

Sending: On Representation

BY JACQUES DERRIDA

[Note: Derrida's French title is "*Envoi*," which has a literary as well as a literal sense; in certain poetic forms the envoi served as a dedication, a signing-off, a summary, something with which the poem was as it were "sent off" to the prince, perhaps, for whom it was written. "*Envoyer*" means just "to send," and since Derrida's own text was the opening address to a congress of French-speaking philosophical societies (whose members had been "sent" to Strasbourg, where it was held—another significant fact in the context of the paper—as "representing" their respective philosophical constituencies) his title has also the sense of a "send-off" for the work of the congress. A further sense of "*envoi*" as "dispatch," something sent with urgency and in telegraphic language, is also sometimes in play in this text.

As the text proceeds, however, the force of the term becomes more metaphysical. The German equivalent of "*envoyer*" is "*schicken*," and in Heidegger the term "*Geschick*" (often translated "destiny") occurs in connection with the emergence of the idea of Being, which is as it were "sent out" from some origin as "destined." This origin is clearly not accessible directly; if it is, in Derrida's language, the "original *envoi*" (and in this part of the text I have tended to leave the term in French), it can be approached only by means of a "*renvoi*" or "sending-back." But "*renvoi*" brings its own complexities, since it is also the term used for "reference" in the scholarly sense (to footnotes, to earlier works, etc.). The problems of translation thus posed are considerable and have sometimes been solved in this case also by simply not translating at all.

The phrase that Derrida takes as a starting-point of his meditation: *On dirait alors que nous sommes en représentation*, I have translated as "One might say that we represent something," exploiting the sense of *en représentation* that conveys the responsibilities of a class or office to be seen as standing for something, as maintaining standards. But of course it means all the other things he suggests as well. Finally, the singular title "*Envoi*" echoes the plural "*Envois*" that Derrida uses as the title of the first part of his most recent book, *La Carte postale*.—P.C.]

AT the beginning of this century, in 1901, the French philosopher Henri Bergson made a remark about what he called "our word representation," our French word representation: "Our word representation is an equivocal word which ought never, according to its etymology, to designate an intellectual object presented to the mind for the first time. It ought to be reserved . . ."etc.

For the moment I leave aside this remark of Bergson's. I shall let it wait on the threshold of an introduction which I propose to entitle simply "Sending," in the singular.

Imagine that French were a dead language.

I could just as well have said: Represent that to yourselves, French, a dead language.

And in some archive of paper or stone, on some roll of microfilm, we could read a sentence. I read it here, let it be the opening sentence of this introductory address, for example this: "One might say that we represent something (*nous sommes en représentation*)."

Are we sure we know what this means, today? Let us not be too quick to believe it.

I have begun intentionally by allowing the word "representation" to appear already inserted in an idiom. Its translation into another idiom would remain problematic, which is another way of saying it could not be done without remainder. I shall not analyze all the dimensions of this problem but shall limit myself to what it most obviously points to.

What do we ourselves know when we pronounce or listen to the sentence I just read? What do we know of this French idiom?

Now what we already know is that if we are here in Strasbourg as representing, then this event bears an essential relation to a double body (*corps*), understanding this word in the sense of "body of work" (*corpus*) or "organized body" (*corporation*). I think on the one hand of the body of philosophy which can itself be considered a corpus of discursive acts or of texts but also as the body or corporation of subjects, of institutions

and of philosophical societies. We are mandated, in one way or another, under some form or degree of legitimacy, to represent these societies here. We may be considered more or less explicitly instructed representatives, delegates, ambassadors, emissaries, I prefer to say envoys. But on the other hand this representation maintains also an essential relation to the body or corpus of the French language. The agreement that authorizes this congress was made in French between philosophical societies whose very constitution alludes to their belonging to a linguistic domain, to a linguistic difference that does not coincide with a national difference.

What in this connection refers philosophical or philosophico-institutional acts back to language, to the supposed constitutive factor of a language or group of languages known as "Latin," obviously cannot be excluded from our discussion, all the more because the chosen theme, *representation*, allows itself less than most to be detached or dissociated from its linguistic embodiment, its lexical and above all nominal embodiment, or as others would be quick to say from its nominal representation. I will return to this point.

The sentence with which such a discourse might have begun ("One might say that we represent something"), all of whose idiomatic resources, as I said, will not be analyzed here, suggests at least this in addition: the sentence evokes the more or less representative representatives, the envoys we are mandated to be, under the aspect and in the highly regulated time of a kind of spectacle, of exhibition, of discursive if not oratorical performance, in the course of ceremonious, coded, ritualized exchanges. This event is a consecrated gathering, a feast or ritual destined to renew the pact, the contract or the symbol. Allow me to salute with some insistence the place of what is taking place here. The event takes place, thanks to the hospitality of one of our societies, in a city which, while it does not, as it once very symbolically did, lie outside of France, is nevertheless not just any French city. This frontier city is a place of passage and of translation, a buffer zone, a privileged site for encounter or competition between two immense linguistic ter-

ritories, two also among the most densely populated worlds of philosophical discourse. And it turns out (an idiom hesitating between chance and necessity) that in dealing with representation we shall not, as philosophers, be able to restrict ourselves to Latinity. It will be neither possible nor legitimate to overlook the enormous historical stake in this question of Latino-Germanic translation, of the relation between *repraesentatio* and the *Stellen* of *Vorstellung* or *Darstellung*. For some centuries it has been the case that as soon as a philosopher, of no matter what linguistic habits, engaged in an inquiry into *repraesentatio*, *Vor-* or *Darstellen*, he finds himself, on both sides of the frontier, on both banks of the Rhine, taken, surprised, preceded, anticipated by the close co-destination, the strange co-habitation, the contamination and the enigmatic co-translation of these two vocabularies. The philosophical—and it is *philosophical* societies that send us here as their representatives—can no longer, in this case, allow itself to be enclosed in a single idiom, at the risk of floating, neutral and disembodied, remote from every body of language. It is just that the philosophical turns out in advance to be engaged in a multiplicity, a linguistic duality, or duel, in the region of a bilingualism that it cannot suppress without suppressing itself. And one of the numerous supplementary involutions of this enigma follows the line of this translation—and of this translator's task. We do not "represent something" only as representatives, as delegates or officeholders sent to an assembly which is to discuss representation; the problem of translatability that we shall not be able to avoid will also be a problem of representation. Is translation of the same order as representation? Does it consist in representing a sense, the same semantic content, by a different word of a different language? If so is it a question of the substitution of one representative structure for another? And as a privileged example, both supplementary and deep, do *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung* play the role of German representations of French (or more generally Latin) representation or vice versa, is "representation" the pertinent representative of *Vorstellung*, indeed

of *Darstellung*? Or does the so-called relation of translation or of substitution already escape the orbit of representation, and in that case how should we interpret representation? I shall come back to this exemplary question but I am satisfied just to situate it at the moment.

Let us suppose that French is a dead language. We think we can distinguish a dead language from a living one and use for this a set of relatively rigorous criteria. Confident in this very naive presumption, represent to yourselves now the following scene of deciphering: Some philologists occupied with a written corpus, with a library or a silent archive, have not only to reconstitute a French language but at the same time to fix the sense of certain words, to establish a dictionary or at least some entries for a dictionary. Without any other context than that of written documents, in the absence of living informants to intervene in this context, the lexicologist would have to elaborate a dictionary of words (you are aware that dictionaries of words and dictionaries of things are differentiated—more or less as Freud differentiated representations of words [*Wortvorstellungen*] and representations of things [*Sach- or Dingvorstellungen*]). Confident in the unity of the word and in the double articulation of language, such a lexicon should classify the different items of the word “representation” by their meanings and their use in a certain state of the language and taking account of a certain richness or diversity of corpuses, codes, and contexts. So one should presuppose a profound unity of these different meanings, and that a law will come to regulate this multiplicity. A minimum and shared semantic kernel would justify upon each occasion the choice of the “same” word “representation” and would allow itself, precisely, “to represent” by means of it, in the most different contexts. In the political domain, we can speak of parliamentary, diplomatic, or union representation. In the aesthetic domain, we can speak of representation in the sense of mimetic substitution, notably in the so-called plastic arts, but, in a more problematic manner, of a theatrical representa-

tion in a sense which is not necessarily or uniquely reproductive or repetitive but in order to name in this case a presentation (*Darstellung*), an exhibition, a performance. I have just evoked two codes, the political and the aesthetic, leaving for the moment in suspense the other categories (metaphysical, historic, religious, epistemological) which are inscribed in the program of our meeting. But there are also all sorts of sub-context and subcodes, all sorts of *uses* of the word "representation," which seems then to mean image, perhaps nonrepresentative, nonreproductive, nonrepetitive, simply presented and placed before our eyes, before our imaginative or mental gaze, according to the traditional metaphor which can also be interpreted and overdetermined as a representation of representation. More broadly, we can also look for what there is in common between the nominal occurrences of the word "representation" and so many idiomatic locutions in which the verb "to represent," indeed "to represent oneself," does not appear simply to modulate, in the mode of the "verb," a semantic kernel which one could identify according to the nominal model of "representation." If the noun "representation," the adjectives "representing," "representable," "representative," the verbs "represent" or "represent oneself" are not only the grammatical modulations of a single and identical meaning, if kernels of different meanings are present, at work in or produced by these grammatical modes of the idiom, then the lexicologist, the semanticist, indeed the philosopher who would try to classify different varieties of "representation" and of "representing," to give account of the variables or the divergences from the identity of an invariant meaning, is going to have a rough time of it.

The hypothesis of the dead language is useful to me only as a heuristic. It draws attention to a situation in which a context is never able to be saturated for the determination and *identification* of a sense. Now in this respect the so-called living language is structurally in the same situation. The two conditions for fixing the meaning of a word or overcoming the

polysemy of a name—namely, the existence of an invariant under the diversity of semantic transformations on one hand, the possibility of determining a context which would saturate the meaning on the other hand—these two conditions seem to me in any case as problematic for a living language as for a dead one.

And this is more or less, here and now, our situation, we who represent something. Whether or not one lays claim to a philosophic use of so-called natural language, the word “*représentation*” does not have the same semantic field and the same mode of functioning as an apparently identical word (“representation” in English, “*Repräsentation*” in German) or as the different words that people take to be its equivalents in current translations (once again, and I shall return to this point, *Vorstellung* is not just one example here among others). If we want to understand each other, to know what we are talking about in relation to a theme which is truly common to us, we have before us two types of great problematic. We can on the one hand ask ourselves what discourse based on representation means in our common language. And then we shall have to do a job which is not fundamentally different from that of the semantic lexicologist who is projecting a dictionary of words. But on the other hand, presupposing an implicit and practical knowledge on this subject, basing ourselves on a living contract or consensus, believing that in the end all subjects competent in the *franca lingua* understand each other about this word, that the variations are only contextual and that no essential obscurity will obfuscate discourse about representation, we shall try to give an account, as they say, of representation today, the thing or the things named “representations” rather than the words themselves. We would have in mind a sort of philosophical “*dictionnaire raisonné*” of things rather than words. We would presuppose that there could be no irremediable misunderstanding as to the content and the destination of the message or the sending named “representation.” In a “natural” situation (as we also say a

natural language), one could always correct the indeterminacy or the misunderstanding; and it is at bottom by philosophy that one would correct philosophy, I mean the bad effects of philosophy. These would follow from a practice that is current and apparently profoundly philosophical: to think what a concept means in itself, to think what representation is, the essence of representation in general. This philosophical practice first pushes the word to its very greatest obscurity, in a highly artificial way, in abstracting it from every context and every use value, as if a word were to regulate itself on a concept independently of any contextualized function, and in the limit independently of any sentence. You will recognize in this a type of objection (let us call it roughly "Wittgensteinian," and if we wish to develop it during the colloquium let us not forget that it was accompanied for Wittgenstein, at a given stage of his career, by a theory of representation in language, a picture theory which should be significant to us here, at least as regards what is "problematic" about it). In this situation, philosophical common usage always tries to stop the philosophic vertigo which catches it up by its language, and to do that by a movement of which I was saying just a moment ago that it was philosophical (philosophy against philosophy) but which is also prephilosophical, because in it one behaves as if one knew what "representation" meant and as if one had only to adjust this knowledge to a present historical situation, to distribute the articles, the types or the problems of representation in different regions but belonging to the same space. A gesture at once very philosophical and prephilosophical. We can understand the legitimate concern of the organizers of this congress, who in order to avoid "too great a dispersion" proposed Sections for the orderly distribution of themes (Aesthetics, Politics, Metaphysics, History, Religion, Epistemology). "To avoid too great a dispersion": this accepts a certain polysemy provided that it is not too excessive and lends itself to a rule, that it allows itself to be measured and governed in this list of six categories or in this encyclopedia as a circle of

six circles or six jurisdictions. Nothing more legitimate, in theory and in practice, than this concern of the Program Committee. Nevertheless, this list of six categories remains problematic, as everyone knows. They cannot be spread out upon the same table, as if one did not imply or never overlapped another, as if everything were homogeneous inside each of the categories or as if this list were *a priori* exhaustive. And you must imagine Socrates arriving in the early dawn of this Symposium, tipsy, late, and asking: "You tell me there is aesthetic, political, metaphysical, historic, religious and epistemological representation, as if each were one among others, but in the end, aside from the fact that you are perhaps forgetting some types, that you are probably enumerating too many or too few, you have not answered the question: what is representation in itself and in general? What makes all these representations representations called by the same name? What is the eidos of representation, the being-representation of representation?" As for this well-known schema of the Socratic question, what limits the possibility of this fiction is that for essential reasons, questions of language which do not allow of being assigned to a simple and limited place, Socrates would never have been able to ask this kind of question about the word "representation," and I think we must begin with the hypothesis that the word "representation" translates no Greek word in any obvious way, leaving nothing aside, unless it is reinterpreted and reinscribed deeply into history. This is not one problem of translation among others, it is the problem of translation itself and its supplementary complication of which I spoke just now. Before knowing how and what to translate by "representation," we must interrogate the concept of translation and of language which is so often dominated by the concept of representation, whether it be a matter of interlinguistic translation, or intralinguistic (within a single language), or even, to revert for convenience to Jakobson's tripartite distinction, intersemiotic translation (between discursive and nondiscursive languages, art for example).

Each time we would find the presupposition or the desire for an invariable identity of sense already present behind all the usages and regulating all the variations, all the correspondences, all the interexpressive relations (I use this Leibnizian language deliberately, what Leibniz calls the "representative nature" of the monad constituting this constant and regulated relation of interexpressivity). Such a representative relation would organize not only the translation of a natural or a philosophic language into another but also the translatability of all regions, for example also of all the contents distributed in the sections allowed for by the Program Committee. And the unity of this list of sections would be assured by the representative structure of the table itself.

This hypothesis or this desire would be precisely that of representation, of a representative language whose object would be to represent something (to represent in all the senses of the delegation of presence, of reiteration rendering present once again, in substituting a presentation for another *in absentia* and so on); such a language would represent something, a sense, an object, a referent, indeed even another representation in whatever sense, which would be anterior and exterior to it. Under the diversity of words from diverse languages, under the diversity of the uses of the same word, under the diversity of contexts or of syntactic systems, the same sense or the same referent, the same representative content would keep its inviolable identity. Language, every language, would be representative, a system of representatives, but the content represented, what is represented by this representation (a meaning, a thing, and so on) would be a presence and not a representation. What is represented would not have the structure of representation, the representative structure of the representative. Language would be a system of representatives or also of signifiers, of place-holders (*lieu-tenants*) substituted for what they say, signify, or represent, and the equivocal diversity of the representatives would not affect the unity, the identity, indeed even the ultimate simplicity of the repre-

sented. Now it is only starting with these premises—that is to say, a language as a system of representation—that the problematic in which we are caught up would be set in place. But to determine language as representation is not the effect of an accidental prejudice, a theoretical fault or a manner of thinking, a limit or a closure among others, a form of representation, precisely, which came about one day and of which we could rid ourselves by a decision when the time comes. Today there is a great deal of thought against representation. In a more or less articulated or rigorous way, this judgment is easily arrived at: representation is bad. And this without being able to assign, in the final analysis, the place and the necessity of that evaluation. We should ask ourselves what is this place and above all what may be the various risks (in particular political ones) of such a prevalent evaluation, prevalent in the world at large but also among the most diverse fields, from aesthetics to metaphysics (to return to the distinctions of our program) by way of politics, where the parliamentary ideal, to which the structure of representation is so often attached, is no longer very inspiring in the best of cases. And yet, whatever the strength and the obscurity of this dominant current, the authority of representation constrains us, imposing itself on our thought through a whole dense, enigmatic, and heavily stratified history. It programs us and precedes us and warns us too severely for us to make a mere object of it, a representation, an object of representation confronting us, before us like a theme. It is even difficult enough to pose a systematic and historical question on the topic (a question of the type: “What is the system and the history of representation?”) now that our concepts of system and of history are essentially marked by structure and the closure of representation.

When one tries today to think what is occurring with representation, at once the extension of its domain and its being called in question, it is impossible to avoid (whatever conclusions one may come to about it) this central motif of Heideggerian meditation when it attempts to determine an epoch of

representation in the destiny of Being, a post-Hellenic epoch in which relations to Being would have come to a halt as *repraesentatio* and *Vorstellung*, in the equivalence of one to the other. Among the numerous texts of Heidegger that ought to be reread in this connection I must limit myself to a passage in *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* (The Epoch of Worldviews) in *Holzwege*. Heidegger there inquires what best expresses itself, the sense (*Bedeutung*) which comes best to expression (*Ausdruck*) in the word *repraesentatio* as in the word *Vorstellung*.¹ This text dates from 1938, and I would like first to draw your attention to one of the peculiarly contemporary features of this meditation. It has to do with publicity and publication, the media, the accelerating pace at which intellectual and philosophical production is becoming technical (is in short becoming a product), in a word everything that could be included today under the heading of a producing society, of representation, of spectacle, with all the responsibilities that that implies. Heidegger initiates in this same place an analysis of the institution of research, of the university and of publication in connection with the dominant position of representative thought, of the determination of appearance or presence as an image-before-one or the determination of the image itself as an object installed before (*vorgestellt*) a subject. I reduce and oversimplify a train of thought which engages itself on the side of the determination of what-is as object and of the world as a field of objectivity for a subject (*subjectité*), the institutionalization of knowledge being unthinkable without this objective setting of representation (*cette mise en représentation objective*). In passing Heidegger evokes furthermore the life of the intellectual who has become a “researcher” and has to participate in the programs of congresses, of the researcher tied to the “instructions of publishers, who decide nowadays what books should be written or not written.” Heidegger adds here a note that I want to read because of its date and because it

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950), p. 84.

belongs by right to our reflection on the epoch of representation:

The growing importance of the reign of the publisher finds its explanation not only in the fact that publishers (through the book trade, for example) acquire a better sense of the needs of the public or master the commercial side of the matter better than authors. It is rather that their own work takes on the form of a procedure which is planned in advance and, constantly reorganizing itself, is oriented towards the question of knowing how, by the commissioned and grouped publication of books and writings, it is possible to gain and maintain an entree into the world under the aspect of publicity (*ins Bild der Öffentlichkeit*). The preponderance of collections, series, journals and pocket editions is already a consequence of this effort on the part of publishers, which in its turn agrees with the intentions of the researchers, who in this way not only make themselves known and noticed more easily and quickly in series and collections but have ready access, on a more developed front, to efficient organization.

Here now is the most palpable articulation, which I lift out of a long and difficult development that I cannot reconstitute here. If we follow Heidegger, the Greek world did not have a relation to what-is as to a conceived image or a representation (here *Bild*). There what-is is presence; and this did not, at first, derive from the fact that man would look at what-is and have what we call a representation (*Vorstellung*) of it as the mode of perception of a subject. In a similar way, in another age (and it is about this sequence of ages or epochs, *Zeitalter*, arranged to be sure in a nonteleological fashion but grouped under the unity of a destiny of Being as fate [*envoi*], *Geschick*, that I would like to raise a question later on), the Middle Ages relates itself essentially to what-is as to an *ens creatum*. "To be something that-is" ("*être-un-étant*") means to belong to the created order; this thus corresponds to God according to the analogy of what-is (*analogia entis*), but, says Heidegger, the being of what-is never consists in an object (*Gegenstand*) brought before man, fixed, stopped, available for the human subject who would possess a representation of it. This will be the mark of

modernity. "That what-is should become what-is in representation (literally in the being-represented, *in der Vorgestelltheit*), this is what makes the epoch (*Zeitalter*) which gets to this point a new epoch in relation to the preceding one." It is thus only in the modern period (Cartesian or post-Cartesian) that what-is is determined as an object present *before* and *for* a subject in the form of *repraesentatio* or *Vorstellen*. So Heidegger analyzes the *Vorgestelltheit des Seienden*. What do *Stellen* and *Vorstellen* mean? I translate, or rather for essential reasons I couple the languages:

It is something entirely different that, in contrast to Greek understanding, signifies (*meint*) modern representation (*das neuzeitliche Vorstellen*), whose signification (*Bedeutung*) reaches its best expression (*Ausdruck*) in the word *repraesentatio*. *Vorstellen bedeutet hier*, representation signifies here: *das Vorhandene als ein Entgegenstehendes vor sich bringen, auf sich, den Vorstellenden zu, beziehen und in diesen zu sich als das massegebenden Bereich zuruckzwingen*, to make the existent (which is already before one: *Vorhandene*) come before one as a standing-over-against, to relate it to the self who represents it and in this way to force it back to the self as a determining field.

It is the self, here the human subject, which is the field in this relation, the domain and the measure of objects as representations, its own representations. I interrupt my citation for a moment.

Heidegger thus uses the Latin word *repraesentatio* and settles at once into the equivalence between *repraesentatio* and *Vorstellung*. This is not illegitimate, on the contrary, but it does require explanation. As "representation," in the philosophical code or in ordinary language, *Vorstellung* seems not to imply immediately the meaning that is carried in the *re-* of *repraesentatio*. *Vorstellen* seems to mean simply, as Heidegger emphasizes, to place, to dispose before oneself, a sort of theme or thesis. But this sense or value of being-before is already at work in "*present*." *Praesentatio* signifies the fact of presenting and *re-praesentatio* that of *rendering* present, of a summoning as a power-of-bringing-back-to-presence. And this power-of-

bringing-back, in a repetitive way, is marked simultaneously by the re- of representation *and* in this positionality, this power-of-placing, disposing, putting, that is to be read in *Stellen* and which at the same time refers back to the self, that is to the power of a subject who can bring back to presence and make present, make something present to itself, indeed just make itself present. This making-present can be understood in two senses at least; this duplicity is at work in the term representation. On the one hand, to render present would be to bring to presence, into presence, cause or allow to come in presenting. On the other hand, but this second sense is implicit in the first, causing or allowing to come implying the possibility of causing or allowing to return, to render present, like all "rendering," all restitution, would be to repeat, to be able to repeat. Whence the idea of repetition and return which resides in the very meaning of representation. I will say of a word that to my knowledge is never used thematically in this context that it is the "render" that is split, meaning *sometimes*, in "to render present," just to present, to allow or cause to come to presence, into presentation, *sometimes* to cause or allow to return, to restore for the second time to presence, perhaps in effigy, by sign or symbol, what was not or was no longer present, this *not* or *no-longer* having a very great diversity of possible modes. Now what is the source, in philosophical or more or less scientific language, of the semantic determination of *repraesentatio* as something that takes place in and for mind, within the subject and over against it, in it and for it, object for a subject? In other words how could this meaning of *repraesentatio* be contemporary, as Heidegger says it is, with the Cartesian or Cartesian-Hegelian epoch of the *subjectum*? In representation, the present, the presentation of what is presented comes back, returns as a double effigy, an image, a copy, an idea as a picture of the thing henceforth at hand, in the absence of the thing, available, disposed and put forward for, by, and in the subject. *For*, *by*, and *in*, the system of these prepositions (puttings-forth) marks the place of representation or of the

Vorstellung. The prefix *re-* marks the repetition in, for, and by the subject, *a parte subjecti*, of a presence which otherwise would present itself to the subject without depending upon it or without having it in its own place. Doubtless the present which returns thus had already the form of what is for and before the subject but was not at its disposition in this preposition itself. Whence the possibility of translating *repraesentatio* by *Vorstellung*, a word which, in its literality and here as a metaphor, we could say somewhat hastily (but I am reserving this problem) marks the gesture which consists of placing, of causing to stand before one, of installing in front of oneself as available, of localizing ready at hand, within the availability of the preposition. And the ideality of the idea as a copy in the mind is precisely what is most readily available, most repeatable, apparently most docile to the reproductive spontaneity of the mind. The value “*pre-*,” “being-before,” was certainly already present in “present”; it is only the rendering available of the human subject that makes representation happen, and this rendering available is exactly that which constitutes the subject as a subject. The subject is what can or believes it can offer itself representations, disposing them and disposing of them. When I say offer itself representations, I could just as easily say, scarcely changing context, offer itself representatives (political ones for instance) or even, and I will come to this, offer itself to itself in representation or as a representative. We see this positional initiative—which will always be in relation with a certain highly determined concept of freedom—marked within the *Stellen* of *Vorstellen*. And I must content myself with situating here the precise place of the necessity of the whole Heideggerian meditation on the *Gestell* and the modern essence of technique.

If *rendering present* is taken to mean the repetition which restitutes thanks to a substitute, we come back to the continuum or the semantic coherence between representation as an idea in the mind pointing to the thing (for instance as the “objective reality” of the idea), as the picture in place of the

thing itself, in the Cartesian sense or in the sense of the empiricists and on the other hand aesthetic representation (theatrical, poetic, literary, or visual) and finally political representation.

The fact that there should be representation or *Vorstellung* is not, according to Heidegger, a recent phenomenon, characteristic of the modern epoch of science, of technique and of subjectness (*subjectité*) of a Cartesian-Hegelian type. But what would be characteristic of this epoch is rather authority, the dominant generality of representation. It is the interpretation of the essence of what is as an object of representation. Everything which becomes present, everything which happens or presents itself is apprehended without the form of representation. The experience of what-is becomes essentially representation. *Representation* becomes the most general category to determine the apprehension of whatever it is that is of concern or interest in any relation at all. All of post-Cartesian and even post-Hegelian discourse, if not in fact the whole of modern discourse, has recourse to this category to designate all the modifications of the subject in its relationship with an object. The great question, the generative question, thus becomes, for this epoch, that of the *value* of representation, of its truth or its adequacy to what it represents. And even the criticism of representation or at least its delimitation and its most systematic excesses—at least in Hegel—seem not to call again into question the very determination of experience as subjective, that is to say, representational. I think this could be shown in Hegel, who nevertheless reminds us regularly of the limits of representation insofar as it is unilateral, only on the side of the subject (“as yet it is only a representation,” he always says in the moment of proposing a new *Aufhebung*; I shall come back to this in a moment). *Mutatis mutandis*, Heidegger would say the same of Nietzsche, who however was strongly opposed to representation. Would he have said the same of Freud, in whom the concepts of representation, of *Vorstellung*, *Repräsentanz*, and even *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* play such a particular

and organizing role in the obscure problematics of impulse and of repression, and in whom by the most roundabout ways the work of mourning (introjection, incorporation, interiorization, idealization, so many modes of *Vorstellung* and of *Erinnerung*), the notions of phantasm and of fetish retain a close relationship with a logic of representation or of representativeness? Again I keep this question aside for the moment.

Of course, Heidegger does not interpret this reign of representation as an accident, still less as a misfortune in the face of which we must retract shivering. The end of *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* is very clear in this respect, at the point where Heidegger evokes a modern world which is beginning to remove itself from the space of representation and of the calculable. We might say in another language that a criticism or a deconstruction of representation would remain feeble, vain, and irrelevant if it were to lead to some rehabilitation of immediacy, of original simplicity, of presence without repetition or delegation, if it were to induce a criticism of calculable objectivity, of criticism, of science, of technique, or of political representation. The worst regressions can put themselves at the service of this antirepresentative prejudice. Reverting to the Heideggerian position itself, let me make this point, which will prepare far in advance a question in its turn on Heidegger's path or undertaking: so as not to be the accident of a faux-pas, this reign of representation should have been fated, predestined, *geschickte*, that is to say, literally sent, dispensed, assigned by a fate as a summary of a history (*Geschick*, *Geschichte*). The advent of representation must have been prepared, prescribed, announced from far off, emitted, I will say signaled at a distance (*télésigné*) in a world, the Greek world, where however representation, the *Vorstellung* or the *Vorge-stelltheit des Seienden* had no dominion. How can this have happened? Representation is to be sure an image, or an idea as an image in and for the subject, an affection of the subject in the form of a relationship to the object which is in it as a copy, a painting or a scene (an idea, if you prefer, more in a Cartesian

sense than a Spinozistic one, which gives rise to a question in passing: that is no doubt why Heidegger always refers to Descartes without naming Spinoza—or perhaps others—in designating this epoch). Representation is not merely this image, but to the extent that it is this supposes that the world is previously constituted as visible. Now if for the Greeks, according to Heidegger, the world is not essentially a *Bild*, an available image, a spectacular form offered to the gaze or to the perception of a subject; if the world was first of all presence (*Anwesen*) which seizes man or attaches itself to him rather than being seen, intuited (*angeschaut*) by him; if it is rather man who is taken over and regarded by what-is, it was nevertheless necessary for the world as *Bild*, and then as representation, to declare itself among the Greeks, and this was nothing less than Platonism. The determination of the being of what is as *eidōs* is not yet its determination as *Bild*, but the *eidōs* (aspect, look, visible figure) would be the distant condition, the presupposition, the secret mediation which would one day permit the world to become representation. Everything happens as if the world of Platonism (and in saying the world of Platonism I also reject the idea that something like Platonist philosophy might have produced a world or that inversely it might have been the simple representation, as reflection or as symptom, of a world that sustains it) had prepared, dispensed, destined, sent, put on its way and on its path the world of representation—as far as our own time, by way of positions or outlooks of Cartesian, Hegelian, Schopenhauerian, even Nietzschean types, and so on, that is to say the whole of the history of metaphysics in its presumed unity as the indivisible unity of a sending.

In any case, for Heidegger no doubt Greek man before Plato did not inhabit a world dominated by representation; and it is with the world of Platonism that the determination of the world as *Bild* announces itself and is sent on its way, a determination that will itself prescribe predominance of representation and send it on its way.

On the other hand while for Plato the being-what-is of what-is (*die Seiendheit des Seienden*) is determined as *eidōs* (aspect, sight, *Aussehen, Anblick*), here we find the presupposition laid down well in advance (sent: *die weit voraus geschickte Voraussetzung*), from long ago mediately, in a hidden way, dominant (ruling: *lang in Verborgenen mittelbar waltende Voraussetzung*) so that the world could become image (*Bild*).

The world of Platonism would thus have given the send-off for the reign of representation, it would have destined it without itself being subjected to it. It would have been at the limit of this sending, as the origin of philosophy. Already and not yet. But this already-not-yet should not be the dialectical already-not-yet which organizes the whole Hegelian teleology of history and in particular the moment of representation (*Vorstellung*) which is already what it is not yet, its own overflowing. The *Geschick*, the *Schicken*, and the *Geschichte* of which Heidegger speaks are not sendings of the representative type. The historicity they constitute is not a representative or representable process, and in order to think it we need a history of being, of the sending of being on its way, no longer regulated or centered on representation.

It remains here then to think out a history which would no longer be of a Hegelian type or dialectic in general. For Hegelian, even neo-Hegelian, criticism of representation (*Vorstellung*) seems always to have been an *Aufhebung* (*releve*) of representation, keeping the latter in the center of becoming, as the form itself, the most general formal structure of passing from one moment to the next, and that in the present form of the already-not-yet. Thus—but these examples could be multiplied—between aesthetic and revealed religion, between revealed religion and philosophy as absolute knowledge, it is always the *Vorstellung* which marks the limit to be transcended (*à relever*). The typical syntagma is thus the following: it is *as yet* only a representation, it is *already* the following stage but that remains *still* in the form of the *Vorstellung*, it is only the subjective unilaterality of a representation. But the “representative” form of this subjectness is taken up

(*relevée*), it continues to inform the relationship to being after its disappearance. It is in this sense and following this interpretation of Hegelianism—at once strong and classical—that the latter would belong to the epoch of subjectness and of representationality (*Vorgestelltheit*) of the Cartesian world. What I retain from the two last points I have just too superficially evoked is that in order to begin to think out the multiple bearings of the word “representation” and the history, if there is one which really is one, of *Vorgestelltheit*, the minimal condition would be to bring up two presuppositions, that of a language of representative or representational structure, and that of a history as a process scanned according to the form or rhythm of *Vorstellung*. We should no longer try to represent to ourselves the essence of representation, *Vorgestelltheit*. The essence of representation is not a representation, it is not representable, there is no representation of representation, *Vorgestelltheit* is not just *Vorstellung*. Nor does it lend itself to this. It is in any case by a gesture of this type that Heidegger interrupts or disqualifies, in different domains, specular reiteration or infinite regress (*renvoi à l’infini*).

This move on Heidegger’s part does not only lead us to think of representation as having become the model of all thought of the subject, of every idea, of all affection, of everything that happens to the subject and modifies it in its relation to the object. The subject is no longer defined only in its essence as the place and the placing of its representations; it is also, as a subject and in its structure as *subjectum*, itself apprehended as a representative. Man, determined first and above all as a subject, as being-subject, finds himself interpreted throughout according to the structure of representation. And in this respect he is not only a subject represented (I open up here in the direction in which one can still say of the subject today, in one way or another, that it is represented, for example by a signifier for another signifier: “the signifier,” says Lacan, “is what represents a subject for another

signifier”²—and all the Lacanian logic of the signifier works also with this structuration of the subject by and as representation): an “entirely calculable” subject, says Lacan, as soon as it is “reduced to the formula of a matrix of significant combinations.”³ What thus brings the reign of representation into accord with the reign of the calculable is precisely Heidegger’s theme; he insists on the fact that only calculability (*Berechenbarkeit*) guarantees the certainty in advance of what is *to be represented* (*der Vorstellender*) and it is toward the *incalculable* that the limits of representation can be transcended. Structured by representation, the represented subject is also a representing subject. A representative of what is and thus also an object, *Gegenstand*. The trajectory which follows upon this point would be roughly the following. By a “modern” *Vorstellen* or *repraesentatio* the subject brings what-is back before itself. The prefix *re-* which does not have necessarily the value of repetition signifies at least the availability of the causing-to-come or to-become-present as what-is-there, in front, placed-before (*pré-posé*). The *Stellen* translates the *re-* insofar as it designates the making available or the putting in place, whereas the *vor* translates the *prae-* of *praesens*. Neither *Vorstellung* nor *repraesentatio* would be able to translate a Greek thought without diverting it elsewhere, which, moreover, all translation does. It has happened for example in French that *phantasia* or *phantasma* has been translated by representation; a lexicon of Plato does this, for instance, and the *phantasia kataleptike* of the Stoics is frequently translated “comprehensive representation.” But this would suppose anachronistically that the *subjectum* and the *repraesentatio* are possible and thinkable for the Greeks. Heidegger challenges this and in appendix 8 of *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* tends to demonstrate that subjectivism was unknown in the Greek world, even to the Sophists; being would have been understood there as presence, it would ap-

² Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 835.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 860.

pear in presence and not in representation. *Phantasia* names a mode of this appearing which is not representative. "In the uncovering (*Unverborgenheit*), *ereignet sich die Phantasia, phantasia* comes into its own, that is to say the coming-to-appearance (*das zum Erscheinen-Kommen*) of the present as such (*des Anwesenden als eines solchen*) for the man who for his part is present for what appears." This Greek thought of *phantasia* (whose fate we should follow here in all its displacements, up to the allegedly modern problematic of "fiction" and "phantasm") addresses itself only to presence, the presence of what is for the presence of man, its sense unmarked by the values of representative reproduction or of the imaginary object (produced or reproduced by man as representations). The enormous philosophical question of the imaginary, of the productive or reproductive imagination, even when it assumes once more, for example in Hegel, the Greek name of phantasy, does not belong to the Greek world but comes up later, at the epoch of representation and of man as a representing subject: "*Der Mensch als das vorstellende Subjekt jedoch phantasiert.*" Man as a representing subject, on the other hand, gives himself over to fantasy, that is to say, moves about in the *imaginatio* (the Latin word always marks the access to the world of representation), to the extent that its representation (*sein Vorstellen*) imagines what-is as the objective in the world insofar as it is a conceived image (the German is still indispensable: *insofern sein Vorstellen das Seiende als das Gegenstandliche in die Welt als Bild einbildet*).

How is man, having become a representative in the sense of *Vorstellend*, also and at the same time a representative in the sense of *Repräsentant*, in other words, not only someone who has representations, who represents himself, but also someone who himself represents something or someone? Not only someone who sends himself or gives himself objects but who is sent (*est l'envoyé de*) by something else or by the other? When he has representations, when he determines everything that is as representable in a *Vorstellung*, man fixes himself in giving

himself an image of what is, he makes of it an idea for himself, he translates for himself what is or gives himself its translation into an image (*Der Mensch setzt über das Seiende sich ins Bild*, says Heidegger). From that point on he puts himself on stage, says Heidegger literally, *setzt er sich selbst in die Szene*, that is to say, in the open circle of the representable, of shared and public representation. And in the following sentence, the expression of staging (*mise-en-scène*) is displaced or folded into itself; and, as in the translation, *Übersetzen*, the placing (*mise*, *Setzen*) is no less important than the stage. Putting himself forward or putting himself on stage, man poses, represents himself as the scene of representation (*Damit setzt sich der Mensch selbst als die Szene, in der das Seiende fortan sich vor-stellen, präsentieren, d.h. Bild sein muss*: in that way, a man puts himself forward as the stage on which what-is must from now on re-present itself, present itself, that is to say, be an image). And Heidegger concludes: "Man becomes the representative [this time *Re-präsentant*, with all the ambiguity of the Latin word] of what is in the sense of object (*im Sinne des Gegenständigen*)."

In this way we can reconstitute the chain of consequences that sends us back from representation as idea or as the objective reality of the idea (relation to the object), to representation as delegation, perhaps political, thus to the substitution of subjects identifiable with one another and the more replaceable as they are objectifiable (and here we have the other side of the democratic and parliamentary ethics of representation, that is to say, the horror of calculable subjectivities, innumerable but which can be numbered, computed, the crowds in concentration camps or in the police computers or those of other agencies, the world of the masses and of the mass media which would be also a world of calculable and representable subjectivity, the world of semiotics and of information theory and of communications). The same chain, if we assume that it hangs together and if we follow the development of the Heideggerian motif, traverses a certain system of pictorial, theatrical, or aesthetic representation in general.

[In the original text Derrida here inserts three justifications for what might be considered an excessive recourse to Heidegger, and to the German language, in this address to a French-speaking audience: first, that Heidegger is the only philosopher to deal with representation in general (*dans son ensemble*); second, that it is necessary to get outside the confines of a Latin language to think clearly the relationship between the “event of thought which is produced under the term *repraesentatio*” and its language of origin; third, to take up again the citation from Bergson given at the beginning and to rehearse the debate on “presentation” and “representation” that took place in the *Société française de Philosophie* in 1900–01. Derrida draws attention among other things to a certain philosophical xenophobia characteristic not only of French philosophers wary of German but produced also by “the violent contamination, the badly tolerated graft of philosophical language onto the body of ordinary and natural language which if the truth were told should really be rejected. . . .”—P.C.]

The reflections I have been presenting to you, if I think of them as expected (more or less expected), are expected questions and not conclusions. Here then, to conclude nevertheless, a certain number of questions that I would like to submit to you in their most economical formulation, indeed in the telegraphic form suitable to such a dispatch.

First question. This touches on the history of philosophy, of language and of French philosophical language. Is there such a language, and is it a single language? And what has happened in it or at its borders since the debate of 1901 on the terms *presentation* and *representation* in the *Société française de Philosophie*? What does the development of this question presuppose?

Second Question. This relates to the very legitimacy of a general interrogation on the essence of representation, in other words, the use of the name and title “representation” in a colloquium in general. This is my main question, and although I must leave it in a minimally schematic state I should explain it a little more than the preceding one, the more so because it may perhaps lead me to outline another relation to Heidegger. It is still a question of language and translation.

One might object, and I take this objection seriously, that in ordinary situations of ordinary language (if there are such things, as we ordinarily think) the question of knowing what we envision under the name of representation is very unlikely to arise, and if it arises it does not last a second. It is adequate in this way to a context which is not saturated but reasonably well determined, as it precisely is in what we call ordinary experience. If I read, if I hear on the radio that the diplomatic or parliamentary representatives (*la représentation diplomatique ou parlementaire*) of some country have been received by the Chief of State, that representatives (*représentants*) of striking workers or the parents of schoolchildren have gone to the Ministry in a delegation, if I read in the paper that this evening there will be a representation of some play, or that such and such a painting represents this or that, etc., I understand without the least equivocation and I do not put my head into my hands to take in what it means. It is clearly enough for me to have the competence usually required in a certain state of society and of its educational system. . . . Given that words always function in an (assumed) context destined to assure in the normal way the normality of their functioning, to ask what they can mean before and outside every such determined context is to study (it might perhaps be said) a pathology or a linguistic dysfunction. The schema is well known. Philosophical questioning about the name and the essence of "representation" before and outside of every particular context would be the very paradigm of this dysfunction. It would necessarily lead to insoluble problems or to pointless language games, or rather to language games which the philosopher would take seriously without perceiving what, in the functioning of language, makes the game possible. In this perspective it would not be a question of excluding philosophical styles or models from ordinary language but of acknowledging their place among others. What we have made of the word "representation" as philosophers in the last centuries or decades would come to be integrated, more or less well, into the

ensemble of codes and usages. This also would be a contextual possibility among others.

This type of problematic—of which I indicate only the most rudimentary opening moves—can give rise, as we know, to the most diverse developments, for example on the side of a pragmatics of language; and it is significant that these developments should have found a favorable cultural terrain outside the duel or dialogue of the Gallo-Germanic *Auseinandersetzung* within which I have somewhat confined myself up to now. However it may be with its more or less Anglo-Saxon representatives, from Peirce (with his problematic of the represented as, already, *representamen*), or from Wittgenstein, if he was English, to the most diverse champions of analytic philosophy or speech act theory, is there not in all this a decentering in relation to the *Auseinandersetzung*, which we too readily consider a point of absolute convergence? And in this decentering, even if we do not necessarily follow it along the Anglo-Saxon tracks I have referred to, even if we suspect them of being still too philosophizing in the hegemonic sense of the term, and if in truth they had their first defenders in Central Europe, will there perhaps be found the incitement to a problematic of a different style? It would not be a question simply of submitting so-called philosophical language to ordinary law and making it answer before this last contextual court of appeal, but of asking whether, in the very interior of what offers itself as the philosophical or merely theoretical usage of the word representation, the unity of some semantic center, which would give order to a whole multiplicity of modifications and derivations, is to be presumed. Is not this eminently philosophical presumption precisely of a re-representative type, in the central sense claimed for the term, in that a single self-same presence delegates itself in it, sends (*envoie*), assembles, and finally recognizes? This interpretation of representation would presuppose a representational pre-interpretation of representation, it would still be a representation of representation. Is not this presumption (unifying, bringing to-

gether, derivationist) at work in Heidegger all the way up to his strongest and most necessary displacements? Do we not find an indication of this in the fact that the epoch of representation or *Vorstellung*, or more generally *Gestell*, appears there as an epoch in the destiny or the *Geschick* of being? Although this epoch is neither a mode nor, in the strict sense, a modification of something that is, or of a substantial sense, although no more is it a moment or a determination in the Hegelian sense, it is certainly announced by an *envoi* of being which first of all uncovers itself as presence, more rigorously as *Anwesenheit*, as we have seen. In order for the epoch of representation to have its sense and its unity as an epoch, it must belong to the grouping (*rassemblement*) of a more original (*originnaire*) and more powerful *envoi*. And if there had not been the grouping of this *envoi*, the *Geschick* of being, if this *Geschick* had not announced itself from the start as the *Anwesenheit* of being, no interpretation of the epoch of representation would come to order it in the unity of a history of metaphysics. . . . This grouping is the condition, the being-together of what offers itself to thought in order for an epochal figure—here that of representation—to detach itself in its contour and order itself in its rhythm in the unity of a destination, or rather of a “destinality,” of being. No doubt the being-together of the *Geschick*, and in it of the *Gestell*, is neither that of a totality, nor that of a system, nor that of an identity comparable to any other. No doubt we should take the same precautions with respect to the grouping of every epochal figure. Nevertheless the question remains: if in a sense that is neither chronological, nor logical, nor intrahistorical in the current sense, all interpretation according to destiny or history (*toute interpretation historique ou destinale*) prescribes for the epoch of representation (in other words modernity, and in the same text Heidegger translates: the era of the subjectum, of objectivism and subjectivism, of anthropology, of aesthetico-moral humanism, etc.) an original *envoi* of being as *Anwesenheit*, which itself translates as presence and then as repre-

sentation according to translations which are so many mutations in the same, in the being-together of the same *envoi*, then the being-together of the original *envoi* arrives reflexively in a way at itself, the most closely to itself, in *Anwesenheit*. Even if there is dissension (*Zwiespalt*) in what Heidegger calls the great Greek epoch and the experience of *Anwesenheit*, this dissension groups itself in the *legein*, escapes, preserves itself and thus assures a sort of indivisibility of what is destined (*du destinal*). It is in basing itself on this grouped indivisibility of the *envoi* that Heidegger's reading can single out (*détacher*) epochs, including the most powerful, the longest, and also the most dangerous of all, the epoch of representation in modern times. Since this is not an epoch among others, and since it is singled out, in its privilege, in a very particular way, might one not be tempted to say that it is itself detached, sent, delegated, taking the place of what in it dissembles itself, suspends itself, reserves itself, retreats and retires there, namely *Anwesenheit* or even presence? Several types of this detachment will be found (metaphor, metonymy, mode, determination, moment, etc.), they will all be unsatisfactory for essential reasons. But it will be difficult to avoid the question whether the relationship of the epoch of representation to the great Greek epoch is not still interpreted by Heidegger in a representative mode, as if the couple *Anwesenheit/repraesentatio* still dictated the law of its own interpretation, which does no more than to redouble and recognize itself in the historical text it claims to decipher. Behind or under the epoch of representation there would be, drawn back, what it dissembles, covers over, forgets as the very *envoi* of what it still represents, presence or *Anwesenheit* in its grouping in the Greek *legein* which will have saved it, first of all from dislocation. My question then is the following, and I formulate it too quickly: Wherever this being-together or with itself of the *envoi* of being divides itself, defies the *legein*, frustrates the destination of the *envoi*, is not the whole schema of Heidegger's reading challengeable in principle, deconstructed from a historical point of view? If there has been

representation, it is perhaps (and Heidegger would recognize this) just because the *envoi* of being was originally menaced in its being-together, in its *Geschick*, by divisibility or dissension (what I would call dissemination). Can we not then conclude that if there has been representation, the epochal reading that Heidegger proposes for it becomes, in virtue of this fact, problematic from the beginning, at least as a normative reading (and it wishes to be this also), if not as an open questioning of what offers itself to thought beyond the problematic, and even beyond the question as a question of being, of a grouped destiny or of the *envoi* of being.

What I have just suggested concerns not only the reading of Heidegger, the one he makes of the destination of representation or the one we would make of his own reading. What I have just suggested concerns not only the whole ordering of epochs or periods in the presumed unity of a history of metaphysics or of the West. What I have just suggested concerns the very credit we would wish, as philosophers, to accord to a centered and centralized organization of all the fields or of all the sections of representation, grouped around a sustaining sense, of a fundamental interpretation. If there has been representation, as I said a moment ago, it is that the division will have been stronger, strong enough to have as a consequence that this sustaining sense no longer keeps, saves, or guarantees anything in a sufficiently rigorous fashion.

So the problematics or metamorphoses of representation that are called "modern" would no longer at all be representations of the same, diffractions of a unique sense starting from a single crossroads, a single place of meeting or passing for convergent enterprises, a single coming together or a single congress.

[Before concluding, Derrida evokes two further problems, that of representation in psychoanalysis and that of the notion of the "unrepresentable."—P.C.]

To what, to whom, to what destination have I been ceaselessly referring in the course of this introduction, at once

insistently and elliptically? I will venture to say: to back-references (*renvois* [see headnote—Tr.]) and references which would no longer be representative. Beyond a closure of representation whose form could no longer be linear, indivisible, circular, encyclopedic, or totalizing, I have tried to retrace a path opened on a thought of the *envoi* which, while (like the *Geschick des Seins* of which Heidegger speaks) of a structure as yet innocent of representation, did not as yet gather itself to itself as an *envoi* of being through *Anwesenheit*, presence and then representation. This *envoi* is as it were pre-ontological, because it does not gather itself together or because it gathers itself only in dividing itself, in differentiating (*différent*) itself, because it is not original or originally a sending-from (*envoi-de*) (the *envoi* of something-that-is or of a present which would precede it, still less of a subject, or of an object by and for a subject), because it is not single and does not begin with itself although nothing present precedes it; and it issues forth only in already sending back: it issues forth only on the basis of the other, the other in itself without itself. Everything begins by referring back (*par le renvoi*), that is to say, does not begin; and once this breaking open or this partition divides, from the very start, every *renvoi*, there is not a single *renvoi* but from then on, always, a multiplicity of *renvois*, so many different traces referring back to other traces and to traces of others. This divisibility of the *envoi* has nothing negative about it, it is not a lack, it is altogether different from subject, from signifier, or that letter of which Lacan says that it does not withstand partition and that it always reaches its destination. This divisibility or this difference is the condition for there being an *envoi*, possibly an *envoi* of being, a dispensation or a gift of being and time, of the present and of representation. These *renvois* of traces or these traces of *renvois* do not have the structure of representatives or of representations, nor of signifiers, nor of symbols, nor of metaphors, nor of metonymies, etc. But as these *renvois* from the other and to the other, these traces of difference, are not original and tran-

scendental conditions on the basis of which philosophy traditionally tries to derive effects, subdeterminations, or even epochs, it cannot be said for example that representative (or signifying or symbolic, etc.) structure *befalls* them; we shall not be able to assign periods or have some epoch of representation follow upon these *renvois*. As soon as there are *renvois*, and it is always already, something like representation no longer waits and we must perhaps arrange to tell this story differently, from *renvois* of *renvois* to *renvois* of *renvois*, in a destiny which is never certain of gathering itself up, of identifying itself, or of determining itself (I do not know if this can be said with or without Heidegger, and it does not matter). This is the only chance—but it is only chance—for there to be history, meaning, presence, truth, language, theme, thesis, and colloquium. Still we have to suppose that the chance is given us—and the law of this chance, the question remaining open as to whether, to say it in classical language, the irrepresentable of *renvois* is what produces the law (for example, the prohibition of representation) or whether it is the law which produces the irrepresentable by prohibiting representation. Whatever the necessity of this question of the relationship between law and traces (or the *renvois* of traces, the *renvois* as traces), it exhausts itself perhaps when we cease representing law to ourselves, apprehending law itself under the species of the representable. Perhaps law itself outreaches any representation, perhaps it is never before us, as what posits itself in a figure or composes a figure for itself. (The guardian of the law and the man from the country are “before the law,” *Vor dem Gesetz*, says Kafka’s title, only at the cost of never coming to see it, never being able to arrive at it. It is neither presentable nor representable, and the “entry” into it, according to an order which the man from the country interiorizes and gives himself, is put off until death.) The law has often been considered as that which puts things in place, posits itself and gathers itself up in composition (thesis, *Gesetz*, in other words what governs the order of representation), and autonomy in this respect always presup-

poses representation, as thematization, becoming-theme. But perhaps the law itself manages to do no more than transgress the figure of all possible representation. Which is difficult to conceive, as it is difficult to conceive anything at all beyond representation, but commits us perhaps to thinking altogether differently.

TRANSLATED BY PETER AND MARY ANN CAWS