



DERRIDA
AND **LACAN**

Another Writing

Michael Lewis

Derrida and Lacan

Properly speaking, the *nœud bo* [Borromean knot] in question completely changes the meaning of writing. It gives to the aforementioned writing an autonomy, which is all the more remarkable in that there is another writing [*une autre écriture*], which results from that which one could call a precipitation of the signifier. Derrida has laid emphasis on this, but it is quite clear that I showed him the way.

(Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, 144)

[T]he motif of divisibility is perhaps the argument of last resort in ‘*Le facteur de la vérité*’ [...]. It is formally, in the chain of consequences, that on which everything depends. The affirmation of the indivisibility of the letter [...]

(Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard*, 512)

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Michael Lewis

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(Scholars should note with amusement the disparity in length between this list and that from my first book. . .)

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Michael Lewis

Sussex

Friday, 18 August 2006 – Friday, 18 April 2008

Abbreviations

Works by Jacques Derrida

- D (1981) *Dissemination* [1972]
EW (1991) ‘“Eating Well”, or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida’ [1988]
FL (2001) ‘Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority” ’ [1989–90]
MP (1982) *Margins: of Philosophy* [1972]
OG (1974) *Of Grammatology* [1967]
P (2002) *Positions* [1972]
PC (1987) *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* [1980]
R (1998) *Resistances: Of Psychoanalysis* [1996]
S (1979) *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles* [1978]
SM (1994) *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* [1993]
SP (1973) *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* [1967]
W (1998) ‘I’ll have to wander all alone’ [1995]
WD (2001) *Writing and Difference* [1967]

Works by Jacques Lacan

- AE (2001) *Autres Écrits*
E (2006) *Écrits* [1966]
SI (1988) *Seminar Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*
SII (1988) *Seminar Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*
SIII (1993) *Seminar Book III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956*
SIV (1994) *Le Séminaire livre IV: La Relation d’Objet, 1956–1957*

Abbreviations

- SV (1998) *Le Séminaire livre V: Les Formations de l'Inconscient, 1957–1958*
- SVI (1958–9) 'Le Séminaire livre VI. Désir et son interprétation, 1958–1959'. Unpublished manuscript [References to unpublished seminars are given by the date of the session]
- SVII (1992) *Seminar Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*
- SVIII (1991) *Le Séminaire livre VIII: Le Transfert, 1960–1961*
- SIX (1961–2) 'Le Séminaire livre IX. L'Identification, 1961–1962'. Unpublished manuscript
- SX (2004) *Le Séminaire livre X: L'Angoisse, 1962–1963*
- SXI (1998) [*Seminar Book XI:*] *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [1964]
- SXIII (1965–6), 'Le Séminaire livre XIII. L'Objet du psychanalyse, 1965–1966'. Unpublished manuscript
- SXIV (1966–7), 'Le Séminaire livre XIV. Logique du fantasme, 1966–1967'. Unpublished manuscript
- SXVII (2007) *Seminar Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* [1969–1970]
- SXX (1999) *Seminar Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973*
- SXXIII (2005) *Le Séminaire livre XXIII: Le Sinthome, 1975–1976*

Preface

In comparison with a genius, that is to say with a being which either *begets* or *bears*, both words taken in their most comprehensive sense – the scholar, the average man of science, always has something of the old maid about him. [. . .] The worst and most dangerous thing of which a scholar is capable comes from the instinct of mediocrity which characterises his species.

(Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ¶206)

The concern of contemporary philosophy, philosophy that stands in the wake of the travails of the transcendental problematic, is to understand the difference between a (present) being and the (absent, transcendental) event that produced it. An attempt to understand contemporary philosophy may thus legitimately take the form of a comparative study of the various ways in which the one unique difference has been understood. To superimpose these explanations of the nature of this difference will bring to light the idiosyncrasies of each explanation and perhaps throw into relief the deficiencies of one account relative to another.

If contemporary thought is an attempt to discern an event and to deal with the potentially distorting effects of *naming* this event in language, is the comparative study, as a superimposition of two or more thoughts of the event, not a productive course for philosophy as it muses on its own end? Is it not a way in which philosophy can be *almost* as vibrant as in its metaphysical pomp and splendour? Is this not what the true adult does, to look back on his younger self with ever more unclouded eyes, forever repeating childhood in its exuberance, and gradually eliminating the mistakes that accompany every ‘first time’?

What are texts of philosophy if not explicit considerations, which now stand as signs, of the way in which beings as a whole present themselves at a certain epoch, and an attempt to understand how that could be so, signposts of the moment at which the absent event crystallised itself into a present entity? Do they not constitute moments of reflection in human life where, rather than being blithely lived through, the conditions of this existence are scrutinised? Moments in

Preface

which the human being turns towards the transcendental event and tries to think it.

And now at the end of history, the injunction to read these and other signs is more shrill than ever, when it is impossible to strike out on one's own and write another metaphysical text. One is compelled rather to explain how the transcendental could have been given, how being could have been 'sent' to thinkers and named by them in so many diverse ways.

By striving upstream in the river of Heraclitus, which is permanently creating and destroying the determinations of beings we see as present, we attempt to reach back before the fully constituted being, to the event which produces it; we attempt actively to move with the flow of the river, instead of merely gazing at one of its stretches. We attempt to eradicate as far as possible those determinations which are imported from the actual being which the event produces. To do otherwise would be to limit the event to our own actuality, which is posterior to and always a restriction of the virtual event. It is to reduce the virtual to the potential, to the possibility modelled upon the actuality that has eventuated from it. It is to make the traditional mistake of transcendental thinkers, in understanding the prior on the basis of the posterior, the origin on the basis of the originated, and thus to explain nothing.

The question we shall ask in the following study is this: must we not do all we can to achieve a proper understanding of our current *actuality*, in order to ensure that we know precisely *what* we might be imputing to the event, to prevent determinations that we do not recognise as such from creeping into our understanding of the event that is meant to explain this determination? And in order to do this, should we not utilise those discourses, perhaps scientific, which elucidate the *genesis* of this actuality?

One way in which one might understand thinkers of the transcendental to set themselves apart from each other is in terms of how much they see their peers or subjects as determining the transcendental on the basis of that which it makes possible. It seems to me, then, particularly in the case of the two thinkers to whose work we shall devote ourselves, that one may fruitfully interpret the divergence between them in terms of their respective understandings of *what precisely* one's explanation is compelled to import into the origins of our current state and the strategies that are required in order to reach the real source in defiance of this current.

When we are operating at the level of the transcendental, today, at the end of history, there is, I believe, a certain justification – if not a

necessity – for operating at both a textual and a comparative level. And one can carry out one's *own* original erasure precisely by means of comparison, superimposing one thinker's text upon another, to produce a new palimpsest, bringing to light something that has genuinely not been seen before.

It is this that I am attempting to achieve by superimposing Lacan's text on Derrida's. The peculiarity which this reveals in *Derrida's* text relates to the question of the animal, which, it seems to me, Derrida cannot properly acknowledge us to be. Here we are following a trope of Agamben's in suggesting that, for Derrida, we, *zōon logon ekhon*, are exhaustively determined by *logos*. To the exclusion of all *zōē*. Lacan avoids this mistake by beginning with a *genetic* approach to the human being, an examination of the modification of the non-human animal or the animalic human which results in the novel creation of language (*logos*). It is this genetic approach that allows Lacan to perhaps more fully understand man's actuality, and thus more competently to approach his transcendental.

Thus, by means of such a superposition, a comparative study can open up a *new* vision of an 'old' philosophy. It can cast new light on an old thinker, shed from a different perspective, setting the other's work into a hitherto concealed relief. In the difference, a revelation can split open.

Perhaps it is hubristic to claim that in this way the comparative study can be *creative*, but in any case it can have an important critical role, a vigil against potentially dogmatic slumber. It can remind *any one perspective* that it cannot be the ultimate, any finite reading that it is not infinitely comprehensive, and precisely by confronting one thinker with another, particularly one with whom they have not themselves engaged, or, as is the case here, with whom they have been able to engage only in a way that is tellingly unsatisfactory. For, as Heidegger has it, great thinkers think but one thought. And those who are not great thinkers have the privilege of being able to envision *more than one*, to open the blinkered and therefore tenaciously unfolded system of one thinker to another. To view the battle of the giants (*gigantomachia peri tēs ousias*) from the position of an ivory tower, from whose vantage one looks on from afar without as yet entering the strife.

Thus, in deference to Nietzsche, this comparative study of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan *is* the work of a 'scholar', but perhaps we have a different estimation of scholarship. We do not say that it is a substitute for true creativity, but neither is it – today – as sterile as Nietzsche thought.

Introduction

Derrida presents deconstruction as if it were not a thesis.

Perhaps deconstruction is almost nothing more than the most extreme consequence of Saussure's linguistics. Following Saussure, Derrida understands a 'text' as a system in which a plurality of differences precedes any presence and makes it possible; and conversely, any system of differences may be deemed a 'text'. The significance of each element of a text is determined by its differences from all of the other elements of the same system. A text is thus a system in the literal sense that no one element can act as a textual element or 'signifier' without 'standing together with' (*syn-stema*) others.

Deconstruction demonstrates that in fact no finite system can be isolated from other systems in which its elements partake. These systems would for this reason be spatially understood as those which 'surround' it. And naturally, the same would apply to these systems, and so on *ad infinitum*. The result would be that each element of a textual system is defined by its differences from an infinite number of elements, and thus by an infinite number of differences.

This infinity is beyond the comprehension of a finite consciousness, and hence if the significance of any one signifier depended upon its references to an infinite number of signifiers, then this significance would be indeterminable for such finite intelligences. Therefore, any finite text which attempts to exist in a self-contained fashion must cut itself off from this infinity of other signifiers in order to achieve a semblance of determinate meaningfulness. It must set a limit to the reference of signs from one to the other and thus manufacture a finite whole. It must posit something absolutely outside of the text which sets a clear limit to its textuality. That which is 'outside the text' (*hors-texte*) is the 'transcendental signified'.

The system of textuality extends infinitely and thus any belief in a moment of presence that would remain outside, precedent to, and governing this text is illusory.

There is no final presence outside of difference, nor would such a presence be reached by subdividing signifiers to reach some atomic

presence that would stop the differences becoming infinitesimal. This presence would be a substance, something that exists and maintains its identity without reference to anything else. It is an immediate self-presence which takes as its model God's relation to himself, or the subject's immediate auto-affection which is figured in the voice of the interior monologue. Divine substance or human subject makes little difference: both are to be submitted to a 'deconstruction' which demonstrates that individual identity cannot be formed if that identity is not differentiated from an infinity of other signifiers which that individual could be. How can one be unique if one has not differentiated oneself from everything else?

Deconstruction demonstrates this reference of any one signifier or text to an infinity of others. This reference is necessary in order for that signifier or text to form its identity and at the same time, since the extent of language is infinite, it results in the impossibility of ever fully forming this identity. The identity of any signifying element will always be in process, an event that is unfolding, as one realises more and more of one's references. One is constituted by this process of signification from one element to another, and from here to yet another. One never finishes finding out who one is, or what it is. The event of differentiating oneself is an event that is never over and done with. This infinity means that one's identity, and the meaning of what one says, or what one's text says, is never entirely within one's control. The text is not governed by a meaning or intention-to-say (*vouloir-dire*) that would be outside of it. It is this that deconstruction demonstrates: that one's meaning cannot be entirely determined independently of the signifiers one is compelled – contingently – to use. It demonstrates not only the dependence of meaning upon the text or context but also that since this text is infinite there are an infinite number of contexts in which a signifier can be used. Thus the meaning of a signifier is never determinable independently of the text and its meaning is simply never fully determinable, or indeed determinate.

In order to mean something, it is necessary to set a limit to one's textuality. But at the same time it is impossible to do so. Deconstruction is the attempt to acknowledge this necessity and its impossibility. Therefore it shows that signifiers cannot mean just what they are *intended* to mean since they *retain* their references to an infinity of other signifiers. Thus any text is susceptible of a double reading: one according to the authorial attempt to suture it, to isolate a finite text within an infinite one, and the other (which is always an infinity

of others) which is opened up by this situation of any finite text within an infinite one.

Deconstruction, therefore, involves no thesis of its own, it merely draws the most extreme consequences from the most penetrating discourses of its day, including, most importantly for our purposes, Saussure's understanding of the signifier. This issues in the notion of an infinite textuality, upon which every supposed instance of presence depends.

The only act which a deconstructive author performs is to show that any finite text depends for its meaning upon an infinite textuality which exceeds it, and at the same time upon its own excision from this infinite context. It finds a moment at which both this dependence and this attempt at independence become visible: in the signifier whose significance is in a technical sense 'undecidable'. Something akin to the 'navel', as Freud deployed the term, which marks at one and the same time one's dependence and independence (Freud 1953 [1900]: 525).

'Deconstruction' is meant to be nothing beyond a series of readings. It is not some thesis or procedure that can exist independently of the texts *which* it reads. Indeed it attempts to be the most faithful reading possible, more so than those which simply reconstruct the author's intention *or* simply ignore it. The decision to mean something (the belief in an intuitive access to a transcendental signified) and the ultimate undecidability of meaning are both *inherent* in the finite system, for we are finite subjects immersed in a textual system that can only be infinite.

If there is nothing outside of the determinate languages and discourses we find ourselves in at any point in history, clearly deconstruction cannot do otherwise than occupy the languages and discourses it has been given, but it does so in a way that admits their contingent placement within an infinity, which philosophical texts at least do not admit to be finally determinant of their meaning.

Deconstruction insists that one's access to an outside of language – 'reference' – is not so simple as is often believed. This is crucial in order to prevent any signifier from believing that it is the ultimate, that it has finally spoken the truth about the real. It is necessary to demonstrate the continuous impossibility of biunivocal reference, by situating texts within an infinite context, in order to show that no one word can ever name the real. And yet, by means of a strategic use of signifiers – which precisely involves a continuous deconstruction,

a continual identification of undecidables, proving the manufactured status of the transcendental signified – one can at least negatively indicate this beyond of language, this unnameable ‘other’.

Deconstruction thus proposes itself as innocent of all idiosyncratic theses, about either the nature of language or the nature of the real that is otherwise than language and the manner whereby the one can or cannot reach the other.

But what if this were not the case? What if this were merely how things appeared? What if, in deconstruction’s demonstration of the production of signification through differential textuality, there *was* a certain idiosyncrasy that amounted to a substantive thesis on the nature of language and its relation to the real? To demonstrate this would be to open deconstruction to the possibility of *criticism*.

It is not with the aim of criticising deconstruction that we open this book, but in order to ask the question of whether it is *possible* to criticise it, because it appears *prima facie* to be of a kind that is not *susceptible* to criticism. If we can demonstrate that deconstruction does in fact involve some idiosyncratic, thetic content in the form of a disavowed proposition, then we may be able to show that it can indeed be criticised.

The best way we have found to bring this purported idiosyncrasy to light is by exposing the existence of an *alternative* approach to the same problematic. That of Lacan. This will allow us to show that deconstruction’s idiosyncrasy relates to its attitude to the transcendental. To believe that we must adopt a transcendental approach and a transcendental approach *alone* might itself be deconstruction’s presupposition – although, as we shall come to suggest at the very end, perhaps this is merely philosophy’s presupposition, which Derrida, as much as Lacan, wishes to demonstrate. The difference will then perhaps be that while Derrida does not appear to believe in an alternative, Lacan – the non-philosopher? – does.

In any case, the transcendental attitude would be deconstruction’s most basic attitude to the other of the text. We shall come to specify just what ‘transcendental’ means for Derrida. In truth, the meaning he finds in the word, the direction in which it signals, will have been imparted to it by every major turning point in the word’s history: Aristotle, the Scholastics, Kant and Husserl. Preliminarily, and very simply, it will be a concern with the conditions of possibility of meaning, that which is generally thought to be a presence or self-presence *without* conditions.

This will also amount to asking the question of the conditions of possibility of language. It will therefore be to ask the question of what is *other than* linguistic, but it insists that we can address this other of language only by *means* of language. Language cannot leave itself, and so one can only gesture towards its other by using language in a certain way. Deconstruction amounts to the destruction of the metaphysical pretension of language simply to leave itself and refer to the real, the 'thing in itself'.

If we can say anything about the real this must be derived transcendently from the standpoint of language, or the signifier (*le signifiant*). We can begin nowhere else in our attempt to reach the real.

If the signifier is actual, deconstruction asks, if there really are signifiers, 'in the real', what must necessarily characterise the real? What must necessarily and continuously characterise the real in order that the signifier be possible? The answer is that the real must *write*. It must contain a heterogeneity or two orders, one of which is capable of leaving a trace in the other. From our standpoint, within the signifier, one way in which we may speak of the capacity to trace is in terms of a 'primitive' form of *writing*. And there are many other words one could use, and which Derrida indeed does use. The crucial point is that the other of language can be spoken about – by definition one might say – only *with* language. It must be figured on the basis of some feature which language can pick out, or rather, which characterises language itself.

And yet, one might ask: might there not be another way in which man as the speaking animal could reach the real? Might it be the case that Derrida understands man to be *entirely* 'imprisoned' within language, and to have no features which might themselves be otherwise than language? It is as if man were trapped within language and had to find some cunning way with words that would provide the password *out* of language, or the linguistic strategy with which to indicate that language is *not* everything, that there is another to it, but another that can only be reached by means of language.

But might there not be another way to approach the real? If man has language, is he not, according to the Aristotelian definition, also an animal? Might this animality not remain a feature of man and provide him with another access to the real than that provided by language? The psychoanalytic theory of Lacan argues for the proposition that the linguistic animal is incapable of leaving this animality behind, and that thereby the real that is other than language continues to feature in his existence, at least in the form of the object of his *desire*.

By juxtaposing Lacan with Derrida we are attempting to determine whether there is an alternative to Derrida's 'quasi-transcendentalism'. But this will not simply be the abstract hanging together of two independent positions; the fixation on the genesis of the human being in Lacan will be shown to affect the way in which we understand the transcendental deduction of the beyond of language. Thus, the Lacanian approach will issue in *another* understanding of the 'writing' which the real must carry out in order for language to exist. The genetic and the transcendental approaches to the signifier meet in the heart of a letter, the Greek letter *khi* (χ), which the current work, by superimposing the two trajectories of Lacan and Derrida, inscribes.

But why the need to criticise? Why should we ever have wished to ask about deconstruction's very susceptibility to criticism? And why initially turn to Lacan in this search? At least in part, this was determined by Derrida's own relationship with Lacan's texts, and the peculiar differences between this relationship and those which Derrida maintains with others of his contemporaries. It is noticeable that there is a certain haste and at the same time an incompleteness about Derrida's relations with Lacan. It is as if he engaged with *this* contemporary earlier than anyone else and persistently throughout his *œuvre*, but without ever getting to grips with his work. This haste and this lack do not characterise his relations with others, such as Habermas and Nancy, which came much later, and others that often occurred only posthumously.

Given the similarity of Lacan's project, the nature of this engagement has made us wonder about deconstruction's ability to enter genuine *dialogues* with discourses that present an alternative way of approaching the problems that deconstruction itself addresses. Is it perhaps the case that the texts which deconstruction reads are either deconstructible (which always means being susceptible to a non-metaphysical reading), such as those of Rousseau, or are themselves close approximations, to be made exact, of a deconstructive reading, such as those of Bataille? Thus one is either unconsciously both deconstructible and deconstructive, or one consciously attempts to be deconstructive. There is no other way in which texts are for Derrida.

But what of those texts which *cannot* be deconstructed? What of those other writings which presuppose neither a metaphysical relation between a text and its outside *nor* a deconstructive re-writing of this relation? Derrida honestly admits that there are some thinkers whom he does not know how to address. Looming large on this horizon is Deleuze, and for a long time it was Marx.

For us, the same seems to be the case with Lacan, and yet here there is a difference. From the very beginning, Derrida spoke of Lacan. Marginally, subliminally, but nevertheless tangibly; and, uniquely, Derrida admits to forming an opinion of Lacan *before* he had ever or could ever have read his complete *œuvre*. In this case then, he seems to apply deconstruction as a purely formal *framework* which he elsewhere resolutely claims that it is not. We might even say, without the caution of quotation marks, that he *criticises* Lacan. Is this because Derrida perceives Lacan as a *rival*?

In its fundamental characteristics, deconstruction does not change from one end of Derrida's work to the other. That this is so testifies to the extraordinary rigour of his thought from the start, but this persistence risks a certain rigidity which rules out in advance a genuine debate and a properly hospitable relation to its *rivals*. This would explain why Derrida rarely engaged with his contemporaries to the same extent as he did with figures from the past. But this reluctance makes Derrida's attitude to Lacan all the more surprising, and illuminating. It is as if Derrida sensed that Lacan, and Lacan alone, represented a genuine alternative to deconstruction, irreconcilable with it. And the fact that Derrida – surely one of the most intellectually honest men who has ever lived – never left Lacan behind, testifies to his continuing unease.

What does Derrida himself say about his precipitant entry into the fray? Without doubt, he saw Lacan as an aggressor, and the force of Lacanian discourse in France at the time was such that it had to be engaged with by a discourse, like deconstruction, which understood so well its inevitable situation within its contemporary discursive configuration.

Derrida's early impression of Lacan, formed on the basis of a small number of his earlier texts, before they were collected in *Écrits*, was that it contained 'motifs' that were pre-deconstructive. And yet at the same time Derrida saw that psychoanalysis was from the start an ally of deconstruction – and particularly insofar as language is central to an understanding of the unconscious. The paradox which Derrida never seems to be able to explain fully is that Lacan, the Freudian who most insisted upon the linguistic nature of the unconscious, was also the 'most deconstructible'. We shall understand this to result from the fact that Lacan was asking the same questions as Derrida but providing answers that were different to his own.

If something about Lacan disturbed Derrida, we suggest that it was his proximity. Lacan shared Derrida's terrain, his own problematic,

but he approached it from a quite different angle, one which Derrida perhaps could never quite measure. It was perhaps the uncanniness of this doubling, which Derrida could not control, that spurred his premature action. Towards the very end of their long, sporadic, joust, Derrida came to think of Lacan and himself as ‘lovers’, and what are lovers if not two subjects who actively strive, not for each other, but for a common object beyond both of them, accidentally almost, in reaching for this forbidden fruit, clutching each other’s hand? This in any case was Lacan’s understanding (cf. SVIII: 66–7).

Derrida’s failure properly to encounter Lacan indicates one thing: that *deconstruction can only deconstruct* – it can only be itself, and cannot become other than it is, and thus respond within a genuine dialogue. This after all is the limit of any great thought: it can be just one thing. It can only be itself. Mediocre thinkers can be many things, while great thinkers are consumed by a single thought and their task is to remain true to the fullest expression of that insight. That ‘deconstruction can only deconstruct’ means that deconstruction *is* idiosyncratic, and hence vulnerable to criticism.

The Lacanian alternative

Let us look ahead to what Lacan’s alternative comprises. It concerns the animal, and the generation of the human being from animal nature.

What initially suggested to us that Lacan might be attempting something both akin to deconstruction and different from it, was his famous triad of imaginary, symbolic and real. Derrida often rails against this tri-partition, but it seems to us that his attention is confined to the symbolic and the real. Now while he is naturally concerned to find an ‘excluded middle’ (*tertium datur*) between the inside and the outside of the text as metaphysics understands it, a relationship of opposition, we shall contend that this third is simply the real, but the real as properly understood. The notion of an autonomous realm, with a nature heterogeneous to both, is something that we believe Derrida does not allow himself. Lacan, on the other hand, does. This suggests both that Lacan is addressing Derrida’s question, and that he reaches a different conclusion. And, as we shall see, it shows that he goes about this by way of a different method.

We shall argue that Derrida’s limiting himself, and man, to just two terms, the symbolic and the real, evinces his belief that we are fundamentally trapped within our cultural symbolic system and all that can be attempted is a strategic manner of indicating its beyond, basically

per negativum. This would be to approach the real transcendently, but to acknowledge that the conditions of one's own possibility are only relatively other and not absolutely other. In other words, that the other extends beyond that otherness which is relative to ourselves, we creatures of language.

This is evinced in Derrida's belief that we can only speak of the outside of the opposition between symbolic and real in terms of oppositions and the deconstruction of these oppositions. Opposition is a relation which characterises *language*. We are condemned to an oppositional relation to the outside, all we can do is work strategically within the opposition, and indicate what it eclipses.

On the other hand, from the very start, Lacan attends to the imaginary. A third realm that obeys the rules neither of the text nor its outside. It is a realm which was revealed to Lacan by his initial travails as a psychiatrist, in the region of science. This attention to science was part of his study of the *chronological* genesis of the human being, from infant to adult. This extended later on into a psychoanalytic and quasi-anthropological interest in the emergence of language and the cultural system, together forming the order of the 'symbolic'. Both of these (ontogenesis and phylogenesis) seem to us to be either ignored by Derrida or restricted in the importance bestowed upon them.

For Lacan, the human being is characterised not by an oppositional understanding of the relation between symbolic and real, but by a triplex binding of symbolic, real and imaginary. Thus from the very beginning, despite his stress on language and culture – a crucial part of psychoanalysis generally – Lacan did not characterise the human being in terms of language alone. For after all, the 'animal that has language' (*zōon logon ekhon*) is also the *animal* that has language. We are not merely entrapped by language, we are also caged in by our *bestial* nature.

Thus, with respect to Derrida, we alter our understanding of the present state in which we find ourselves, and this must in turn alter the manner in which we go about extracting ourselves from this state. We must know from what to abstract before we begin our abstraction. It is not just the symbolic that entraps us but the imaginary as well. But at the same time, the imaginary may provide us with another opening onto the genuinely real, outside of its oppositional determination by language. In fact, this is the ambiguity of the imaginary as Lacan understands it.

The imaginary is the realm of Gestaltic images which, when perceived, trigger instincts. It is only due to a malfunctioning of the

imaginary in the human animal that the symbolic order is produced. Man needs the crutch of the symbolic in order to compensate for his inability *naturally* to satisfy his vital needs. (These needs are then minimally satisfied but at the cost of their infinitisation into desire.) If one does not attend to evolution – or rather, since Lacan is not a Darwinian, to ‘genesis’ – and the sciences which speak of the animal and its characteristics, one will perhaps miss something of the nature of language. It is perhaps an essential feature of the word that it is the answer to a need that arises in a realm which precedes it. For Lacan, its present nature forever bears the scar of its genesis. Language yields up traces of a *chronological*, pre-historic past, in which our inhuman, animal nature can be read.

That language never truly eradicates the beast is foundational for psychoanalytic thought. The *zōon*’s primal cries resound in the *logos* of the *zōon logon ekhon*. We are simply not consumed by language without remainder. The animal persists.

The imaginary is the animal within us. If Derrida ignores this imaginary, it is because he ignores the genesis of the human being and believes that we must ignore it, now that we are firmly enmeshed in a network of oppositions, of dualities. Does he thereby understand the human being in a way that is *too* human? Does this not leave Derrida unable to take into account the insights of any natural and human sciences which do *not* understand the world in a way that conforms to the laws of the signifier or the nature of the trace? Does Derrida display too much belief in the philosopher when he understands man as the animal who has language and then proceeds to investigate only the *logos*?

By failing to envisage the full repercussions of this animal genesis, does Derrida miss the fact that the human remains a product of pre-human and inhuman tendencies, animal tendencies, material tendencies, which have conglomerated in one only apparently stable species, which we perceive as such only as a result of our selective and limited perceptual systems? What if the human were rather a site which of itself involved an inhuman otherness, and one which set a definite limit to the infinite differentiation of the signifier? Perhaps we are not only human, but also animals, and even minerals, and as such able in some way to access these elements which existed long before this conglomerate ‘man’ came about?

If the present is constituted by something other than language, if the symbolic is joined and limited by the *imaginary*, then this must lead us to understand the real in a different way. The real is differentiated not

merely oppositionally, from the symbolic, but from *both* the symbolic and the imaginary. This real will not simply be the real as it is accessed from the standpoint of the symbolic, which Derrida calls ‘archi-writing’ – among other things – but also the real of the *imaginary*.

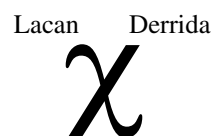
Lacan’s thought provides philosophy with a new way to relate to the *non*-philosophical, and to the sciences in particular. For do these sciences not at times genuinely reveal an inhuman or pre-human world, elements which are utterly distinct from those categories which our perspectival perception attributes to the world? At least one name for the jointure of philosophy and science is ‘psychoanalysis’.

Thus, while we agree with Derrida’s assertion of the necessity of transcendentalism, we shall propose that the way in which we transcend determination towards the indeterminate – the ‘other’, the ‘real’ – should be modified by an attention to genesis, to scientific insight, to the animal. This is the method that will lead Lacan towards an alternative to Derridean deconstruction.

The chiasm of the two paths

The course of this work may be mapped by the miniscule form of the letter *khi*. I insist on this diagram partly in tribute to Lacan’s diagrams and the way in which they present a different form of writing to Derrida’s. At the same time, it will be remembered that it is on the topic of the *letter* that Derrida distances himself from Lacan. The latter’s diagrams are deliberately overloaded with signification; they are meant to transport us sublimely beyond the limits of meaning towards the real, and they must, I believe, always be understood as a form of *letter*. Every diagrammatic image is a letter, and every letter a diagram. Writing for Lacan always involves an imaginary dimension, the trace that lies at the basis of language constituting an indivisible imaginary unity, which amounts to the pre-symbolic real as it is preserved in the symbol. This imaginary dimension is precisely what distinguishes his writing from Derrida’s.

Thus the letter as diagram and the diagram as letter is the perfect model for our own approach, our own writing, which imprints Lacan’s *œuvre* on Derrida’s:



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