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

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Michael Lewis

Sussex

Friday, 18 August 2006 – Friday, 18 April 2008

Abbreviations

Works by Jacques Derrida

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

Works by Jacques Lacan

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

Abbreviations

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 Unpublished manuscript [References to unpublished seminars are given by the date of the session]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 Unpublished manuscript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 Unpublished manuscript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 Unpublished manuscript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

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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