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of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.

1968

From Work to Text¹

It is a fact that over the last few years a certain change has taken place (or is taking place) in our conception of language and, consequently, of the literary work which owes at least its phenomenal existence to this same language. The change is clearly connected with the current development of (amongst other disciplines) linguistics, anthropology, Marxism and psychoanalysis (the term 'connection' is used here in a deliberately neutral way: one does not decide a determination, be it multiple and dialectical). What is new and which affects the idea of the work comes not necessarily from the internal recasting of each of these disciplines, but rather from their encounter in relation to an object which traditionally is the province of none of them. It is indeed as though the *interdisciplinarity* which is today held up as a prime value in research cannot be accomplished by the simple confrontation of specialist branches of knowledge. Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins *effectively* (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down—perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion—in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation. The mutation in which the idea of work seems to be gripped must not, however, be over-estimated: it is more in the nature of an epistemological slide than of a real break. The break, as is frequently stressed, is seen to have taken place in the last century with the appearance of Marxism and Freudianism;² since then there has been no further break, so that in a way it can be said that for the last hundred years we have been living in repetition. What History, our History, allows us today is merely to slide, to vary, to exceed, to repudiate. Just as Einsteinian science³ demands that *the relativity of the frames of reference* be included in the object studied, so the combined action of Marxism, Freudianism and structuralism demands, in literature, the relativization of the relations of writer, reader and observer (critic). Over against the traditional notion of the *work*, for long—and still—conceived of in a, so to speak, Newtonian way, there is now the requirement of a new object, obtained by the sliding or overturning of former categories. That object is the *Text*. I know the word is fashionable (I am myself often led to use it) and therefore regarded by some with suspicion, but that is exactly

1. Translated by Stephen Heath.

2. On the economic and political theorist KARL MARX (1818–1883) and the founder of psychoanalysis SIGMUND FREUD (1856–1939), see above.

3. That is, the theory of special relativity devel-

oped by Albert Einstein (1879–1955), which explains what the mechanical worldview associated with Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) could not: the interactions of radiation and matter viewed from different inertial frames of reference.

why I should like to remind myself of the section of which I see the Text as standing understood more in a grammatical than in a not argumentations but enunciations, 'to remain metaphorical. Here then are method, genres, signs, plurality, filiation.

1. The Text is not to be thought of as would be futile to try to separate out material, the tendency must be avoided to savant-garde; it is not a question of drawing name of modernity and declaring certain 'out' by virtue of their chronological situation ancient work, while many products of contexts. The difference is this: the work is a part of the space of books (in a library, odological field. The opposition may recall for term) Lacan's⁴ distinction between 'played, the other demonstrated; likewise shops, in catalogues, in exam syllabus demonstration, speaks according to certain the work can be held in the hand, the text the movement of a discourse (or rather, knows itself as text); the Text is not the work that is the imaginary tail of the Text *only in an activity of production*. It follows example on a library shelf); its constitutive (in particular, it can cut across the work).

2. In the same way, the Text does not be contained in a hierarchy, even in a substitutes the Text is, on the contrary (on respect of the old classifications. How d Bataille?⁵ Novelist, poet, essayist, eco answer is so difficult that the literary mar Bataille who, in fact, wrote texts, perhaps Text poses problems of classification (wh functions), this is because it always inv (to take up an expression from Philippe talk—but in a very restricted sense—o and's? *Vie de Rancé*, which does indeed o the Text is that which goes to the limit of readability, etc.). Nor is this a rhetorical effect: the Text tries to place itself very (is not general opinion—constitutive of erfully aided by mass communications—

4. JACQUES LACAN (1901–1981), French psychoanalyst.

5. French writer (1897–1962).

6. Albert Thibaudet (1874–1936), French critic. Sollers (b. 1936), French writer.

which it excludes, its *censorship*?). Taking the word literally, it may be said that the Text is always *paradoxical*.

3. The Text can be approached, experienced, in reaction to the sign. The work closes on a signified.⁹ There are two modes of signification which can be attributed to this signified: either it is claimed to be evident and the work is then the object of a literal science, of philology, or else it is considered to be secret, ultimate, something to be sought out, and the work then falls under the scope of a hermeneutics, of an interpretation (Marxist, psycho-analytic, thematic, etc.); in short, the work itself functions as a general sign and it is normal that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign. The Text, on the contrary, practises the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as 'the first stage of meaning', its material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its *deferred action*. Similarly, the *infinity* of the signifier refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the unnameable signified) but to that of a *playing*; the generation of the perpetual signifier (after the fashion of a perpetual calendar) in the field of the text (better, of which the text is the field) is realized not according to an organic progress of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations. The logic regulating the Text is not comprehensive (define 'what the work means') but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy (lacking it, man would die); the work—in the best of cases—is *moderately* symbolic (its symbolic runs out, comes to a halt); the Text is *radically* symbolic: *a work conceived, perceived and received in its integrally symbolic nature is a text*. Thus is the Text restored to language; like language, it is structured but off-centred, without closure (note, in reply to the contemptuous suspicion of the 'fashionable' sometimes directed at structuralism, that the epistemological privilege currently accorded to language stems precisely from the discovery there of a paradoxical idea of structure: a system with neither close nor centre).

4. The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric). The reader of the Text may be compared to someone at a loose end (someone slackened off from any imaginary); this passably empty subject strolls—it is what happened to the author of these lines, then it was that he had a vivid idea of the Text—on the side of a valley, a *oued*¹ flowing down below (*oued* is there to bear witness to a certain feeling of unfamiliarity); what he perceives is multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives: lights, colours, vegetation, heat, air, slender explosions of noises, scant cries of

9. The sign was divided into *signified* (the meaning conveyed) and *signifier* (the symbol or sound that conveys that meaning) by the Swiss linguist FER-

DINAND DE SAUSSURE (1857–1913).

1. Wadi (Arabic); a streambed that is usually dry, except during the rainy season.

birds, children's voices from over on the clothes of inhabitants near or far away identifiable: they come from codes which is unique, founds the stroll in a difference the Text: it can be it only in its difference uality), its reading is semelfactive² (this deductive science of texts—no 'grammar' or entirely with citations, references, echoes, is not?), antecedent or contemporary, w through in a vast stereophony. The interte it itself being the text-between of another some origin of the text: to try to find the 's is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet without inverted commas. The work has n philosophy (we know that there are oppos philosophy, plural is the Evil. Against the v take as its motto the words of the man p 'My name is Legion: for we are many.' which opposes text to work can bring with ing, and precisely in areas where monologi of the 'texts' of Holy Scripture traditio monism (historical or anagogical) will per tion of meanings (finally, that is to say, to Marxist interpretation of works, so far re materialize itself more by pluralizing itse tutions' allow it).

5. The work is caught up in a process o mination of the work by the world (by rac of works amongst themselves, and a conf The author is reputed the father and the therefore teaches *respect* for the manuscri tions, while society asserts the legality of f 'droit d'auteur'³ or 'copyright', in fact of r legalized at the time of the French Rev without the inscription of the Father. Hen separates from that of the work: the latter which grows by vital expansion, by 'deve cantly ambiguous, at once biological and Text is that of the *network*; if the Text e combinatory systematic (an image, moreo ceptions of the living being). Hence no v can be *broken* (which is just what the Mid authoritative texts—Holy Scripture and A guarantee of its father, the restitution of t ing any legacy. It is not that the Author n his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'.

2. A neologism—*sema* (Greek) = sign; *semi* (Latin) = half; *factio* (Latin) = making—suggesting that the reading of "text" is largely sign pro-

du

3.



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