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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

A commence of the second of th 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

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 stand understood more in a grammatical than 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 ma ular, the tendency must be avoided to s avant-garde; it is not a question of draw name of modernity and declaring certain 'out' by virtue of their chronological situ ancient work, while many products of co texts. The difference is this: the work is a part of the space of books (in a librar odological field. The opposition may rec for term) Lacan's4 distinction between '1 played, the other demonstrated; likewis shops, in catalogues, in exam syllab demonstration, speaks according to cert the work can be held in the hand, the te the movement of a discourse (or rather, knows itself as text); the Text is not the work that is the imaginary tail of the Te only in an activity of production. It foll example on a library shelf); its constitutive (in particular, it can cut across the work

In the same way, the Text does not be contained in a hierarchy, even in a si stitutes the Text is, on the contrary (o respect of the old classifications. How c Bataille?5 Novelist, poet, essayist, eco answer is so difficult that the literary mar Bataille who, in fact, wrote texts, perhap Text poses problems of classification (when the control of the con 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 the Text is that which goes to the limit of readability, etc.). Nor is this a rhetorica effect: the Text tries to place itself very (is not general opinion—constitutive of erfully aided by mass communications—

I. 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-

^{4.} JACQUES LACAN (1901-1981), French psycho-

^{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, psychoanalytic, 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 offcentred, 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

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

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' o 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 monolog 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 rematerialize itself more by pluralizing itse tutions' allow it).

5. The work is caught up in a process of mination of the work by the world (by rac of works amongst themselves, and a conj The author is reputed the father and the therefore teaches respect for the manuscri tions, while society asserts the legality of 'droit d'auteur'3 or 'copyright', in fact of r legalized at the time of the French Revo without the inscription of the Father. He 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 Mic authoritative texts-Holy Scripture and A guarantee of its father, the restitution of t ing any legacy. It is not that the Author r his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'.

^{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.

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

in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological,4 his inscription is ludic. He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary); it is the work of Proust, of Genet's which allows their lives to be read as a text. The word 'bio-graphy' re-acquires a strong, etymological sense, at the same time as the sincerity of the enunciation—veritable 'cross' borne by literary morality—becomes a false problem: the I which writes the text, it too, is never more than a paper-I.

6. The work is normally the object of a consumption; no demagogy is intended here in referring to the so-called consumer culture but it has to be recognized that today it is the 'quality' of the work (which supposes finally an appreciation of 'taste') and not the operation of reading itself which can differentiate between books: structurally, there is no difference between 'cultured' reading and casual reading in trains. The Text (if only by its frequent 'unreadability') decants the work (the work permitting) from its consumption and gathers it up as play, activity, production, practice. This means that the Text requires that one try to abolish (or at the very least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading, in no way by intensifying the projection of the reader into the work but by joining them in a single signifying practice. The distance separating reading from writing is historical. In the times of the greatest social division (before the setting up of democratic cultures), reading and writing were equally privileges of class. Rhetoric, the great literary code of those times, taught one to write (even if what was then normally produced were speeches, not texts). Significantly, the coming of democracy reversed the word of command: what the (secondary) School prides itself on is teaching to read (well) and no longer to write (consciousness of the deficiency is becoming fashionable again today: the teacher is called upon to teach pupils to 'express themselves', which is a little like replacing a form of repression by a misconception). In fact, reading, in the sense of consuming, is far from playing with the text. 'Playing' must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself plays (like a door, like a machine with 'play') and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which re-produces it, but, in order that that practice not be reduced to a passive, inner mimesis6 (the Text is precisely that which resists such a reduction), also playing the Text in the musical sense of the term. The history of music (as a practice, not as an 'art') does indeed parallel that of the Text fairly closely: there was a period when practising amateurs7 were numerous (at least within the confines of a certain class) and 'playing' and 'listening' formed a scarcely differentiated activity; then two roles appeared in succession, first that of the performer, the interpreter to whom the bourgeois public (though still itself able to play a littlethe whole history of the piano) delegated its playing, then that of the (passive) amateur, who listens to music without being able to play (the gramophone record takes the place of the piano). We know that today post-serial music8 has radically altered the role of the 'inte some sort the co-author of the score, of 'expression'. The Text is very much a so reader a practical collaboration. Which executes the work? (Mallarmé9 posed the produce the book). Nowadays only the o the play on words). The reduction of re responsible for the 'boredom' experienced ('unreadable') text, the avant-garde film of one cannot produce the text, open it out,

7. This leads us to pose (to propose) a pleasure. I do not know whether there has (eudæmonist philosophies are themselves sure of the work (of certain works); I can Proust, Flaubert, Balzac, even-why not? sure, no matter how keen and even when part (unless by some exceptional critical for if I can read these authors, I also kno it is impossible today to write 'like that enough, suffices to cut me off from the very moment their remoteness establishes to know clearly what cannot be started bound to jouissance,2 that is to a pleasur signifier, the Text participates in its own w (supposing the latter does not opt for ba the transparence of social relations, that Text is that space where no language has guages circulate (keeping the circular ser

These few propositions, inevitably, do Theory of the Text and this is not simp person here presenting them (who in m more than pick up what is being develope the fact that a Theory of the Text cann exposition: the destruction of meta-lang necessary provisionally to resort to metapart of the theory itself: the discourse or other than text, research, textual activity which leaves no language safe, outside, in position as judge, master, analyst, cor Text can coincide only with a practice of

^{4.} A neologism—alētheia (Greek) = the self-presentation of Truth; theological = relating to the study of religious faith—meaning that the author's writing no longer operates in a theological realm of truth.

^{5.} Jean Genet (1910-1986), French dramatist.

Marcel Proust (1871-1922), French novelist.

Natice Frous: (1671–1922), French november 6. Representation, imitation (Greek).

7. Barthes was an avid amateur pianist.

8. Music that was a reaction against serialism, the total mathematization of all musical variables in the atonal compositions of Pierre Boulez (b. 1925)

and others; in some cases the interpreter shapes a deliberately "open" work, still viewed as a network

^{9.} STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ (1842-1898), French

poet. 1. French novelist and dramatist (1802–1870).



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