowing pattern and content from writing, follow.

Once more, then, we definitely have to oppose Saussure to himself. Before being or not being “noted,” “represented,” “figured,” in a “*graphie*,” the linguistic sign implies an originary writing. Henceforth, it is not to the thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign that I shall

appeal directly, but to what Saussure associates with it as an indispensable correlative and which would seem to me rather to lay the foundations for it: the thesis of *difference* as the source of linguistic value.

What are, from the grammatological point of view, the consequences of this theme that is now so well-known (and upon which Plato already reflected in the *Sophist*)?

By definition, difference is never in itself a sensible plenitude. Therefore, its necessity contradicts the allegation of a naturally phonic essence of language. It contests by the same token the professed natural dependence of the graphic signifier. That is a consequence Saussure himself draws against the premises defining the internal system of language. He must now exclude the very thing which had permitted him to exclude writing: sound and its “natural bond” [*lien naturel*] with meaning. For example: “The thing that constitutes language is, as I shall show later, unrelated to the phonic character of the linguistic sign”. And in a paragraph on difference:

It is impossible for sound alone, a material element, to belong to language. It is only a secondary thing, substance to be put to use. All our conventional values have the characteristic of not being confused with the tangible element which supports them. . . . The linguistic signifier . . . is not [in essence] phonic but incorporeal — constituted not by its material substance but the differences that separate its sound-image from all others. The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it.

Without this reduction of phonic matter, the distinction between language and speech, decisive for Saussure, would have no rigour. It would be the same for the oppositions that happened to descend from it: between code and message, pattern and usage, etc. Conclusion: “Phonology this bears repeating — is only an auxiliary discipline [of the science of language] and belongs exclusively to speaking”. Speech thus draws from this stock of writing, noted or not, that language is, and it is here that one must meditate upon the complicity between the two “stabilities.” The reduction of the phonè reveals this complicity. What Saussure says, for example, about the sign in general and what he “confirms” through the example of writing, applies also to language: “Signs are governed by a principle of general semiology: continuity in time is coupled to change in time; this is confirmed by orthographic systems, the speech of deaf-mutes, etc.”.

The reduction of phonic substance thus does not only permit the distinction between phonetics on the one hand (and a fortiori acoustics or the physiology of the phonating organs) and phonology on the other. It also makes of phonology itself an “auxiliary discipline.” Here the direction indicated by Saussure takes us beyond the phonologism of those who profess to follow him on this point: in fact, Jakobson believes indifference to the phonic substance of expression to be impossible and illegitimate. He thus criticises the glossematic. — of Hjelmslev which requires and practices the neutralising of sonorous substance. And in the text cited above, Jakobson and Halle maintain that the “theoretical requirement” of a research of invariables placing sonorous substance in parenthesis (as an empirical and contingent content) is:

1. *impracticable* since, as “Eli Fischer-Jorgensen exposes [it]”, “the sonorous substance [is taken into account] at every step of the analysis.” [Jakobson and Halle] But is that a “troubling discrepancy,” as Jakobson and Halle would have it? Can one not account for it as a fact serving as an example, as do the phenomenologists who always need, keeping it always within sight, an exemplary empirical content in the reading of an essence which is independent of it by right?
2. *inadmissible in principle* since one cannot consider “that in language form is opposed to substance as a constant to a variable.” It is in the course of this second demonstration that the literally Saussurian formulas reappear within the question of the relationships between speech and writing; the order of writing is the order of exteriority of the “occasional,” of the accessory,” of the “auxiliary,” of the “*parasitic*” (italics added). The argument of Jakobson and Halle appeals to the factual genesis and invokes the secondariness of writing in the colloquial sense: “Only after having mastered speech does one graduate to reading and writing. Even if this commonsensical proposition were rigorously proved — something that I do not believe (since each of its concepts harbours an immense problem) — one would still have to receive assurance of its pertinence to the argument. Even if “after” were here a facile representation, if one knew perfectly well what one thought and stated while assuring that one learns to write after having learned to speak, would that suffice to conclude that what thus comes “after” is parasitic? And what is a parasite? And what if writing were precisely that which makes us reconsider our logic of the parasite?”

In another moment of the critique, Jakobson and Halle recall the imperfection of graphic representation; that imperfection is due to “the cardinally dissimilar patterning of letters and phonemes:”

Letters never, or only partially, reproduce the different distinctive features on which the phonemic pattern is based and unfailingly disregard the structural relationship of these features.

I have suggested it above: does not the radical dissimilarity of the two elements-graphic and phonic-exclude derivation? Does not the inadequacy of graphic representation concern only common alphabetic writing, to which glossematic formalism does not essentially refer? Finally, if one accepts all the phonologist arguments thus presented, it must still be recognised that they oppose a “scientific” concept of the spoken word to a vulgar concept of writing. What I would wish to show is that one cannot exclude writing from the general experience of “the structural relationship of these features.” Which amounts, of course, to reforming the concept of writing.

In short, if the Jakobsonian analysis is faithful to Saussure in this matter, is it not especially so to the Saussure of Chapter VI? Up to what point would Saussure have maintained the inseparability of matter and form, which remains the most important argument of Jakobson and Halle? The question may be repeated in the case of the position of André Martinet who, in this debate, follows Chapter VI of the *Course* to the letter. And only Chapter VI, from which Martinet *expressly* dissociates the doctrine of what, in the *Course*,

effaces the privilege of phonic substance. After having explained why “a dead language with a perfect ideography,” that is to say a communication effective through the system of a generalised script, “could not have any real autonomy,” and why *nevertheless*, “such a system would be something so particular that one can well understand why linguists want to *exclude it* from the domain of their science” (*La linguistique synchronique*, p. i8; italics added), Martinet criticises those who, following a certain trend in Saussure, question the essentially phonic character of the linguistic sign: “Much will be attempted to prove that Saussure is right when he announces that ‘the thing that constitutes language [*l’essentiel de la langue*] is . . . unrelated to the phonic character of the linguistic sign,’ and, going beyond the teaching of the master, to declare that the linguistic sign does not necessarily have that phonic character”.

On that precise point, it is not a question of “going beyond” the master's teaching but of following and extending it. Not to do it is to cling to what in Chapter VI greatly limits formal and structural research and contradicts the least contestable findings of Saussurian doctrine. To avoid “going beyond,” one risks returning to a point that falls short.

I believe that generalised writing is not just the idea of a system to be invented, an hypothetical characteristic or a future possibility. I think on the contrary that oral language already belongs to this writing. But that presupposes a modification of the concept of writing that we for the moment merely anticipate. Even supposing that one is not given that modified concept, supposing that one is considering a system of pure writing as an hypothesis for the future or a working hypothesis, faced with that hypothesis, should a linguist refuse himself the means of thinking it and of integrating its formulation within his theoretical discourse? Does the fact that most linguists do so create a theoretical right? Martinet seems to be of that opinion. After having elaborated a purely “dactylological” hypothesis of language, he writes, in effect:

It must be recognised that the parallelism between this “dactylology” and phonology is complete as much in synchronic as in diachronic material, and that the terminology associated with the latter may be used for the former, except of course when the terms refer to the phonic substance. Clearly, if we do not *desire* to exclude from the domain of linguistics the systems of the type we have just imagined, it is most important to modify traditional terminology relative to the articulation of signifiers so as to eliminate all reference to phonic substance; as does Louis Hjelmslev when he uses “ceneme” and “cenematics” instead of “phoneme” and “phonematics.” *Yet it is understandable that the majority of linguists hesitate to modify completely the traditional terminological edifice for the only theoretical advantages of being able to include in the field of their science some purely hypothetical systems. To make them agree to engage such a revolution, they must be persuaded that, in attested linguistic systems, they have no advantage in considering the phonic substance of units of expression as to be of direct interest* (italics added).

Once again, we do not doubt the value of these phonological arguments, the presuppositions behind which I have attempted to expose above. Once one assumes these presuppositions, it would be absurd to reintroduce confusedly a derivative writing, in the area of oral language and within the system of this derivation. Not only would ethnocentrism not

be avoided, but all the frontiers within the sphere of its legitimacy would then be confused. It is not a question of rehabilitating writing in the narrow sense, nor of reversing the order of dependence when it is evident. Phonologism does not brook any objections as long as one conserves the colloquial concepts of speech and writing which form the solid fabric of its argumentation. Colloquial and quotidian conceptions, inhabited besides — uncontradictorily enough — by an old history, limited by frontiers that are hardly visible yet all the more rigorous by that very fact.

I would wish rather to suggest that the alleged derivativeness of writing, however real and massive, was possible only on one condition: that the original, “natural,” etc. language had never existed, never been intact and untouched by writing, that it had itself always been a writing. An arche-writing whose necessity and new concept I wish to indicate and outline here; and which I continue to call writing only because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing. The latter could not have imposed itself historically except by the dissimulation of the arche-writing, by the desire for a speech displacing its other and its double and working to reduce its difference. If I persist in calling that difference writing, it is because, within the work of historical repression, writing was, by its situation, destined to signify the most formidable difference. It threatened the desire for the living speech from the closest proximity, it *breached* living speech from within and from the very beginning. And as we shall begin to see, difference cannot be thought without the *trace*.

This arche-writing, although its concept is invoked by the themes of “the arbitrariness of the sign” and of difference, cannot and can never be recognised as the *object of a science*. It is that very thing which cannot let itself be reduced to the form of *presence*. The latter orders all objectivity of the object and all relation of knowledge. That is why what I would be tempted to consider in the development of the *Course* as “progress,” calling into question in return the uncritical positions of Chapter VI, never gives rise to a new “scientific” concept of writing.

Can one say as much of the algebraism of Hjelmslev, which undoubtedly drew the most rigorous conclusions from that progress?

The *Principes de grammaire générale* (1928) separated out within the doctrine of the *Course* the phonological principle and the principle of difference: It isolated a concept of form which permitted a distinction between formal difference and phonic difference, and this even within “spoken” language. Grammar is independent of semantics and phonology.

That independence is the very principle of glossematics as the formal science of language. Its formality supposes that “there is no necessary connection between sounds and language.” [*On the Principles of Phonematics*] That formality is itself the condition of a purely functional analysis. The idea of a linguistic function and of a purely linguistic unit — the glosseme — excludes then not only the consideration of the substance of expression (material substance) but also that of the substance of the content (immaterial substance). Since language is a form and not a substance (Saussure), the glossemes are by definition

independent of substance, immaterial (semantic, psychological and logical) and material (phonic, graphic, etc.).” [Hjelmslev and Uldall] The study of the functioning of language, of its *play*, presupposes that the substance of meaning and, among other possible substances, that of *sound*, be placed in parenthesis. The unity of sound and of sense is indeed here, as I proposed above, the reassuring closing of plan,. Hjelmslev situates his concept of the *scheme* or *play* of language within Saussure's heritage of Saussure's formalism and his theory of value. Although he prefers to compare linguistic value to the “value of exchange in the economic sciences” rather than to the “purely logico-mathematical value,” he assigns a limit to this analogy.

An economic value is by definition a value with two faces: not only does it play the role of a constant vis-à-vis the concrete units of money, but it also itself plays the role of a variable vis-à-vis a fixed quantity of merchandise which serves it as a standard. In linguistics on the other hand there is nothing that corresponds to a standard. That is why the game of chess and not economic fact remains for Saussure the most faithful image of a grammar. The scheme of language is in the last analysis *a game* and nothing more. [Langue et parole, *Essais linguistiques*]

In the *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1943), setting forth the opposition *expression/content*, which he substitutes for the difference *signifier/signified*, and in which each term may be considered from the point of view of form or *substance*, Hjelmslev criticises the idea of a language naturally bound to the substance of phonic expression. It is by mistake that it has hitherto been supposed “that the substance-expression of a spoken language should consist of 'sounds':”

Thus, as has been pointed out by the Zwirners in particular, the fact has been overlooked that speech is accompanied by, and that certain components of speech can be replaced by, gesture, and that in reality, as the Zwirners say, not only the so-called organs of speech (throat, mouth, and nose), but very nearly all the striate musculature cooperate in the exercise of “natural” language. Further, it is possible to replace the usual sound-and-gesture substance with any other that offers itself as appropriate under changed external circumstances. Thus the same linguistic form may also be manifested in writing, as happens with a phonetic or phonemic notation and with the so-called phonetic orthographies, as for example the Finnish. Here is a “graphic” substance which is addressed exclusively to the eye and which need not be transposed into a phonetic “substance” in order to be grasped or understood. And this graphic “substance” can, precisely from the point of view of the substance, be of quite various sorts. [*Prolegomena to A Theory of Language*, 1943]

Refusing to presuppose a “derivation” of substances following from the substance of phonic expression, Hjelmslev places this problem outside the area of structural analysis and of linguistics.

Moreover it is not always certain what is derived and what not; we must not forget that the discovery of alphabetic writing is hidden in prehistory [n.: Bertrand Russell quite rightly calls attention to the fact that we have no means of deciding whether writing or speech is the older form of human expression (*An Outline of Philosophy*), so that the assertion that it rests on a phonetic analysis is only one of the possible diachronic hypotheses; it may, also be rested on a formal analysis of linguistic structure. But in any case, as is recognised by modern linguistics,

diachronic considerations are irrelevant for synchronic descriptions.

H. J. Uldall provides a remarkable formulation of the fact that glossematic criticism operates at the same time thanks to Saussure and against him; that, as I suggested above, the proper space of a grammatology is at the same time opened and closed by *The Course in General Linguistics*. To show that Saussure did not develop “all the theoretical consequences of his discovery” he writes:

It is even more curious when we consider that the practical consequences have been widely drawn, indeed had been drawn thousands of years before Saussure, for it is only through the concept of a difference between form and substance that we can explain the possibility of speech and writing existing at the same time as expressions of one and the same language. If either of these two substances, the stream of air or the stream of ink, were an integral part of the language itself, it would not be possible to go from one to the other without changing the language. [*Speech and Writing*, 1938]

Undoubtedly the Copenhagen School thus frees a field of research: it becomes possible to direct attention not only to the purity of a form freed from all “natural” bonds to a substance but also to everything that, in the stratification of language, depends on the substance of graphic expression. An original and rigorously delimited description of this may thus be promised. Hjelmslev recognises that an “analysis of writing without regard to sound has not yet been undertaken”. While regretting also that “the substance of ink has not received the same attention on the part of linguists that they have so lavishly bestowed on the substance of air,” H. J. Uldall delimits these problems and emphasises the mutual independence of the substances of expression. He illustrates it particularly by the fact that, in orthography, no grapheme corresponds to accents of pronunciation (for Rousseau this was the misery, and the menace of writing) and that, reciprocally, in pronunciation, no phoneme corresponds to the spacing between written words.

Recognising the specificity of writing, glossematics did not merely give itself the means of describing the graphic element. It showed how to reach the literary element, to what in literature passes through an irreducibly graphic text, tying the play of form to a determined substance of expression. If there is something in literature which does not allow itself to be reduced to the voice, to epos or to poetry, one cannot recapture it except by rigorously isolating the bond that links *the play of form* to the substance of graphic expression. (It will by the same token be seen that “pure literature,” thus respected in its irreducibility, also risks limiting the play, restricting it. The desire to restrict play is, moreover, irresistible.) This interest in literature is effectively manifested in the Copenhagen School. It thus removes the Rousseauist and Saussurian caution with regard to literary arts. It radicalises the efforts of the Russian formalists, specifically of the O.P.O.I.A.Z, who, in their attention to the being-literary of literature, perhaps favoured the phonological instance and the literary models that it dominates. Notably poetry. That which, within the history of literature and in the structure of a literary text in general, escapes that framework, merits a type of description whose norms and conditions of possibility glossematics has perhaps better isolated. It has perhaps thus better prepared itself to study the purely graphic stratum within the structure of

the literary text within the history of the becoming-literary of literality, notably in its “modernity.”

Undoubtedly a new domain is thus opened to new and fecund researches. But I am not primarily interested in such a parallelism or such a recaptured parity of substances of expression. It is clear that if the phonic substance lost its privilege, it was not to the advantage of the graphic substance, which lends itself to the same substitutions. To the extent that it liberates and is irrefutable, glossematics still operates with a popular concept of writing. However original and irreducible it might be, the “form of expression” linked by correlation to the graphic “substance of expression” remains very determined. It is very dependent and very derivative with regard to the arche-writing of which I speak. This arche-writing would be at work not only in the form and substance of graphic expression but also in those of non-graphic expression. It would constitute not only the pattern uniting form to all substance, graphic or otherwise, but the movement of the sign-function linking a content to an expression, whether it be graphic or not. This theme could not have a place in Hjelmslev's system.

It is because arche-writing, movement of difference, irreducible archesynthesis, opening in one and the same possibility, temporalisation as well as relationship with the other and language, cannot, as the condition of all linguistic systems, form a part of the linguistic system itself and be situated as an object in its field. (which does not mean it has a real field *elsewhere*, another assignable site.) Its concept could in no way enrich the scientific, positive, and “immanent” (in the Hjelmslevian sense) description of the system itself. Therefore, the founder of glossematics would no doubt have questioned its necessity, as he rejects, en bloc and legitimately, all the extra-linguistic theories which do not arise from the irreducible immanence of the linguistic system. He would have seen in that notion one of those appeals to experience which a theory should dispense with. He would not have understood why the name writing continued — to be used for that X which becomes so different from what has always been called “writing.”

I have already begun to justify this word, and especially the necessity of the communication between the concept of arche-writing and the vulgar concept of writing submitted to deconstruction by it. I shall continue to do so below. As for the concept of experience, it is most unwieldy here. Like all the notions I am using here, it belongs to the history of metaphysics and we can only use it under erasure [*sous rature*]. “Experience” has always designated the relationship with a presence, whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or not. At any rate, we must, according to this sort of contortion and contention which the discourse is obliged to undergo, exhaust the resources of the concept of experience before attaining and in order to attain, by deconstruction, its ultimate foundation. It is the only way to escape “empiricism” and the “naive” critiques of experience at the same time. Thus, for example, the experience whose “theory,” Hjelmslev says, ‘must be independent’ is not the whole of experience. It always corresponds to a certain type of factual or regional experience (historical, psychological, physiological, sociological, etc.),

giving rise to a science that is itself regional and, as such, rigorously outside linguistics. That is not so at all in the case of experience as arche-writing. The parenthesising of regions of experience or of the totality of natural experience must discover a field of transcendental experience. This experience is only accessible in so far as, after having, like Hjelmslev, isolated the specificity of the linguistic system and excluded all the extrinsic sciences and metaphysical speculations, one asks the question of the transcendental origin of the system itself, as a system of the objects of a science, and, correlatively, of the theoretical system which studies it: here of the objective and “deductive” system which glossematics wishes to be. Without that, the decisive progress accomplished by a formalism respectful of the originality of its object, of “the immanent system of its objects,” is plagued by a scientificist objectivism, that is to say by another unperceived or unconfessed metaphysics. This is often noticeable in the work of the Copenhagen School. It is to escape falling back into this naive objectivism that I refer here to a transcendentalism that I elsewhere put into question. It is because I believe that there is a short-of and a beyond of transcendental criticism. To see to it that the beyond does not return to the within is to recognise in the contortion the necessity of a pathway [*parcours*]. That pathway must leave a track in the text. Without that track, abandoned to the simple content of its conclusions, the ultra-transcendental text will so closely resemble the precritical text as to be indistinguishable from it. We must now form and meditate upon the law of this resemblance. What I call the erasure of concepts ought to mark the places of that future meditation. For example, the value of the transcendental arche [*archie*] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The concept of arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure. It is in fact contradictory and not acceptable within the logic of identity. The trace is not only the disappearance of origin — within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary non-trace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace. Yet we know that that concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace. We must then *situate*, as a simple moment of *the discourse*, the phenomenological reduction and the Husserlian reference to a transcendental experience. To the extent that the concept of experience in general — and of transcendental experience, in Husserl in particular — remains governed by the theme of presence, it participates in the movement of the reduction of the trace. The Living Present (*lebendige Gegenwart*) is the universal and absolute form of transcendental experience to which Husserl refers us. In the descriptions of the movements of temporalisation, all that does not torment the simplicity and the domination of that form seems to indicate to us how much transcendental phenomenology belongs to metaphysics. But that must come to terms with the forces of rupture. In the originary temporalisation and the movement of relationship with the outside, as Husserl actually describes them, nonpresentation or derepresentation is as “originary” as presentation. *That is why a thought of the trace can no more break with a transcendental*

phenomenology *than be reduced to* it. Here as elsewhere, to pose the problem in terms of choice, to oblige or to believe oneself obliged to answer it by a *yes* or *no*, to conceive of appurtenance as an allegiance or non-appurtenance as plain speaking, is to confuse very different levels, paths, and styles. In the deconstruction of the arche, one does not make a choice.

Therefore I admit the necessity of going through the concept of the arche-trace. How does that necessity direct us from the interior of the linguistic system? How does the path that leads from Saussure to Hjelmslev forbid us to avoid the originary trace?

In that its passage through *form* is a passage through the imprint. And the meaning of difference in general would be more accessible to us if the unity of that double passage appeared more clearly.

In both cases, one must begin from the possibility of neutralising the phonic substance.

On the one hand, the phonic element, the term, the plenitude that is called sensible, would not appear as such without the difference or opposition which gives them form. Such is the most evident significance of the appeal to difference as the reduction of phonic substance. Here the appearing and functioning of difference presupposes an originary synthesis not preceded by any absolute simplicity. Such would be the originary trace. Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the pure movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is difference.* It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude. Although *it does not* exist, although it is never a being-present outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign (signified/signifier, content/expression, etc.), concept or operation, motor or sensory. This difference is therefore not more sensible than intelligible and it permits the articulation of signs among themselves within the same abstract order — a phonic or graphic text for example — or between two orders of expression. It permits the articulation of speech and writing — in the colloquial sense — as it founds the metaphysical opposition between the sensible and the intelligible, then between signifier and signified, expression and content, etc. If language were not already, in that sense, a writing, no derived “notation” would be possible; and the classical problem of relationships between speech and writing could not arise. Of course, the positive *sciences* of signification can only describe the work and the *fact* of difference, the determined differences and the determined presences that they make possible. There cannot be a science of difference itself in its operation, as it is impossible to have a science of the origin of presence itself, that is to say of a certain non-origin.

Difference is therefore the formation of form. But it is on *the other* hand the being-imprinted of the imprint. It is well-known that Saussure distinguishes between the “sound-image” and the objective sound. He thus gives himself the right to “reduce,” in the

phenomenological sense, the sciences of acoustics and physiology at the moment that he institutes the science of language. The sound-image is the structure of the appearing of the sound [*l'apparaître du son*] which is anything but the sound appearing [*le son apparaissant*]. It is the sound-image that he calls signifier, reserving the name signified not for the thing, to be sure (it is reduced by the act and the very ideality of language), but for the “concept,” undoubtedly an unhappy notion here; let us say for the ideality of the sense. “I propose to retain the word *sign* [*signe*] to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified [*signifié*] and signifier [*signifiant*].” The sound-image is what is *heard*; not the sound heard but the being-beard of the sound. Being-heard is structurally phenomenal and belongs to an order radically dissimilar to that of the real sound in the world. One can only divide this subtle but absolutely decisive heterogeneity by a phenomenological reduction. The latter is therefore indispensable to all analyses of being-heard, whether they be inspired by linguistic, psychoanalytic, or other preoccupations.

Now the “sound-image,” the structured appearing [*l'apparaître*] of the sound, the “sensory matter” lived and informed by difference, what Husserl would name the *hylè/morphé* structure, distinct from all mundane reality, is called the “psychic image” by Saussure: “The latter [the sound-image] is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychic imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses [*la représentation que nous en donne le témoignage de nos sens*]. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it 'material,' it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it, to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract”. Although the word “psychic” is not perhaps convenient, except for exercising in this matter a phenomenological caution, the originality of a certain place is well marked.

Before specifying it, let us note that this is not necessarily what Jakobson and other linguists could criticise as “the mentalist point of view”:

In the oldest of these approaches, going back to Baudouin de Courtenay and still surviving, the phoneme is a sound imagined or intended, opposed to the emitted sound as a “psychophonetic” phenomenon to the “physiophonetic” fact. It is the psychic equivalent of an exteriorised sound.

Although the notion of the “psychic image” thus defined (that is to say according to a pre-phenomenological psychology of the imagination) is indeed of this mentalist inspiration, it could be defended against Jakobson's criticism by specifying: (i) that it could be conserved without necessarily affirming that “our internal speech is confined to the distinctive features to the exclusion of the configurative, or redundant features;” (2) that the qualification psychic is not retained if it designates exclusively *another natural reality, internal and not external*. Here the Husserlian correction is indispensable and transforms even the premises of the debate. Real (*reell* and not real) component of lived experience, the *hylè/morphé* structure is not a reality (*Realität*). As to the intentional object, for example, the content of the image, it does not really (*reall*) belong either to the world or to lived experience: the non-real component of lived experience. The psychic image of which Saussure speaks must not be an internal reality copying an external one. Husserl, who criticises this concept of

“portrait” in *Idee* shows also in the *Krisis* how phenomenology should overcome the naturalist opposition whereby psychology and the other sciences of man survive — between internal” and “external” experience. It is therefore indispensable to preserve the distinction between the appearing sound [*le son apparaissant*] and the appearing of the sound [*l'apparaître du son*] in order to escape the worst and the most prevalent of confusions; and it is in principle possible to do it without “attempt[ing] to overcome the antinomy between invariance and variability by assigning the former to the internal and the latter to the external experience” (Jakobson). The difference between invariance and variability does not separate the two domains from each other, it divides each of them within itself. That gives enough indication that the essence of the *phonè* cannot be read directly and primarily in the text of a mundane science, of a psycho-physiophonetics.

These precautions taken, it should be recognised that it is in the specific zone of this imprint and this trace, in the temporalisation of a *lived* experience which is neither in the world nor in “another world,” which is not more sonorous than luminous, not more in time than in space, that differences appear among the elements or rather produce them, make them emerge as such and constitute the texts, the chains, and the systems of traces. These chains and systems cannot be outlined except in the fabric of this trace or imprint. The unheard difference between the appearing and the appearance [*l'apparaissant et l'apparaître*] (between the “world” and “lived experience”) is the condition of all other differences, of all other traces, and *it is already a trace*. This last concept is thus absolutely and by rights “anterior” to all *physiological* problematics concerning the nature of the engramme [the unit of engraving], or metaphysical problematics concerning the meaning of absolute presence whose trace is thus opened to deciphering. *The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the difference* which opens appearance [*l'apparaître*] and signification. Articulating the living upon the non-living in general, origin of all repetition, origin of ideality, the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and no *concept of metaphysics can describe it*. And as it is *a fortiori* anterior to the distinction between regions of sensibility, anterior to sound as much as to light, is there a sense in establishing a “natural” hierarchy between the sound-imprint, for example, and the visual (graphic) imprint? The graphic image is not seen; and the acoustic image is not heard. The difference between the full unities of the voice remains unheard. And, the difference in the body of the inscription is also invisible.

The Hinge [*La Brisure*]

You have, I suppose, dreamt of finding a single word for designating difference and articulation. I have perhaps located it by chance in Robert[s] Dictionary] if I play on the word, or rather indicate its double meaning. This word is brisure [joint, break] “ — broken, cracked part. Cf. breach, crack, fracture, fault, split, fragment, [brèche, cassure, fracture, faille, fente, fragment.] — Hinged articulation of two parts of wood- or

metal-work. The hinge, the brisure [folding-joint] of a shutter. Cf. joint. — Roger Laporte (letter)

Origin of the experience of space and time, this writing of difference, this fabric of the trace, permits the difference between space and time to be articulated, to appear as such, in the unity of an experience (of a “same” lived out of a “same” body proper [corps propre]). This articulation therefore permits a graphic (“visual” or “tactile,” “spatial”) chain to be adapted, on occasion in a linear fashion, to a spoken (“phonic,” “temporal”) chain. It is from the primary possibility of this articulation that one must begin. Difference is articulation.

This is, indeed, what Saussure says, contradicting Chapter VI:

The question of the vocal apparatus obviously takes a secondary place in the problem of language. One definition of *articulated* language might confirm that conclusion. In Latin, *articulus* means a member, part, or subdivision of a sequence; applied to speech [*langage*], articulation designates either the subdivision of a spoken chain into syllables or the subdivision of the chain of meanings into significant units. . . . Using the second definition, we can say that what is *natural to mankind is not spoken language* but the faculty of constructing a language; i.e., a system of distinct signs Corresponding to distinct ideas (italics added).

The idea of the “psychic imprint” therefore relates essentially to the idea of articulation. Without the difference between the sensory appearing [*apparaissant*] and its lived appearing [*apparaître*] (“mental imprint”), the temporalising synthesis, which permits differences to appear in a chain of significations, could not operate. That the “imprint” is irreducible means also that speech is originally passive, but in a sense of passivity that all intramundane metaphors would only betray. This passivity is also the relationship to a past, to an always-already-there that no reactivation of the origin could fully master and awaken to presence. This impossibility of reanimating absolutely the manifest evidence of an originary presence refers us therefore to an absolute past. That is what authorised us to call *trace* that which does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present. It could in fact have been objected that, in the indecomposable synthesis of temporalisation, protection is as indispensable as retention. And their two dimensions are not added up but the one implies the other in a strange fashion. To be sure, what is anticipated in protention does not sever the present any less from its self-identity than does that which is retained in the trace. But if anticipation were privileged, the irreducibility of the always-already-there and the fundamental passivity that is called time would risk effacement. On the other hand, if the trace refers to an absolute past, it is because it obliges us to think a past that can no longer be understood in the form of a modified presence, as a present-past. Since past has always signified present-past, the absolute past that is retained in the trace no longer rigorously merits the name “past.” Another name to erase, especially since the strange movement of the trace proclaims as much as it recalls: difference defers-differs [differs]. With the same precaution and under the same erasure, it may be said that its passivity is also its relationship with the “future.” The concepts of *present*, *past*, and *future*, everything in the concepts of time and history which implies evidence of them — the metaphysical concept of time in general — cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace. And deconstructing the

simplicity of presence does not amount only to accounting for the horizons of potential presence, indeed of “dialectic of protention and retention that one would install in the heart of the present instead of surrounding it with it. It is not a matter of complicating the structure of time while conserving its homogeneity and its fundamental successivity, by demonstrating for example that the past present and the future present constitute originally, by dividing it, the form of the living present. Such a complication, which is in effect the same that Husserl described, abides, in spite of an audacious phenomenological reduction, by the evidence and presence of a linear, objective, and mundane *model*. *Now B* would be as such constituted by the retention of *Now A* and the protention of *Now C*; in spite of all the play that would follow from it, from the fact that each one of the three *Now-s* reproduces that structure in itself, this model of successivity would prohibit a *Now X* from taking the place of *Now A*, for example, and would prohibit that, by a delay that is inadmissible to consciousness, an experience be determined, in its very present, by a present which would not have preceded it immediately but would be considerably “anterior” to it. It is the problem of the deferred effect (*Nachträglichkeit*) of ,which Freud speaks. The temporality to which he refers cannot be that which lends itself to a phenomenology of consciousness or of presence and one may indeed wonder by what right all that is in question here should still be called time, now, anterior present, delay, etc.

In its greatest formality, this immense problem would be formulated thus: is the temporality described by a transcendental phenomenology as “dialectical” as possible, a ground which the structures, let us say the unconscious structures, of temporality would simply modify? Or is the phenomenological model itself constituted, as a warp of language, logic, evidence, fundamental security, upon a woof that is not its own? And which — such is the most difficult problem — is no longer at all mundane? For it is not by chance that the transcendental phenomenology of the internal time-consciousness, so careful to place cosmic time within brackets, must, as consciousness and even as internal consciousness, live a time that is an accomplice of the time of the world. Between consciousness, perception (internal or external), and the “world,” the rupture, even in the subtle form of the reduction, is perhaps not possible.

It is in a certain “unheard” sense, then, that speech is in the world, rooted in that passivity which metaphysics calls sensibility in general. Since there is no non-metaphoric language to oppose to metaphors here, one must, as Bergson wished, multiply antagonistic metaphors. “Wish sensibilised,” is bow Maine de Biran, with a slightly different intention, named the vocalic word. That the logos is first imprinted and that that imprint is the writing-resource of language, signifies, to be sure, that the logos is not a creative activity, the continuous full element of the divine word, etc. But it would not mean a single step outside of metaphysics if nothing more than a new motif of “return to finitude,” of “God's death,” etc., were the result of this move. It is that conceptuality and that problematics that must be deconstructed. They belong to the onto-theology they fight against. Differance is also something other than finitude.

According to Saussure, the passivity of speech is first its relationship with language. The relationship between passivity and difference cannot be distinguished from the relationship between the fundamental unconsciousness of language (as rootedness within the language) and the *spacing* (pause, blank, punctuation, interval in general, etc.) which constitutes the origin of signification. It is because “language is a form and not a substance” that, paradoxically, the activity of speech can and must always draw from it. But if it is a form, it is because “in language there are only differences”. Spacing (notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space) is always the unperceived, the non-present, and the non-conscious. *As such*, if one can still use that expression in a non-phenomenological way; for here we pass the very limits of phenomenology. Arche-writing as spacing cannot occur *as such* within the phenomenological experience of a *presence*. It marks *the dead* time within the presence of the living present, within the general form of all presence. The dead time is at work. That is why, once again, in spite of all the discursive resources that the former may borrow from the latter, the concept of the trace will never be merged with a phenomenology of writing. As the phenomenology of the sign in general, a phenomenology of writing is impossible. No intuition can be realised in the place where “the 'whites' indeed take on an importance” (Preface to *Coup de dés*).

Perhaps it is now easier to understand why Freud says of the dreamwork that it is comparable rather to a writing than to a language, and to a hieroglyphic rather than to a phonetic writing. And to understand why Saussure says of language that it “is not a function of the speaker”. With or without the complicity of their authors, all these propositions must be understood as more than the simple *reversals* of a metaphysics of presence or of conscious subjectivity. Constituting and dislocating it at the same time, writing is other than the subject, in whatever sense the latter is understood. Writing can never be thought under the category of the subject; however it is modified, however it is endowed with consciousness or unconsciousness, it will refer, by the entire thread of its history, to the substantiality of a presence unperturbed by accidents, or to the identity of the selfsame [*le propre*] in the presence of self-relationship.

And the thread of that history clearly does not run within the borders of metaphysics. To determine an X as a subject is never an operation of a pure convention, it is never an indifferent gesture in relation to writing.

Spacing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject. By the movement of its drift/derivation [*dérive*] the emancipation of the sign constitutes in return the desire of presence. That becoming-or that drift/derivation-does not befall the subject which would choose it or would passively let itself be drawn along by it. As the subject's relationship with its own death, this becoming is the constitution of subjectivity. On all levels of life's organisation, that is to say, of *the economy of death*. All graphemes are of a testamentary essence. And the original absence of the subject of writing is also the absence of the thing or the referent.

Within the horizontality of spacing, which is in fact the precise dimension I have been speaking of so far, and which is not opposed to it as surface opposes depth, it is not even necessary to say that spacing cuts, drops, and causes to drop within the unconscious: the unconscious is nothing without this cadence and before this caesura. This signification is formed only within the hollow of difference: of discontinuity and of discreteness, of the diversion and the reserve of what does not appear. This hinge [*brisure*] of language as writing, this discontinuity, could have, at a given moment within linguistics, run up against a rather precious continuist prejudice. Renouncing it, phonology must indeed renounce all distinctions between writing and the spoken word, and thus renounce not itself, phonology, but rather phonologism. What Jakobson recognises in this respect is most important for us:

The stream of oral speech, physically continuous, originally confronted the mathematical theory of communication with a situation “considerably more involved” [*The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Urbana, 1949] than in the case of a finite set of discrete constituents, as presented by written speech. Linguistic analysis, however, came to resolve oral speech into a finite series of elementary informational units. These ultimate discrete units, the so-called “distinctive features,” are aligned into simultaneous bundles termed “phonemes,” which in turn are concatenated into sequences. Thus form in language has a manifestly granular structure and is subject to a quantal description. [*Linguistique et théorie de la communication*]

The hinge [*brisure*] marks the impossibility that a sign, the unity of a signifier and a signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present and an absolute presence. That is why there is no full speech, however much one might wish to restore it by means or without benefit of psychoanalysis. Before thinking to reduce it or to restore the meaning of the full speech which claims to be truth, one must ask the question of meaning and of its origin in difference. Such is the place of a problematic of the *trace*.

Why of the *trace*? What led us to the choice of this word? I have begun to answer this question. But this question is such, and such the nature of my answer, that the place of the one and of the other must constantly be in movement. If words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms, only within a topic [an orientation in space] and an historical strategy. The justification can therefore never be absolute and definitive. It corresponds to a condition of forces and translates an historical calculation. Thus, over and above those that I have already defined, a certain number of givens belonging to the discourse of our time have progressively imposed this choice upon me. The word *trace* must refer to itself to a certain number of contemporary discourses whose force I intend to take into account. Not that I accept them totally,. But the word *trace* establishes the clearest connections with them and thus permits me to dispense with certain developments which have already demonstrated their effectiveness in those fields. Thus, I relate this concept of *trace* to what is at the center of the latest work of Emmanuel Levinas and his critique of ontology: relationship to the illeity as to the alterity of a past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence. Reconciled here to a Heideggerian intention, — as it is not in Levinas's thought — this notion signifies, sometimes beyond Heideggerian discourse, the undermining of an ontology which, in its innermost course, has determined the meaning of being as presence and the

meaning of language as the full continuity of speech. To make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words “proximity,” “immediacy,” “Presence” (the proximate [*proche*], the own [*propre*], and the pre- of presence), is my final intention in this book. This deconstruction of presence accomplishes itself through the deconstruction of consciousness, and therefore through the irreducible notion of the trace (Spur), as it appears in both Nietzschean and Freudian discourse. And finally, in all scientific fields, notably in biology, this notion seems currently to be dominant and irreducible.

If the trace, arche-phenomenon of “memory,” which must be thought before the opposition of nature and culture, animality and humanity, etc., belongs to the very movement of signification, then signification is a priori written, whether inscribed or not, in one form or another, in a “sensible” and “spatial” element that is called “exterior.” Arche-writing, at first the possibility of the spoken word, then of the “*graphie*” in the narrow sense, the birthplace of “usurpation,” denounced from Plato to Saussure, this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing. The outside, “spatial” and “objective” exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not appear without the grammé, without difference as temporalisation, without the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present, without the relationship with death as the concrete structure of the living present. Metaphor would be forbidden. The presence-absence of the trace, which one should not even call its ambiguity but rather its play (for the word “ambiguity” requires the logic of presence, even when it begins to disobey that logic), carries in itself the problems of the letter and the spirit, of body and soul, and of all the problems whose primary affinity I have recalled. All dualisms, all theories of the immortality of the soul or of the spirit, as well as all monisms, spiritualist or materialist, dialectical or vulgar, are the unique theme of a metaphysics whose entire history was compelled to strive toward the reduction of the trace. The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archaeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as *parousia*, as life without difference: another name for death, historical metonymy where God's name holds death in check. That is why, if this movement begins its era in the form of Platonism, it ends in infinitist metaphysics. Only infinite being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God, at least as it is pronounced within classical rationalism, is the name of indifference itself. Only a positive infinity can lift the trace, “sublimate” it (it has recently been proposed that the Hegelian *Aufhebung* be translated as sublimation; this translation may be of dubious worth as translation, but the juxtaposition is of interest here). We must not therefore speak of a “theological prejudice,” functioning sporadically when it is a question of the plenitude of the logos; the logos as the sublimation of the trace is *theological*. Infinitist theologies are always logocentrism, whether they are creationisms or not. Spinoza himself said of the understanding — or logos — that it was the immediate infinite mode of the divine substance, even calling it its eternal son in the *Short Treatise*. [Spinoza] It is also to this epoch, “reaching completion” with Hegel, with a theology of the absolute concept as logos, that all

the non-critical concepts accredited by linguistics belong, at least to the extent that linguistics must confirm — and how can a *science* avoid it? — the Saussurian decree marking out “the internal system of language.”

It is precisely these concepts that permitted the exclusion of writing: image or representation, sensible and intelligible, nature and culture, nature and technics, etc. They are solidary with all metaphysical conceptuality and particularly with a naturalist, objectivist, and derivative determination of the difference between outside and inside.

And above all with a “vulgar concept of time.” I borrow this expression from Heidegger. It designates, at the end of *Being and Time*, a concept of time thought in terms of spatial movement or of the now, and dominating all philosophy from Aristotle's *Physics* to Hegel's *Logic*. This concept, which determines all of classical ontology, was not born out of a philosopher's carelessness or from a theoretical lapse. It is intrinsic to the totality of the history of the Occident, of what unites its metaphysics and its technics. And we shall see it later associated with the linearisation of writing, and with the linearist concept of speech. This linearism is undoubtedly inseparable from phonologism; it can raise its voice to the same extent that a linear writing can seem to submit to it. Saussure's entire theory of the “linearity of the signifier” could be interpreted from this point of view.

Auditory signifiers have at their command only the dimension of time. Their elements are presented in succession; they form a chain. This feature becomes readily apparent when they are represented in writing.... The signifier, being auditory, is unfolded solely in time from which it gets the following characteristics: (a) it represents a span, and (b) the span is measurable in a single dimension; it is a line.

It is a point on which Jakobson disagrees with Saussure decisively by substituting for the homogeneousness of the line the structure of the musical staff, “the chord in music.” What is here in question is not Saussure's affirmation of the temporal essence of discourse but the concept of time that guides this affirmation and analysis: time conceived as linear successivity, as “consecutivity.” This model works by itself and all through the *Course*, but Saussure is seemingly less sure of it in the *Anagrams*. At any rate, its value seems problematic to him and an interesting paragraph elaborates a question left suspended:

That the elements forming a word follow one *another* is a truth that it would be better for linguistics not to consider uninteresting because evident, but rather as the truth which gives in advance the central principle of all useful reflections on words. In a domain as infinitely special as the one I am about to enter, it is always by virtue of the fundamental law of the human word in general that a question like that of consecutiveness or non-consecutiveness may be posed.
[*Mercur de France*, 1964]

This linearist concept of time is therefore one of the deepest adherences of the modern concept of the sign to its own history. For at the limit it is indeed the concept of the sign itself, and the distinction, however tenuous, between the signifying and signified faces, that remain committed to the history of classical ontology. The parallelism and correspondence of the faces or the planes change nothing. That this distinction, first appearing in Stoic logic,

was necessary for the coherence of a scholastic thematics dominated by infinitist theology, forbids us to treat today's debt to it as a contingency or a convenience. I suggested this at the outset, and perhaps the reasons are clearer now. The signatum always referred, as to its referent, to a *res*, to an entity created or at any rate first thought and spoken, thinkable and speakable, in the eternal present of the divine logos and specifically in its breath. If it came to relate to the speech of a finite being (created or not; in any case of an intracosmic entity) through the *intermediary* of a *signans*, the *signatum* had an immediate relationship with the divine logos which thought it within presence and for which it was not a trace. And for modern linguistics, if the signifier is a trace, the signified is a meaning thinkable in principle within the full presence of an intuitive consciousness. The signified face, to the extent that it is still originally distinguished from the signifying face, is not considered a trace; by rights, it has no need of the signifier to be what it is. It is at the depth of this affirmation that the problem of relationships between linguistics and semantics must be posed. This reference to the meaning of a signified thinkable and possible outside of all signifiers remains dependent upon the ontotheo-teleology that I have just evoked. It is thus the idea of the sign that must be deconstructed through a meditation upon writing which would merge, as it must, with the undoing [*sollicitation*] of onto-theology, faithfully repeating it in its totality and making it *insecure* in its most assured evidences. One is necessarily led to this from the moment that the trace affects the totality of the sign in both its faces. That the signified is originally and essentially (and not only for a finite and created spirit) trace, that it is *always already in the position of the signifier*, is the apparently innocent proposition within which the metaphysics of the logos, of presence and consciousness, must reflect upon writing as its death and its resource.

Further Reading:

[Speech & Writing according to Hegel](#), Derrida 1971 | [Spectres of Marx](#), Derrida 1994
| [Biography](#) | [Rousseau](#) | [Saussure](#) | [Jakobson](#) | [Barthes](#) | [Foucault](#) | [Althusser](#) |
[Rorty](#) | [Chomsky](#) | [Vygotsky](#)

[Marxist Literary Criticism](#) | [France Subject Archive](#)
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