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Re/pro/ductions: Ça déborde

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Abstract: This article examines Jacques Derrida’s work of self-reflection on his own teaching practice by using as a guiding thread the problematics of reproduction in the seminars of the 1970s. The first part of the article examines the sequence of seminars taught by Derrida at École normale supérieure from 1971 to 1977 to show how the concept of reproduction is deconstructed by Derrida across several seminars. Derrida systematically demonstrates, across several themes and fields (sociology and economy, biology and sexuality, art, technique, ontology, and so on), that the critical recourse to the concept of reproduction (for instance, in its Marxist form) risks being complicit in the reproductive system it criticizes. The deconstructive motif of *débordement* is introduced to problematize this onto-logic of re-production. The second part of the article analyzes more specifically the unpublished seminar “GREPH, le concept de l’idéologie chez les idéologues français” (1974–75), in which Derrida examines the seminar function, his role as a teacher, and his own situation within the French educational system. In particular, Derrida offers a deconstructive critique of the reproductive effects of teaching, and of the institution of philosophy inasmuch as it functions as a reproductive machine. This work of deconstruction is done in the seminar notably through readings of Marx, Engels, and Althusser, with special attention to the concepts of ideology, reproduction, and sexual difference.

Keywords: Jacques Derrida, deconstruction, Louis Althusser, Karl Marx, Marxism, pedagogy, politics of education, ideology, division of labor, sexual difference

Re/pro/ductions: *Ça déborde*

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pour Peggy Kamuf

“Now, in the work that awaits us, we must be suspicious of all forms of reproduction, and the resources of such reproduction are powerful and subtle.”

Jacques Derrida, “GREPH, le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français” (1974–75)

“The concept of re-production is barely conceivable.”

Jacques Derrida, “La vie la mort” (1975–76)

Intro/ductions: What Happens in the Classroom (Does Not) Stay(s) in the Classroom

In this article, I want to point to a series of problems or difficulties related to the study of Jacques Derrida’s seminars, whether we study them in the archives or in the form of published volumes.¹ One of the problems I want to bring out concerns the temptation to read the seminars as proper “books” in and for themselves. This temptation partly results from the fact that most of Derrida’s courses are entirely written out and, as a matter of fact, many seminar sessions across the decades

A first version of this essay was presented in June 2019 at the University of Salerno, during the conference “From the Archive: Reading Derrida.” I am grateful to Francesco Vitale for his invitation, his hospitality, and his friendship. I also want to thank all participants for their comments and suggestions; in particular, I want to thank Peggy Kamuf for her invaluable engagement and her encouragements. This research has benefited from the support of ANID/FONDECYT.

¹ For more information on this publication process, itself involving a complex logic of *repro-duction*, see Adam R. Rosenthal’s inspiring introduction to this issue.

were extracted from their pedagogical context, revised, and published in one form or another in the course of Derrida's life. Nevertheless, even though it is always possible—and sometimes fruitful—to read such or such course in isolation, as a “book,” I want to bring out the type of erasure that might result from such reading strategy. Not only does it tend to erase the singular performativity of the pedagogical scene, constraints related to the historical-institutional context of said scene, as well as the textual and literary dispositives specific to the seminar form and to the “genre” of the philosophy course. But—and this will be my main claim in this article—it also erases the fact that what we call “the seminar” is always both *singular* and *plural*: the seminar(s) in question *also* participate(s) in a teaching sequence supposing a certain seriality, a certain technicity and reproducibility involved in its/their fabrication, one which produces, from one seminar to the other, from one year to the next, effects of return, repetition and/or anticipation, continuities and/or ruptures on which Derrida as a teacher implicitly or explicitly capitalizes.² From this law of differential seriality (which is, also, the law of text, text as law), patterns, echoes, and leitmotifs might emerge, offering themselves to interpretative reading—even though the event “itself,” the singular pedagogical scene that brought them about, forever remains inaccessible. In reading, we attempt to represent something which eludes representability; we attempt to reproduce something which escapes reproducibility.

In order to give a better account of the difficulties I have just described, I will use as a guiding thread Derrida's deconstructive analysis of the “logic” of reproduction (or, as he often styles it, “re-production”) in the 1970s seminars. In

² I'll give just one example of this type of explicit internal-external *renvoi* from one seminar to the other—one which directly concerns our topic: ideology and re-production. In “La vie la mort” (1975–76), Derrida refers to the seminar “GREPH, le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français,” which took place the previous year (1974–75): “Once again re-productibility is not an accident that supervenes upon production but the very essence of production. This is also very clear in the passages from *Capital* that we read together last year concerning ideology” (Derrida 2019a: 141; 2020: 103).

the last part of this article, I will focus on Derrida's reading of re-production in one specific course: the unpublished seminar "GREPH, le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français" (1974–75), wherein the question of reproduction is most explicitly connected to the problem of pedagogy and education, and more particularly to the teaching of philosophy understood as contributing to socioeconomic and ideological conditions of social production and reproduction. When one studies Derrida's work of self-reflection about his own teaching, as we are attempting to do here, from "within" the classroom, the "GREPH" seminar might indeed seem to constitute a privileged entry point. It took place in the years 1974–75, in the wake of the creation of GREPH (Groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement philosophique). The GREPH association was officially founded during its first General Assembly on January 15, 1975, but its constitution was preceded by several preparatory meetings that took place in 1974. Derrida was one of the main (and most famous) organizers of the group, which also included a variety of high school and university philosophy professors such as Sarah Kofman, Roland Brunet, Michèle Le Doeuff, Jean-Luc Nancy, and many others.³

GREPH's main objective was to study "the connections that exist between philosophy and its teaching" (Derrida 2002: 97) and to re-inscribe the teaching of philosophy within "the historical and political conditions and functions of the teaching system in general" (ibid.). But, in more general terms, the group also aimed to interrogate the ways in which the philosophical institution, the teaching of philosophy, and the forms taken by the school system and the university are articulated to power, to the general structures of society and the state, and to the forces that make up their sociopolitical field of inscription:

How is the didactico-philosophical inscribed in the so-called instinctual [*pulsionnel*], historical, political, social, and economic fields?

³ For a historical overview and a description of GREPH's objectives, see Derrida 2002: 92–98 and Orchard 2010.

How does it *inscribe itself* there, that is, how does it operate and represent—(to) itself—its inscription, and how is it *inscribed* in its very representation? What are the “general logic” and the specific modes of this inscription? Of its normalizing normativity and of its normalized normativity? (Derrida 2002: 93–94; 1990: 148)

In the wake of the events of 1968, the members of GREPH aimed to interrogate the apparent objectivity and neutrality—in axiological and sociopolitical terms—of the French philosophical institution. Notably, they advocated for a better understanding of the conditions of employment and recruitment regulated by the *Capès* and *agrégation* concours, and of their effects on the reproduction of the educational orthodoxies and ideological consensus that made up the dominant (institutionally legitimate) philosophical scene of the 1970s. One of GREPH’s flagship propositions was to extend the teaching of philosophy (until then reserved to the *terminale* students) to the three levels of high school, and even to younger pupils. From 1975 onward, GREPH’s initiatives crystallized around the contestation of the so-called Haby reform, which contributed to give more visibility to the group’s political-institutional engagements and made them popular with a broader audience of philosophy professors, students, and a portion of the general public (Orchard 2010: 46–78).

All these political and institutional aspects surely infuse the 1974–75 seminar that bears the name “GREPH, le concept de l’idéologie chez les idéologues français.” However, it is important to stress that this seminar was by no means used by Derrida as a political tribune or as a showcase for GREPH’s engagements. The seminar was, to all intents and purposes, a course of philosophy, continuing the sequence of seminars which Derrida gave every year at the École normale supérieure (ENS) from 1964 to 1983. For this reason, it obeys the same rules as the other seminars of the same period: it follows a certain matrix and complies with a number of constraints—temporal, spatial, institutional, and so on. For example, just like every seminar, this one comprises a certain number

of sessions, which requires adopting a certain cadence or rhythm, made of interruptions and sudden accelerations. The folder of the seminar stored in the archives includes nine sessions entirely written out (typed on a typewriter), but Derrida mentions that additional sessions were hosted by other participants.⁴ Most decisively, during the years he taught at ENS, Derrida was required to adapt the topics of his seminar to the *notions au programme*, that is, the themes assigned each particular year to the students-*agrégationnistes*. These themes were imposed on him as part of the nationally centralized program of the *agrégation de philosophie* and differed every year. These institutional constraints partly determined the authors and concepts addressed by Derrida in his classroom, which resulted in the incredible variety of questions and themes discussed in the seminars of those years.⁵ In 1974–75, the theme of *agrégation* was “society.”

I will return to the “GREPH” seminar and to Derrida’s analysis of the Marxist critique of socio-economic-ideological re-production in the last part of this essay. First, I want to make an additional remark relating to the law of seriality exposed above. It is important to note that in the years leading up to the foundation of GREPH (and the following ones), Derrida expressed many times, and very explicitly, his frustration regarding the constraints of the *agrégation* program and more generally the repetitiveness and conservatism of the philosophical institution. In this sense, the “GREPH” seminar does not constitute

⁴ Notably, Pierre Bourdieu presented between sessions 6 and 7 a synthesis of his famous sociological critique of Heidegger’s “political ontology”—which is *also* a critique of the ideological nature of philosophy *in general*. A first version of Bourdieu’s intervention was published in November 1975 as “L’ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger” in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (Bourdieu 1975). A modified version was published in book form in 1988, in the wake of the “Farias affair.” An English translation of Bourdieu’s book was published in 1991 (Bourdieu 1991).

⁵ To give a few examples related to the period I will examine in this article, the themes imposed by the *agrégation* program were: *le droit, la politique* (1971–72), *religion et philosophie* (1972–73), *l’art* (1973–74), *la société* (1974–75), *la vie et la mort* (1975–76), and so on. Each year, the *agrégationnistes* are thus required to study more particularly an entire field or subfield of philosophy. Despite numerous modifications in the protocols of the *agrégation*, this tradition has survived until today. For instance, the *notion au programme* for the year 2019–20 is *la représentation*; and for the year 2020–21, *le commun*.

an isolated exception, although the deconstruction of the educational system indeed takes center stage in 1974–75. In several seminars of the early 1970s, Derrida had already denounced the philosophical institution’s functioning as a reproductive machine, explicitly exposed the limitations of the seminar form, exhibited his own situation as a teacher, and displayed on stage the frustrations that these institutional constraints provoked in him.⁶ What became the central “theme” of the “GREPH” seminar, in 1974–75, had thus already been touched upon, and somewhat performed, in previous seminars.

For all these reasons, before analyzing the seminar “GREPH, le concept de l’idéologie chez les idéologues français” in more detail, I want to consider more broadly the sequence of the 1970s seminars. My claim is that Derrida’s explicit deconstruction of the educational system to which he belongs is inseparable, in those years, from a more general concern with the “logic” of production-reproduction, of re-production, in the field of education and beyond. In the 1970s seminars, the question of re-production in fact constitutes a motif in the pictorial or musical sense—a recurring mark or trace, re-produced from one year to the other, which connects many of these seminars despite the exorbitant variety of themes, authors, and concepts they address. As we shall see, in these seminars the motif of re-production, the conceptual logic associated with the notions of production-reproduction, brings together fields of inquiry, concepts, authors, or problems that seem to have very little in common but that Derrida insists in

⁶ Two examples: The seminar “Religion et philosophie” (1972–73) begins with a violent critique (four pages entirely written out) of the *agrégation* concours, and of the teaching conditions it imposes on philosophy teachers and their students (Derrida 1972–73). Those four pages constitute a sort of preamble to the course; they are thematically and materially separated from the rest of the seminar. In contradistinction, the following year, the introduction of the seminar “L’art (Kant)” (1973–74) outlines a series of protocols that prefigure GREPH’s concerns; but those are seamlessly woven into the general problematic of the seminar—that is, a deconstruction of the self-accredited sovereignty and totalizing systematicity of philosophy (of its discourse and its institution), which gives itself the authority to legislate over a supposedly subordinate “field” or “subfield”: art, artistic production, and aesthetics (Derrida 1973–74: session 1).

reading alongside each other: fields such as family and society, law and politics, art and aesthetics, economy and sociology, the institution of philosophy, culture and ideology, biology and genetics, sex and sexuality, technological re-production, education and pedagogy, and so on. Despite their apparent diversity and heterogeneity, all these seemingly “regional” fields or subfields of theoretical inquiry recur to the conceptual logic of production-reproduction, and this is what justifies that they can be read together, albeit in very different contexts, and on a pedagogical scene that is each time singular. For this reason and others which will soon appear, the question of re-production is of course more than a mere example: the “logic” of re-production is precisely one of the main targets of Derrida’s teaching practice, and arguably of deconstruction in general.

Re/pro/tra/ductions: *Débordements*

Roughly speaking, the sequence I want to talk about starts in 1971 and ends in 1977. Every year, from 1971–72 to 1976–77, Derrida reproduced, each time differently, the motif of re-production and adapted his deconstructive reading to the theme of each year’s seminar—usually in tune with the theme imposed by the program of *agrégation*. Each year, the tune was played very differently, in a different key. Let me describe this sequence in very schematic terms.

In the 1971–72 seminar “La famille de Hegel” (subtitled, in the seminar’s typescript, “Introduction à Hegel”), Derrida interrogates the Hegelian conception of family and the resources of its production and reproduction in and through the objective spirit—chiefly the law and the state (Derrida 1971–72). In the years 1971–72, the program of *agrégation* was *le droit, la politique*. In the seminar, which was later revised and reproduced in *Glas*, and which makes up, roughly, the first two thirds of its first column, Derrida shows that Hegel’s dialectics of family and the state *require* sexual difference *as difference*, but only to *reduce* it to a simple *contradiction* and *Aufhebung*, a mere oppositional moment to be sublated in and

through the general process of self-reproduction of the spirit. The philosophical logic of the Concept and its “re-production” works in reducing sexual difference through the phantasm of Immaculate Conception. The following year (1972–73), Derrida deconstructed the resources of this re-production in the passage from religion to philosophy—the seminar’s title, “Religion et philosophie,” reproduces exactly the theme of the *agrégation*’s program. There, Derrida reads Hegel through Marx’s, Freud’s, and Kant’s theories of ideology, fetishism, and religion. In the 1973–74 seminar “L’art (Kant),” which is presented as a possible treatment of the *agrégation* theme *l’art*, Derrida focuses a lot of energy in deconstructing the opposition between production and reproduction—particularly in the form of “productive” versus “reproductive imagination” in Kant’s third *Critique*. I will return to the 1974–75 seminar “GREPH, le concept de l’idéologie chez les idéologues français” in the last part of this essay. We will see that the concepts of production-reproduction and sexual difference play a decisive role in it. This is also the case in the 1975–76 seminar “La vie la mort,” wherein Derrida proposes a very detailed deconstruction of the logic of re-production (deemed sexual or not) in the life sciences—chiefly through a deconstructive reading of biologist and geneticist François Jacob’s definition of life as self-reproductive.

One could argue that the quasi-obsessional recurrence of the motif of “re-production” in the years leading up to GREPH and the following ones relates to Derrida’s growing attention to his own practice as a teacher, and to an effort to analyze how one’s own teaching might contribute to produce or reproduce the system in which this practice inscribes itself. But it is also important to note that Derrida’s apparent obsession with the logic of re-production also illustrates another type of frustration, caused by the quasi-omnipresence of the *concepts* of production and reproduction on the contemporary intellectual scene. Derrida expresses this frustration several times in the 1970s seminars, most explicitly in the

“GREPH” seminar (1974–75) and in “La vie la mort” (1975–76).⁷ As is often the case, this frustration is made more explicit in the seminars than in the publications of the same period—although Derrida is quite clear in denouncing the vocabulary of “production” in the interview “*Ja, or the faux-bond*,” which took place in October 1975, exactly between the seminars “GREPH” and “La vie la mort”:

To produce, that is the big verb today.⁸

And production is the all-purpose concept, just indeterminate enough around the edges [*sur les bords*] to move in everywhere where other notions have been disqualified: notions like “creation,” “causality,” “genesis,” “constitution,” “formation,” “information” (of a material or of a content), “fabrication,” “composition,” and many more still. (Derrida 1995: 37; 1992: 44)

In the same interview, Derrida goes on to explain that, while the term *production* is supposed to replace other concepts that are now widely considered as too theological, ideological, or metaphysical, thus contributing to give a scientific gloss to the discourses which make use of it, it also risks making “the metaphysical determination of truth” “return in full force” (Derrida 1995: 37). There, Derrida notably refers to Althusser, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Deleuze without naming them. All these authors use the conceptuality attached to production-reproduction to exceed (*déborder*) a certain metaphysics without, however, interrogating the philosophical provenance of this conceptuality. But—Derrida asks—what does this onto-logic of re-production *reproduce*, in and through this very *débordement*?

⁷ “Where one can no longer say create (because only God is supposed to create and we are done with the theological), one says produce; where one can no longer say engender, express, think, and so on, where some concept is seen—and rightly so—to be importing too much from some dubious metaphysics, theology, or ideology, one calls upon producing to replace or neutralize it. You know that today one does not form a system or a theory or a concept, one does not conceive a concept, one does not express something; one produces a system of knowledge, one produces an utterance, one produces a theory, one produces an effect” (Derrida 2019a: 136; 2020: 99).

⁸ The French original—“Produire, c’est aujourd’hui le verbe”—parodies theological parlance: “Au commencement était le verbe.” Derrida thus seems to suggest that the concept of production carries with it (reproduces, perhaps) a certain religious motif, and maybe a creationist streak.

It is probably in the recently published seminar “La vie la mort” (Derrida 1975–76; 2019a; 2020) that the deconstruction of the strange and complicated logic of re-production is most developed. Please allow me to select and reproduce a series of quotations from the seminar⁹—“select” and “reproduce” because, as Derrida explains in the seminar, these two gestures are at once incompatible and inseparable: “Selection and reproduction form a pair [*un couple*] of concepts whose association is for us as enigmatic as it is necessary. . . . How can a reproduction be selective? This is as difficult to think as the contrary: how can a reproduction not be selective?” (Derrida 2019a: 84–85; 2020: 57). This is what makes the concept of re-production “barely conceivable,” “à peine conceivable” (or only conceivable, precisely, as phantasm of pure—immaculate—conception). Pure reproduction is unthinkable, just like pure production, of which reproduction is supposed to be the re-production. These difficulties have to do with the logic of the self, the ipseity which cannot *be*, other than by being itself its own re-productibility:

Hence the reproduction of self reproduces that which (itself) already exists. But, here, what already exists is the effect of a reproduction of the self. Of another self, the same. No matter how far one goes back, one will not find a reproduction that does not re-produce a re-production. An absolute production of self produces a self that is a (living) self only to the extent that and only insofar as this ordinary and living production is produced—produces itself—as reproducibility. The self of “producing itself” is already, in its identity, reproducibility; without this, it would have no identity. The identity of the self or of the self with itself [*de soi à soi*] is a certain reproducibility. (Derrida 2019a: 134; 2020: 96–97)

Derrida thus highlights the aporias of ontology, of an “onto-logic” on which the logic of production-reproduction is dependent:

One must therefore think the re-production of self otherwise, other than as that which comes after the fact to complicate a simple production. Productibility is from the very start re-productibility, and re-productibility is reproducibility of the

⁹ These reproductions are in fact translations—*repro-traductions*—by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. I can’t thank them enough for their patient work of translation. Translators give the text the chance of a supplementary sur-vival, of a *repro-traduction* in life death, beyond “life” and “death,” beyond production or reproduction (see notably Derrida 2020: 117). I’ve slightly modified the translation in rare occasions.

self. But since the self is not before this capacity to reproduce itself, before its own re-productibility, there is no self-sufficiency or pure spontaneity before its production *as* reproduction, before its reproductibility as re-productibility. It is its reproductibility. (Derrida 2019a: 134; 2020: 97)

To *be* is to be *reproducible*. It is thus important to keep in mind that this complicated schema of production-reproduction (reduction, selection, re/pro/duction, and so on) is in fact *required* by the logic of the self and by the onto-logic of presence. It *is* this logic. In sessions 4 to 6, Derrida refers numerous times to Hegel to expose what this whole logic of re-production owes to Hegelian dialectics, often through the influence of Marxist terminology—an influence that Derrida considers decisive (Derrida 2019a: 136–43; 2020: 99–105). In session 5, Derrida explains that the logic of re-production, and in particular the “concept” of production, provides the empirical-scientific discourse (be it that of biology, sociology, economy, history, and so on) with a “support,” a basis on which its accredited scientificity relies. But this “support” (the concept of production) remains in itself uninterrogated as a philosophical object, as *philosopheme*: “this support is obviously a philosopheme (the determination of being as *physis-technē-alētheia*-life, manifestation-information: production of essentiality as maximal re-production of self, presentation of self—for what does to produce mean if not to present—etc.)” (Derrida 2019a: 143; 2020: 105). The logic of re-production thus supposes a certain metaphysics of presence, an ontological discourse on the truth of being which functions by presupposing the presence of what is being re-produced, while erasing its own heterogeneity. This discourse posits itself by positing the homogeneity and identity of the object that is being “produced” or “reproduced,” in the form of presence—in short, “presented.”

In the sixth session of “La vie la mort,” Derrida proceeds to complicate this onto-logic by pointing to translation and text, and by speaking about “repro-traduction” (repro-translation):¹⁰

the text begins by its translation [*traduction*] or its description or its reproduction. . . . Without the translating event there would be nothing to translate [*traduire*]. Without the event of trans-lation [*tra-duction*] or of re-production there would be no product and no production. . . . Here the event is a text . . . ; it is a text-event that reproduces itself, that is to say, that takes itself as a referent, that has as a reference a text, and that not only reproduces itself but also induces itself as reproduction, begins by its reproduction, its *repro-traduction*. (Derrida 2019a: 156–57; 2020: 116–17)

And shortly after:

Naturally, this textual self-reference, this closing upon itself of a text that refers only to text, has nothing tautological or autistic about it. On the contrary. It is because alterity is there irreducible that there is only text; it is because no term, no element, is itself sufficient or even has an effect, referring as it always does to the other and never to itself, that there is text; and it is because the whole that text is [*l'ensemble texte*] cannot close upon itself that there is only text, and that what is called the “general” text . . . is neither a whole nor a totality: it can neither comprehend itself nor be itself comprehended. But it can be written and read, which is something else. (Derrida 2019a: 159; 2020: 118)

From the point of view of re-production, this law of general text implies two things. First, the text that is being interpreted—and here “text” covers a field of experience that is virtually unlimited, implied everywhere differential traces are involved—must be *read*, that is, it must be legible, decipherable, and therefore reproducible; it requires models that will determine its legibility, representability,

¹⁰ The question of translation as *repro-traduction* is also addressed in the seminar “Walter Benjamin.” The exact date of the seminar is uncertain, but in *Parages*, Derrida mentions that it was given “in 1974 or 1975” (Derrida 1986: 211). It does belong to the sequence I am describing here. On page 2 of the third (and last) session of the seminar, Derrida asks: “Is translation [*traduction*] a production or a reproduction? The problem of production and reproducibility has been the most continuous thread of our reading for three sessions; and it has seemed necessary to me to follow it if we must, as has been our program, interrogate ourselves about a Marxist theory of culture” (Derrida 1974–75 [exact date uncertain]: session 3, page 2; my translation).

and reproducibility in the form of truth-making discourse.¹¹ However, this work of decipherment and the models it re-produces must also select, reduce, and thus cannot fully “produce” or “reproduce” their object of inquiry. The scientific or philosophical (ontological) discourse is always somewhat analogous to the text it reads; but it is a priori exceeded, overflowed by the text, in which it partakes. The law of text thus signifies a certain inescapability of reproduction or reproducibility, but quite as much that of an excess, an overflowing, the radical heterogeneity of an absolute unproductivity, of what remains irreproducible while, however, being at work in all the analogical models we are talking about here. The *reading* of a *text* (in the “general” sense that Derrida gives to these terms) is neither simply “production” nor a simple “reproduction.”

It follows from this overflowing law of irreducible heterogeneity that the so-called biological field cannot be defined as totality. It becomes extremely difficult to circumscribe: “more than once we have come to see that it is difficult, and for essential reasons, to limit or delimit the biological field, that this field is its very overflowing [*son débordement même*], that overflowing [*le débordement*] is its structure” (Derrida 2019a: 182; 2020: 139). This law of *débordement* is defined more precisely in the 1976–77 seminar “Théorie et pratique,” an important part of which is dedicated to the concept of production in the Marxist and Heideggerian discourses. The verb *déborder* is difficult to translate. It can mean “overflowing,” “going over the brim,” “over the edge”—a river *déborde*. A child might be careful not to go over the edge when she is coloring in, out of fear that her parents tell her “ça déborde.” *Déborder* can also have a temporal meaning, as in “going over time.” In the military or strategic language, *déborder* signifies “outflanking” the troops of

¹¹ This is why the monster, “absolute monstrosity,” by essence without essence, unrecognizable, irreproducible, must remain foreign to the biological discourse—or to any ontological discourse taking as its object the truth of being, for that matter. See Derrida 2019a: 123; 2020: 88–89. I have more to say about the monster (and the mutant) in the work of Foucault, Derrida, and Malabou in Mercier 2019b.

the enemy. The term can be used similarly in the language of chess, or soccer, for instance, when a player *déborde* (outflanks) an opponent. The noun *débordements*, usually pluralized, suggests the event of something relatively unpredictable that takes the authorities by surprise—for instance, a political demonstration or a public gathering can be followed by *débordements*, which suggests a somewhat violent and illegal behavior, at least some manifestations of violence that take place in the margins of the law, and in the margins of the demonstration “itself.” In a similar way, the term can designate behaviors deemed excessive or abnormal, as in *débordements outranciers* or *débordements d’affection*. When used as an adjective in the passive voice, *déborderé* usually has negative connotations: *être débordé* signifies “to be overwhelmed,” “overworked,” as a philosophy teacher can sometimes be when they are required to give a seminar—something which is illustrated by this quotation from the 1976–77 seminar “Théorie et pratique,” recently translated by David Wills as *Theory and Practice*:

We are over the edge [*Nous sommes débordés*]. Whence our fatigue.

We are truly over the edge.

Truly. Truly, which doesn’t qualify the way in which we would be over the edge, truly over the edge, because to tell the truth perhaps we are not at all over the edge, in truth [*nous ne le sommes peut-être pas du tout, débordés, en vérité*]. “Truly” means rather that if there is going over the edge [*débordement*], if there is an overflowing effect, it is an effect of truth. It is in the name of truth that it always overflows [*C’est au nom de la vérité que ça déborde toujours*]. (Derrida 1976–77; 2019b: 83)

But the reference to *débordement* can also have positive connotations, especially when the term is used in the active voice of present participle, as when one refers to someone as *débordant* or *débordante de vitalité*. A person, a place, a city, a work can be said to be *d’une vitalité débordante*.

In Derrida’s writings, and in particular those of the 1970s, the motif of *débordement*, *débord*, gestures toward everything that overflows, goes over the edge, out of frame, while remaining somewhat attached to the edge, within/without the

frame: text and context, the title, the signature, margins and marginalia, the legend, the parergon, borderlines or *journal de bord*, and so on: “That irreducible analogy is what impels me to pose the question of the edge [*bord*]: each time there is overflow [*chaque fois que ça déborde*] it resembles what is overflowed [*débordé*], overflowing [*le débordant*] remains in affinity with what is overflowed [*débordé*], affined and I’ll even say confined to what is overflowed” (Derrida 1976–77; 2019b: 86). The *déborder*—which can also designate the sewn border of a garment’s lining, or the edge of a road— is thus within/without, inside/outside; it necessarily shares traits with the *débordé*. It marks and re-marks the border; it retraces the edge and the line that it crosses in the *débordement*. As such, the *débordant* cannot *not* reproduce something of the *débordé*. This is why Derrida, in *Theory and Practice*, is explicitly suspicious of Heidegger’s claim to exceed (*déborder*) the opposition between theory and practice, or of Althusser’s claim that Theory with a capital *T* exceeds and *déborde* the field of philosophy (see for example Derrida 2019b: 71 and 86). The law of *débordement*, just like that of text, translation, writing-reading, introduces a “logic” that is different from that of re-production, but that does not simply do away with re-production. *Débordement* is neither simply production nor simply reproduction. It is something else—a structure or law of *différance* that is often associated by Derrida with the “general text,” understood as *débordement* or self-*débordement*.¹² In this perspective, *débordement* could be considered as a sort of watchword of deconstruction—but because of its disseminating polysemy, due to the multiplicity of its potential equivalents, the lexical field of *bord*, *déborder*, *déborder*, *débordement* sometimes goes unnoticed and often disappears or becomes scattered in English translations, *re-pro-traduit*, or repro-translated, into a plurality of rough equivalents: excess, overflowing, transgression, going over the edge, the brim, brimming up or brimming over, and so on.

¹² See for instance Derrida 1972a: xix; 1972b: 81–82.

Even though Derrida’s work on re-production in the “La vie la mort” seminar targets in the first place the *biological* concept of reproduction (deemed “sexual” or not) and concerns itself with life sciences inasmuch as they define the essence of life as self-reproduction, Derrida refuses to limit this analysis to the so-called biological field. *Débordement* is the structure of the field. In the course of the seminar, and more particularly in sessions 4 to 6, Derrida shows how the deconstruction of the model of re-production, of re-production *as* model, *déborde* the biological field and contributes to deconstruct other oppositions, such as life and death, the sexual and the nonsexual, nature and culture, *physis* and *technē*, or (living) animals and (nonliving) machines, heredity and inheritance, and so on.¹³ This is done by interrogating the logic of re-production as modelizing tool, as a textual device that travels between the various fields of inquiry that might recur to it. Derrida goes to show that the logic of re-production *is* the model, the very essence of modelization, inasmuch as modelization implies re-production and reproduces the ontological, philosophical discourse of the essence:

not only does Jacob not break purely and simply with the philosophical discourse on essence but he ends up returning, with this essence of life as tendency and capacity for reproduction, not only, I would say, to essence but also to the essentiality of essence, the origin and end of essence as [the] dynamics and energy of being, that which gives the power and actuality of being, maximal being, and which . . . assures from the inside its own production, that is, its re-production. (Derrida 2019a: 121–22; 2020: 87)

In this perspective, re-production is itself the model of the model, that is, the ontology of the essence understood as potentiality and actuality of being, such as philosophical discourse has defined it. The model defining life as self-reproduction espouses the structure of the essence, thus confirming philosophical discourse to be the discourse on the essence, on truth as essence—by definition a *reproducible* essence. But this model is not limited to life sciences: it traverses and exceeds all

¹³ For an in-depth analysis of the “La vie la mort” seminar, see Vitale 2018, 2019.

the fields which recur to the genetic onto-logic of re-production, according to the general law of *débordement* I described a moment ago. Every time a discourse, any discourse, recurs to the logic of re-production, it also reproduces the philosophical logic or model of essentiality described above by Derrida. This is why the notion of model (just like that of analogy) is so important in the 1975–76 seminar. The different “models” of re-production or reproductive systems—biological reproduction, socioeconomic and ideological reproduction, technological reproduction, ontological reproduction, and so on—these different models in fact require each other: they are the model of each other, the analogy or the metaphor of each other, so that the model of reproduction is itself the model—the model of reproduction *is* reproduction, *another* reproduction, a reproduction that translates itself into another reproduction, and potentially involving at every turn, virtually or in actuality, reduction, *traduction* (translation), transduction, induction, deduction, education (itself derived from *ex-ducere*), *conduite* or conduction, seduction, and so on.¹⁴

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that the connection that chains these words together in the French language through their root “duction” (*duco, ducere*: to draw, to lead) is not quite translatable into English, precisely because *traduction*, as it must be translated as “translation,” loses its connection to “production,” “reproduction,” “education,” “seduction,” and so on. The *duction* is lost in translation. The consequences of these untranslatable differences between *tra-duction* and *translation* are probably enormous, notably because *translation*, unlike *traduction*, preserves a *reference* to the supine of *fero* (*latum*), and thus to *reference*, *transference*, and *difference*. The word *translation* (transportation, displacement) exists in French, but it is rare and no longer used to speak of “translation.” Although I certainly do not feel able to *draw* all the consequences from it, I am very grateful to Adam R. Rosenthal for having *drawn* my attention to this problem of untranslatability at the locus of translation/*traduction*. It is at least one instance in which the words *translation* and *traduction* cannot simply be translated into each other and cannot be considered as pure synonyms—supposing the words are synonym to themselves in the first place. . . . Let’s note in passing that, in *The Truth in Painting*, which was first published in French in 1978, Derrida interrogated the lexicon and the whole logic of “duction,” derived from *duco, ducere*—what he calls “the system of *duction* (production, reproduction, induction, reduction, etc.)” (Derrida 1987: 10). This is done more particularly in the text “Cartouches,” in which Derrida tries to approach Gérard Titus-Carmel’s artwork. Derrida describes his inability to find the words to speak about it: “The glossary or array I’m dealing with at the moment (*tire, tirer, tiroir, tirage* [draw, to draw, drawer, drawing]) leads to that of the *trait*, it induces, precisely, *duction*, and even the ‘*ductus*,’ the idiomatic *trait* by which one recognizes a draftsman even before he signs his name (it is this ‘*ductus*’ I won’t manage to talk about here)” (192). Something (remains) resists—*déborde*: “No word will

Each model of reproduction *déborde* its own conceptuality, its own field of inscription, and this *débordement* is performed in the text of the seminars I am talking about here: while deconstructing the logic or onto-logic of “re-production” as model, relentlessly, year after year, Derrida also deconstructs the *programme* of *agrégation*, and the logic of “selecting” themes or “notions” as if they could designate separate fields of inquiry for the philosophical discourse (and for the disciplines or subdisciplines that might partake in those fields): “art,” “law and politics,” “life and death,” “society,” “religion,” and so on. Across the years, from one session to another, Derrida’s seminar *se déborde*, spills over itself or folds over onto itself and, in doing so, performs, puts in practice the deconstruction of the institutional system within which it is inscribed (starting with the *agrégation* concours), as well as of the different fields or subfields (philosophy of law, of education, aesthetics, political philosophy, philosophy of science, of religion, and so on) that the Western philosophical canon aims to codify, over which it tends to establish its authority by defining their limits and objects, their protocols of truth-making, and their conditions of scientificity. In other words, by deconstructing the logic of re-production inasmuch as it traverses and *déborde* fields of inquiry that are apparently separate, Derrida not only interrogates the borders and limits between the “fields” which are being examined but also deconstructs the philosophical gesture which tends to ensure its own mastery over these disciplines or subdisciplines by dividing between those fields, by defining their objects and area of expertise, and thus by imposing a certain *division of labor*. This division of labor, the definition and stabilization of different fields of inquiry, is essential to the reproduction and perpetuation of the philosophical system itself. Western

have been ductile enough, especially not the words ‘production,’ ‘reproduction,’ ‘seduction,’ ‘reduction.’ Duction is no longer sufficient for it” (195). It is noteworthy that, perhaps oddly, Derrida does not mention *traduction* in that text. The motif of *débordement*, however, is at work in all the texts included in *The Truth in Painting*. *Débordement* is also a decisive motif in *Signéponge* and in the texts collected in *Parages*—most notably “Survivre/Journal de bord”—which were all written around the same period, in the 1970s (Derrida 1984, 1986).

philosophy, in its metaphysical or ontological expression, *is* the reproductive system, and it reproduces itself through the production of subordinate disciplines or subdisciplines, all collected under the phantasmatic control of the philosophical institution “itself,” which presents itself as their origin and end by giving itself the power to legislate over their territories. This self-reproductive gesture always supposes the phantasmatic authority of a paternity claim. And one of the main resources of this phallogocentric, imperial, philosophical drive is *education*.¹⁵

Se/ductions: Reading—Divisions of Labor and Sexual Differences

With all this in mind, I now return to the 1974–75 seminar “GREPH, le concept de l’idéologie chez les idéologues français.” Although it inscribes itself in the sequence described above, I do not wish to erase its singularity in that series. In fact, Derrida emphasizes the singularity of that pedagogical scene on the very first page of the seminar:¹⁶

after approximately 15 years of teaching practice and 23 years as a civil servant, I am only beginning to interrogate, exhibit, and critique systematically (it is the systematic character that is important if one does not want to remain content with empirical skirmishes, scrapes which do not shake or transform the system in place, and which, on the contrary, make up part of its self-critical reproduction, self-critical reproduction being perhaps the very element of philosophical tradition and conservation . . .), I am only beginning, so late, to interrogate, exhibit, and critique systematically—in view of a transformation—the very borders [*les bords même*] of that within which I was until now casting [*coulais*] my discourse. (Derrida 1974–75: session 1, page 1)

¹⁵ This is why the deconstruction of philosophy always has to do with education; it must target teaching and the pedagogical institution: “the deconstruction of phallogocentrism as the deconstruction of the onto-theological principle, of metaphysics, of the question ‘What is?’, of the subordination of all the fields of questioning to the onto-encyclopedic instance, and so forth, such a deconstruction tackles the root of the *universitas*: the root of philosophy as teaching, the ultimate unity of the philosophical, of the philosophical discipline or the philosophical university as the basis of every university. The university is philosophy. A university is always the construction of a philosophy” (Derrida 2002: 73).

¹⁶ Parts of the first and second sessions of the seminar were revised and published as “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends” (Derrida 1990, 2002). The rest of the seminar was never published. I’ve translated all quotations from this seminar.

This passage is followed by a sort of self-justification. Derrida attempts to justify why deconstruction did not address earlier the discourses of sociology or economy, and why it did not raise more explicitly sociopolitical and institutional questions—more particularly in their Marxist form. (Remember that “society” was the theme of the *agrégation* program that year.) This justification has to do with the expression of what I would call a *double anxiety* with respect to “reproduction,” in particular the type of “reproduction” associated with education and “the teaching body,” *le corps enseignant*. On the one hand, Derrida clearly states that he does not want to “reproduce” the classical, framing logic—“la logique classique du cadre”—which governs the tradition of social or political critique. But on the other hand, he suggests that the concept, the model of “reproduction” is itself an effect of the logic that must be deconstructed (Derrida 2002: 72). As if the logic of reproduction, including its denunciation in critical-Marxist form—for instance, Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)—were in fact a resource for reproduction, and for the reproduction of philosophy understood as the discourse of self-critical reproduction.¹⁷

¹⁷ This concern is echoed in the statement Derrida made in 1980 during his thesis defense, later published as “Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis.” There, Derrida explains that it is useless to denounce the violence of social and institutional reproduction—for example, in the form of a discourse coded as “revolutionary”—if said discourse espouses the dominant forms and codes of the institution, thus accommodating the “reproductive force of authority.” Although Derrida is speaking here about the authority of philosophy and of its institution (chiefly, the university), he also stresses the broader political implications of his remarks:

if I say that politics was also involved it is because, in this case, the political does not take only the conventional distribution along a left/right axis. The reproductive force of authority can get along more comfortably with declarations or theses whose encoded content presents itself as revolutionary, provided that they respect the rites of legitimation, the rhetoric and the institutional symbolism that defuses and neutralizes everything that comes from outside the system. What is unacceptable is what, underlying positions or theses, upsets this deeply entrenched contract, the order of these norms, and that does so in the very *form* of the work, of teaching or of writing. (Derrida 2004: 122)

This passage nicely summarizes Derrida’s attitude toward Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s. For more details on Derrida’s relationship with Marxist thought and politics—in particular Althusser’s—in the 1960s and 1970s, see Mercier 2020b.

Since it is impossible to summarize the “GREPH” seminar within the limits of this essay, I will focus on a number of elements concerning Derrida’s deconstruction of the logic of reproduction.¹⁸ In the seminar, Derrida is particularly attentive to the fact that classical-liberal economists—notably Condillac, Adam Smith, Destutt de Tracy, Jean-Baptiste Say, Ricardo, who advocate for socioeconomic reproduction—and Marxists and critical sociologists—Marx and Engels, Gramsci, Althusser, Balibar, Buci-Glucksmann, Bourdieu, who *denounce* said reproduction—share the same network of concepts: production and reproduction, capital, labor, ideology, and dualisms such as family/society, nature/culture, life/technique, animal/man, ideality/materiality, intellectual/material labor, theory/praxis, and so on. In particular, Derrida shows that Marxist concepts partly *reproduce* classical philosophemes and entertain, more specifically, a relationship to the Hegelian system which remains uninterrogated, and which affects their conception of education (and of the philosophical institution) as *essentially* reproductive.

In the fifth session, Derrida proceeds to read and analyze in detail Althusser’s 1970 text on ISAs, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” (which was later reproduced and translated in Althusser 2014). On page 5, Derrida introduces this reading by exposing a certain number of contextual elements. He recalls “the common use, today, in the language of a certain intelligentsia, of the word reproduction in order to designate the effect of teaching apparatuses, and of ideological apparatuses in general” (Derrida 1974–75: session 5, page 5);¹⁹ he evokes “Bourdieu and Passeron’s works, who have made of *Reproduction* not only the title of one of their books, but in fact

¹⁸ For a detailed description and analysis of this unpublished seminar, see Mercier 2019a, 2020a.

¹⁹ Here, Derrida added a handwritten marginal note: “Value of productivity = general philosophical consensus (Deleuze ⇒ Marx...)” (Derrida 1974–75: session 5, page 5). The reference to Deleuze most likely refers to his (and Guattari’s) definition of “desire” as “production” in *Anti-Oedipus*.

the very field of their analyses” (ibid.);²⁰ and he finally turns to Althusser’s text, which proposes to think ideology and ISAs *scientifically*, that is to say, “*from the point of view of reproduction*” (Althusser 2014: 236–38). Derrida is particularly interested in Althusser’s critique of ideology inasmuch as it is inseparable from a study of the school system, of “the educational ISA.” Althusser shows that the reproduction of capital and of class domination supposes not only the reproduction of material resources, but also that of a number of skills, competences, and orthodoxies that are necessary for the reproduction of docile human resources, and which contribute to reproduce the division of labor and class divisions. Althusser explains that this type of ideological reproduction—through language teaching and moral and civic instruction, for instance—cannot be conceived in purely mechanistic terms, notably because it supposes internal and external (class) struggles, within the apparatus and between the various ideological apparatuses (between the “ISA Family” and the “ISA School,” for example, or between the “ISA School” and the “ISA Church,” etc.). Nevertheless, the educational ISA is central to Althusser’s theory of ideology: it is defined as the *dominant* ISA in “mature capitalist social formations,” where it replaced the ISA Church in this dominant function sometime in the nineteenth century (according to a timeline that Althusser does not provide—see Althusser 2014: 249).

Although Derrida recognizes the undeniable progress that Althusser’s theory of ISAs constitutes compared with other (Lucien Sève’s, for example) Marxist theories of education—notably because it attempts to account for a certain conflictuality and plurality inherent to the reproduction of ideology—he remains suspicious of Althusser’s discourse inasmuch as it is captive to the notion that ideology can be analyzed from the point of view of a *science* of ideology, for instance in the form of a “scientific theory of the state” (Althusser 2014: 241), or of

²⁰ See Bourdieu and Passeron 1990. Their book *La reproduction* was first published in French in 1970.

a “scientific discourse on ideology”: “from within ideology we have to outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific (i.e. subject-less) discourse on ideology” (Althusser 2014: 263). And this scientific theory is possible, according to Althusser, precisely because it presents itself as a theory of reproduction—a reproductive model that cannot *not* reproduce a certain mechanistic functioning. However, Derrida asks: How can the apparatus *reproduce itself* while the resources of its functioning *as reproductive machine* are—as Althusser himself explains— numerous, heterogeneous, proteiform, and involve a multiplicity of conflictual forces, reversals, delays, relays, and mutations? The formation of ideological apparatuses supposes a long and complex history—a history itself heterogeneous and agonistic, resulting from the relative stabilization of struggles between a multitude of ideological apparatuses, discourses, and interpretations thereof, concerning and affecting the very concept of history, and which Derrida analyzes in detail all through the seminar. Still in the fifth session, Derrida demonstrates that the construction and identification of “the apparatus,” its “production” as a theoretical object for critique—its identification as an object available for critical theory—is itself an *effect of the apparatus*. The critique of the apparatus is an effect of the apparatus. Therefore, the critique of ideology cannot escape a certain ideological becoming, of which we are also the effects, so that the deconstruction of ideology itself partakes in the apparatus that is being deconstructed, which in fact deconstructs itself. This signifies that there is no pure and simple exit from the apparatus and its reproduction: the deconstruction of ideology is possible only because it is, in part, an effect of the apparatus that is being deconstructed, and this partaking is what *opens the possibility of reading*, while also *limiting* it in other aspects. This partaking supposes a differential complicity with the so-called apparatus (which, in any case, does not designate a homogeneous whole or the concept of something homogeneous)—and this differential complicity requires an intervention *within* the apparatus, through the

invention of new practices and interpretative models aiming to deconstruct the apparatus inasmuch as it re-presents itself as re-productive machine. This is, once again, the law of text and *débordement*—neither pure production nor pure reproduction.

In the eighth and ninth sessions of the seminar, in a stunning reading of Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology*—one which was never reproduced in later publications—Derrida complicates the traditional Marxist schema of reproduction in several crucial ways, which all have to do with a certain reading of sexual difference. In *The German Ideology*, the concepts of division of labor and ideology (which are inseparable in the Marxian text) presuppose *another* division of labor, presented as more “originary” and “natural”: what Marx calls “the division of labor in the sexual act” (*die Teilung der Arbeit im Geschlechtsakt*) (qtd. in Derrida 1974–75: session 9). Derrida explains that it is difficult to comprehend what Marx exactly means by this: does he refer to the sexual “act”—the coitus, properly speaking—or to the whole organization of sexual re-production, the distribution of labor between sexes within the familial structures, and the traditional, dual definition of sexes? In any case, the definition of the sexual division of labor as “natural” and “originary” tends to espouse classical Hegelian schemes by reproducing traditional oppositions such as family/society, nature/culture, animality/humanity, and so on. Although Marx explains that the sexual division of labor itself already presupposes dialectical relations between agonistic forces, he maintains the naturalness of sexuality as production and reproduction, conceived as preceding society, politics, and the class struggle, properly speaking. Marx posits the sexual division of labor as pre-ideological, pre-social, and pre-political. According to Derrida, this position shows that the dialectical-Marxist theory of reproduction (including Althusser's) requires sexual difference (which might seem quite obvious), while also reducing it to a mere moment within the general process of reproduction. This reduction contributes to localizing and stabilizing sexual

difference, to reducing sex and sexual differences to a simple means of production and reproduction.

Nevertheless, because it is inscribed in the dialectical process of production-reproduction as its origin, this sexual division becomes very hard to fully delimit and stabilize: Is it simply “natural,” or is it also cultural-ideological? Is it biological or sociopolitical? Is it even *human*, strictly speaking? Is it simply reducible to the traditional duality of sexes? Can it be defined and localized in ontological terms? Does it have a stable essence, and how does it affect the logic of socioeconomic reproduction as a whole? In fact, Derrida suggests that Marx’s presupposition of this originary sexual division of labor tends to wreak havoc on the whole Marxian system as theory of re-production. It is obvious that the originary sexual difference, since it is described as *originary* division of labor, cannot be abolished in the same way that the *secondary* division of labor (between material and intellectual labor) should (and will) be abolished according to Marx’s eschatoteleology. This supposes a first difficulty: because (sexual) division of labor is “originary” and “natural,” because it has always already started, this signifies that there will always be some level of division of labor, some differential division of labor that will repeat or reproduce itself, even though it reproduces itself in *différance*, practically transforming labor in and through all its divisions. Labor divides (itself) in and through reproduction; there is no labor without division. Labor is essentially division, or divisibility. Labor divides (itself), differs (from itself), and this differential division or self-division is the condition of possibility and impossibility for reproduction in general. Derrida thus demonstrates that Marx tends to give to the concepts of “labor” and “division of labor” a virtually unlimited extension, which cannot simply be contained within the limits of a regional field (such as “the economy” in the narrow sense of the term).

Now, if we take seriously the fact that the “originary” division of labor is defined by Marx as *sexual*, we must also admit that this sexual division concerns

and affects all production and all labor deriving from this “origin”: manual and/or intellectual, material and/or ideological, practical and/or theoretical, and so on.²¹ Sexual division (and its underlying conflictuality) must affect the whole of the re-productive system and becomes virtually limitless, thus making the limits between family, society, state, school, religion, and all other “apparatuses” tremble. Derrida names this general structure the “ideological-sexual organization” of the socius, and postulates what he calls an “agonistic *différance*”: a nonderivable and nonreducible divisibility, a multiplicity of sexual-material-textual differential forces affecting and traversing all the concepts at play here, and challenging the stabilization of “politics,” “economy,” “sexuality,” or “ideology” into ontological categories that could be strictly delimited (Derrida 1974–75: session 9). Through the postulation of this “agonistic *différance*,” Derrida then proceeds to articulate the Marxist discourse on labor, division, class conflict, and ideology with the psychoanalytic questions of sexuality, the unconscious, the phantasm, the economy of the drives, repression, the uncanny, and so on. From the point of view of ideology and its reproduction, Derrida’s pre-ontological “agonistic *différance*” implies, *first*, that the structure of the ideological cannot strictly reproduce itself, that it is itself nonhomogeneous, that it exists in *différance*, as a heterogeneous system of sexual, economic, cultural, or textual traces; and, *second*, that the ideological can never be simply explained away, “reduced” or “abolished” once and for all, but that its structure remains to be translated,

²¹ Derrida refers to this aspect of the argument “two years” later, in the seminar “Theory and Practice” (1976–77), in another example of textual *renvoi* or *débordement* from one seminar to the other: “if sexual practice is not one example of practice among others, then you’ll get the sense here that the question of work and of the division of labor, and of the sexual division of labor within the Marxist problematic, *a set of questions that we looked into together here two years ago*, this set of questions that we will find again is indeed a systematic set and not localizable as particular or derivative” (Derrida 2019b: 31; my emphasis). In the French and English editions of *Theory and Practice*, a footnote mentions that Derrida is referring to the seminar “L’art (Kant),” but it is most certainly the one we are talking about here.

transformed, and deconstructed²²—while always maintaining a link to originary (pre-ontological) sexual *différance*.

Let me add one last remark about what Marx's account of sex and *Geschlechtsakt* does to dialectics (and philosophy) as reproductive system: sexuality being defined as originary labor and division of labor, it contaminates the whole of the system which supposedly reproduces itself from this so-called "origin." In the process, the "origin" must reproduce itself. The (sexual) division of labor cannot *not* reproduce itself, but it reproduces itself *as difference*, in *différance*, always presupposing a certain agonistic differential, a conflict between forces. Sexual divisions crosscut and divide all other divisions. The agonistic sexual division is required and reproduced in and through the secondary division of labor—class division in the "strict" sense of the term, starting with the division between intellectual and material labor, which in turn produces ideology. This signifies that divisions of labor, class divisions, the production of ideology, and more generally the whole re-productive system, are in fact always already sexual, sexualized, or sexualizing; they are *marked sexually*, originally affected by the sexual division—a sexual division or difference which cannot simply be stabilized or captured, comprehended by the ontological discourse of philosophy, since this discourse is

²² Could it be said that Derrida's line of argumentation in this last session of the seminar was partly prompted by Bourdieu's sociological critique of philosophical ideology, such as presented by him earlier during the same seminar? It is hard to tell, of course, because there are no explicit signs of this in the text of the seminar "itself." But we cannot exclude the possibility that Derrida *reacted* to a certain number of debates internal and external to the seminar, and adapted his teaching from one session to the other—something which, I insist, is harder to take into account if we simply read the seminars as books, and not as archival-pedagogic documents. For example, in Bourdieu's "L'ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger," one finds the following argument, which targets the ideological nature of the philosophical discourse in general: "An ideological production is all the more successful as it is more capable to *put in the wrong* anyone who attempts to *reduce* it to its objective truth: what is proper to dominant ideology is its capacity to make the science of ideology fall under the accusation of ideology" (Bourdieu 1975: 119; my translation). This passage was heavily modified from 1975 to 1988, and thus does not appear as such in the English translation of the 1988 book. One can imagine what Derrida would have to say about the expression "science of ideology," and about Bourdieu's dogmatic claim to operate a "reduction" of ideology (here, philosophy) to "its objective truth" (that is, class interests)—here again: re/pro/ductions.

itself the (ideological) product of the series of (socio-economic-sexual) divisions of labor identified by Marx, and of their underlying conflicts. It follows that there cannot be any neutral and nonideological theoretical discourse on sexual difference: sexual difference or *différance* does not let itself be reduced to a theoretical object available to a neutral theoretical discourse, nor does it let itself be reduced to the essence of a being-present—although (or because) it originally affects the position of the philosophical discourse on the essence, and of the onto-logic of re-production that goes with it. (Sexual) *différance déborde* ontology, while not being strictly or purely external to it; and ontology, the philosophical discourse on the essence—here in the form of dialectics—can only attempt to re-duce (sexual) *différance* to a process of re-production.

All this leads to considering Derrida's deconstruction of the sexual politics of ontology (through the notion of *dissemination*, for example, understood as *that which does not return to the Father*) as a radicalization of the Marxian critique of ideology in relation to production and reproduction. Deconstruction always targets an authoritative and seminal father figure, a power principle, be it logos, the state, or the onto-logic mastery of philosophy, which performs its own sovereignty by positing itself as a discourse on the origin and truth of being—a truth whose essence is to be *reproducible*, to reproduce itself, notably through education. The onto-logic of re-production always works in neutralizing the work of dissemination, in attempting to re-duce the irreducible heterogeneity of the disseminal text. As Peggy Kamuf explains, it is probable that this disseminal force, which interrupts the reproductive machine, always retains some reference to some sexual difference or *différance*, to some “sexual drive” at work in all the models and reproductive systems we are talking about here—but which can never be fully stabilized by them:

That probability is even a certainty if one takes as seriously as one should *dissemination* as Derrida has described it and which he understands to be at work in every text as its possibility, that is, the possibility of its coming to find a reader.

This term can still be heard in its so-called sexual (that is, genital) sense: a dissemination, where the prefix has a privative value. It would be a non-semination, a non-generative non-reproduction of the seed and the semen, which is the masculine essence. But the word has not just a privative sense, because it also says *dissemination*, the scattering of the semantic or semiotic value of signs. Between these levels, between the body of signs and the genitally sexed body, the act of semination is itself dis-seminated, meaning it does not reproduce itself, no “itself” can reproduce itself. (Kamuf 2001: 88)

Just as the text’s functioning depends on the reader to come, the teaching discourse finds meaning only in the response. *This*—which remains scandalous for any onto-logic—will always be *surprising*, even to the most sophisticated models of re-production. The overflowing surprise comes from the unpredictable other—today’s or tomorrow’s readers, for instance. But the overflowing already takes place *in the classroom*, in the singular event of the pedagogical scene. It interrupts in advance the teaching discourse and the seminal scene of the seminar. The teacher, and the reproductive system to which he or she belongs, cannot *not* be *débordés*. Certainly, this *débordement* might point to the defeat of the Master, to the defect of the reproductive machine and of the inseminating function of the seminar. For the teacher, *débordement* is surely a source of fatigue, perhaps of discouragement. It signals a certain powerlessness, or *impouvoir*. But such depowering *débordement* also suggests a generative or affirmative force of dissemination, the chance of a dispossession, the surprise of a reversal—one which might constitute, somewhat perversely, a source of pleasure for the teacher, but a pleasure that remains entrusted to the other: *un plaisir débordé-débordant*:

Hence I never fail to be surprised when I give a course. Surprise is that structure that draws metalanguage back, that always surprises it in its naiveté, surprises it at the moment of its withdrawal [*retraite*], . . . and it procures, so long as this surprise is affirmed and reaffirmed by whoever has the force to give in to it in the end, pleasure, a pleasure that, in keeping with the essence of pleasure or of desire, must be and remain *dubious*, entrusted to the other to take or to leave. One never knows where a course will go. That of which one speaks and those to whom one speaks always have in reserve something to say in advance not only about the course but about pedagogical theory. (Derrida 2019a: 86; 2020: 58)

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