

THE EARLY DERRIDA : DOWN THE PLAY

IST, Term 1 (2017)

Session 4

Monday 23 January 2017

FREUD AND THE SCENE OF WRITING

1966 (conference & publication)

On Sigmund Freud, mainly “Project for a scientific psychology” (1895) and “Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad” (1925)

Broad themes, terms and questions : the text in psychoanalysis, hieroglyph vs. spoken language, *logocentrism*, science, *differance*, *presence*, *arch-writing*, *trace*

Psychoanalysis and its margins to logocentrism :

Our aim is limited : to locate in Freud’s text several points of reference, and to isolate, on the threshold of a systematic examination, those elements of psychoanalysis which can only uneasily be contained within logocentric closure, as this closure limits not only the history of philosophy but also the orientation of the “human sciences,” notably of a certain linguistics. If the Freudian breakthrough has an historical originality, this originality is not due to its peaceful coexistence or theoretical complicity with this linguistics, at least in its congenital phonologism.

Derrida, *WP*, 249

1895 : a psychoanalytic *science* :

In 1895, the question was to explain memory in the manner of the natural sciences, in order “to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science : that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determined states of specifiable material particles” (Freud).

Derrida, *WP*, 251

Trace, memory and difference :

Trace as memory is not a pure breaching that might be re-appropriated at any time as simple presence ; it is rather the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches. We thus already know that psychic life is neither the transparency of meaning nor the opacity of force but the difference within the exertion of forces. As Nietzsche had already said.

Derrida, *WP*, 253

A primary trace (... !)

No doubt life protects itself by repetition, trace, *différance* (deferral). But we must be wary of this formulation : there is no life present at first which would *then* come to protect, postpone, or reserve itself in *différance*. The latter constitutes the essence of life. Or rather : as *différance* is not an essence, as it is not anything, it is not life, if Being is determined as *ousia*, presence, essence/ existence, substance or subject. Life must be thought of as trace before Being may be determined as presence. (...)

It is thus the delay which is in the beginning.* Without which, *différance* would be the lapse which a consciousness, a self-presence of the present, accords itself. To defer (*différer*) thus cannot mean to retard a present possibility, to postpone an act, to put off a perception already now possible. That possibility is possible only through a *différance* which must be conceived of in other terms than those of a calculus or mechanics of decision. To say that *différance* is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why “originary” must be understood as having been *crossed out*, without which *différance* would be derived from an original plenitude. It is a non-origin which is originary.

* End note : The concepts of originary *différance* and of delay are unthinkable within the authority of the logic of identity or even within the concept of time. The very absurdity betrayed by *the terms* provides the possibility — if organised in a certain manner — of thinking beyond that logic and that concept. The word “delay” must be taken to mean something other than a relation between two “presents” ; and the following model must be avoided : what was to happen (should have happened) in a (prior) present A, occurs only in a present B. The concepts of originary *différance* and originary “delay” were imposed upon us by a reading of Husserl (*Introduction to the Origin of Geometry*, 1962).

(...) The irreducibility of the “effect of deferral”— such, no doubt, is Freud’s discovery.

Derrida, *WP*, 254-255

The *writing* of dreams :

“Dreams generally follow old facilitations,” said the *Project*. Topographical, temporal, and formal regression in dreams must thus be interpreted, henceforth, as a path back into a landscape of writing. Not a writing which simply transcribes, a stony echo of muted words, but a lithography before words : metaphonetic, non-linguistic, a-logical. (Logic obeys consciousness, or pre-consciousness, the site of verbal images, as well as the principle of identity, the founding expression of a philosophy of presence. (...))

Derrida, *WP*, 259

How to *read* a dream — an example :

Assume, for example, says Freud, that I have dreamed of a letter (*Brief / epistola*), then of a burial. Open a *Traumbuch*, a book in which the keys to dreams are recorded, an encyclopaedia of dream signs, the dream dictionary which Freud will soon reject. It teaches us that letter must be translated (*übersetzen*) by spite, and burial by engagement to be married. Thus a letter (*epistola*) written with letters (*litterae*), a document composed of phonetic signs, the transcription of verbal discourse, may be translated by a non-verbal signifier which, inasmuch as it is a determined affect, belongs to the overall syntax of dream writing. The verbal is cathected, and its phonetic transcription is bound, far from the centre, in a web of silent script.

Derrida, *WP*, 260

An old, God-given gift :

That science is *Traumdeutung*, also known as oneirocriticism. When all is said and done, it was only a science of writing in priestly hands. God, the Egyptians believed, had made man a gift of writing just as he inspired dreams. Interpreters, like dreams themselves, then had only to draw upon the curiological or tropological storehouse. They would readily find there the key to dreams, which they would then pretend to divine. The hieroglyphic code itself served as a *Traumbuch*. An alleged gift of God, in fact constructed historically, it had become the common source from which was drawn oneiric discourse: the setting and the text of the dream's *mise en scène*. Since dreams are constructed like a form of writing, the kinds of transposition in dreams correspond to condensations and displacements already performed and enregistered in the system of hieroglyphics.

Derrida, *WP*, 261

Psychical writing :

Freud makes of psychical writing so ordinary a production that the writing we believe to be designated by the proper sense of the word — a script which is coded and visible “in the world” would only be the metaphor of psychical writing. This writing, for example the kind we find in dreams which “follow old facilitations,” a simple moment in a regression toward a “primary” writing, cannot be read in terms of any code. It works, no doubt, with a mass of elements which have been codified in the course of an individual or collective history. But in its operations, lexicon, and syntax a purely idiomatic residue is irreducible and is made to bear the burden of interpretation in the communication between unconsciousnesses. The dreamer invents his own grammar.

(...) The absence of an exhaustive and absolutely infallible code means that in psychic writing, which thus prefigures the meaning of writing in general, the difference between signifier and signified is never radical. Unconscious experience, prior to the dream which “follows old facilitations,” does not borrow but produces its own signifiers ; does not create them in their materiality, of course, but produces their status-as-meaningful (*signifiante*). Henceforth, they are no longer, properly speaking, signifiers.

(...) Ordinary writing, if there is one, must produce the space and the materiality of the sheet itself.

Derrida, *WP*, 262-263

No full present :

That the present in general is not primal but, rather, reconstituted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which constitutes experience, that there is no purity of the living present — such is the theme, formidable for metaphysics, which Freud, in a conceptual scheme unequal to the thing itself, would have us pursue. This pursuit is doubtless the only one which is exhausted neither within metaphysics nor within science.

Derrida, *WP*, 266

Psychoanalysis and hieroglyphic writing :

It seems to us more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing than with language. In fact, the interpretation of a dream is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphics. In both cases there are certain elements which are not intended to be interpreted (or read, as the case may be) but are only designed to serve as “determinatives,” that is to establish the meaning of some other element. The ambiguity of various elements of dreams finds a parallel in these ancient systems of writing If this conception of the method of representation in dreams (*mise en scène*) has not yet been followed up, this, as will be readily understood, must be ascribed to the fact that psychoanalysts are entirely ignorant of the attitude and knowledge with which a philologist would approach such a problem as that presented by dreams.

Freud

Derrida, *WP*, 277

"We are written only as we write" (285).

Summary of the second part of the lecture, and first discussions of *arch-writing*, *trace*, *erasure* (289-291).

THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY AND THE CLOSURE OF REPRESENTATION

1966 (conference & publication)

On Antonin Artaud, mainly *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938).

Theatre and force :

Western theatre has been separated from the force of its essence, removed from its *affirmative* essence, its *vis affirmativa*. And this dispossession occurred from the origin on, is the very movement of origin, of birth as death.

Derrida, *WP*, 293

The limit of representation :

The theatre of cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the non-representable origin of representation. "I have therefore said 'cruelty' as I might have said 'life'" (*The Theatre and Its Double*). This life carries man along with it, but is not primarily the life of man. The latter is only a representation of life, and such is the limit — the humanist limit — of the metaphysics of classical theatre. "The theatre as we practice it can therefore be reproached with a terrible lack of imagination. The theatre must make itself the equal of life — not an individual life, that individual aspect of life in which CHARACTERS triumph, but the sort of liberated life which sweeps away human individuality and in which man is only a reflection" (*The Theatre and Its Double*).

Is not the most naïve form of representation *mimesis* ? Like Nietzsche — and the affinities do not end there — Artaud wants to have done with the *imitative* concept of art, with the Aristotelean aesthetics in which the metaphysics of Western art comes into its own. "Art is not the imitation of life, but life is the imitation of a transcendental principle which art puts us into communication with once again" (Artaud).

Derrida, *WP*, 294-295

Theatre as a non-theological space :

The theatre of cruelty expulses God from the stage. It does not put a new atheist discourse on stage, or give atheism a platform, or give over theatrical space to a philosophising logic that would once more, to our greater lassitude, proclaim the death of God. The theatrical practice of cruelty, in its action and structure, inhabits or rather *produces* a non-theological space.

The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance. The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements : an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter *represent* him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas. He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, enslaved interpreters who represent characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of the "creator." Interpretive slaves who faithfully execute the providential designs of the "master."

Derrida, *WP*, 296

To betray through oblivion : perversion

The Occident — and such is the energy of its essence — has worked only for the erasure of the stage. For a stage which does nothing but illustrate a discourse is no longer entirely a stage.

Derrida, *WP*, 297

This explains why classical theatre, in Artaud's eyes, is not simply the absence, negation, or forgetting of theatre, is not a non-theatre : it is a mark of cancellation that lets what it covers be read ; and it is corruption also, a "perversion," a *seduction*, the margin of an aberration whose meaning and measure are visible only beyond birth, at the eve of theatrical representation, at the origin of tragedy.

Derrida, *WP*, 298

Literature taking precedence over performance :

It is this extreme and difficult sense of spectacular representation that another passage from the same letter attempts to delimit : "So long as the *mise en scène* remains, even in the minds of the boldest directors, a simple means of presentation, an accessory mode of expressing the work, a sort of spectacular intermediary with no significance of its own, it will be valuable only to the degree it succeeds in hiding itself behind the works it is pretending to serve. And this will continue as long as the major interest in a performed work is in its text, as long as literature takes precedence over the kind of performance improperly called spectacle, with everything pejorative, accessory, ephemeral and external that that term carries with it" (Artaud, letter)

Derrida, *WP*, 300

Cruelty ?

We can distinguish the sense of *cruelty* as *necessity* and *rigour*. Artaud certainly invites us to think only of “rigour, implacable intention and decision,” and of “irreversible and absolute determination” (*The Theatre and its Double*), of “determinism,” “submission to necessity” (*The Theatre and its Double*), etc., under the heading of cruelty, and not necessarily of “sadism,” “horror,” “bloodshed,” “crucified enemies” (ibid.), etc. (And certain productions today inscribed under Artaud’s name are perhaps violent, even bloody, but are not, for all that, cruel.) Nevertheless, there is always a murder at the origin of cruelty, of the necessity named cruelty. And, first of all, a parricide. The origin of theatre, such as it must be restored, is the hand lifted against the abusive wielder of the logos, against the father, against the God of a stage subjugated to the power of speech and text.

In my view no one has the right to call himself author, that is to say creator, except the person who controls the direct handling of the stage. And exactly here is the vulnerable point of the theatre as it is thought of not only in France but in Europe and even in the Occident as a whole: Occidental theatre recognises as language, assigns the faculties and powers of a language, permits to be called language (with that particular intellectual dignity generally ascribed to this word) only articulated language, grammatically articulated language, i.e., the language of speech, and of written speech, speech which, pronounced or unpronounced, has no greater value than if it is merely written. In the theatre as we conceive it, the text is everything.

Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*

Derrida, *WP*, 301

Language of before the words :

We know what value Artaud attributed to what is called — in the present case, quite incorrectly — onomatopoeia. Glossopoeia, which is neither an imitative language nor a creation of names, takes us back to the borderline of the moment when the word the theatre of cruelty has not yet been born, when articulation is no longer a shout but not yet discourse, when repetition is *almost* impossible, and along with it, language in general : the separation of concept and sound, of signified and signifier, of the pneumatical and the grammatical, the freedom of translation and tradition, the movement of interpretation, the difference between the soul and the body, the master and the slave, God and man, author and actor. This is the eve of the origin of languages, and of the dialogue between theology and humanism whose inextinguishable reoccurrence has never not been maintained by the metaphysics of Western theatre.

Derrida, *WP*, 302-303

Is the theatre of cruelty possible ?

Perhaps we now can ask, not about the conditions under which a modern theatre could be faithful to Artaud, but in what cases it is surely unfaithful to him. What might the themes of infidelity be, even among those who invoke Artaud in the militant and noisy fashion we all know? We will content ourselves with naming these themes. Without a doubt, foreign to the theatre of cruelty are:

1. All non-sacred theatre.
2. All theatre that privileges speech or rather the verb, all theatre of words (...)
3. All *abstract* theatre which excludes something from the totality of art, and thus, from the totality of life and its resources of signification: dance, music, volume, depth of plasticity, visible images, sonority, phonicity, etc. (...)
4. All theatre of alienation. (...)
5. All non-political theatre. (...)
6. All ideological theatre, all cultural theatre, all communicative, interpretive (...) theatre seeking to transmit a content, or to deliver a message (of whatever nature : political, religious, psychological, metaphysical, etc.) that would make a discourse's meaning intelligible for its listeners (...)

In thus enumerating the themes of infidelity, one comes to understand very quickly that fidelity is impossible. There is no theatre in the world today which fulfils Artaud's desire. And there would be no exception to be made for the attempts made by Artaud himself. He knew this better than any other : the "grammar" of the theatre of cruelty, of which he said that it is "to be found," will always remain the inaccessible limit of a representation which is not repetition, of a *re*-presentation which is full presence, which does not carry its double within itself as its death, of a present which does not repeat itself, that is, of a present outside time, a non-present. The present offers itself as such, appears, presents itself, opens the stage of time or the time of the stage only by harbouring its own intestine difference, and only in the interior fold of its original repetition, in representation. In dialectics. (...)

Artaud kept himself as close as possible to the limit: the possibility and impossibility of pure theatre. Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated.

Derrida, *WP*, 307-314

The *play* of representation :

Because it has always already begun, representation therefore has no end. But one can conceive of the closure of that which is without end. Closure is the circular limit within which the repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself. That is to say, closure is its *playing* space. This movement is the movement of the world as play. "And for the absolute life itself is a game" (Artaud). This play is cruelty as the unity of necessity and chance. "It is chance that is infinite, not god" (Artaud). This play of life is artistic.

Derrida, *WP*, 316

THE EARLY DERRIDA : DOWN THE PLAY

IST, Term 1 (2017)

Session 6

Monday 6 February 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (SPIVAK)

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE (SPIVAK)

PREFACE (DERRIDA)

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WRITING BEFORE THE LETTER

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EXERGUE

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THE END OF THE BOOK AND THE BEGINNING OF WRITING

CH. 2

LINGUISTICS AND GRAMMATOLOGY

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OF GRAMMATOLOGY AS A POSITIVE SCIENCE

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PART 2

NATURE, CULTURE, WRITING

INTRODUCTION TO THE "AGE OF ROUSSEAU"

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THE VIOLENCE OF THE LETTER : FROM LÉVI-STRAUSS TO ROUSSEAU

CH. 2

"... THAT DANGEROUS SUPPLEMENT..."

CH. 3

GENESIS AND STRUCTURE OF THE *ESSAY ON THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES*

CH. 4

FROM/OFF THE SUPPLEMENT OF THE SOURCE : THE THEORY OF WRITING

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

By Gayathri Spivak

- ix-xiii **The question of the preface.** Hegel, the *aufhebung* — sublation, vs. Derrida's *dissemination*.
- I xiii-xx **The sous-rature (under erasure).** Heidegger's question of being. How Derrida's sous-rature differs. Bricolage (Lévi-Strauss), the play, clotûre (enclosure) of metaphysics
- II xxi-liv **Precursors**
- xxi-xxxviii **Nietzsche.** Knowledge, affirmation, morality, active forgetfulness, the body, dance, etc. Corroborating quotes from *Will to Power*, *Genealogy of Morals*, *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense*, *The Twilight of Idols*. Crossed references from Derrida's essays *White Mythology*, *The Ends of Man*, *Différance*. Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche.
- xxxviii-xlvi **Freud.** Psychoanalysis as method, psyche and writing, originary inscription, economy, traces, deconstruction and psychoanalysis, etc. Corroborating quotes from various essays gathered in Freud's *Standard Editions*, including *The Interpretation of Dreams*.
- xlviii-l **Heidegger.** *Destruction* (deconstruction).
- l-liv **Husserl.** Intuition, voice and writing, the "I", etc. Crossed references with Derrida's translation and introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, and *Speech and Phenomena*.
- liv **Hegel**
- III liv-lxvii **Derrida and Structuralism**
- liv-lx **Classical structuralism** : structural linguistics (de Saussure, Jakobson, Barthes), anthropological structuralism (Lévi-Strauss).
- lx-lxii **Foucault.** Back to *Cogito and the History of Madness*. Foucault's response.
- lxii-lxvii **Lacan.** Fiction, desire for the signified, phallus as transcendental signifier. Crossed references to Derrida's *La double séance* (hymen, pli, etc.).
- IV lxvii-lxxviii **Writing and Deconstruction.** Logocentrism as phonocentrism and centrism itself. Writing as an entire investigation. Trace, reserve, différance — the many names of différance. The primordial non self-presence. On Derrida and relativism ; Hegel and the critique. Metaphor vs. truth — metaphorology. The irruption of new concepts. Deconstruction in a nutshell. Desire of deconstruction ; Desire. If knowledge is a dream, agreeing to dream.

- V lxxviii-lxxxvii **Structure of *Of Grammatology*. *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*.** Spivak presents, comments and criticises (i.e. the messianic tone of the promise in Derrida). The geographical pattern, and reverse ethnocentrism. Derrida's discussion of Lévi-Strauss, writing-less communities, proper name, etc. Intertextuality, and the switch to Rousseau's texts. Early Derrida : moments of classical scholarship. Final note on translation — the impossibility of translation, and translation as intertextuality.
- VI lxxxvii **(Spivak plays)**

The sous-rature :

This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.) To take an example from Derrida that I shall cite again : "... the sign is that ill-named thing . . . which escapes the instituting question of philosophy . . ." (*Of Grammatology*).

...

Now there is a certain difference between what Heidegger puts under erasure and what Derrida does. "Being" is the master-word that Heidegger crosses out. Derrida does not reject this. But his word is "trace" (the French word carries strong implications of track, footprint, imprint), a word that cannot be a master-word, that presents itself as the mark of an anterior presence, origin, master.

...

Now we begin to see how Derrida's notion of "sous rature" differs from that of Heidegger's. Heidegger's *Being* might point at an inarticulate presence. Derrida's *trace* is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.

...

At once inside and outside a certain Hegelian and Heideggerian tradition, Derrida, then, is asking us to change certain habits of mind: the authority of the text is provisional, the origin is a trace; contradicting logic, we must learn to use and erase our language at the same time.

Spivak, Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, xiv-xviii

Writing as an entire investigation :

... the name "writing" is given here to an entire structure of investigation, not merely to "writing in the narrow sense," graphic notation on tangible material.

...

A careful reading of the *Grammatology* shows quickly that Derrida points out, rather, that speech too — grafted within an empirical context, within the structure of speaker-listener, within the general context of the language, and the possibility of the absence of the speaker-listener — is structured as writing, that in this general sense, there is "writing in speech".

Spivak, Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, lxix-lxx

The many names of difference :

Derrida would not privilege a signifier into transcendence. The movement of "difference-itself," precariously saved by its resident "contradiction," has many nicknames : trace, difference, reserve, supplement, dissemination, hymen, greffe, pharmakon, parergon, and so on. They form a chain where each may be substituted for the other, but not exactly (of course, even two uses of the same word would not be exactly the same) : "no concept overlaps with any other" (*Positions*). Each substitution is also a displacement, and carries a different metaphoric charge, as Derrida reminds us often.

Spivak, Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, lxx

The irruption of new concepts. Deconstruction in a nutshell. :

The critic must make room for "the irruptive emergence of a new concept : a concept which no longer allows itself to be understood in terms of the previous regime [system of oppositions]."

...

To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier ; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it ; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed. Deconstruction in a nutshell. But take away the assurance of the text's authority, the critic's control, and the primacy of meaning, and the possession of this formula does not guarantee much.

Spivak, Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, lxxvii

Writing and Difference and *Of Grammatology* :

Of Grammatology can be taken as a long essay articulated in two parts between which one can stitch in *L'écriture et la différence*. The *Grammatology* often refers to it. In that case, the interpretation of Rousseau [Part II of *Of Grammatology*] would be the twelfth item of the collection. Conversely, one can insert *Of Grammatology* in the middle of *L'écriture et la différence*. Since six texts of the latter are anterior, in fact and in principle, to the publication ... in *Critique*, of the articles announcing *Of Grammatology* ; the five last, beginning with "Freud and the Scene of Writing" are engaged in the grammatological overture.

Derrida, *Positions* (Cited in Spivak, lxxix)

Impossibility of translation & translation as inter-textuality :

To an extent, this particular problem informs the entire text. Denying the uniqueness of words, their substantiality, their transferability, their repeatability, *Of Grammatology* denies the possibility of translation. Not so paradoxically perhaps, each twist of phrase becomes at the same time "significant" and playful when language is manipulated for the purpose of putting signification into question, for deconstructing the binary opposition "signifier-signified." That playfulness I fear I have not been able remotely to capture.

...

I began this preface by informing my readers that Derrida's theory admitted — as it denied — a preface by questioning the absolute repeatability of the text. It is now time to acknowledge that his theory would likewise admit — as it denies — translation, by questioning the absolute privilege of the original. Any act of reading is besieged and delivered by the precariousness of intertextuality. And translation is, after all, one version of inter-textuality.

Spivak, Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, lxxxvi

Spivak plays :

"The first part of this book, 'Writing before the Letter,' sketches in broad outlines *Now I insert my text within his and move you on, situating here* a theoretical matrix. It indicates certain significant historical moments, and proposes *My name* : certain critical concepts. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. These critical concepts are put to the test *the places of this work* : *Iowa City, (New Delhi-Dacca-Calcutta), Boston, Nice, Providence, Iowa City*, in the second part, 'Nature, Culture, Writing.' *Its time: July, 1970- October, 1975*. This part may be called illustrative ...

Spivak, Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, lxxxvii

PREFACE

By Jacques Derrida

(Reading / Discussions)

EXERGUE

CH. 1

THE END OF THE BOOK AND THE BEGINNING OF WRITING

SECTION 1

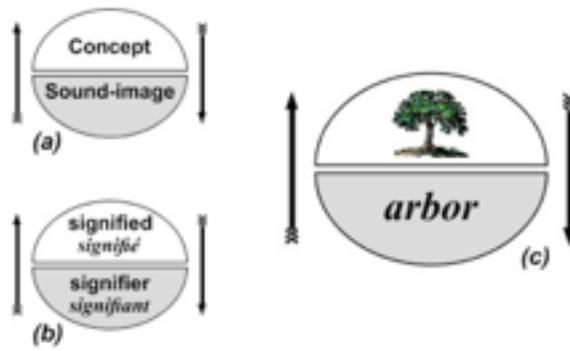
THE PROGRAMME

Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics :

Contribution 1 : sign = signified + signifier

= ["meaning", "thing", "referent", "concept"]

+ ["word", "name", "expression"]



SECTION 2

THE SIGNIFIER AND TRUTH

The problem : Written signifier, always derived

All signifiers, and first and foremost the written signifier, are derivative with regard to what would wed the voice indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense, indeed to the thing itself ... The written signifier is always technical and representative. It has no constitutive meaning. This derivation is the very origin of the notion of the "signifier." ... This notion remains therefore within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism : absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning.

p. 11-12

On Nietzsche, Heidegger and Hegel : modern bifurcations of this long history, complexifying being as source of writing, and being as object of writing

Deconstruction works from within : the example of Nietzsche

Nietzsche, far from remaining simply ... *within* metaphysics, contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos and the related concept of truth or the primary signified, in whatever sense that is understood. ... One must *accentuate* the "naïveté" of a breakthrough which cannot attempt a step outside of metaphysics, which cannot *criticise* metaphysics radically without still utilising in a certain way ... Nietzsche has *written what* he has written. He has written that writing — and first of all his own — is not originally subordinate to the logos and to truth.

p. 19

Second example. Heidegger crossing out the term ~~being~~ : being is beyond a concept, beyond a term, beyond a signifier-referring-to-a-signified. We are to use it by default, while re-affirming that its being-a-word is misleading.

THE EARLY DERRIDA : DOWN THE PLAY

IST, Term 1 (2017)

Session 12

Monday 20 March 2017

SPEECH AND PHENOMENA

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Speech and repetition and historical progress

The presence-of-the-present is derived from repetition and not the reverse. While this is against Husserl's express intention, it does take into account what is implied by his description of the movement of temporalisation and of the relation with the other, as will perhaps become clear later on.

The concept of *ideality* naturally has to be at the center of such a question. According to Husserl, the structure of speech can only be described in terms of ideality. ... But this ideality, which is but another name for the permanence of the same and the possibility of its repetition, *does not exist* in the world, and it does not come from another world ; it depends entirely on the possibility of acts of repetition.

...

For Husserl, historical progress always has as its essential form the constitution of idealities whose repetition, and thus tradition, would be assured *ad infinitum*, where repetition and tradition are the transmission and reactivation of origins. And this determination of being as ideality is properly a *valuation*, an ethico-theoretical act that revives the decision that founded philosophy in its Platonic form.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 52-53

The sign and my death

The relation with the presence of the present as the ultimate form of being and of ideality is the move by which I transgress empirical existence, factuality, contingency, worldliness, etc. — first of all, *my own* empirical existence, factuality, contingency, worldliness, etc. To think of presence as the universal form of transcendental life is to open myself to the knowledge that in my absence, beyond my empirical existence, before my birth and after my death, *the present is*. I can empty all empirical content, imagine an absolute overthrow of the *content* of every possible experience, a radical transformation of the world. I have a strange and unique certitude that this universal form of presence, since it concerns no determined being, will not be affected by it. The relationship with *my death* (my disappearance in general) thus lurks in this determination of being as presence, ideality, the absolute possibility of repetition. The possibility of the sign is this relationship with death. The determination and elimination of the sign in metaphysics is the dissimulation of this relationship with death, which yet produced signification.

If the possibility of my disappearance in general must somehow be experienced in order for a relationship with presence in general to be instituted, we can no longer say that the experience of the possibility of my absolute disappearance (my death) affects me, occurs to an *I am*, and modifies a subject. The *I am*, being experienced only as an I am present, itself presupposes the relationship with presence in general, with being as presence. The appearing of the I to itself in the *I am* is thus originally a relation with its own possible disappearance. Therefore, *I am* originally means *I am mortal*.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 53-54

The *ad infinitum* return

Without reducing the abyss which may indeed separate retention from re-presentation, without hiding the fact that the problem of their relationship is none other than that of the history of "life" and of life's becoming conscious, we should be able to say *a priori* that their common root — the possibility of re-petition in its most general form, that is, the constitution of a trace in the most universal sense — is a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the very movement of difference it introduces. **Such a trace is** — if we can employ this language without immediately contradicting it or crossing it out as we proceed — **more "primordial" than what is phenomenologically primordial.** For the ideality of the form (*Form*) of presence itself implies that it be infinitely repeatable, that its re-turn, as a return of the same, is necessary *ad infinitum* and is inscribed in presence itself. It implies that the re-turn is the return of a present which will be retained in a *finite* movement or retention and that primordial truth, in the phenomenological sense of the term, is only to be found rooted in the finitude of this retention. It is furthermore implied that the relation with infinity can be instituted only in the opening of the form of presence upon ideality, as the possibility of a re-turn *ad infinitum*.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 67

Particular case : the inner statement of “You have gone wrong, you can't go on like that”. The fiction of “self communication”.

Voice hears itself

In order to really understand where the power of the voice lies, and how metaphysics, philosophy, and the determination of being as presence constitute the epoch of speech as *technical* mastery of objective being, to properly understand the unity of *techne* and *phone*, we must think through the objectivity of the object. The ideal object is the most objective of objects ; independent of the here-and-now acts and events of the empirical subjectivity which intends it, it can be repeated infinitely while remaining the same. Since its presence to intuition, its being-before the gaze, has no essential dependence on any worldly or empirical synthesis, the re-establishment of its sense in the form of presence becomes a universal and unlimited possibility. But, being *nothing* outside the world, this ideal being must be constituted, repeated, and expressed in a medium that does not impair the presence and *self-presence* of the acts that aim at it, a medium which both preserves the *presence of the object* before intuition and self-presence, the absolute proximity of the acts to themselves. The ideality of the object, which is only its being-for a non-empirical consciousness, can only be expressed in an element whose phenomenality does not have worldly form. *The name of this element is the voice. The voice is heard.*

...

My words are “alive” because they seem not to leave me: not to fall outside me, outside my breath, at a visible distance; not to cease to belong to me, to be at my disposition “without further props.” In any event, the phenomenon of speech, the phenomenological voice, *gives itself out* in this manner.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 75-76

The unique “hearing oneself speak”

The operation of “hearing oneself speak” is an auto-affection of a unique kind. On the one hand, it operates within the medium of universality ; what appears as signified therein must be idealities that are *idealiter* indefinitely repeatable or transmissible as the same. On the other hand, the subject can hear or speak to himself and be affected by the signifier he produces, without passing through an external detour, the world, the sphere of what is not “his own.”

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 78

Consciousness and voice

It is this universality which dictates that, *de jure* and by virtue of its structure, no consciousness is possible without the voice. The voice is the being which is present to itself in the form of universality, as consciousness : the voice *is* consciousness.

...

To speak to someone is doubtless to hear oneself speak, to be heard by oneself ; but, at the same time, if one is heard by another, to speak is to make him *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-oneseff-speak in the very form in which I effectuated it. This immediate repetition is a reproduction of pure auto-affection without the help of anything external. This possibility of reproduction, whose structure is absolutely unique, *gives itself* out as the phenomenon of a mastery or limitless power over the signifier, since the signifier itself has the form of what is not external. Ideally, in the teleological essence of speech, it would then be possible for the signifier to be in absolute proximity to the signified aimed at in intuition and governing the meaning. The signifier would become perfectly diaphanous due to the absolute proximity to the signified. This proximity is broken when, instead of hearing myself speak, I see myself write or gesture.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 79-80

Modes of temporality

What constitutes the originality of speech, what distinguishes it from every other element of signification, is that its substance seems to be purely temporal. And this temporality does not unfold a sense that would itself be non-temporal ; even before being expressed, **sense is through and through temporal**. According to Husserl, the omni-temporality of ideal objects is but a mode of temporality.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 83

Present and trace

But this pure difference, which constitutes the self-presence of the living present, introduces into self-presence from the beginning all the impurity putatively excluded from it. The living present springs forth out of its non-identity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is always already a trace. This trace cannot be thought out on the basis of a simple present whose life would be within itself ; **the self of the living present is primordially a trace**.

...

This proto-writing [arch-writing] is at work at the origin of sense.

...

Space is "in" time ; it is time's pure leaving-itself ; it is the outside-itself as the self-relation of time. The externality of space, externality as space, does not overtake time ; rather, it opens as pure "outside" "within" the movement of temporalisation.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 85

Back to the supplement

If indication is not added to expression, which is not added to sense, we can nonetheless speak in regard to them, of a primordial “supplement” : their *addition* comes to *make up* [suppléer] for a deficiency, it comes to compensate for a primordial non-self-presence. And if indication — for example, writing in the everyday sense — must necessarily be “added” to speech to complete the constitution of the ideal object, if speech must be “added” to the thought identity of the object, it is because the “presence” of sense and speech had already from the start fallen short of itself.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 87

The “I am”, always meaningful

Even supposing that such an immediate representation is possible and actually given, does not the appearance of the word *I* in solitary speech (a supplement whose *raison d'être* is not clear if immediate representation is possible) already function as an ideality? Doesn't it give itself out as capable of remaining *the same* for an I-here-now in general, keeping its sense even if my empirical presence is eliminated or radically modified? When I say *I*, even in solitary speech, can I give my statement meaning without implying, there as always, the possible absence of the object of speech — in this case, myself? When I tell myself “I am,” this expression, like any other according to Husserl, has the status of speech only if it is intelligible in the absence of its object, in the absence of intuitive presence — here, in the absence of myself. Moreover, it is in this way that the *ergo sum* is introduced into the philosophical tradition and that a discourse about the transcendental ego is possible. Whether or not I have a present intuition of myself, “I” expresses something; whether or not I am alive, *I am* “means something.”

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 95

Differance of the living present

We have experienced the systematic interdependence of the concepts of sense, ideality, objectivity, truth, intuition, perception, and expression. **Their common matrix is being as presence**: the absolute proximity of self-identity, the being-in-front of the object available for repetition, the maintenance of the temporal present, whose ideal form is the self-presence of transcendental *life*, whose ideal identity allows *idealiter* of infinite repetition. **The living present**, a concept that cannot be broken down into a subject and an attribute, **is thus the conceptual foundation of phenomenology as metaphysics**.

While everything that is *purely* thought in this concept is thereby determined as *ideality*, **the living present** is nevertheless *in fact*, really, effectively, etc., **deferred *ad infinitum***. This *differance* is the difference between the ideal and the non-ideal.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 99

Beyond meaning

As for what “begins” then — “beyond” absolute knowledge — *unheard-of* thoughts are required, sought for across the memory of old signs. As long as we ask if the concept of differance should be conceived on the basis of presence or antecedent to it, it remains one of these old signs, enjoining us to continue indefinitely to question presence within the closure of knowledge. It must indeed be so understood, but also understood differently: it is to be heard in the openness of an unheard-of question that opens neither upon knowledge nor upon some non-knowledge which is a knowledge to come. In the openness of this question *we no longer know*. This does not mean that we know nothing but that we are beyond absolute knowledge (and its ethical, aesthetic, or religious system), approaching that on the basis of which its closure is announced and decided. Such a question will legitimately be understood as *meaning* nothing, as no longer belonging to the system of meaning.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 102

New names

In order to conceive of this age, in order to “speak” about it, we will have to have other names than those of sign or re-presentation. New names indeed will have to be used if we are to conceive as “normal” and pre-primordial what Husserl believed he could isolate as a particular and accidental experience, something dependent and secondary ... There never was any “perception” ; and “presentation” is a representation of the representation that yearns for itself therein as for its own birth or its death.

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 103

The labyrinth

It remains, then, for us to *speak*, to make our voices *resonate* throughout the corridors in order to make up for [*suppléer*] the breakup of presence. The phoneme, the *akoumenom*, is the *phenomenon of the labyrinth*. This is the *case* with the *phone*. Rising toward the sun of presence, it is the way of Icarus.

And contrary to what phenomenology — which is always phenomenology of perception — has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always escapes.

Contrary to the assurance that Husserl gives us a little further on, “the look” cannot “abide.”

Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 104