

Kristeva and Derrida : Face-to-Face (Who Invented Deconstruction?)

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Abstract: This essay is an attempt to revisit the history of literary theory by considering the role Julia Kristeva played in it. A closer examination of Kristeva's works from the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s gives a different picture of her position from the one usually associated with her. In particular, what Kristeva calls "paragrammatism" is the term for what Derrida calls "grammatology." It is worth realizing that the two theorists were pointing out the necessity of moving beyond the limits and possibilities of linguistics and semiotics. Both Kristeva and Derrida claim that linguistics and semiotics cannot adequately account for the true nature of language, especially for the practices that true nature nourishes and exploits. My essay investigates the implications of what happened between 1967 and 1970 for the history of literary theory. After the publication of *De la grammatologie* (1967), Derrida came into contact with the *Tel Quel* group and, through this contact, changed the direction of deconstruction, since by reading Sollers's and Kristeva's texts he discovered that deconstruction could be applied beyond the close reading of concrete contradictions. I argue that Derrida adopts the logic of paragrammatism from Kristeva's theory, using it not as an object specific to poetic language but as a strategic tool for his analysis, while also sketching out a complementary logic when his texts deal with poets like Mallarmé or novelists such as Sollers or Joyce. Deconstruction in its most recent form is based on paragrammatism as a particular mode of reading. In fact, what we are used to calling deconstruction is the application of paragrammatism to philosophical, political, or theoretical texts.

Résumé : Cet essai est une tentative de revisiter l'histoire de la théorie littéraire en considérant le rôle qu'y a joué Julia Kristeva. Un examen attentif des travaux de Kristeva de la fin des années 1960 et du début des années 1970 donne une image différente de la position qui lui est habituellement associée. En particulier, ce que Kristeva appelle "paragrammatisme" est le terme de ce que Derrida désigne par "grammatologie". Il est intéressant que les deux théoriciens soulignent la nécessité d'aller au-delà des limites et des possibilités de la linguistique et de la sémiotique. Kristeva et Derrida arguent tous les deux que la linguistique et la sémiotique ne peuvent plus suffisamment rendre compte de la vraie nature du langage, en particulier des pratiques qui se nourrissent de sa véritable nature. Mon essai se penche sur les implications pour l'histoire de la théorie littéraire de ce qui s'est passé entre 1967 et 1970. Après la publication de *De la grammatologie* (1967), Derrida est entré en contact avec le groupe *Tel Quel*, et c'est ce contact qui a changé la direction de la déconstruction, car en lisant Sollers et Kristeva, Derrida découvre que la déconstruction pourrait être appliquée au-delà de la lecture minutieuse ("close reading") des contradictions concrètes. J'argue que Derrida adopte la logique du paragrammatisme de la théorie de Kristeva, en l'utilisant non comme un objet spécifique à la langue poétique mais comme un outil stratégique pour son analyse, tout en inventant une logique complémentaire lorsque ses textes traitent de poètes comme Mallarmé ou de romanciers tels que Sollers ou Joyce. La déconstruction dans sa forme la plus récente est basée sur le paragrammatisme comme un mode particulier de lecture. Ce

que nous sommes habitués à appeler la déconstruction est en fait l'application du paragrammatisme à des textes philosophiques, politiques ou théoriques.

Keywords: Julia Kristeva – paragrammatisme – *Tel Quel* – Jacques Derrida – deconstruction

In 2006, I published *Los años salvajes de la teoría* [The Wild Years of Theory], a book dedicated to *Tel Quel's* contribution to the formation of post-structuralist literary theory. In this paper I am going to develop and extend some arguments of that book, above all because some of them focus on Julia Kristeva's work. First of all, it is necessary to clarify that when I talk about *Tel Quel* I mean not only the review bearing this name but also the "space" of *Tel Quel* extending the name of the review to a press management, a political activity, a creation of different groups of study. It is worth remembering that Roland Barthes employed the expression *telquelisme* in 1961 in order to describe the political attitude of this heterogeneous group. Jean-Michel Rabaté has insisted on the same point. In fact, for him *Tel Quel* was more than a review, it embodied what we call today the "Time of Theory" (Rabaté 411).

If I mention the meaning of the phrase *tel quel* it is because it reveals the framework of my argument. What is that framework? It is the strong heterogeneity in which it is not easy to identify either the author, or the "origin" of an idea or of a movement. From the point of view of the history of literary theory (or precisely, theory) where a movement begins and where it ends seem clear enough; these moments do not appear problematic or reveal conflicts and disagreements. However, a pedagogical exposition and illustration of a historical phase in any field ought not to be confused with the critical knowledge of what actually happened, even if we have to acknowledge the limits and negativity of that knowledge and the impossibility of reaching any kind of absolute information about the context. That is to say, following the Nietzschean and Foucauldian genealogies, I maintain that history is effective when it introduces discontinuity into its analysis: behind any kind of "origin," behind "what already existed," there is a secret without essence, low, ironic, full of mistakes to be found (Foucault 1978). In this sense, we can consider this paper as a kind of revision of the history of literary theory and of the role Kristeva has played in it.

For this reason, I would like to focus my comments on a set of texts produced and published between 1967 and 1969 by three protagonists: Phillippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida. In 1968, Sollers published *Nombres*, a continuation of another "novel"¹ published in 1965, *Drame*. 1968 and 1969 are the years when "La pharmacie de Platon" (*Tel Quel*, 1968) and "La dissémination" (*Critique*, 1969) by Derrida as well as "L'engendrement de la formule" (*Tel Quel*, 1969) by Kristeva appear

¹ Quotation marks are mine (M. A.)

in print.² There is no doubt that close readings of the two Sollers' "novels," *Drame* and *Nombres*, were very important to these three essays. I write "novel" (*roman* as Sollers termed these texts) in quotations marks because it is very problematic to say to which register or genre such texts belong. Kristeva herself points out the difference between what she calls "text" and "literary," "poetic," "scientific," "religious," etc. discourses. In fact, *Nombres* does not belong simply to literature; it gives birth to a set of theories that are at the heart of what will be called "post-structuralism."

In order to realize the importance of Sollers's novels we have to take into account how Derrida's article "La dissémination" (in *Dissémination*) and Kristeva's "L'engendrement de la formule" were explicitly written by taking these two novels as points of departure.³ I take pains to use the phrase "points of departure" and not expressions like "written on" or "written about," because one of the main problems that occurs when one focuses on these texts is precisely the extent to which they differ from one another. In more than one sense, it is very difficult to indicate where the voices of Derrida and Sollers begin in "La dissémination" and where they end. As Philippe Forest has noted, what happened with that text was at the origins of the break between Derrida and Sollers : "Ce texte relève d'une étrange analyse qui semble s'appropriier entièrement son objet: étudiant *Nombres*, Derrida 'réécrit' ce roman, comme s'il s'attachait à déloger Sollers du lieu de sa propre création" ["This text is the result of a strange analysis that seems to take over its object entirely: in his analysis of *Nombres*, Derrida rewrites the novel as if he was trying to displace Sollers from his own creative space"; all translations of French texts are my own] (402).

Somehow we can imagine the contact between these three texts as a relationship between a *host* and a *parasite* with all the ambivalences implied in those words as analyzed by J. Hillis Miller in his essay "The Critic as Host." In a similar way, it is not possible to ignore Kristeva's statement in "L'engendrement de la formule" : "Nous allons tenter de soutenir dans ce qui suit un tel type de discours qui est bien entendu entièrement rendu possible et disons-le, entièrement *prévu* par le texte que nous abordons : *Nombres* de Philippe Sollers" ["In what follows we shall attempt to maintain a type of discourse which, of course, is entirely made possible and, to be frank, entirely anticipated by the text we are analyzing : *Nombres* by Philippe Sollers"] (41). Here Kristeva conceives the relationship between Sollers's text and her own as both belonging to the same textual space. She speaks in fact of "rendu possible" [made possible] and "prévu" [anticipated] in allusion to the connection between her essay and Sollers's *Nombres*.

In this text, and already in *Drame*, a theory of writing is revealed within the limits of a mode of representation in the (before-) borders of "literature," a theory from which Derrida learned much concerning deconstructive strategies: not only the deconstruction

² Let us also mention Roland Barthes's essays dedicated to Sollers that appeared after 1965 and were regrouped under the title *Sollers écrivain* in 1979 (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1979).

³ Derrida's "La dissémination" first appeared in *Critique* 261-262, 1969.

of the opposition *langue-parole*, the disappearance of the author in traditional terms, intertextuality, the infinity of *différance* or unlimited *semiosis*, the undoing of the existence of a transcendental meaning as such (the main topics of deconstruction), but also the modes of representation that Derrida moves from the field of synthetic writing of “literature” to the analytic field of philosophy.

What, then, is the role that Kristeva played in this trio? The most common answer is to identify Kristeva (at least, the early Kristeva) with linguistics, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. Her reflections on *sémanalyse* for instance are considered within the limits of semiotics, even if the subject of *sémanalyse* is not signification but the signifying process [*signifiance*]. There is no doubt that her language at that moment was steeped in linguistics, semiotics, and psychoanalytic terminology. But if we look carefully at her work from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1970s we discover some important facts that ought to modify our current understanding of her contribution. Take, for instance, her theory about the “géo-texte,” defined as the “engendrement du tissu de la langue . . . non pas l’autre scène par rapport au présent formulaire et axial, mais l’ensemble des autres scènes dans la multiplicité desquelles il marque un index présent écarté-écartelé par la surdétermination qui définit, de l’intérieur, l’infini” [“the engendering of the fabric of language . . . not the ‘other scene’ in relation to the formulary and axial present but the ‘entirety of the other scenes’, in the multiplicity of which the present index is set aside-torn apart by the overdetermination that defines infinity from within”] (Kristeva, “L’engendrement” 35-38).

As it is well known, the “géo-texte” is not opposed to the “phéno-texte” (Šaumjan’s and Soboleva’s terms)⁴ precisely because the “phéno-texte” is the place of emergence of the “géo-texte.” It means that what we read in some passages of *Nombres* is not the result of a selection realized by the subject as Roman Jakobson describes in his classical essay “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances” (1956)⁵. In fact, it is the moment before, in which the subject has not yet decided and is boiling within the infinity of linguistic and non-linguistic possibilities. *Nombres* is not forced to eliminate the infinity of linguistic sequences that can fit on a white page but instead projects all this infinity onto the space of the page. Obviously, the coexistence of the infinity of linguistic sequences becomes a text full of contradictions, paradoxes and non-sequiturs. For example, when *Nombres* talks about a mysterious woman represented in the text by the pronoun *elle* (even if we guess this “elle” could be the same Kristeva, to whom the “novel” is dedicated), the reader is disoriented by the fact that the description does not follow a logic of actions (as Aristotle conceives of it):

⁴ See Kristeva, “Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes.”

⁵ Jakobson’s essay first appeared in Jakobson, Roman and Morris Halle. *Fundamentals of Language*. The Hague: Mouton, 1956.

Et en somme je la voyais accrochée à la nuit, et j'étais sa respiration dont je suis l'habitant passager et mort. . . . J'allais vers elle, je venais d'elle, je savais d'elle ce qu'il fallait savoir pour apprendre à savoir, j'ignorais tout d'elle, je savais tout d'elle, je ne voyais rien d'elle, je ne pouvais éprouver que sa surface ivre, son "rien, jamais rien" dissipé, actif. . . Elle n'arrivait pas jusqu'aux mots, les sons "or" ou "if" la désignent mieux dans les phrases que je viens d'écrire. (Sollers 41)

And in fact I saw her hooked on the night, and I was her breathing that, transient and dead, I inhabit. . . . I went to her, I came from her, I knew what one needed to know about her in order to learn to know, I didn't know anything about her, I knew everything about her, I didn't see anything of her, I could only feel her drunk surface, her dissolute and active 'nothing, never anything.' . . . She didn't get as far as words, the sounds 'or' or 'if' describe her better in the sentences I have just written.

It is not clear from this passage if the protagonist is heading toward her or if he or she is coming from her, nor is it clear if s/he knows all of her or if s/he knows nothing about her, if s/he is a body or a mere linguistic conjunction. And this blurring precisely results from the way the text functions within all the possibilities alive at the same time. Combination is without selection. However, we have to take into account that three years earlier Kristeva dealt with a similar problem. Indeed, in "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes," Kristeva had identified the same phenomenon in relation to poetic language. After pointing out that the limits of scientific logic do not allow one to account for "les fonctions du discours poétique" [the functions of poetic discourse], she explains the reasons for that impossibility: poetic language contains "toutes les figures combinatoires que l'algèbre a formalisées dans un système de signes artificiels" [all the combinatory figures which algebra has formalized within a system of artificial signs] and represents "le code infini ordonné" [the ordered infinite code], "la seule infinie du code" ["the only infinity of code"] ("Pour une sémiologie" 54-56).

As we can see, the definition of poetic language gives way to the definition of the geno-text. What was the main feature of poetic language in 1967, using Saussurean and Chomskyan arguments against Saussure and Chomsky, becomes the most important thread in a kind of text that cannot be reduced to literature, to signification, to binary logic two years later. And what was the 1967 definition of a paragram (the literary text functions within the totality of texts and is an affirmative or negative writing of-reply to other texts [Kristeva, "Pour une sémiologie" 58]), is reformulated in the 1969 essay "L'engendrement de la formule" in the following manner: "les mots-signes peuvent se succéder et se tordre de façon indéfinie pour marquer que la langue nage sur un fond idéal illimité duquel émergent ces signes" ["the words-signs can follow one

another and twist and turn indefinitely in order to demonstrate that language is floating on an ideal and unlimited foundation from which those signs arise”] (Kristeva 49).

In the final pages of my essay I will concentrate on Kristeva’s text, “Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes” (1967), because it holds great importance for the “invention” of deconstruction theory. As a matter of fact, it is this text that actually gives Derrida the key for developing what is known today as deconstruction. Inasmuch as Kristeva’s essay finishes with a reference to “poetic paragrams,” it is clear that the aim of her essay is to account for some kind of specificity in poetic language as had been common in the writings of the Russian Formalists. However, we should not overlook the fact that very important shifts take place throughout the essay. Sometimes Kristeva substitutes the phrase “poetic language” for “literary text,” as we have seen in the former quotation: “Le texte littéraire . . . est une écriture-réplique.” [“The literary text . . . is writing as reply/replica”] (58). Of course, this example is not the only one. The shifts point out that paragrammatic science – *science paragrammatique* (74) – is not limited to poetic language but applies to literary (poetic or non-poetic) language in a general sense as well. Here lies the reason why Kristeva includes a text like Sollers’s *Drame* within the framework of the paragrammatic practice. But taking another step forward, Kristeva at times claims that language itself is the place of paragrammatism: “La pratique littéraire se révèle comme exploration et découverte des possibilités du langage” [“Literary praxis proves to be an exploration and a discovery of the possibilities of language”] (“Pour une sémiologie” 56), that is to say, we can find the features attributed to poetic and literary texts in language, not in a similar mode of expression, but selecting some possibilities and refusing others, placing linguistic activity within a binary logic.

How should we locate this figuration of paragrammatism in relation to the three semiotic practices Kristeva distinguishes? On the one hand, we have the semiotic system based on the sign as it appears in scientific and representative discourse. As Kristeva indicates, this semiotic system is conservative, limited, and oriented toward the *denotatum*. On the other hand, we have transformational semiotics that is oriented toward the other, not tied to the *denotatum*. It is called “transformational” precisely because it changes the sign and seeks to modify it. Finally, there is “writing” (*écriture*), the most important activity of eliminating the sign in order to stir up a bees’ nest of (para)grams (“Pour une sémiologie” 67). As it is easy to observe, these three practices are defined in relation to what they do to the sign: either to use it linked to the *denotata*, or to use it detached from the *denotata*, or to eliminate it. For me the equation is the following: since poetic language is defined as a class A that has the same power as the function of the infinity of codes so that all other languages are quotients of A limited by rules of construction, it means that paragrammatism is wider than semiology and linguistics, and that the latter are included in the former.

Why is this clever conclusion so important for the history of literary theory? Because what Kristeva calls “paragrammatism” is what Derrida calls “grammatology.” It is worth realizing that both are pointing out the necessity of moving beyond the limits and possibilities of linguistics and semiotics. Both claim that these disciplines cannot adequately account for the true nature of language, especially in the practices that true nature nourishes and exploits. Kristeva writes that such disciplines even disguise the logic of complementarity of ordinary language (“Pour une sémiologie” 55). The term used for describing the modality of the emergence of paragrams or grams is the same: *écriture*. The point is that both Derrida and Kristeva are paving the way for post-structuralism at the end of the 1960s : “La sémiologie littéraire tend à dépasser déjà ce qu’on croit être les défauts inhérents au structuralisme” [“Literary semiology already tends to overcome what are supposed to be the inherent shortcomings of structuralism”] is the opening sentence of the essay “Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes” (53). And needless to say this overcoming of structuralism is achieved according to classical Marxism or hermeneutic positions. The following statement is common to both grammatology and paragrammatology and marks the distance between these two perspectives and those of classical Marxism and hermeneutics. Talking about syntactic or syntagmatic grams, Kristeva points out that “le paragramme refuse de lui prêter une valeur, un *sens stable*” [“the paragram refuses to assign it a value, a *fixed meaning*”] (“Pour une sémiologie” 65, italics by Kristeva).

It is strange that when Derrida, in his essay “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines” (lecture delivered in 1966), asks “Où et comment se produit ce décentrement comme pensée de la structuralité de la structure?” [“Where and how does this decentering, in terms of thinking the structurality of structure, occur?”], his answer does not take into account along with Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss the work done before within the space of *Tel Quel* and, particularly, by Sollers and Kristeva. As a matter of fact, the parallel between Kristeva and Derrida is more than a simple parallelism. Take, for example, the term “writing” (*écriture*) as a fundamental concept shared by authors belonging to the review *Tel Quel* (Jean-Louis Baudry, Marcelien Pleynet, Denis Roche, Jean Thibaudet, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva), and others participating in the space of the *Tel Quel* group (Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, etc.). What does “writing” mean for these authors?

If we come back to Kristeva’s description of three social semiotic practices, we realize that the notion of “writing” (*écriture*) conceives of the text as being under a continuous reflection (actually, hyper-reflection), the written reply to the code, to the law, even to itself. “Writing” designates the material practice in which paragrammatism appears and in which logocentrism is placed upside down. However, when Derrida is dealing with “writing” between 1962 (year of his publication of Husserl’s *L’origine de la géométrie*) and 1967, what he attempts to say is that writing, in its usual and traditional

sense, as opposed to speech, has been repressed by the metaphysical tradition from Plato to Saussure and beyond. Writing in this sense is inscription. Derrida is not referring to “writing” as a kind of text undermining binary oppositions as such but to the inscription of speech on a supporting medium. At that time, Derrida used “writing” either in its vulgar or transcendental sense. That is what we find if we read, for example, *De la grammatologie* (first published in *Critique*, 1965). In fact, this is what Derrida means, for instance, when he writes : “D’une part, selon la tradition occidentale qui règle non seulement en théorie mais en pratique (au principe de sa pratique) les rapports entre la parole et l’écriture, Saussure ne reconnaît à celle-ci qu’une fonction *étroite et dérivée*” [“On the one hand, in keeping with the Western tradition that not only in theory but in practice (at the root of its practice) governs the relationships between speech and writing, Saussure only grants the latter a *narrow and derived* function”] (*De la grammatologie* 46).

Since *De la grammatologie* is a close reading of Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* what allows Derrida to deconstruct the opposition between writing and speech (*langue-parole*) as a logical contradiction implicit in the thesis maintained by Saussure? A thesis concerning the arbitrary nature of the sign and, even more, about difference as a condition of the possibility of signs system : “On doit donc récuser au nom même de l’arbitraire du signe, la définition saussurienne de l’écriture comme ‘image’ . . . de la langue” [“Therefore, Saussure’s definition of writing as an ‘image’ . . . of language needs to be rejected on the very grounds of the arbitrary nature of the sign”] (66). As Derrida himself recognizes, “Saussure accumule ainsi les arguments contradictoires . . .” [“Saussure thus accumulates contradictory arguments”] (67). And this is the reason that supports the act of opposing Saussure to himself : “C’est donc encore à lui-même qu’il faut décidément opposer Saussure” (77). Following a classical logical argument and adopting a Heideggerian strategy of not simply employing an opposition, Derrida proclaims the necessity of “reformer le concept de l’écriture” [“reforming the concept of writing”] (80). That is to say : to reform writing does not mean to maintain that every sign is writing but to argue that every sign finds its condition of possibility in writing. Of course, this last “writing” is not “writing” in its vulgar sense but what he calls “archi-writing” or *différance*: “C’est que l’archi-écriture, mouvement de la différence, archi-synthèse irréductible . . .” [“That is to say, archi-writing, the movement of *différance*, the irreducible archi-synthesis”] (*De la grammatologie* 88). In other words, “archi-writing” is not identical with writing in its vulgar sense, nor with speech, yet at the same time it represents the condition of the possibility of writing (in its vulgar sense) and speech.

So the point is that, between 1965 and 1967, what Derrida includes under the concepts or archi-concepts of “writing” and “archi-writing” has nothing to do with what the *Telquelists*, Sollers and especially Kristeva, conceive of as “writing.” As Gasché has demonstrated, Derrida’s work takes place within the limits of phenomenology and a philosophy of reflection. And he is right, but only if we talk about Derrida’s work before 1968. As a matter of fact, we find grounds in order to develop that argument:

Derrida received a philosophical education during those years, in spite of his interest in literature (Artaud, Poe, Joyce, etc.).

What happened between 1967 and 1970? After the publication of *De la grammatologie*, Derrida came into contact with the *Tel Quel* group. Through this contact, Derrida changed the direction of deconstruction, since by reading Sollers's and Kristeva's texts he discovered that deconstruction could be applied beyond the close reading of concrete contradictions. Until that time he wrote, for example, about Artaud. Rather than being an essay similar to others about literature from 1967-1968, his article "La parole soufflée," first published in 1965, then in 1967 in *L'écriture et la différence*, is a text which projects onto Artaud all of the problems concerning the reaction against metaphysics, whether in the field of philosophy, in the field of literary commentary, or in the field of clinics : "Artaud a voulu détruire une histoire, celle de la métaphysique dualiste qui inspirait plus ou moins souterrainement les essais évoqués plus haut: dualité de l'âme et du corps soutenant, en secret, bien sûr, celle de la parole et de l'existence, du texte et du corps, etc." ["It was Artaud's desire to destroy one history, namely the history of dualist metaphysics which was the inspiration, in a more or less underground way, for the essays mentioned above : the duality of mind and body which, secretly of course, underlies the duality of speech and existence, text and body etc."] (*L'écriture* 261).

And what is it that Derrida learns from Kristeva (and from Sollers)? He learns all of the content and form that we pointed out in Kristeva's essay "La sémiologie des paragrammes." In Derrida's work, events take a rather unforeseen turn when he becomes conscious of the power of language as analyzed and introduced by Kristeva in that essay with relation to the logic of the paragram. My argument is this : Derrida takes from Kristeva's theory the logic of the paragram not as an object specific to poetic language but as a strategic tool for his analysis. Of course, he also sketches out a complementary logic when his texts deal with poets like Mallarmé or novelists like Sollers or Joyce. However, deconstruction in its most recent form is based on the use of paragrammatism as a particular mode of reading. In fact, what we call deconstruction is nothing but the application of paragrammatism to philosophical, political or theoretical works.

As we have seen, Kristeva's aim is to prove that poetic language is the only infinite code. What is important in order to develop my argument is that if a text explores this path it will be impossible to establish a contradiction with relation to its statements. The conclusion of her argument will be taken into account by Derrida: "le lp [langage poétique] est un formalisme indécidable qui ne cherche pas à se résoudre ["pl [poetic language] is an undecidable formalism that doesn't seek its resolution"] (Kristeva, "Pour une sémiologie" 64, translation is mine). All readers of Derrida know how crucial the notion of "undecidable" is. The infrastructures like *pharmakon*, supplement, *différance*, archi-writing, dissemination, subjectile, etc. are the tools employed by Derrida against metaphysics and logocentrism.

The relationship between the undecidability of infrastructures (according to Derrida) and the undecidability of the semantic level of poetic language (according to Kristeva) is quite clear. On the other hand, a close reading of Derrida's work before 1968 reveals that he is not yet using that notion of "undecidability," at least not in a systematic way. The explanation is not difficult at all: until then, he places his discourse mainly within a transcendental horizon. However, when he reads Kristeva he realizes that the idea of undecidability fits in very well with his first infrastructures like *différance* or archi-writing.

The jump from *De la grammatologie* to *La dissémination* is too radical to go unnoticed, and the exceptional change is due, without doubt, to Derrida's reading of Sollers and Kristeva. We can describe it, first of all, as the passing from a transcendental level to an empirical level. In order to reach the latter, Derrida adopts the logic or non-logic of paragrammatism. It produces a kind of hybridization in his work that will enjoy great success following a chance meeting with two critics coming out of New Criticism and Close Reading: Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller. As I have pointed out, Derrida realizes that what Kristeva states in relation to the undecidability of paragrammatism fits in very well with his infrastructures, and from that moment he begins to use the notion of undecidability in a systematic way, above all in the essays that will appear in 1972 in the book *La dissémination*. For example: can it be unfounded that Derrida refers to Gödel in order to explain what he understands by "undecidability"? The answer is no, because it is the same allusion made by Kristeva in order to justify the undecidability proper to poetic language. The context of this reference is very similar because they both speak of poetry.

Kristeva alludes specifically to the features of the "grammes scripturaux sémiques" (and the examples are extracted from *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Lautréamont):

La notion de constructibilité (qui implique l'axiome du choix), associée aux autres observations sur le langage poétique, explique l'impossibilité d'établir une contradiction dans l'espace du langage poétique. Cette constatation est proche de la constatation de Gödel concernant l'impossibilité d'établir la contradiction d'un système par des moyens formalisés dans ce système. . . . Fait d'oppositions surmontées (liées), le lp [langage poétique] est un formalisme *indécidable qui ne cherche pas à se résoudre*. ("Pour une sémiologie" 63-64; my italics)

The idea of constructability (which implies the axiom of choice), in conjunction with the other observations on poetic language, explains why it is impossible to establish a contradiction in poetic language. This observation is close to Gödel's observation about the impossibility of establishing the contradiction of a system by means of something that is formalized within this system. . . . Since it is made up of oppositions that

have been overcome (are tied up), pl [poetic language] is an *undecidable formalism that does not seek its own resolution*.

Note how Kristeva's approach to the semantic level of poetic language is made from a syntactic perspective, and this is the reason why she talks about "formalisme."

For his part, Derrida refers to Gödel in the context of the analysis of the practice of "play" in the poetry of Mallarmé [*la pratique du 'jeu' dans l'écriture mallarméenne*]. He is writing on the word "hymen" and on the position of this word within the syntactic structure of his poems :

C'est bien l'opération qu'on appelle ici par analogie indécidable. Une proposition indécidable, Gödel en a démontré la possibilité en 1931, est une proposition qui, étant donné un système d'axiomes qui domine une multiplicité, n'est ni en contradiction avec eux, ni vrai ni fausse au regard de ces axiomes. *tertium datur*, sans synthèse. (*La dissémination* 248-249)

This is exactly the operation that, by analogy, we will call undecidable here. An undecidable utterance – which Gödel proved to be possible in 1931 – is an utterance that, given a system of axioms controlling a multiplicity, does not contradict them and is neither true nor false with respect to these axioms. *tertium datur*, without synthesis.

In both texts the mention of Gödel is made with care: Kristeva says that her statement is close to Gödel; Derrida affirms that he speaks of "undecidability" only by analogy. In both fragments we find the more or less explicit allusion to a corrosive effect of "undecidability" on metaphysics or logocentrism. And finally, both authors comment on the impossibility of overcoming undecidability with almost the same words: undecidability does not look for a resolution (Kristeva); the undecidable proposition does not have any possibility of synthesis (Derrida). And what is more important: in both cases "undecidability" appears as a fundamental political tool. Kristeva speaks of the revolutionary aspect of paragrammatism and undecidability (close to the Leninist position shared by other *Telquelists* at the time), and Derrida speaks of the strategic operation accomplished by undecidability within and against metaphysics. At the same time, they are conscious that the only way of fighting against metaphysics, against the law, is from within: according to Kristeva, it is not possible to separate poetic language from the law ("Pour une sémiologie" 56).

On the other hand, Derrida uses paragrammatism as a strategic tool of reading. The deconstruction of Husserl, Saussure, and Rousseau is a consequence of the real existence of a logical contradiction in their texts. As we have seen before, the theory of a grammatology comes as a result of the contradictory arguments about the arbitrariness of sign and difference that governs the semiotic system. As Derrida reads these texts he

realizes the contradictory conflict at work here. However, in *La dissemination* things don't follow in the same way. *La dissémination* is composed of three texts and was first published in 1968, a year that was revolutionary not only in the streets, in the social imagination and in fashion, but also in the trajectory of Derrida's thought. I would like to reiterate that it is in that timeframe that he encountered and read Sollers's and Kristeva's texts from the three or four previous years. The point is that in the first essay of *La dissémination*, "La pharmacie de Platon," which represents a link between the first and second deconstruction, Derrida uses a different strategy for deconstructing the Platonic opposition between writing and speech.

In the limits of this essay we cannot walk through the entire Derrida's essay, nor do I think it necessary to do so. It is well known that the aim of the essay is to demonstrate how Plato's accusation against writing ends up turning against itself. The word Derrida focuses on is, in fact, *pharmakon* and its family, *pharmakeus*, *pharmakeia*. The Greek word oscillates between the meanings "poison" and its opposite "cure" in such a way that it becomes an undecidability. An undecidability that again represents the condition of the possibility of writing and speech, being the form that allows the appearance of all forms. Apparently, this is the same pattern Derrida followed in his deconstructive criticism of Saussure. Somehow it has to be the same in order to underscore how the metaphysical scheme repeats itself throughout history with similar arguments. However, it is not the same procedure because such a deconstruction does not happen as a result of a logical contradiction explicitly present in Plato but as a consequence of the paragrammatism, used and projected by Derrida onto the Platonic text. Derrida is perfectly aware of that situation when he writes that :

Platon semble ne faire porter aucun accent sur le mot *pharmakon* au moment où l'effet d'écriture vire du positif au négatif . . . Il ne dit pas que le *pharmakon* est le lieu, le support et l'opérateur de cette mutation. (*La dissémination* 148)

Platon does not seem to emphasize the term *pharmakon* when the effect of writing switches from positive to negative. . . . He does not claim that the *pharmakon* is the place, the support and the operative agent of this mutation.

That is to say that Plato says nothing about the opposite meanings of the word *pharmakon* ("poison" and "cure"), nothing about the fact that *pharmakon* becomes the agent of a transformation from one meaning to another. So what? Derrida resorts to the convention that "an author can't control the entire net of meanings of the language he has employed," and writes : "On peut dire en tout cas que tous les mots 'pharmaceutiques' que nous avons signalés faisaient effectivement, si l'on peut dire, 'acte de présence' dans le texte des dialogues" ["One may, at any rate, claim that all the

‘pharmaceutical’ terms we have been highlighting actually ‘put in an appearance,’ so to speak, in the text of the dialogues”] (148). What is more, Derrida uses words not utilized at any moment by Plato. Derrida recognizes this : “Si nous le mettons en communication . . . nous ne pouvons plus nous contenter de reconstituer une chaîne” [“If we connect it . . . we can no longer be content with reconstructing a chain”] (148). He points out that if *pharmakon* becomes undecidable this is not the result of a logical contradiction in the Platonic text but an act provoked by him. The following words clarify the question : “Comme tout texte, celui de ‘Platon’ ne pouvait pas ne pas être en rapport, de manière au moins virtuelle, dynamique, latérale, avec tous les mots composant le système grec. Des forces d’association unissent, à des distances, avec une force et selon des voies diverses, les mots ‘effectivement présents’ dans un discours à tous les autres mots du système lexical” [“Like any text, Plato’s cannot help being connected, at least in a virtual, dynamic, lateral way, with all the words that make up the Greek system. At a distance, by virtue and means of different pathways, associative forces unite the words that are ‘actually present’ in a certain discourse with all the other words of the lexical system.”] (*La dissémination* 148).

Is this not the generalization of paragrammatism? What Kristeva highlights as a feature of poetic language (“le texte littéraire se présente comme un système de connexions multiples qu’on pourrait décrire comme une structure de réseaux paragrammatiques” [“the literary text appears as a system of multiple connections that might be described as a structure of paragrammatic networks”], “Pour une sémiologie” 60), is generalized by Derrida as a common feature of all texts (“tout texte”) and converted into a tool that, when projected onto a text, can provoke its deconstruction. Thereby, we can affirm that the emergence of Derrida’s deconstruction is the result of his reading of the paragrammatic theory of Kristeva. Following this reading, Derrida adopts the paragrammatic logic and applies it to unexpected texts, to texts that are not poetic yet nonetheless sustained by the same rules of poetic language, even if this is a secret. But precisely such a secret is what occurred between Kristeva and Derrida.

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