

Foreword, volume 4: Lévi-Strauss in the Eighteenth Century

[**Editorial note: this manuscript file will be replaced by a definitive pdf in early 2013**]

[3] The metaphor that might describe without fault or mistake the genealogy of a text still cannot be formulated. In its syntax and in its vocabulary, in its spacing, through its punctuation, its gaps, its margins, the historical belonging of a text is never a matter of direct descent. Nor a simple accumulation of layers. Nor pure juxtaposition of borrowed pieces. And if a text always gives itself a certain representation of its own roots, these only live off this representation, which is to say on condition that they never touch the ground. This no doubt destroys their *radical essence*, but not the necessity of their *rooting function*. To say that we only ever intertwine roots ad infinitum, bending them to take root in roots, to pass through the same points, to redouble ancient adhesions, to circulate between their differences, to coil up in themselves or to envelop each other reciprocally, to say that a text is only ever a *system of roots*, is no doubt to contradict both the concept of system and the schema of a root. But for it not to be merely apparent, this contradiction only acquires the sense of a contradiction, and receives its 'illogicism', as a result of being thought in a finite configuration – the history of metaphysics – taken from inside a system of roots that never ends and that still has no name.

The text's consciousness of itself, however, i.e. the circumscribed discourse in which is articulated its genealogical representation (for example a certain conception of the 'eighteenth century' that Lévi-Strauss constitutes and lays claim to), without collapsing into this genealogy per se, plays an organizing role, precisely through this gap, in the structure of the text. Even if we had the right to speak of retrospective illusion, such illusion would not be an accident or a theoretical waste [*déchet*]; we would have to account for its necessity and for its positive effects. And this genealogical representation of itself is itself already representation [4] of a representation of self: that which the 'French eighteenth century', for example, if such a thing exists, already constructed as its own provenance and its own presence.

The play of these belongings, so manifest in the texts of anthropology and of the 'human sciences', is it produced entirely within a 'history of metaphysics'? Does it somewhere enforce its closure? Such is perhaps the larger horizon of the questions that will be considered here on the basis of some examples. To which we can give proper names: the holders of discourse, Condillac, Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss; or common names: the concepts of analysis, of genesis, of origin, of nature, of culture, of sign, of speech, of writing, etc... – in the end the common name of proper name [*le nom commun de nom propre*].

Jacques Derrida.