what each of these words (transmission, meaning, etc.) involved. And
yet, we have no prior authorization for neglecting communication as a
word, or for impoverishing its polysemy aspects; indeed, this word
opens up a semantic domain that precisely does not limit itself to seman-
tics, semiotics, and even less to linguistics. For one characteristic of
the semantic field of the word communication is that it designates non-
semantic movements as well. Here, even a provisional recourse to
ordinary language and to the equivocations of natural language instruc
tus that one can, for instance, communicate a movement or that a tremor
(ébranlement), a shock, a displacement of force can be communicated
—that is, propagated, transmitted. We also speak of different or remote
places communicating with each other by means of a passage or open-
ing. What takes place, in this sense, what is transmitted, communicated,
does not involve phenomena of meaning or signification. In such cases
we are dealing neither with a semantic or conceptual content, nor with a
semiotic operation, and even less with a linguistic exchange.

We would not, however, assert that this non-semiotic meaning of
the word communication, as it works in ordinary language, in one or
more of the so-called natural languages, constitutes the literal or primary
(primitif) meaning and that consequently the semantic, semiotic, or lin-
guistic meaning corresponds to a derivation, extension, or reduction, a
metaphoric displacement. We would not assert, as one might be
tempted to do, that semio-linguistic communication acquired its title
more metaphorico, by analogy with “physical” or “real” communication,
inasmuch as it also serves as a passage, transporting and transmitting
something, rendering it accessible. We will not assert this for the follow-
ing reasons:

1) because the value of the notion of literal meaning (sens propre)
appears more problematical than ever, and

2) because the value of displacement, of transport, etc., is precisely
constitutive of the concept of metaphor with which one claims to com-
prehend the semantic displacement that is brought about from com-
munication as a non-semio-linguistic phenomenon to communication as
a semio-linguistic phenomenon.

(Let me note parenthetically that this communication is going
to concern, indeed already concerns, the problem of polysemy and of
communication, of dissemination—which I shall oppose to polysemy—
and of communication. In a moment a certain concept of writing cannot
fail to arise that may transform itself and perhaps transform the prob-
lematic under consideration.)

It seems self-evident that the ambiguous field of the word “com-
munication” can be massively reduced by the limits of what is called a
context (and I give notice, again parenthetically, that this particular communication will be concerned with the problem of context and with the question of determining exactly how writing relates to context in general). For example, in a philosophic colloquium on philosophy in the French language, a conventional context—produced by a kind of consensus that is implicit but structurally vague—seems to prescribe that one propose “communications” concerning communication, communications in a discursive form, colloquial communications, oral communications destined to be listened to, and to engage or to pursue dialogues within the horizon of an intelligibility and truth that is meaningful, such that ultimately general agreement may, in principle, be attained. These communications are supposed to confine themselves to the element of a determinate, “natural” language, here designated as French, which commands certain very particular uses of the word communication. Above all, the object of such communications is supposed, by priority or by privilege, to organize itself around communication qua discourse, or in any case qua signification. Without exhausting all the implications and the entire structure of an “event” such as this one, an effort that would require extended preliminary analysis, the conditions that I have just recalled seem to be evident; and those who doubt it need only consult our program to be convinced.

But are the conditions [les réquisits] of a context ever absolutely determinable? This is, fundamentally, the most general question that I shall endeavor to elaborate. Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of context? Or does the notion of context not conceal, behind a certain confusion, philosophical presuppositions of a very determinate nature? Stating it in the most summary manner possible, I shall try to demonstrate why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather, why its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated. This structural non-saturation would have a double effect:

1) it would mark the theoretical inadequacy of the current concept of context (linguistic or non-linguistic), as it is accepted in numerous domains of research, including all the concepts with which it is systematically associated;

2) it would necessitate a certain generalization and a certain displacement of the concept of writing. This concept would no longer be comprehensible in terms of communication, at least in the limited sense of a transmission of meaning. Inversely, it is within the general domain of writing, defined in this way, that the effects of semiotic communication can be determined as effects that are particular, secondary, inscribed, and supplementary.
the homogeneity of all dimensions [ordres]. Analogy is a major concept in the thought of Condillac. I have also chosen this example because the analysis, "retracing" the origin and function of writing, is placed, in a rather uncritical manner, under the authority of the category of communication.1 If men write it is: (1) because they have to communicate; (2) because what they have to communicate is their "thought," their "ideas," their representations. Thought, as representation, precedes and governs communication, which transports the "idea," the signified content; (3) because men are already in a state that allows them to communicate their thought to themselves and to each other when, in a continuous manner, they invent the particular means of communication, writing. Here is a passage from chapter XIII of the Second Part ("On Language and Method"), First Section ("On the Origins and Progress of Language"): (Writing is thus a modality of language and marks a continual progression in an essentially linguistic communication), paragraph XIII, "On Writing": "Men in a state of communicating their thoughts by means of sounds, felt the necessity of imagining new signs capable of perpetuating those thoughts and of making them known to persons who are absent" (1 underscored this value of absence, which, if submitted to renewed questioning, will risk introducing a certain break in the homogeneity of the system). Once men are already in the state of "communicating their thoughts," and of doing it by means of sounds (which is, according to Condillac, a second step, when articulated language has come to "supplant" [suppléer] the language of action, which is the single and radical principle of all language), the birth and progress of writing will follow in a line that is direct, simple, and continuous. The history of writing will conform to a law of mechanical economy: to gain or save the most space and time possible by means of the most convenient abbreviation; hence writing will never have the slightest effect on either the structure or the contents of the meaning (the ideas) that it is supposed to transmit [véhiculer]. The same content, formerly communicated by gestures and sounds, will henceforth be transmitted by writing, by successively different modes of notation, from pictographic writing to alphabetic writing, collaterally by the hieroglyphic writing of the Egyptians and the ideographic writing of the Chinese. Condillac continues: "Thus, the imagination will represent to them only the very same images that they had already expressed through actions and words, and which had, from the very beginning, rendered language figural and metaphorical. The most natural means was thus to depict [dessiner] images of things. To express the idea of a man or of a horse, one represented the form of the one or of the other, and the first attempt at writing was nothing but a simple painting" (my emphasis—J. D.).

The representational character of the written communication—writing as picture, reproduction, imitation of its content—will be the invariant trait of all progress to come. The concept of representation is here indissociable from those of communication and of expression that I have emphasized in Condillac's text. Representation, of course, will become more complex, will develop supplementary ramifications and degrees; it will become the representation of a representation in various systems of writing, hieroglyphic, ideographic, or phonetic-alphabetical, but the representative structure which marks the first degree of expressive communication, the relation idea/sign, will never be either annulled or transformed. Describing the history of the types of writing, their continuous derivation from a common root that is never displaced and which establishes a sort of community of analogical participation among all the species of writing, Condillac concludes (in what is virtually a citation of Warburton, as is most of this chapter): "Thus, the general history of writing proceeds by simple gradation from the state of painting to that of the letter, for letters are the final steps that are left to be taken after the Chinese marks which, on the one hand, participate in the nature of Egyptian hieroglyphics, and on the other, participate in that of letters just as the hieroglyphs participate both in Mexican paintings and Chinese characters. These characters are so close to our writing that an alphabet simply diminishes the inconvenience of their great number and is their succinct abbreviation."

Having thus confirmed the motif of economic reduction in its homogeneous and mechanical character, let us now return to the notion of absence that I underscored, in passing, in the text of Condillac. How is that notion determined there?

1) It is first of all the absence of the addressee. One writes in order to communicate something to those who are absent. The absence of the sender, of the receiver [destinateur], from the mark that he abandons, and which cuts itself off from him and continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions [vouloir-dire], indeed even after his death, his absence, which moreover belongs to the structure of all writing—and I shall add further on, of all language in general—this absence is not examined by Condillac.

2) The absence of which Condillac speaks is determined in the most classic manner as a continuous modification and progressive extenuation of presence. Representation regularly supplants [suppléer] presence. However, articulating all the moments of experience insofar as it is involved in signification ("to supplant," suppléer, is one of the most decisive and most frequent operational concepts in Condillac's Essay), this operation of supplementation is not exhibited as a break in presence
but rather as a continuous and homogeneous reparation and modification of presence in the representation.

I am not able to analyze, here, everything presupposed in Condillac’s philosophy and elsewhere, by this concept of absence as the modification of presence. Let us note only that this concept governs another operational notion (for the sake of convenience I invoke the classical opposition between operational and thematic) which is no less decisive for the Essay: tracing and retracing. Like the concept of supplanting [suppléance], the concept of trace would permit an interpretation quite different from Condillac’s. According to him, tracing means “expressing,” “representing,” “recalling,” “rendering present” (“Thus painting probably owes its origin to the necessity of tracing our thoughts in the manner described, and this necessity has doubtless contributed to preserving the language of action as that which is most readily depictable” [“On Writing,” p. 128]. The sign comes into being at the same time as imagination and memory, the moment it is necessitated by the absence of the object from present perception [la perception présente] (“Memory, as we have seen, consists in nothing but the power of recalling the signs of our ideas, or the circumstances that accompanied them; and this power only takes place by virtue of the analogy of the signs [my emphasis—J. D.: the concept of analogy, which organizes the entire system of Condillac, provides the general guarantee of all the continuities and in particular that linking presence to absence] that we have chosen; and by the order that we have instituted among our ideas, the objects that we wish to retrace are bound up with several of our present needs” 1, 11 ch. iv, # 39)]. This holds true for all the orders of signs distinguished by Condillac (arbitrary, accidental, and even natural, distinctions that Condillac qualifies and, on certain points, even calls into question in his letters to Cramer). The philosophical operation that Condillac also calls “retracing” consists in reversing, by a process of analysis and continuous decomposition, the movement of genetic derivation that leads from simple sensation and present perception to the complex edifice of representation: from ordinary presence to the language of the most formal calculus [calcul].

It would be easy to demonstrate that, fundamentally, this type of analysis of written signification neither begins nor ends with Condillac. If I call this analysis “ideological,” I do so neither to oppose its notions to “scientific” concepts nor to appeal to the dogmatic—one might also say ideological—usage to which the term “ideology” is often put, while seldom subjecting either the various possibilities or the history of the word to serious consideration. If I define notions such as those of Condillac as “ideological” it is because, against the background [sur le fond] of a vast, powerful, and systematic philosophical tradition dominated by the prominence of the idea (eidos, idea), they delineate the field of reflection of the French “ideologues,” who in the wake of Condillac elaborated a theory of the sign as representation of the idea which itself represented the object perceived. From that point on, communication is that which circulates a representation as an ideal content (meaning); and writing is a species of this general communication. A species: a communication admitting a relative specificity within a genre.

If we now ask ourselves what, in this analysis, is the essential predicate of this specific difference, we rediscover absence.

I offer here the following two propositions or hypotheses:

1) since every sign, whether in the “language of action” or in articulated language (before even the intervention of writing in the classical sense), presupposes a certain absence (to be determined), the absence within the particular field of writing will have to be of an original type if one intends to grant any specificity whatsoever to the written sign;

2) if per chance the predicate thus introduced to characterize the absence peculiar and proper to writing were to find itself no less appropriate to every species of sign and of communication, the consequence would be a general shift: writing would no longer be one species of communication, and all the concepts to whose generality writing had been subordinated (including the concept itself qua meaning, idea or grasp of meaning and of idea, the concept of communication, of the sign, etc.) would appear to be non-critical, ill-formed, or destined, rather, to insure the authority and the force of a certain historical discourse.

Let us attempt, then, while still continuing to take this classical discourse as our point of departure, to characterize the absence that seems to intervene in a specific manner in the functioning of writing.

A written sign is proffered in the presence of the receiver. How to style this absence? One could say that at the moment when I am writing, the receiver may be absent from my field of present perception. But is not this absence merely a distant presence, one which is delayed or which, in one form or another, is idealized in its representation? This does not seem to be the case, or at least this distance, divergence, delay, this deferral [différance] must be capable of being carried to a certain absoluteness of absence if the structure of writing, assuming that writing exists, is to constitute itself. It is at that point that the difference [difference and deferral, trans.] as writing could no longer be an (ontological) modification of presence. In order for my “written communication” to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectiv-
ity of receivers. Such iterability—(iter, again, probably comes from itara, other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved (whether pictographical, hieroglyphic, ideographic, phonetic, alphabetic, to cite the old categories). A writing that is not structurally readable—iterable—beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing. Although this would seem to be obvious, I do not want it accepted as such, and I shall examine the final objection that could be made to this proposition. Imagine a writing whose code would be so idiomatic as to be established and known, as secret cipher, by only two "subjects." Could we maintain that, following the death of the receiver, or even of both partners, the mark left by one of them is still writing? Yes, to the extent that, organized by a code, even an unknown and non-linguistic one, it is constituted in its identity as mark by its iterability, in the absence of such and such a person, and hence ultimately of every empirically determined "subject." This implies that there is no such thing as a code—organon of iterability—which could be structurally secret. The possibility of repeating and thus of identifying the marks is implicit in every code, making it into a network [une grille] that is communicable, transmittable, decipherable, iterable for a third, and hence for every possible user in general. To be what it is, all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence, it is an rupture in presence, the "death" or the possibility of the "death" of the receiver inscribed in the structure of the mark (I note in passing that this is the point where the value or the "effect" of transcendentiality is linked necessarily to the possibility of writing and of "death" as analyzed). The paradoxical consequence of my here having recourse to iteration and to code: the disruption, in the last analysis, of the authority of the code as a finite system of rules; at the same time, the radical destruction of any context as the protocol of code. We will come to this in a moment.

What holds for the receiver holds also, for the same reasons, for the sender or the producer. To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten. When I say "my future disappearance" [disparition: also, demise, trans.], it is in order to render this proposition more immediately acceptable. I ought to be able to say my disappearance, pure and simple, my non-presence in general, for instance the non-presence of my intention of saying something meaning-ful [mon vouloir-dire, mon intention-de-signification], of my wish to communicate, from the emission or production of the mark. For a writing to be a writing it must continue to "act" and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written "in his name." One could repeat at this point the analysts outlined above this time with regard to the addressee. The situation of the writer and of the underwriter [du souscripteur: the signatory, trans.] is, concerning the written text, basically the same as that of the reader. This essential drift [dérive] bearing on writing as an iterative structure, cut off from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the ultimate authority, orphaned and separated at birth from the assistance of its father, is precisely what Plato condemns in the Phaedrus. If Plato's gesture is, as I believe, the philosophical movement par excellence, one can measure what is at stake here.

Before elaborating more precisely the inevitable consequences of these nuclear traits of all writing (that is: (1) the break with the horizon of communication as communication of consciousnesses or of presences and as linguistic or semantic transport of the desire to mean what one says [vouloir-dire]; (2) the disengagement of all writing from the semantic or hermeneutic horizons which, inasmuch as they are horizons of meaning, are riven [crever] by writing; (3) the necessity of disengaging from the concept of polysemics what I have elsewhere called dissemination, which is also the concept of writing; (4) the disqualification or the limiting of the concept of context, whether "real" or "linguistic," inasmuch as its rigorous theoretical determination as well as its empirical saturation is rendered impossible or insufficient by writing, I would like to demonstrate that the traits that can be recognized in the classical, narrowly defined concept of writing, are generalizable. They are valid not only for all orders of "signs" and for all languages in general but moreover, beyond semi-linguistic communication, for the entire field of what philosophy would call experience, even the experience of being: the above-mentioned "presence."

What are in effect the essential predicates in a minimal determination of the classical concept of writing?

1) A written sign, in the current meaning of this word, is a mark that subsists, one which does not exhaust itself in the moment of its inscription and which can give rise to an iteration in the absence and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a
given context, has omitted or produced it. This is what has enabled us, at least traditionally, to distinguish a "written" from an "oral" communication.

2) At the same time, a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription. This breaking force [force de rupture] is not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written text. In the case of a so-called "real" context, what I have just asserted is all too evident. This allegedly real context includes a certain "present" of the inscription, the presence of the writer to what he has written, the entire environment and the horizon of his experience, and above all the intention, the wanting-to-say-what-he-means, which animates his inscription at a given moment. But the sign possesses the characteristic of being readable even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor consciously intended to say at the moment he wrote it, i.e., abandoned it to its essential drift. As far as the internal semiotic context is concerned, the force of the rupture is no less important: by virtue of its essential iterability, a written syntagma can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted or given without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning, if not all possibility of "communicating," precisely. One can perhaps come to recognize other possibilities in it by inscribing it or grafting it onto other chains. No context can entirely enclose it. Nor any code, the code here being both the possibility and impossibility of writing, of its essential iterability (repetition/alterity).

3) This force of rupture is tied to the spacing [espacement] that constitutes the written sign: spacing which separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain (the always open possibility of its disengagement and graft), but also from all forms of present reference (whether past or future in the modified form of the present that is past or to come), objective or subjective. This spacing is not the simple negativity of a lacuna but rather the emergence of the mark. It does not remain, however, as the labor of the negative in the service of meaning, of the living concept, of the telos, supersedable and reducible in the Aufhebung of a dialectic.

Are these three predicates, together with the entire system they entail, limited, as is often believed, strictly to "written" communication in the narrow sense of this word? Are they not to be found in all language, in spoken language for instance, and ultimately in the totality of "experience" insofar as it is inseparable from this field of the mark, which is to say, from the network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability, which are separable from their internal and external context and also from themselves, inasmuch as the very iterability which constituted their identity does not permit them ever to be a unity that is identical to itself?

Let us consider any element of spoken language, be it a small or large unit. The first condition of its functioning is its delineation with regard to a certain code; but I prefer not to become too involved here with this concept of code which does not seem very reliable to me; let us say that a certain self-identity of this element (mark, sign, etc.) is required to permit its recognition and repetition. Through empirical variations of tone, voice, etc., possibly of a certain accent, for example, we must be able to recognize the identity, roughly speaking, of a signifying form. Why is this identity paradoxically the division or dissociation of itself, which will make of this phonetic sign a grapheme? Because this unity of the signifying form only constitutes itself by virtue of its iterability, by the possibility of its being repeated in the absence not only of its "referent," which is self-evident, but in the absence of a determinate signified or of the intention of actual signification, as well as of all intention of present communication. This structural possibility of being weaned from the referent or from the signified (hence from communication and from its context) seems to me to make every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general, which is to say, as we have seen, the non-present remainder [reste] of a differential mark cut off from its putative "production" or origin. And I shall even extend this law to all "experience" in general if it is conceded that there is no experience consisting of pure presence but only of chains of differential marks.

Let us dwell for a moment on this point and return to that absence of the referent and even of the signified meaning, and hence of the correlative intention to signify. The absence of referent is a possibility easily enough admitted today. This possibility is not only an empirical actuality. It constructs the mark, and the potential presence of the referent at the moment it is designated does not modify in the slightest the structure of the mark, which implies that the mark can do without the referent. Husserl, in his Logical Investigations, analyzed this possibility very rigorously, and in a two-fold manner:

1) An utterance [enonce] whose object is not impossible but only possible can very well be made and understood without its real object (its referent) being present, either to the person who produced the statement or to the one who receives it. If while looking out the window, I say: "The sky is blue," this utterance will be intelligible (let us say, provisionally if you like, communicable) even if the interlocutor does not see the sky; even if I do not see it myself, if I see it badly, if I am mistaken or if I wish to mislead my interlocutor. Not that this is always
the case; but the structure of possibility of this utterance includes the capability to be formed and to function as a reference that is empty or cut off from its referent. Without this possibility, which is also that of iterability in general, "generable," and generative of all marks, there would be no utterance.

2) The absence of the signified. Husserl analyzes this as well. He judges it to be always possible even if, according to the axiology and teleology that governs his analysis, he judges this possibility to be inferior, dangerous, or "critical": it opens the phenomenon of the crisis of meaning. This absence of meaning can take three forms:

A) I can manipulate symbols without animating them, in an active and actual manner, with the attention and intention of signification (crisis of mathematical symbolism, according to Husserl). Husserl insists on the fact that this does not prevent the sign from functioning; the crisis or the emptiness of mathematical meaning does not limit its technical progress (the intervention of writing is decisive here, as Husserl himself remarks in The Origin of Geometry).

B) Certain utterances can have a meaning although they are deprived of objective signification. "The circle is squared" is a proposition endowed with meaning. It has sufficient meaning at least for me to judge it false or contradictory ("Udnerstling" and not stimlos, Husserl says). I place this example under the category of the absence of the signified, although in this case the tripartite division into signifier/signified/referent is not adequate to a discussion of the Husserlian analysis. "Squared circle" marks the absence of a referent, certainly, as well as that of a certain signified, but not the absence of meaning. In these two cases, the crisis of meaning (non-presence in general, absence as the absence of the referent—or the perception—or of the meaning—or the intention of actual signification) is still bound to the essential possibility of writing; and this crisis is not an accident, a factual and empirical anomaly of spoken language, it is also its positive possibility and its "internal" structure, in the form of a certain outside [dehors].

C) Finally there is what Husserl calls Sinnlosigkeit or agrammaticality. For instance, "the green is either" or "abracadabra" (le vert est ou; the ambiguity of ou or où is noted below, trans.). In such cases Husserl considers that there is no language any more, or at least no "logical" language, no cognitive language such as Husserl construes in a teleological manner, no language accorded the possibility of the intuition of objects given in person and signified in truth. We are confronted here with a decisive difficulty. Before stopping to deal with it, I note a point that touches our discussion of communication, namely that the primary interest of the Husserlian analysis to which I am referring here (while precisely detaching it up to a certain point, from its context or its teleological and metaphysical horizon, an operation which itself ought to provoke us to ask how and why it is always possible), is its claim rigorously to dissociate (not without a certain degree of success) from every phenomenon of communication the analysis of the sign or the expression (Ausdruck) as signifying sign, the seeking to say something (bedeutungsvolles Zeichen).

Let us return to the case of agrammatical Sinnlosigkeit. What interests Husserl in the Logical Investigations is the system of rules of a universal grammar, not from a linguistic point of view but from a logical and epistemological one. In an important note to the second edition, he specifies that his concern is with a pure logical grammar, that is, with the universal conditions of possibility for a morphology of significations in their cognitive relation to a possible object, not with a pure grammar in general, considered from a psychological or linguistic point of view. Thus, it is solely in a context determined by a will to know, by an epistemic intention, by a conscious relation to the object as cognitive object within a horizon of truth, solely in this oriented contextual field is "the green is either" unacceptable. But as "the green is either" or "abracadabra" do not constitute their context by themselves, nothing prevents them from functioning in another context as signifying marks (or indices, as Husserl would say). Not only in contingent cases such as a translation from German into French, which would endow "the green is either" with grammaticality, since "either" (oder) becomes for the ear "where" [ou] (a spatial mark). "Where has the green gone (of the lawn: the green is where)." "Where is the glass gone in which I wanted to give you something to drink?" ["Où est passé le verre dans lequel je voulais vous donner à boire?"] But even "the green is either" itself still signifies an example of agrammaticality. And this is the possibility on which I want to insist: the possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semiotic communication; in writing, which is to say in the possibility of its functioning being cut off, at a certain point, from its "original" desire-to-say-what-one-means [vouloir-dire] and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context. Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illegible. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the
contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring [ancrage]. This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called "normal." What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way?

PARASITES, ITEM, OF WRITING: THAT IT PERHAPS DOES NOT EXIST

I now propose to elaborate a bit further this question with special attention to—but in order, as well, to pass beyond—the problematic of the performative. It concerns us here for several reasons:

1) First of all, Austin, through his emphasis on an analysis of perlocution and above all of illocution, appears to consider speech acts only as acts of communication. The author of the introduction to the French edition of How To Do Things With Words, quoting Austin, notes as much: "It is by comparing constative utterances (i.e., classical 'assertions, generally considered as true or false 'descriptions' of facts) with performative utterances (from the English 'performative,' i.e., allowing to accomplish something through speech itself) that Austin is led to consider every utterance worthy of the name (i.e., intended to communicate—thus excluding, for example, reflex-exclamations) as being primarily and above all a speech act produced in the total situation in which the interlocutors find themselves" (How To Do Things With Words, p. 147, C. Lane, Introduction to the French translation, p. 19).

2) This category of communication is relatively new. Austin's notions of illocution and perlocution do not designate the transference or passage of a thought-content, but, in some way, the communication of an original movement (to be defined within a general theory of action), an operation and the production of an effect. Communicating, in the case of the performative, if such a thing, in all rigor and in all purity, should exist (for the moment, I am working within that hypothesis and at that stage of the analysis), would be tantamount to communicating a force through the impetus [impulsion] of a mark.

3) As opposed to the classical assertion, to the constative utterance, the performative does not have its referent (but here that word is certainly no longer appropriate, and this precisely is the interest of the discovery) outside of itself or, in any event, before and in front of itself. It does not describe something that exists outside of language and prior to it. It produces or transforms a situation, it effects; and even if it can be said that a constative utterance also effectuates something and always transforms a situation, it cannot be maintained that that constitutes its internal structure, its manifest function or destination, as in the case of the performative.

4) Austin was obliged to free the analysis of the performative from the authority of the truth value, from the true/false opposition, at least in its classical form, and to substitute for it at times the value of force, of difference of force (illocutionary or perlocutionary force). (In this line of thought, which is nothing less than Nietzschean, this in particular strikes me as moving in the direction of Nietzsche himself, who often acknowledged a certain affinity for a vein of English thought.)

For these four reasons, at least, it might seem that Austin has shattered the concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept. The performative is a "communication" which is not limited strictly to the transference of a semantic content that is already constituted and dominated by an orientation toward truth (be it the unveling of what is in its being or the adequation-congruence between a judicative utterance and the thing itself).

And yet—such at least is what I should like to attempt to indicate now—all the difficulties encountered by Austin in an analysis which is patient, open, aporetical, in constant transformation, often more fruitful in the acknowledgement of its impasses than in its positions, strike me as having a common root. Austin has not taken account of what—in the structure of location (thus before any illocutory or perlocutory determination)—already entails the system of predicates I call graphematic in general and consequently blurs [brouille] all the oppositions which follow, oppositions whose pertinence, purity, and rigor Austin has unsuccessfully attempted to establish.

In order to demonstrate this, I shall take for granted the fact that Austin's analyses at all times require a value of context, and even of a context exhaustively determined, in theory or teleologically; the long list of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicities" which in their variety may affect the performative event of "infelicit
tions, or in the internal and linguistic context, or in the grammatical form, or in the semantic determination of the words employed; no irreducible polysemy, that is, no "dissemination" escaping the horizon of the unity of meaning. I quote from the first two lectures of How to Do Things with Words:

Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, appropriate, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should also perform certain other actions, whether physical or mental actions or even acts of uttering further words. Thus, for naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her; for (Christian) marrying, it is essential that I should not be already married with a wife living, sane and unfaithful, and so on; for a bet to have been made, it is generally necessary for the offer of the bet to have been accepted by a taker (who must have done something, such as to say 'Done'), and it is hardly a gift if I say 'I give it you' but never hand it over.

So far, well and good. (Pp. 8–9)

In the Second Lecture, after eliminating the grammatical criterion in his customary manner, Austin examines the possibility and the origin of failures or "infelicities" of performative utterance. He then defines the six indispensable—if not sufficient—conditions of success. Through the values of "conventional procedure," "correctness," and "completeness," which occur in the definition, we necessarily find one more of those of an exhaustively definable context, of a free consciousness present to the totality of the operation, and of absolutely meaningful speech [voulant dire] master of itself: the teleological jurisdiction of an entire field whose organizing center remains intention.5 Austin's procedure is rather remarkable and typical of that philosophical tradition with which he would like to have so few ties. It consists in recognizing that the possibility of the negative (in this case, of infelicities) is in fact a structural possibility, that failure is an essential risk of the operations under consideration; then, in a move which is almost immediately simultaneous, in the name of a kind of ideal regulation, it excludes that risk as accidental, exterior, one which teaches us nothing about the linguistic phenomenon, being considered. This is all the more curious—and, strictly speaking, unanswerable—in view of Austin's ironic denunciation of the "fetishized" opposition: value/fact.

Thus, for example, concerning the conventionality without which there is no performative, Austin acknowledges that all conventional acts are exposed to failure: "it seems clear in the first place that, although it has excited us (or failed to excite us) in connexion with certain acts, which are or are in part acts of uttering words, infelicity is an ill to which all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all conventional acts: not indeed that every ritual is liable to every form of infelicity (but then nor is every performative utterance)" (pp. 18–19, Austin's emphasis).

In addition to the questions posed by a notion as historically sedimented as "convention," it should be noted at this point:

1) that Austin, at this juncture, appears to consider solely the conventionality constituting the circumstance of the utterance [énoncé], its contextual surroundings, and not a certain conventionality intrinsic to what constitutes the speech act [location] itself, all that might be summarized rapidly under the problematical rubric of "the arbitrary nature of the sign," which extends, aggravates, and radicalizes the difficulty. "Ritual" is not a possible occurrence [éventualité]; but rather, as iterability, a structural characteristic of every mark.

2) that the value of risk or exposure to infelicity, even though, as Austin recognizes, it can affect a priori the totality of conventional acts, is not interrogated as an essential predicate or as a law. Austin does not ponder the consequences issuing from the fact that a possibility—a possible risk—is always possible, and is in some sense a necessary possibility. Nor whether—once such a necessary possibility of infelicity is recognized—infelicity still constitutes an accident. What is a success when the possibility of infelicity [échec] continues to constitute its structure?

The opposition success/failure [échec] in illocution and in perlocution seems quite insufficient and extremely secondary [dévolve]. It presupposes a general and systematic elaboration of the structure of location that would avoid an endless alternation of essence and accident. Now it is highly significant that Austin rejects and defers that "general theory" on at least two occasions, specifically in the Second Lecture. I leave aside the first exclusion.

I am not going into the general doctrine here: in many such cases we may even say the act was 'void' (or voidable for duress or undue influence) and so forth. Now I suppose some very general high-level doctrine might embrace both what we have called infelicities and these other 'unhappy' features of the doing of actions—in our case actions containing a performative utterance—in a single doctrine: but we are not including this kind of unhappiness—we must just remember, though, that features of this sort can and do constantly obtrude into any case we are discussing. Features of this sort would normally come under the heading of 'extenuating circumstances' or of 'factors reducing or arrogating the agent's responsibility,' and so on. (P. 21, my emphasis)

The second case of this exclusion concerns our subject more directly. It involves precisely the possibility for every performative utterance (and a priori every other utterance) to be "quoted." Now Austin excludes this
possibility (and the general theory which would account for it) with a kind of lateral insistence, all the more significant in its off-handedness. He insists on the fact that this possibility remains abnormal, parasitic, that it constitutes a kind of extenuation or agonized succumbing of language that we should strenuously distance ourselves from and resolutely ignore. And the concept of the "ordinary," thus of "ordinary language," to which he has recourse is clearly marked by this exclusion. As a result, the concept becomes all the more problematical, and before demonstrating as much, it would no doubt be best for me simply to read a paragraph from the Second Lecture:

(ii) Secondly, as utterances our performances are also heir to certain other kinds of ill, which infect all utterances. And these likewise though again they might be brought into a more general account, we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, (my emphasis, J. D.) but in many ways parasitic upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the violations of language. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (Pp. 21–23)

Austin thus excludes, along with what he calls a "sea-change," the "non-serious," "parasitism," "etiolation," "the non-ordinary" (along with the whole general theory which, if it succeeded in accounting for them, would no longer be governed by those oppositions), all of which he nevertheless recognizes as the possibility available to every act of utterance. It is as just such a "parasite" that writing has always been treated by the philosophical tradition, and the connection in this case is by no means coincidental.

I would therefore pose the following question: is this general possibility necessarily one of a failure or trap into which language may fall or lose itself as in an abyss situated outside of or in front of itself? What is the status of this parasitism? In other words, does the quality of risk admitted by Austin surround language like a kind of ditch or external place of perdition which speech [la location] could never hope to leave, but which it can escape by remaining "at home," by and in itself, in the shelter of its essence or telos? Or, on the contrary, is this risk rather its internal and positive condition of possibility? Is that outside its inside, the very force and law of its emergence? In this last case, what would be meant by an "ordinary" language defined by the exclusion of the very law of language? In excluding the general theory of this structural parasitism, does not Austin, who nevertheless claims to describe the facts and events of ordinary language, pass off as ordinary an ethical and teleological determination (the univocity of the utterance [énoncé]—that he acknowledges elsewhere [pp. 72–73] remains a philosophical "ideal"—the presence to self of a total context, the transparency of intentions, the presence of meaning [vouloir-dire] to the absolutely singular uniqueness of a speech act, etc.)?

For, ultimately, isn’t it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, "non-serious," a citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality—or rather, a general iterability—without which there would not even be a "successful" performative? So that—a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion—a successful performative is necessarily an “impure” performative, to adopt the word advanced later on by Austin when he acknowledges that there is no “pure” performative.10

I take things up here from the perspective of positive possibility and not simply as instances of failure or infelicity: would a performative utterance be possible if a citational doubling [doubleur] did not come to split and dissociate from itself the pure singularity of the event? I pose the question in this form in order to prevent an objection. For it might be said: you cannot claim to account for the so-called graphematic structure of location merely on the basis of the occurrence of failures of the performative, however real those failures may be and however effective or general their possibility. You cannot deny that there are also performatives that succeed, and one has to account for them: meetings are called to order (Paul Ricoeur did as much yesterday); people say: "I pose a question"; they bet, challenge, christen ships, and sometimes even marry. It would seem that such events have occurred. And even if only one had taken place only once, we would still be obliged to account for it.

I’ll answer: “Perhaps.” We should first be clear on what constitutes the status of “occurrence” or the eventhood of an event that entails in its allegedly present and singular emergence the intervention of an utterance [énoncé] that in itself can be only repetitive or citational in its structure, or rather, since those two words may lead to confusion: iterable. I return then to a point that strikes me as fundamental and that now concerns the status of events in general, of events of speech or by speech, of the strange logic they entail and that often passes unseen.

Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a “coded” or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then
what authorizes me, taking account of the predicates just recalled, to posit the general graphematic structure of every "communication." By no means do I draw the conclusion that there is no relative specificity of effects of consciousness, or of effects of speech (as opposed to writing in the traditional sense), that there is no performative effect, no effect of ordinary language, no effect of presence or of discursive event (speech act). It is simply that those effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them, term by term: on the contrary, they presuppose it, in an asymmetrical way, as the general space of their possibility.

SIGNATURES

That general space, is first of all spacing as a disruption of presence in a mark, what I here call writing. That all the difficulties encountered by Austin intersect in the place where both writing and presence are in question is for me indicated in a passage such as that in Lecture V in which the divided instance of the juridic signature [setup] emerges.

Is it an accident if Austin is there obliged to note: "I must explain again that we are floundering here. To feel the firm ground of prejudice slipping away is exhilarating, but brings its revenges" (p. 61). Shortly before, an "impasse" had appeared, resulting from the search for "any single simple criterion of grammar and vocabulary" in distinguishing between performative or constative utterances. (I should say that it is this critique of linguisticism and of the authority of the code, a critique based on an analysis of language, that most interested and convinced me in Austin's undertaking.) He then attempts to justify, with non-linguistic reasons, the preference he has shown in the analysis of performative for the forms of the first person, the present indicative, the active voice. The justification, in the final instance, is the reference made therein to what Austin calls the source (p. 60)* of the utterance. This notion of source—and what is at stake in it is clear—frequently reappears in what follows and governs the entire analysis in the phase we are examining. Not only does Austin not doubt that the source of an oral utterance in the present indicative active is present to the utterance [énonciation] and its statement [énoncé] (I have attempted to explain why we had reasons not to believe so, but he does not even doubt that the equivalent of this tie to the source utterance is simply evident in and assured by a signature:

Where there is not, in the verbal formula of the utterance, a reference to the person doing the uttering, and so the acting, by means of the pronoun I

* Austin's term is "utterance-origin"; Derrida's term (source) is hereafter translated as "source."—Eds.
Jacques Derrida

(or by his personal name), then in fact he will be ‘referred to’ in one of two ways:

(a) In verbal utterances, by his being the person who does the uttering—what we may call the utterance-origin which is used generally in any system of verbal reference-co-ordinates.

(b) In written utterances (or ‘inscriptions’), by his appending his signature (this has to be done because, of course, written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are). (Pp. 60–61)

An analogous function is attributed by Austin to the formula “hereby” in official documents.

From this point of view, let us attempt to analyze signatures, their relation to the present and to the source. I shall consider it as an implication of the analysis that every predicate established will be equally valid for that oral “signature” constituted—or aspired to—by the presence of the “author” as a “person who utters,” as a “source,” to the production of the utterance.

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical non-presentation of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been-present in a past now or present [maintenant] which will remain a future now or present [maintenant], thus in a general maintenanc, in the transcendental form of presentness [maintenances]. That general maintenance is in some way inscribed, pinpointed in the always evident and singular present peculiarity of the form of the signature. Such is the enigmatic originality of every paraph. In order for the reiterating to the source to occur, what must be retained is the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form: the pure reproducibility of a pure event.

Is there such a thing? Does the absolute singularity of signature as event ever occur? Are there signatures?

Yes, of course, every day. Effects of signature are the most common thing in the world. But the condition of possibility of those effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and its singularity, divides its seal [seceu]. I have already indicated above the principle of this analysis.

To conclude this very dry discussion:

1) as writing, communication, if we retain that word, is not the means of transference of meaning, the exchange of intentions and meanings [vouloir-dire], discourse and the “communication of consciousnesses.” We are witnessing not an end of writing that would restore, in accord with McLuhan’s ideological representation, a transparency or an immediacy to social relations; but rather the increasingly powerful historical expansion of a general writing, of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc., would be only an effect, and should be analyzed as such. It is the exposure of this effect that I have called elsewhere logocentrism;

2) the semantic horizon that habitually governs the notion of communication is exceeded or split by the intervention of writing, that is, by a dissemination irreducible to polysemic. Writing is read; it is not the site, “in the last instance,” of a hermeneutic deciphering, the decoding of a meaning or truth;

3) despite the general displacement of the classical, “philosophical,” occidental concept of writing, it seems necessary to retain, provisionally and strategically, the old name. This entails an entire logic of paleontology that I cannot develop here.11 Very schematically: an opposition of metaphysical concepts (e.g., speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and the order of a subordination. Deconstruction cannot be restricted or immediately pass to a neutralization: it must, through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing—put into practice a reversal of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of intervening in the field of oppositions it criticizes and that is also a field of non-discursive forces. Every concept, moreover, belongs to a systematic chain and constitutes in itself a system of predicates. There is no concept that is metaphysical in itself. There is a labor—metaphysical or not—performed on conceptual systems. Deconstruction does not consist in moving from one concept to another, but in reversing and displacing a conceptual order as well as the non-conceptual order with which it is articulated. For example, writing, as a classical concept, entails predicates that have been subordinated, excluded, or held in abeyance by forces and according to necessities to be analyzed. It is those predicates (I have recalled several of them) whose force of generality, generalization, and generativity is liberated, grafted onto a "new" concept of writing that corresponds as well to what has always resisted the prior organization of forces, always constituted the residue irreducible to the dominant force organizing the hierarchy that we may refer to, in brief, as logocentric. To leave to this new concept the old name of writing is tantamount to maintaining the structure of the graft, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective intervention in the constituted historical field. It is to give at everything in stake in the operations of deconstruction the chance and the force, the power of communication.
But this will have been understood, as a matter of course, especially in a philosophical colloquium: a disseminating operation removed from the presence (of being) according to all its modifications, writing, if there is any, perhaps communicates, but certainly does not exist. Or barely, hereby, in the form of the most improbable signature.

(Remark: the—written—text of this—oral—communication was to be delivered to the Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française before the meeting. That dispatch should thus have been signed. Which I do, and counterfeit, here. Where? There. J.D.)

J. DERRIDA.

NOTES

1. The Rousseauist theory of language and of writing is also introduced under the general title of communication ("On the diverse means of communicating our thoughts" is the title of the first chapter of the Essay on the Origin of Languages).

2. Language supplants action or perception: articulated language supplants the language of action: writing supplants articulate language, etc. [The word, supplée, used by Derrida and here by Rousseau, implies the double notion of supplanting, replacing, and also supplementing, bringing to completion, remedying—Trans.]

3. "Up to now, we have considered expressions in their communicative function. This derives essentially from the fact that expressions operate as indexes. But a large role is also assigned to expressions in the life of the soul inasmuch as it is not engaged in a relation of communication. It is clear that this modification of the function does not affect what makes expressions expressions. They have, as before, their Bedeutungen and the same Bedeutungen as in collocation." Logical Investigations 1, ch. 1, 48. What I assert here implies the interpretation that I have offered of the Husserlian procedure on this point. I therefore refer the reader to Speech and Phenomenon (La voix et le phénomène).

4. "In the first edition I spoke of 'pure grammar,' a name that was conceived on the analogy of 'pure science of nature' in Kant, and expressly designated as such. But to the extent that it cannot be affirmed that the pure morphology of Bedeutungen englobes all grammatical a prioris in their universality, since for example relations of communication between psychic subjects, which are so important for grammar, entail their own a prioris, the expression of pure logical grammar deserves priority. . . ." (II II, part 2, ch. iv).

5. Austin names the "two fetishes which I admit to an inclination to play Old Harry with, viz. (1) the true/false fetish, (2) the value/fact fetish" (p. 150).

6. He says, for example, that "The total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating" (p. 147).

7. Which occasionally requires Austin to reintroduce the criterion of truth in his description of performatives. Cf., for example, pp. 50–52 and pp. 89–90.


9. Austin often refers to the suspicious status of the "non-serious" (cf., for example, pp. 104, 121). This is fundamentally linked to what he says elsewhere about oratio obliqua (pp. 70–71) and mine.

10. From this standpoint, one might question the fact, recognized by Austin, that "very commonly the same sentence is used on different occasions of utterance in both ways, performative and constative. The thing seems hopeless from the start, if we are to leave utterances as they stand and seek for a criterion." The graphematic root of citationality (iterability) is what creates this embarrassment and makes it impossible, as Austin says, "to lay down even a list of all possible criteria."

11. Cf. La dissémination and Positions.
It would be a mistake, I think, to regard Derrida's discussion of Austin as a confrontation between two prominent philosophical traditions. This is not so much because Derrida has failed to discuss the central theses in Austin's theory of language, but rather because he has misunderstood and misstated Austin's position at several crucial points, as I shall attempt to show, and thus the confrontation never quite takes place.

His paper divides naturally into two parts: In the first part he discusses writing and its relation to context and communication. In the second, applying various of the conclusions of the first part, he discusses some features of Austin's theory of speech acts. He concludes with a discussion of the role of signatures. In my reply I will not attempt to deal with all or even very many of the points he raises, but will concentrate on those that seem to me the most important and especially on those where I disagree with his conclusions. I should say at the outset that I did not find his arguments very clear and it is possible that I may have misinterpreted him as profoundly as I believe he has misinterpreted Austin.
clearly not. Writing makes it possible to communicate with an absent receiver, but it is not necessary for the receiver to be absent. Written communication can exist in the presence of the receiver, as for example, when I compose a shopping list for myself or pass notes to my companion during a concert or lecture.

No doubt it would be possible to specify many features which distinguish writing from spoken utterances—for example, writing is visual and speaking is aural—but for the purposes of this discussion the most important distinguishing feature is the (relative) permanence of the written text over the spoken word. Even in an era of tape recordings and record playing machines, the primary device for preserving utterances is the written (or printed) word. This relative permanence in turn allows for both the absence of the receiver and, equally important, the accumulation of linguistic acts in an extended text. I can read an author's words after he has died, and even while he is alive he himself cannot tell me the entire content of all his books, only his books can do that. Now the first confusion that Derrida makes, and it is important for the argument that follows, is that he confuses iterability with the permanence of the text. He thinks the reason that I can read dead authors is because their works are repeatable or iterable. Well, no doubt the fact that different copies are made of their books makes it a lot easier, but the phenomenon of the survival of the text is not the same as the phenomenon of repeatability: the type-token distinction is logically independent of the fact of the permanence of certain tokens. One and the same text (token) can be read by many different readers long after the death of the author, and it is this phenomenon of the permanence of the text that makes it possible to separate the utterance from its origin, and distinguishes the written from the spoken word.

This confusion of permanence with iterability lies at the heart of his argument for assimilating features of the written text with features of spoken words. He writes, "This structural possibility of being woven from the referent or from the signified (hence from communication and from its context) seems to me to make every marking, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general; which is to say, as we have seen, the non-present remainder [restance] of a differential mark cut off from its putative 'production' or 'origin'" (p. 183).

But there is an ambiguity in this argument that is fatal to its validity. The way in which a written text is woven from its origin is quite different from the way in which any expression can be severed from its meaning through the form of "iterability" that is exemplified by quotation. The two phenomena operate on quite different principles. The principle according to which we can weave a written text from its origin is simply that the text has a permanence that enables it to survive the death of its author, receiver, and context of production. This principle is genuinely "graphematic." But the principle according to which quotation (citation) allows us to consider an expression apart from its meaning is simply this: since any system of representation must have some representing devices whether marks, sounds, pictures, etc., it is always possible to consider those devices quite apart from their role in representation. We can always consider words as just sounds or marks and we can always construe pictures as just material objects. But again this possibility of separating the sign from the signified is a feature of any system of representation whatever; and there is nothing especially graphematic about it at all. It is furthermore quite independent of those special features of the "classical concept" of writing which are supposed to form the basis of the argument. The type-token distinction, together with the physical realization of the signs makes quotation possible; but these two features have nothing to do with previously mentioned special features of graphemes. I conclude that Derrida's argument to show that all elements of language (much less, experience) are really graphemes is without any force. It rests on a simple confusion of iterability with permanence.

I have left the most important issue in this section until last. Do the special features of writing determine that there is some break with the author's intentions in particular or with intentionality in general in the forms of communication that occur in writing? Does the fact that writing can continue to function in the absence of the writer, the intended receiver, or the context of production show that writing is not a vehicle of intentionality? It seems to me quite plain that the argument that the author and intended receiver may be dead and the context unknown or forgotten does not in the least show that intentionality is absent from written communication; on the contrary, intentionality plays exactly the same role in written as in spoken communication. What differs in the two cases is not the intentions of the speaker but the role of the context of the utterance in the success of the communication. To show this ask yourself what happens when you read the text of a dead author. Suppose you read the sentence, "On the twenty-first of September 1793 I set out on a journey from London to Oxford." How now do you understand this sentence? To the extent that the author said what he meant and you understand what he said you will know that the author intended to make a statement to the effect that on the twenty-first of September 1793, he set out on a journey from London to Oxford, and the fact that the author is dead and all his intentions died with him is irrelevant to this feature of your understanding of his surviving written utterances. But
suppose you decide to make a radical break—as one always can—with the strategy of understanding the sentence as an utterance of a man who once lived and had intentions like yourself and just think of it as a sentence of English, weaned from all production or origin, putative or otherwise. Even then there is no getting away from intentionality, because a meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act. To understand it, it is necessary to know that anyone who said it and meant it would be performing that speech act determined by the rules of the languages that give the sentence its meaning in the first place.

There are two obstacles to understanding this rather obvious point, one implicit in Derrida, the other explicit. The first is the illusion that somehow illocutionary intentions if they really existed or mattered would have to be something that lay behind the utterances, some inner pictures animating the visible signs. But of course in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions: there need be no gulf at all between the illocutionary intention and its expression. The sentences are, so to speak, fungible intentions. Often, especially in writing, one forms one’s intentions (or meanings) in the process of forming the sentences: there need not be two separate processes. This illusion is related to the second, which is that intentions must all be conscious. But in fact rather few of one’s intentions are ever brought to consciousness as intentions. Speaking and writing are indeed conscious intentional activities, but the intentional aspect of illocutionary acts does not imply that there is a separate set of conscious states apart from simply writing and speaking.

To the extent that the author says what he means the text is the expression of his intentions. It is always possible that he may not have said what he meant or that the text may have become corrupt in some way; but exactly parallel considerations apply to spoken discourse. The situation as regards intentionality is exactly the same for the written word as it is for the spoken: understanding the utterance consists in recognizing the illocutionary intentions of the author and these intentions may be more or less perfectly realized by the words uttered, whether written or spoken. And understanding the sentence apart from any utterance is knowing what linguistic act its utterance would be the performance of.

When we come to the question of context, as Derrida is aware, the situation really is quite different for writing than it is for speech. In speech one can invoke all sorts of features of the context which are not possible to use in writing intended for absent receivers, without explicitly representing these features in the text. That is why verbatim transcripts of conversations are so hard to interpret. In conversation a great deal can be communicated without being made explicit in the sentence uttered.

Derrida has a distressing penchant for saying things that are obviously false. I will discuss several instances in the next section but one deserves special mention at this point. He says the meaningless example of ungrammatical French, "le vert est ou," means (signifie) one thing anyhow, it means an example of ungrammaticality. But this is a simple confusion. The sequence "le vert est ou" does not MEAN an example of ungrammaticality, it does not mean anything, rather it IS an example of ungrammaticality. The relation of meaning is not to be confused with instantiation. This mistake is important because it is part of his generally mistaken account of the nature of quotation, and his failure to understand the distinction between use and mention. The sequence "le vert est ou" can indeed be mentioned as an example of ungrammaticality, but to mention it is not the same as to use it. In this example it is not used to mean anything; indeed it is not used at all.

II. DERRIDA'S AUSTIN

Derrida's discussion of Austin is designed to show that all the difficulties encountered by Austin in his theory of speech acts have a common root: "Austin has not taken account of what—in the structure of locution (thus before any illocutory or perlocutory determination)—entails that system of predicates I call graphematic in general..." (p. 187). Thus in what follows Derrida ties his discussion of Austin to his preceding discussion of writing; in both he emphasizes the role of the iterability and citationality of linguistic elements. I believe he has misunderstood Austin in several crucial ways and the internal weaknesses in his argument are closely tied to these misunderstandings. In this section therefore I will very briefly summarize his critique and then simply list the major misunderstandings and mistakes. I will conclude with an—again too brief—discussion of the relation between intention and iterability in speech acts.

Derrida notes that Austin distinguishes between felicitous and infelicitous speech acts but does not sufficiently ponder the consequences arising from the fact that the possibility of failure of the speech act is a necessary possibility. More to the point, according to Derrida, Austin excludes the possibility that performative utterances (and a priori every other utterance) can be quoted. Derrida makes this extraordinary charge on the grounds that Austin has excluded fictional discourse, utterances made by actors on a stage, and other forms of what Austin
called "parasitic" or "etiolated" speech from consideration when setting out the preliminary statement of his theory of speech acts. Furthermore, according to Derrida, Austin saw these forms of discourse as a kind of *agonic* of language "qu'il faut fortement tenir à distance." They are not, according to Derrida's version of Austin, even part of "ordinary language." But, asks Derrida, does the possibility of this parasitism surround language like a ditch (*fossé*), an external place of perdition, as Austin seems to think, or is it not rather the case that this risk is the internal and positive condition of language itself? He points out unambiguously that "it is as just such a 'parasite' that writing has always been treated by the philosophical tradition" (p. 190). And he concludes his sequence of rhetorical questions with the following: "For, ultimately isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, 'non-serious,' *citation* (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality—or rather, a general iterability—without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative" (p. 191). According to Derrida (and contrary to what he suggests is Austin's view) a performative can succeed only if its formulation repeats a coded or iterable utterance, only if it is identifiable in some way as a citation. Once we have a typology of such forms of iteration we can see that there is "an essential absence of intention to the actuality of the utterance," and that Austin was wrong to exclude "parasitic" forms from ordinary language.

Before beginning a discussion of Derrida's charge I should point out that I hold no brief for the details of Austin's theory of speech acts, I have criticized it elsewhere and will not repeat those criticisms here. The problem is rather that Derrida's Austin is unrecognizable. He bears almost no relation to the original.

1. Derrida has completely mistaken the status of Austin's exclusion of parasitic forms of discourse from his preliminary investigations of speech acts. Austin's idea is simply this: if we want to know what it is to make a promise or make a statement we had better not start our investigation with promises made by actors on stage in the course of a play or statements made in a novel by novelists about characters in the novel, because in a fairly obvious way such utterances are not standard cases of promises and statements. We do not, for example, hold the actor responsible today for the promise he made on stage last night in the way that we normally hold people responsible for their promises, and we do not demand of the author how he knows that his characters have such and such traits in a way that we normally expect the maker of a statement to be able to justify his claims. Austin describes this feature by saying that such utterances are "hollow" or "void" and "nonserious."

Furthermore, in a perfectly straightforward sense such utterances are "parasitical" on the standard cases: there could not, for example, be promises made by actors in a play if there were not the possibility of promises made in real life. The existence of the pretended form of the speech act is logically dependent on the possibility of the nonpretended speech act in the same way that any pretended form of behavior is dependent on nonpretended forms of behavior, and in that sense the pretended forms are parasitical on the nonpretended forms.

Austin's exclusion of these parasitic forms from consideration in his preliminary discussion is a matter of research strategy; he is, in his words, excluding them "at present"; but it is not a metaphysical exclusion: he is not casing them into a ditch or perdition, to use Derrida's words. Derrida seems to think that Austin's exclusion is a matter of great moment, a source of deep metaphysical difficulties, and that the analysis of parasitic discourse might create some insuperable difficulties for the theory of speech acts. But the history of the subject has proved otherwise. Once one has a general theory of speech acts—a theory which Austin did not live long enough to develop himself—it is one of the relatively simpler problems to analyze the status of parasitic discourse, that is, to meet the challenge contained in Derrida's question, "What is the status of this parasitism?" Writings subsequent to Austin's have answered this question. But the terms in which this question can be intelligently posed and answered already presuppose a general theory of speech acts. Austin correctly saw that it was necessary to hold in abeyance one set of questions, about parasitic discourse, until one has answered a logically prior set of questions about "serious" discourse. But the temporary exclusion of these questions within the development of the theory of speech acts, proved to be just that—temporary.

2. Related to the first misunderstanding about the status of the exclusion of parasitic discourse is a misunderstanding of the attitude Austin had to such discourse. Derrida suggests that the term "parasitic" involves some kind of moral judgment; that Austin is claiming that there is something bad or anomalous or not "ethical" about such discourse. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. The sense in which, for example, fiction is parasitic on nonfiction is the sense in which the definition of the rational numbers in number theory might be said to be parasitic on the definition of the natural numbers, or the notion of one logical constant in a logical system might be said to be parasitic on another, because the former is defined in terms of the latter. Such parasitism is a relation of logical dependence; it does not imply any moral judgment and certainly not that the parasite is somehow impossibly sponging off the host (Does one really have to point this out?).
Furthermore it is simply a mistake to say that Austin thought parasitic discourse was not part of ordinary language. The expression "ordinary language" in the era that Austin gave these lectures was opposed to technical or symbolic or formalized language such as occurred in mathematical logic or in the technical terminology of philosophy. Austin never denied that plays and novels were written in ordinary language; rather, his point is that such utterances are not produced in ordinary circumstances, but rather, for example, on stage or in a fictional text.

3. In what is more than simply a misreading of Austin, Derrida supposes that by analyzing serious speech acts before considering the parasitic cases, Austin has somehow denied the very possibility that expressions can be quoted. I find so many confusions in this argument of mine that I hardly know where to get started on it. To begin with, the phenomenon of citationality is not the same as the phenomenon of parasitic discourse. A man who composes a novel or a poem is not in general quoting anyone; and a man who says his lines on a stage while acting in a play while he is indeed repeating lines composed by someone else, is not in general quoting the lines. There is a basic difference in this in parasitic discourse the expressions are being used and not mentioned. To Derrida's rhetorical question, "If, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exceptions, 'non-serious' citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality—or rather, a general iterability—without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative?" (p. 191), the answer is a polite but firm "No, it isn't true." To begin with most of the instances of parasitic discourse are not cases of citation at all. They are, to repeat, cases where expressions are used and not mentioned. But, more important, parasitic discourse of the kind we have been considering is a determined modification of the rules for performing speech acts, but it is not in any way a modification of iterability or citationality. Like all utterances, parasitic forms of utterances are instances of, though not modifications of, iterability, for—to repeat—without iterability there is no language at all. Every utterance in a natural language, parasitic or not, is an instance of iterability, which is simply another way of saying that the type-token distinction applies to the elements of language.

Derrida in this argument confuses no less than three separate and distinct notions: iterability, citationality, and parasitism. Parasitism is neither an instance of nor a modification of citationality, it is an instance of iterability in the sense that any discourse whatever is an instance of iterability, and it is a modification of the rules of serious discourse. Stated in its most naked form, and leaving out the confusion about citationality, the structure of Derrida's argument is this: Parasitism is (an instance of) iterability; iterability is presupposed by all performative utterances; Austin excludes parasitism, therefore he excludes iterability; therefore he excludes the possibility of all performative utterances and a priori of all utterances.

But this argument is not valid. Even had Austin's exclusion of fictional discourse been a metaphysical exclusion and not a part of his investigatory strategy, it would not follow from the fact that Austin excludes parasitic discourse that he excludes any other forms of iterability. Quite the contrary. He sets aside the problems of fiction in order to get at the properties of fictional performatives. Both are instances of iterability in the trivial sense that any use of language whatever is an instance of a use of iterable elements, but the exclusion of the former does not preclude the possibility of the latter.

On a sympathetic reading of Derrida's text we can construe him as pointing out, quite correctly, that the possibility of parasitic discourse is internal to the notion of language, and that performatives can succeed only if the utterances are iterable, repetitions of conventional—or as he calls them, "coded"—forms. But neither of these points is in any way an objection to Austin. Indeed, Austin's insistence on the conventional character of the performative utterance in particular and the illocutionary act in general commits him precisely to the view that performatives must be iterable, in the sense that any conventional act involves the notion of the repetition of the same.

4. Derrida assimilates the sense in which writing can be said to be parasitic on spoken language with the sense in which fiction, etc., are parasitic on nonfiction or standard discourse. But these are quite different. In the case of the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, the relation is one of logical dependency. One could not have the concept of fiction without the concept of serious discourse. But the dependency of writing on spoken language is a contingent fact about the history of human languages and not a logical truth about the nature of language. Indeed, in mathematical and logical symbolism the relation of dependency goes the other way. The spoken, oral version of the symbols is simply an orally communicable way of representing the primary written forms.

5. A leitmotif of Derrida's entire discussion is the idea that somehow the iterability of linguistic forms (together with the citationality of linguistic forms and the existence of writing) militates against the idea that intention is the heart of meaning and communication, that indeed, an understanding of iteration will show the "essential absence of intention to the actuality of the utterance." But even if everything he said about iterability were true it would not show this. Indeed, I shall con-
clude this discussion by arguing for precisely the converse thesis: The iterability of linguistic forms facilitates and is a necessary condition of the particular forms of intentionality that are characteristic of speech acts.

The performances of actual speech acts (whether written or spoken) are indeed events, datable singular events in particular historical contexts. But as events they have some very peculiar properties. They are capable of communicating from speakers to hearers an infinite number of different contents. There is no upper limit on the number of new things that can be communicated by speech acts, which is just another way of saying that there is no limit on the number of new speech acts. Furthermore, hearers are able to understand this infinite number of possible communications simply by recognizing the intentions of the speakers in the performances of the speech acts. Now given that both speaker and hearer are finite, what is it that gives their speech acts this limitless capacity for communication? The answer is that the speaker and hearers are masters of the sets of rules we call the rules of language, and these rules are recursive. They allow for the repeated application of the same rule.

Thus the peculiar features of the intentionality that we find in speech acts require an iterability that includes not only the type we have been discussing, the repetition of the same word in different contexts, but also includes an iterability of the application of syntactical rules. Iterability—both as exemplified by the repeated use of the same word type and as exemplified by the recursive character of syntactical rules—is not as Derrida seems to think something in conflict with the intentionality of linguistic acts, spoken or written. It is the necessary presupposition of the forms which that intentionality takes.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to H. Dreyfus and D. Searle for discussion of these matters.
2. This of course is not the normal purpose of quotation, but it is a possible purpose.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PAUL DE MAN is professor of French and comparative literature at Yale University. His present contribution to Glyph is the concluding chapter of a book on Rousseau to be published in the near future. He is the author of Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism and is currently completing a book-length study of Nietzsche.

JACQUES DERRIDA teaches philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. He is best known for his theory and practice of "deconstruction," which he elaborates in such texts as La voix et le phénomène, De la grammaïologie, L'écriture et la différence, La dissémination, and Mégare. His more recent work has dealt with writers such as Genet and Hegel (Glas), Kant, Maurice Blanchot, and Francis Ponge.

RODOLPHE GASCHÉ teaches French in the Department of Romance Languages at the Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of Di hybride Wissenschaft, the French translation of which will appear shortly. He has published essays on Nietzsche, Freud, Artaud, and Bataille and has translated major works by Derrida and Lacan into German.

LOUIS MAHUN, born in Grenoble in 1931, studied at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, where he received his academic degrees: Licence-ès-lettres, Agrégation (philosophy), and Doctorat d'État (philosophy);