

PAPER MACHINE

Jacques Derrida

Translated by Rachel Bowlby

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Paper or Me, You Know . . . (New Speculations on a Luxury of the Poor)

LES CAHIERS DE MÉDIOLOGIE: You have written books with various ways into them, with various formats, or folds, as if to elude the surface of the paper and the traditional linearity of writing. You have clearly dreamed of making the page a theatrical scene (for the voice, but also for the body), of hollowing out a depth in it, and also often an abyss. “*L’écrit*, l’écran, l’écrin”—“writing, encasing, screening”—you wrote, in a formulation that has to be read rather than heard.¹ To what extent does paper already function as multimedia? To what extent has it been adequate for you to communicate your thinking?

JACQUES DERRIDA: Seeing all these questions emerging on paper, I have the impression (the *impression!*—what a word, already) that I have never had any other *subject*: basically, paper, paper, paper.² It could be demonstrated, with supporting documentation and quotations, “on paper”: I have always written, and even spoken, *on* paper: on the subject of paper, an actual paper, and with paper in mind. Support, subject, surface, mark, trace, written mark, inscription, fold—these were also themes that gripped me by a tenacious certainty, which goes back forever but has been more and more justified and confirmed, that the history of this “thing,” this thing that can be felt, seen, and touched, and is thus contingent, paper, will have been a brief one. Paper is evidently the limited “subject” of a domain circumscribed in the time and space of a hegemony that marks out a period in the history of a technology and in the history of humanity. The end of this hegemony (its structural if not its

quantitative end, its degeneration, its tendency to decline) suddenly speeded up at a date which roughly coincides with that of my “generation”: the length of a lifetime.

Another version, in short, of Balzac’s *La Peau de chagrin*—*The Wild Ass’s Skin*. The successor to parchment made of skin, paper is *declining*, it is *getting smaller*, it is *shrinking* inexorably at the rate that a man grows old—and everything then becomes a play of expenditure and savings, calculation, speed, political economy, and—as in the novel—of knowledge, power, and will: “to know,” “to will [*vouloir*],” and “to have your will [*pouvoir*].”³

Ever since I started writing, both the institution and the stability of paper have been constantly exposed to seismic shake-ups. The beasts of relentless writing that we are could not remain either deaf or insensitive to this. Every sign on the paper had to be picked up as an advance sign: it foretold the “loss” of a support: the end of the “subjectile” is nigh. That is also, doubtless, where this body of paper has a bodily hold on us. Because if we hold to paper, and will do for a long time to come, if it gets hold of us bodily, and through every sense, and through every fantasy, this is because its economy has always been more than that of a medium (of a straightforward means of communication, the supposed neutrality of a support)—but also, paradoxically, and your question suggests this, that of a multimedia. It has always been so, already, virtually. Multimedia not, naturally, in the regular and current use of this word, which, strictly speaking, generally presupposes precisely the *supposition* of an electrical support. Paper is no more multimedia “in itself,” of course, but—and you are right to stress this—it “already functions,” *for us*, virtually, as such. That on its own explains the interest, investment, and economy that it will continue to mobilize for a long time to come. Paper is the support not only for marks but for a complex “operation”—spatial and temporal; visible, tangible, and often sonorous; active but also passive (something other than an “operation,” then, the becoming-opus or the archive of operative work).

The word *support* itself could give rise to plenty of questions on the subject of paper. There is no need to trust blindly in all the discourses that reduce paper to the function or *topos* of an inert surface laid out *beneath* some markings, a substratum meant for sustaining them, for ensuring their survival or subsistence. On this commonsense view, paper would be a body-subject or a body-substance, an immobile and impassible surface underlying the traces that may come along and affect it from the outside, superficially, as events, or accidents, or qualities. This discourse is neither true

nor false, but it is heavy with all the assumptions that, not accidentally, are sedimented down into the history of the substance or the subject, the support or *hypokeimenon*—but also that of the relationships between the soul and the body.⁴ What is happening to paper at present, namely what we perceive at least as a sort of ongoing decline or withdrawal, an ebb or rhythm as yet unforeseeable—that does not only remind us that paper has a history that is brief but complex, a technological or material history, a symbolic history of projections and interpretations, a history tangled up with the invention of the human body and of hominization. It also reveals another necessity: we will not be able to think through or deal with or treat this retreat or withdrawal without general and formalized (and also deconstructive) reflection on what will have been meant—by the *trait* or mark, of course, and retreat (*retrait*), but first of all by *being-beneath*, the submission or subjectedness of subjectivity in general.

To come back now as close as possible to your question: yes, paper can *get to work like a multimedia*, at least when it is for reading or writing—remember there is also wrapping paper, wallpaper, cigarette papers, toilet paper, and so on. Paper for writing on (notepaper, printer or typing paper, headed paper) may lose this intended use or this dignity. Before being, or when it ceases to be, a “backing [*support*] for writing,” it lends itself to quite different kinds of use, and there we have two main sources of evaluations. They go against each other but can sometimes be mixed up to fight over the same object. On the one hand there is the condition of a priceless archive, the body of an irreplaceable copy, a letter or painting, an absolutely unique event (whose rarity can give rise to surplus value and speculation). But there is also paper as support or backing for printing, for technical reprinting, and for reproducibility, replacement, prosthesis, and hence also for the industrial commodity, use and exchange value,—and finally for the throwaway object, the abjection of litter.

This inverts a hierarchy that is always unstable: “fine paper” in all its forms can become something thrown out. The virginity of the immaculate, the sacred, the safe, and the indemnified is also what is exposed or delivered to everything and everyone: the undersides and the abasement of prostitution. This “underside” of underlying paper can deteriorate into bumf, better suited to the basket or bin than the fire. Just the word *paper* on its own is sometimes enough, depending on the tone, to connote this kind of deterioration. With “newspaper,” already suspect in relation to the quality and survival of what is written on it, we know in advance that it

can deteriorate into wrapping paper or toilet paper. (And the press can now exist in two simultaneous forms, on “paper” and online—thus with the suggestion of, indeed exposure to, “interactive” use). A solemn promise, a pact, a signed alliance, a written oath, can all, at the moment of betrayal, become “bits of paper,” *chiffons de papier*. *Chiffons de papier* is all the odder as an expression given that the raw material of paper—which in the West is less than a thousand years old, since it came to us from China and from the Middle East when soldiers returned from the Crusades—was initially chiffon or rags: bits of linen, or cotton, or hemp. To denounce something as a simulacrum or artifact, a deceptive appearance, we will say for instance “paper tiger,” or in German “paper dragon.” When something is not effective or remains only virtual, we will say—whether to praise or discredit it—that it is “only on paper”: “only ‘on paper’ does this state have available an army of this kind”; “this government has built such and such a number of units of social housing, or has created this number of jobs for young people ‘on paper.’” Credit or discredit, legitimation or delegitimation, have long been signified by the body of paper. A guarantee is worth what a signed piece of paper is worth. Devalorization or depreciation, drop in value, the “devaluation” of paper is in proportion to its fragility, to its assumed lower cost, to the straightforwardness of its production, or sending, or reproduction. This is, for instance, the difference between paper money, more subject to devaluation, and the metal piece of gold or silver, or between paper guaranteed by a state or a notary public, stamped paper, and plain paper (a vast series of linked subjects: capital, and so on).

Finally, I was saying, I come back to your question. Paper echoes and resounds, *subjectile* of an inscription from which phonetic aspects are never absent, whatever the system of writing.⁵ Beneath the appearance of a surface, it holds in reserve a volume, folds, a labyrinth whose walls return the echoes of the voice or song that it carries itself; for paper also has the range or the ranges of a voice bearer. (We should come back to this question of paper’s “range.”) Paper is utilized in an experience involving the body, beginning with hands, eyes, voice, ears; so it mobilizes both time and space. Despite or through the richness and multiplicity of these resources, this multimedia has always proclaimed its inadequacy and its finitude.

What—to pick up your words—could be adequate to “communicate” a “thought”? If I place myself within the logic of your question, I must provisionally admit, out of convention, that given a situation of “communicating” a “thought” (which would then exist prior to its “com-

munication") and communicating it by entrusting it to a means, to the mediation of a medium, in this instance a trace inscribed on a backing that is more stable and lasting than the action itself of inscribing—then, and at that point only, the hypothesis of paper would arise: in history, alongside or after many other possible backings. So it is true that my experience of writing, like that of the majority of human beings for just a few centuries, will have belonged to the era of paper, to this parenthesis which is both very long and very short, both terminable and interminable. In the experimental works you allude to—*Dissemination*, "Tympan," and *Glas*, but there's also *The Post Card*, or "Circumfession" (writings "on" or "between" the card, the page, skin, and computer software), or *Monolingualism of the Other* (which names and puts into play an "extraordinary tattoo")⁶—I tried to play with the surface of paper and also to foil it.⁷ Through the invention or reinvention of formatting devices, primarily the breaking or occupation of the surface, the point was to try to deflect particular typographical norms, *including even paper*. To twist dominant conventions, the conventions through which you had thought you had to appropriate the historical economy of this backing by bending it (without bending it: flat, in fact) to the continuous and irreversible time of a *line*, a vocal line. And a monorhythmical one. Without depriving myself of the voice recorded there (which makes paper in fact into a sort of audiovisual multimediu), I partly—and only partly—and in a sort of continual transaction, exploited the chances that paper offers to visibility, meaning first of all the simultaneity, synopsis, and synchrony of what will never belong to the same time: thus a number of lines or trajectories of speech can inhabit the same surface, be offered to the eye in a time that is not exactly that of unilinear utterance, nor even that of reading in a low voice, in a single low voice. By changing dimension and bending to other conventions or contracts, letters can thus belong to a number of words. They jump out above their immediate adherence. So they disturb the very idea of a surface that is flat, or transparent, or translucent, or reflective. To keep to the example you mentioned, the word TAIN overprints its visibility onto *écrit*, *écran*, *écrin*—"writing, encasing, screening."⁸ And it can also be heard, not just seen. By naming the *cr* that repeats and crosses, squeaking, shouting, or cracking the three words; by opening the hollow without a reflection, the abyss without *mise en abyme* of a surface that puts a stop to reflection, it thereby designates that which archives the *written*, the *écrit*, on a page—that which conserves it or encrypts it or ensures its keeping in an *écrin* or box;

but which also continues, and this is the point I want to insist on, to control the surface of the *screen* (*écran*).

The page remains a screen. That is one of the themes of this text which also takes account of numerology, including computer number-logic and the digitization of writing. It is primarily a figure of paper (of the book or codex), but the page nowadays continues, in many ways, and not only metonymically, to govern a large number of surfaces of inscription, even where the body of paper is no longer there in person, so to speak, thus continuing to haunt the computer screen and all internet navigations in voyages of all kinds. Even when we write on the computer, it is still *with a view* to the final printing on paper, whether or not this takes place. The norms and figures of paper—more than of parchment—are imposed on the screen: lines, “sheets,” pages, paragraphs, margins, and so on. On my computer I even have an item called a “Notebook,” imitating the one you carry around with you, on which I can jot down notes; on the screen it looks like a box and I can turn its pages; they are both numbered and dog-eared. I also have an item called “Office”—*bureau*—although this word, like *bureaucracy*, belongs to the culture and even the political economy of paper. Let’s not talk about the verbs *cut* and *paste* or *delete* that my software also includes. They have lost all concrete and descriptive reference to the technical operations performed, but these infinitives or imperatives also retain the memory of what has disappeared: the paper, the page of the codex. Thus the order of the page, even as a bare survival, will prolong the after-life of paper—far beyond its disappearance or its withdrawal.

I always prefer to say its *withdrawal* [*retrait*], since this word can mark the limit of a structural or even structuring, modeling hegemony, without that implying a death of paper, only a *reduction*. This last word would be fairly appropriate, too. It would redirect the reduction of paper, without end and without death, toward a change of dimension but also toward a qualitative frontier between the duction of production and the duction of reproduction. Contrary to what one would expect, during the same time, that is the time of withdrawal or reduction—well, the production of paper for reproducing, the transformation and consumption of printing paper, can increase in quantity both more widely and faster than ever. The reduction of paper does not make it rarer. For the time being, the opposite is certainly the case.⁹ This quantitative increase really involves the paper that could be characterized as “secondary,” the sort that has nothing to do with the first inscription (the “first” incision or breaking of a piece of writing) or else only with mechanical printing or the reproduction of writing

and image. What must be decreasing proportionally, though, dramatically *withdrawing* and *reducing*, is the quantity of what we might call “primary” paper—the place of reception for an original tracing, for an initial composition or for invention, or writing with a pen, a pencil, or even a typewriter—in other words, paper used for everything we continue to call “first version,” “original,” “manuscript,” or “rough draft.”

Withdrawal and reduction: these two words go fairly well together with shrinkage—paper becoming *peau de chagrin*.¹⁰ So before it was a constraint, paper was a virtual multimedia, and it is still the chance of a multiple text and even a sort of symphony, or even a chorus. It will have been this in at least two ways.

First, force of law, just because of the transgression provoked by a constraint (the narrowness of its area, its fragility, hardness, rigidity, passivity or quasi-dead impassiveness, the rigor mortis of what is “without response”—as opposed to the potential interactiveness of the research interlocutor, which a computer or a multimedia internet system now is). And I think that the typographical experiments you were alluding to, particularly the ones in *Glas*, wouldn’t have been interesting to me any more; on a computer, and without those constraints of paper—its hardness, its limits, its resistance—I wouldn’t have *desired* them.

On the other hand, by carrying us beyond paper, the adventures of technology grant us a sort of future anterior; they liberate our reading for a retrospective exploration of the past resources of paper, for its *previously* multimedia vectors. This mutation is integrative too, with no absolute rupture. It is our “generation’s” chance or destiny still to maintain the desire to give nothing up—which, as you know, is the definition of the unconscious. In this the unconscious, or what we still call by that name, is the multimedia itself.

Having said this, while we do have to recognize the “multimedia” resources or possibilities of paper, we should avoid that most tempting but also most serious of mistakes: reducing the technological event, the invention of apparatus that are multimedia in the strict sense of the word—in their external objectality, in the time and space of their electro-mechanics, in their numerical or digital logic—to being merely a *development* of paper, its virtual or implicit *possibilities*.

LES CAHIERS DE MÉDIOLOGIE: There have been mediological questions running through your oeuvre ever since Edmund Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry,” in 1962, and of course *Of Grammatology* (1967). This mediology

in particular interrogates the book-form of thinking—its typography, its build, its folds. . . . Freud, for instance, you very early on read in relation to the “mystic writing-pad”: the *Wunderblock*.¹¹ You come back to this in *Archive Fever* (1995), where you ask what form Freudian theory would have taken in the era of recording tapes, e-mail, faxes, and the multiplication of screens. Is psychoanalysis—to keep to this conspicuous example—infiltrated right through to its theoretical models by the paper-form of thinking—or, let’s say, by the “graphosphere”?

DERRIDA: Definitely, yes. This hypothesis is worth using in a differentiated way—both systematically and prudently. In saying “the paper-form of thinking—or, let’s say, by the ‘graphosphere,’” you are pointing out a vital distinction. What belongs to the “graphosphere” always implies some kind of surface, and even the materiality of some kind of backing or support; but not all graphemes are necessarily imprinted on paper, or even on a skin, a photographic film, or a piece of parchment. The use of the technological apparatus that was the “mystic writing-pad,” as an example for pedagogical or illustrative purposes, raises problems of every kind that I can’t come back to here; but Freud’s putting paper, literally, to work in this text is still astonishing. He goes with paper, as backing and surface of inscription, as a place where marks are retained; but simultaneously he tries to free himself from it. He would like to break through its limits. He uses paper, but as if he would like to put himself *beyond a paper principle*. The economic schema that is guiding him at this point could be an inspiration to us for every kind of reflection on the surface-backing in general, and on the surface-backing of paper in particular. Freud does begin, it is true, by speaking of “the pocket-book or sheet of paper.” This makes up for the deficiencies of my memory when it keeps my written notations. This “surface” is then compared to a “materialized element of my mnemonic apparatus, which I otherwise carry about with me invisible.” Again let us stress the scope of this *I carry*. But this finite surface is rapidly saturated; I need (to carry) another virgin sheet to continue and I may then lose interest in the first sheet. If, in order to continue inscribing new impressions without a pause, I write on a board with chalk, I can certainly rub out, write, and rub out again, but without keeping a lasting trace. Double bind of paper, double binding of paper: “Thus an unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces seem to be mutually exclusive properties in the apparatus which we use as substitutes for our memory: either the receptive surface must be renewed or the notation must be destroyed.”¹² So in practice, Freud claims, the technical model of the *Wunderblock* would

make it possible to remove this double constraint and resolve this contradiction—but on condition of making the function of actual paper relative, if I can put it like that, and dividing that function in itself. It is only then that “this small contrivance . . . promises to perform more than the sheet of paper or the slate.”¹³ For the mystic writing-pad is not a block of paper but a tablet of resin or of dark brown wax. It is only *bordered* by paper. A thin, transparent sheet is affixed to the upper edge of the tablet but it remains loosely placed there, sliding across the lower edge. This sheet is itself double—not reflexive or folded, but double and *divided* into two “layers.” (And indeed a reflection on paper ought in the first place to be a reflection on the *sheet* or *leaf* [*feuille*]: on the figure, nature, culture, and history of what some languages, including French and English, call a “leaf,” thereby overprinting in the “thing” a huge dictionary of connotations, tropes, or virtual poems. All the leaves in the world, beginning with the ones on trees—which in fact are used to make paper—become, as if this was their promised fate, sisters or cousins of the one on which we are “laying” our signs, before they become the leaves of a newspaper or journal or book. There is the folding of the leaves, the reserve for a vast number of references to Mallarmé and all his “folds”—I ventured this in “The Double Session” [in *Dissemination*]¹⁴—but there are also all the folds made by the meaning of the word *feuille*. This word *feuille* is itself a semantic *portefeuille* or portfolio. We should also, if we don’t forget to later, speak about the semantics of the *portefeuille*, at least in French.)¹⁴ The upper layer, to return to the writing-pad, is made of celluloid, so it is transparent—a sort of film or *pellicule*,¹⁵ an artificial skin; the lower layer is a sheet [*feuille*] of thin, translucent wax. You write without ink, using a pointed pen, and not going through to the wax paper, but only on the sheet of celluloid; hence Freud suggests a return to the tablet of the ancient world. We can’t now go back in detail over the implications and limits of what—in memory of Kant—I dubbed the “three analogies of writing.” There are other limits that Freud did not think of. But he did have an inkling of more than one. He himself regarded this technology as a mere auxiliary model (“There must come a point at which the analogy between an auxiliary apparatus of this kind and the organ which is its prototype will cease to apply,” he says, before pushing it further anyway).¹⁶ I just wanted to flag two or three points in relation to what is important in this connection:

1. In Freud, this “model” is in competition with others (an optical apparatus, for instance, but others too), or complicated by photographic writ-

ing (which presupposes other quasi-paper supports, the camera film and printing paper).

2. Paper is already “reduced” or “withdrawn,” “sidelined” in this—at least actual paper, if we can still talk about such a thing. But can we speak here about paper *itself*, about the “thing itself” called “paper”—or only about figures for it? Hasn’t “withdrawal” always been the mode of being, the process, the very movement of what we call “paper”? Isn’t the essential feature of paper the withdrawal or sidelining of what is rubbed out and withdraws *beneath* what a so-called support is deemed to back, receive, or welcome? Isn’t paper always in the process of “disappearing”—dying out—and hasn’t it always been? Passed away, don’t we mourn it at the very moment when we entrust it with mourning’s nostalgic signs and make it disappear beneath ink, tears, and the sweat of this labor, a labor of writing that is always a work of mourning and loss of the body? *What is* paper, itself, strictly speaking? Isn’t the history of the question “What is?” always “on the edge,” just before or just after a history of paper?

At any rate, with the “mystic writing-pad,” paper is neither the dominant element nor the dominant support.

3. What we have here is an apparatus, and already a little machine for two hands. What is printed on paper doesn’t proceed directly from a single movement of just one hand; there has to be a manipulation and even a multiple handling, a holding with more than one hand. Division of labor: to each hand its role and its surface, and its period. Freud’s last words may recall the medieval copyist (with his pen in one hand and his scraping knife [for erasing] in the other), but also predict the computer (the two hands, the difference between the three stages—the first “floating” inscription; saving; printing out on paper): “If we imagine one hand writing upon the surface of the Mystic Writing-Pad while another periodically raises its covering-sheet from the wax slab, we shall have a concrete representation of the way in which I tried to picture the functioning of the perceptual apparatus of our mind.”¹⁷

That said—I’m not forgetting your question—if we are making a distinction between what you call the “paper form” of knowledge and the “graphosphere,” we cannot say that psychoanalysis, *all* psychoanalysis, depends on paper or even the figure of paper in its theoretical models. The scene and the “analytic situation” seem to exclude any form of recording on an external support as a matter of principle (but, since Plato, there remains the vast question of the tracing called metaphorical in the soul, in the psychological apparatus). It is difficult to imagine what institutions, communities,

and scientific communication would have been for psychoanalysis in Freud's time and that of his immediate successors, without the paper of publications and especially the tons of handwritten correspondence, or without the time and space governed in this way by the "paper" form or the substance of "paper." But still, the *theoretical* dependence of psychoanalytical knowledge with regard to this medium can be neither certain nor homogeneous. A place and a concept should be reserved for uneven developments (more or less dependence at some one moment than at another; dependence of another type in certain sites of discourse, or sites of the institutional community, or of private, secret, or public life—assuming that they can be rigorously distinguished, which is indeed the problem). The process is still going on. We cannot now go back to the protocols for questions that I put forward in *Archive Fever*; but the very concept of "theoretical model" could appear to be as problematical as that of pedagogical illustration (picture, writing on paper, volume or apparatus made of paper, and so on). There are of course a great many competing models (whether more *technical* ones—optical, as I said, like a photographic apparatus or a microscope; *graphic*, like the writing-pad; or more "natural"—engrams, mnemonic or biographical or genetical-graphical traces, with the support being a person's body: going right back to Freud's first writings). These "models" can sometimes, though not always, do without paper, but they *all* belong to what you call the "graphosphere," in the broadest sense that I am always tempted to give it. The prepsychoanalytic traditions invoked by Freud himself (the hieroglyphic code as *Traumbuch* [dream-book], for instance) or those to which he is brought back (a strong Jewish filiation or affiliation, as Yosef Yerushalmi has emphasized),¹⁸ are techniques of decoding. They involve a decoding of graphical marks, with or without paper. Even when Lacan puts linguistic-rhetorical models back to work, in order to displace them, even during the period when he is de-biologizing and, so to speak, "dis-affecting" the Freudian tradition, and even when he makes the notion of full speech his main theme, his dominant figures derive from what you would call the graphosphere.

As for the topological model of the Moebius strip, to what extent is it still a "representation" or a "figure"? Does it irreducibly depend, *as such*, on what we call a body of "paper"? A *feuille* or leaf whose two pages (recto-verso) would develop a surface that was one and the same? For Lacan, as you know, it's a question of a division of the subject "with no distinction of origin," between knowledge and truth. This "internal eight" also marks "the internal exclusion" of the subject "from its object."¹⁹ When Lacan

replies in these terms to the question of the “double inscription,” we should ask questions about the status and the necessity of these tropes (are they irreducible or not? I wouldn’t like to say too hastily):

It [the question of the double inscription] is quite simply in the fact that the inscription does not cut into the same side of the parchment, coming from the truth printing-plate or the knowledge printing-plate.

That these inscriptions are mixed up had simply to be resolved in a topology: a surface where the top and the underneath are such as to be joined everywhere was within reach of the hand.

Yet it is much further away than in an intuitive schema; it is by clasping him round, if I can put it like that, in his being, that this topology can seize hold of the analyst.²⁰

Not to speak of the hand, of a “hand’s reach,” of all those “intuitive schemas” that Lacan does however seem to refuse, the parchment (of skin) is not paper, is not the subject or the subjectile of a printing machine. It’s not machine-paper. The two “materials” belong to heterogeneous technological periods and systems of inscription. *Behind* these specific determinations (the support made of skin, or the paper, and other ones too), beyond or before them, might there be a sort of general, even quasi-transcendental structure? A structure both superficial, actually that of a surface, and yet also profound enough and sensitive enough to receive or retain impressions? When we say “paper,” for example, are we naming the empirical body that bears this conventional name? Are we already resorting to a rhetorical figure? Or are we by the same token designating this “quasi-transcendental paper,” whose function could be guaranteed by any other “body” or “surface,” provided that it shared some characteristics with “paper” in the strict sense of the word (corporality, extension in space, the capacity to receive impressions, and so on)?

It is to be feared (but is this a threat? isn’t it also a resource?) that these three “uses” of the noun *paper*, the word *paper*, are superimposed or overprinted on each other in the most equivocal way—at every moment. And thus overwritten on each other right from the figuration of the relation between the signifier and signified “paper.” To such an extent that in this case the “What is?” question—“What is paper?”—is almost bound to go astray the minute it is raised. And it would be fun to demonstrate—it’s what I was suggesting just now—that it is practically the same age as paper, the “What is?” question. Like philosophy and the project of rigorous science, it is barely older or younger than our paper.

As far as the signifier/signified couplet is concerned, you will remem-

ber moreover that Saussure, while he vigorously excluded writing from language, still *compared* language itself to a sheet or leaf of paper:

A language might also be compared to a sheet of paper. Thought is one side of the sheet and sound the reverse side. [Hey! why not the other way around?] Just as it is impossible to take a pair of scissors and cut one side of paper without at the same time cutting the other, so it is impossible in a language to isolate sound from thought, or thought from sound; this could only be done by an abstraction.²¹

What are we to make of this “comparison”? A theoretical model? The paper-form of knowledge? Belonging to the graphosphere? Let’s not forget that psychoanalysis claims to interpret fantasies themselves, the projections, cathexes, and desires that are conveyed just as much on typewriters or paper-processing machines as on paper itself. In the virtually infinite field of this overinterpretation, whose models and protocols must themselves be reinterrogated, we are not required to limit ourselves to psychoanalytic hypotheses. But they do point out some ways forward. Between the era of paper and the multimedia technologies of writing that are completely transforming our existence, let us not forget that the *Traumdeutung* [*Interpretation of Dreams*] “compares” all the complicated mechanisms of our dreams—as it does weapons, too—to male genital organs. And in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, the blank sheet of paper becomes the mother’s body, at least when it is being written on with pen and ink: “As soon as writing, which entails making a liquid flow out of a tube on to a piece of white paper, assumes the significance of copulation, or as soon as walking becomes a symbolic substitute for treading upon the body of mother earth, both writing and walking are stopped because they represent the performance of a forbidden sexual act.”²²

We have forgotten to talk about the *color* of paper, the color of ink, and their comparative chromatics: a vast subject. That will be for another time. When it is not associated—like a leaf, moreover, or a silk paper—with a veil or canvas, writing’s *blank white*,²³ spacing, gaps, the “blanks which become what is important,” always open up onto a *base* of paper. Basically, paper often remains for us the *basis of the basis*, the base figure on the basis of which figures and letters are separated out. The indeterminate “base” of paper, the basis of the basis *en abyme*, when it is also surface, support, and substance (*hypokeimenon*), material substratum, formless matter and force in force (*dynamis*), virtual or dynamic power of virtuality—see how it appeals to an interminable genealogy of these great philosophemes. It even governs an anamnesis (a deconstructive one, if you like) of all the

concepts and fantasies that are sedimented together in our experience of letters, writing, and reading.

In a minute, I would like to show that this fundamental or basic chain of the “base” (support, substratum, matter, virtuality, power) cannot possibly be dissociated, in what we call “paper,” from the apparently antinomic chain of the act, the formality of “acts,” and the force of law, which are all just as constitutive. Let me mention in passing, for the moment, that the philosophical problematic of matter is often inscribed in Greek in a “hyletic” (from the word *hyle*, which also means “wood,” “forest,” “construction materials”—in other words the raw material from which paper will later be produced). And given what Freud did, as you know, with the semantic or figural series “material”—“Island of ‘Madeira,’” “Madeira wood,” “*mater*,” “matter,” “maternity”²⁴—here we are back again with *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*.

Can we speak here of *abandon*, *arrest*, or *inhibition* to designate the ongoing *withdrawal* or decline of a certain kind of writing, the decline of steely writing with the point of a pen on a surface of paper, the decline of the hand, or at any rate of a particular and unique way of using the hand? If we were now to associate this withdrawal with a *dénouement* or untying, namely the untying that effectively undoes the symbolic link of this writing to walking, moving along, breaking a path, thereby untying the plotted connections between eyes, hands, and feet, then perhaps we would be dealing with the symptoms of another historical—or historial, or even, as some would say, posthistorical—phase. At any rate another epoch would be hanging in the balance, keeping us in suspense, carrying off another scene, another scenario, keeping us distanced from and raised above paper: according to another model of the prohibited. There would also be a kind of anxiety on the agenda. There is of course the anxiety of the blank page, its virginity of birth or death, of winding-sheet or bed sheet, its ghostly movement or immobility; but there can also be the anxiety to do with a lack of paper. An individual or collective anxiety. I remember the first time I went to the Soviet Union. Intellectuals there were severely deprived of paper—for writing and for publishing. It was one of the serious dimensions of the political question; other media had to make up for the lack.

Another epoch, then; but isn't an *epoche* always the suspension of a prohibition, an organization of withdrawal or retention? This new epoch, this other *reduction*, would also correspond to an original displacement, already, of the body in displacement—to what some might perhaps be quick

to call another body, even another unconscious. What is more, the remark of Freud's that I have just quoted is part of a passage on the eroticization of fingers, feet, hands, and legs. While it is tied to the "paper" system (just a few centuries, a second in regard to the history of humanity), this furtive eroticization also belongs to the very long time of some process of hominization. Do tele-sex or internet sex alter anything in this? A program with no base. A program of the baseless.

LES CAHIERS DE MÉDIOLOGIE: You have been concerned with the movement involving African *sans-papiers*, undocumented immigrants in France, and their struggle to get identity papers like everyone else. Without playing on words, this history reminds us of the extent to which identity, the social bond, and the forms of solidarity (interpersonal, media-based, and institutional) go through filters made of paper. Let's now imagine a science-fiction scenario: the disappearance of all the papers, books, newspapers, personal documents . . . on which we literally support our existence. Can we measure the loss, or the possible gain, that would result from this? Shouldn't we be worried about the less obvious but also more efficient effects of electronic identifications and markers?

DERRIDA: The process you describe is not out of science fiction. It's on the way. There's no denying it; the issue seems both serious and boundless. It is true that it's less a matter of a state of things or a *fait accompli* than of an ongoing process and a tendency that can't be challenged, which will involve, for a long time to come, vastly unequal or "uneven developments," as we put it. Not only between different parts of the world, different types of wealth, and different places of technological and economic development, but also within each social space which will have to enable the paper culture and electronic culture to cohabit. So a "balance sheet" of pros and cons is risky. Because the process is speeding up and becoming investment-based. In addition, its effects are essentially equivocal; they never fail to produce a logic of *compensation*. We always soften the traumatic irruption of novelty. But more than ever, it is a case of "loser wins." The potential "gain" is only too obvious.

The "de-paperization" of the support,²⁵ if I can put it like that, is to begin with the economic rationality of a profit: a simplification and acceleration of all the procedures involved; a saving of time and space, and thus the facilitation of storage, archiving, communication, and debates beyond social and national frontiers; a hyperactive circulation of ideas, images, and

voices; democratization, homogenization, and universalization; immediate or transparent “globalization”—and so, it is thought, more sharing out of rights, signs, knowledge, and so on. But by the same token, just as many catastrophes: inflation and deregulation in the commerce of signs; invisible hegemonies and appropriations, whether of languages or places. It is not in itself a novelty or a mutation that the modes of appropriation are becoming spectral, are “dematerializing” (a very deceptive word, meaning that in truth they are moving from one kind of matter to another and actually becoming all the more material, in the sense that they are gaining in potential *dynamis*); that they are virtualizing or “fantasmatizing”; that they are undergoing a process of abstraction; it could be shown that they have always done this, even in a culture of paper. What is new is the change of tempo and, once again, a *technical* stage in the externalization, the objectal incorporation of this possibility. This virtualizing spectralization must now resign itself to the loss of schemata whose sedimentation seemed natural and vital to us—that’s how old it is—at the level of our individual or cultural memories. Once they have been identified with the form and material of “paper,” these incorporated schemata are also privileged ghost-members, supplements of structuring prostheses. For a number of centuries they have supported, propped up, and so really constructed or instituted the experience of identifying with oneself (“I who can sign or recognize my name on a surface or a paper support”; “The paper is mine”; “Paper is a self or ego”; “Paper is me”). Paper often became the place of the self’s appropriation of itself, then of becoming a subject in law. As a result, in losing this tangible body of paper, we have the feeling that we are losing that which protected that subjectivity itself, because it stabilized the personal law in a minimum of real law. Indeed a sort of primary narcissism: “Paper is me”; “Paper *or* me” (*vel*).²⁶ Marking out both public and private space, the citizenship of the subject of law ideally assumed a self-identification with the means of autograph whose substantive schema remained a body of paper. The tendency of all the “progressive” changes of the current trend is to replace this support for the signature, the name, and in general autodeictic enunciation (“me, I who . . .”; “I, the undersigned, authenticated by my presence, in the presence of the present paper”). In substituting for this the electronic support of a numerical code, there is no doubt that these forms of “progress” are secreting a more or less muffled anxiety. An anxiety that may here and there accompany an animistic and “omnipotent” jubilation in the power of manipulation; but an anxiety that is both motivated

and justified. Motivated by the always imminent loss of the paper ghost-members that we have learned to trust, it is also justified before the powers of concentration and manipulation, the powers of information expropriation (electronic mailings almost instantly available to every international police force—insurance, bank accounts, health records; infinitely faster and uncheckable filing of personal data; espionage, interception, parasitizing, theft, falsification, simulacra, and simulation).

These new powers delete or blur the frontiers in unprecedented conditions, and at an unprecedented pace (once again, it is the extent and the pace of the “objectalization” that form the qualitative or modal novelty, since the structural “possibility” has always been there). These new threats on the frontiers (that also get called threats on freedom) are *phenomenal*; they border on phenomenality itself, tending to phenomenalyze, to render perceptible, visible, or audible; to expose everything on the outside. They do not only affect the limit between the public and the private—between the political or cultural life of citizens and their innermost secrets, and indeed secrets in general; they touch on actual frontiers—on frontiers in the narrow sense of the word: between the national and the global, and even between the earth and the extraterrestrial, the world and the universe—since satellites are part of this “paperless” setup.

Nowadays, although the authentication and identification of selves and others increasingly escapes the culture of paper—although the presentation of selves and others increasingly does without traditional documents—a certain legitimating authority of paper still remains intact, at least in the majority of legal systems and in international law, in its dominant form today and as it will be for some time to come. In spite of the seismic shake-ups that this law will soon have to undergo, on this point and on others, the ultimate juridical resource still remains the signature done with the person’s “own hand” on an irreplaceable paper support. Photocopies, facsimiles (faxes), or mechanical reproductions have no authenticating value, except in the case of signatures whose reproduction is authorized by convention—banknotes or checks—on the basis of a prototype that is itself authenticifiable by a classic procedure, namely the assumed possibility of attestation, by oneself and by the other person, of the manual signature, certified “on paper,” of a signatory deemed responsible and present to his or her own signature, capable of confirming aloud: “Here I am, this is my body, see this signature on this paper—it’s me, it’s mine, it’s me so-and-so, I sign before you, I present myself here; this paper that remains represents me.”

Since we are speaking of legitimation, the publication of the book remains, for good or bad reasons, a powerful resource for recognition and credit. For some time to come, biblioculture will be in competition with plenty of other forms of publication outside the received norms of authorization, authentication, control, accreditation, selection, sanction—in fact thousands and thousands of forms of censorship.²⁷ Euphemistically, we can say: a new legal age is imminent. In reality we are being precipitated toward it, at a rate which as yet cannot be calculated. But in this revolution there are only stages of transition. Economies of compensation always succeed in dulling the pain of mourning—and melancholia. For instance, at the very moment when the number of electronic journals on the Web is rapidly increasing, traditional procedures of legitimation and the old protective norms are being reaffirmed, in the academy and elsewhere—the norms that are still tied to a culture of paper: presentation, formatting, the visibility of editorial boards and selection committees who have gained their experience in the world of the classic library. Above all, people exert themselves to obtain the final consecration: the publication and sale of electronic journals, at the end of the day, on quality paper. For a certain time to come, a time that is difficult to measure, paper will continue to hold a sacred power. It has the force of law, it gives accreditation, it incorporates, it even embodies the soul of the law, its letter and its spirit. It seems to be indissociable from the Ministry of Justice, so to speak, from the rituals of legalization and legitimation, from the archive of charters and constitutions for what we call, in the double sense of the word, *acts*. Indeterminate matter but already virtuality, *dynamis* as potentiality but also as power, power incorporated in a natural matter but force of law, informal matter for information but already form and act, act as action but also as archive—there you have the assumed tensions or contradictions that have to be thought under the name of “paper.” We are coming back to this in a moment in relation to undocumented persons, the “paperless”—I haven’t forgotten your question.

Now if the earthquake that is happening sometimes leads to “losing one’s head” or loss of “sense,” that is not because it would be merely vertiginous, threatening the loss of propriety, proximity, familiarity, singularity (“This paper is me,” and the like), stability, solidity, the very place of *habitus* and *habilitation*—accreditation. It would in fact be possible to think that the paper that is threatened with disappearance guaranteed all that, as close as could be to the body, to the eyes and hands. But no, this

loss of place, these processes of prosthetic delocalization, expropriation, and becoming fragile or precarious, were already going on. They were known to be started, represented, and figured by paper itself.

What is it then that makes some people “lose their heads”—all of us, in fact—head and hands, a certain way of using head, eyes, mouth, and hands, tied to paper or a certain habit (*habitus, hexis*) in relation to them? It is not a *threat*, a mere threat, the imminence of an injury, a lesion, a trauma; no, it is the fold or *duplicity* of a threat that is divided, multiplied, *contradictory*, twisted, or perverse—for this threat inhabits even the promise. For reasons I would like to remind you of, it is possible only to desire both to keep and to lose paper—a paper that is both protective and destined to be withdrawn. What we have there is a kind of logic of self-immunization, whose results I have attempted elsewhere to deploy, generalize, or formalize, particularly in “Faith and Knowledge.”²⁸ Paper protects by exposing, alienating, and first of all by threatening withdrawal, which it is always in one way in the process of. Protection is itself a threat, an aggression differing from itself, which then twists and tortures us in a spiraling movement. For the “same” threat introduces a sort of twisting that makes head and hands spin; it causes vertigo in the conversion of a contrariety, an internal and external contradiction, on the limit—between the outside and the inside: paper is *both, at the same time*, more solid *and* more fragile than the electronic support, closer *and* more distant, more *and* less appropriable, more *and* less reliable, more *and* less destructible, protective *and* destructive, more *and* less manipulable, more *and* less protected in its capacity for being reproduced; it guarantees a protection that is both smaller *and* greater of the personal or the appropriable, of what can be handled. It is more and less suitable for accreditation. That confirms for us that everywhere and always, appropriation has followed the trajectory of a reappropriation, in other words endurance, detour, crossing, risks—in a word the experience of a self-immunizing expropriation that has had to be trusted.

Since this structure of *ex-appropriation* appears to be irreducible and timeless; since it is not tied to “paper” any more than to electronic media, the seismic feeling depends on a *new* figure of ex-appropriation, one as yet unidentifiable, not sufficiently familiar, and inadequately mastered: on a new economy, which is also to say a new law and a new politics of prostheses or supplements at the origin. This is why our fright and our vertigo are both justified or irrepressible—and pointless, in fact ridiculous. For the reasons described above, this threat does certainly put us in a twist—it tor-

tures us—but it is also funny, even side-splitting; it threatens nothing and no one. Serious as it is, the war sets only fantasies—in other words, specters—against each other. Paper will have been one of them, for several centuries. A compromise formation between two resistances: writing with ink (on skin, wood, or paper) is more fluid, and thus “easier,” than on stone tablets, but less ethereal or liquid, less wavering in its characters, and also less labile, than electronic writing. Which offers, from another point of view, capacities for resistance, reproduction, circulation, multiplication, and thus survival that are ruled out for paper culture. But as you may know, it is possible to write directly with a quill pen, without ink, projecting from a table, on a computer screen. You thus reconstitute a simulacrum of paper, a paper paper, in an electronic element.

It is no longer even possible to speak of a determinate “context” for this historical shake-up—which is more and something else than a “crisis of paper.” What it puts in question is in fact the possibility of outlining a *historical* context, a space-time. So it is a question here of a certain interpretation of the concept of history. If we now fold ourselves back into “our countries,” toward the relatively and provisionally stabilized context of the “current” phase of the “political” life of nation-states, the war against “undocumented” or “paperless” people testifies to this incorporation of the force of law, as noted above, in paper, in “acts” of legalization, legitimation, accreditation, and regularization linked to the holding of “papers”: power accredited to deliver “papers,” power and rights linked to holding certificates on official paper on one’s person, close up to oneself.²⁹ “Paper is me”; “Paper or me”; “Paper: my home.” At any rate, whether they are expelled or made legal, it is made clear to the “paperless” that we don’t want any illegal immigrants or “paperless” people in our country. And when we fight on behalf of “paperless” people, when we support them today in their struggle, we *still* demand that they be issued with papers. We have to remain within this logic. What else could we do? We are not—at least in this context, I stress—calling for the disqualification of identity papers or of the link between documentation and legality. As with bank address details and as with names, “home” presupposes “papers.” The “paperless” person is an outlaw, a nonsubject legally, a noncitizen or the citizen of a foreign country refused the right conferred, *on paper*, by a temporary or permanent visa, a rubber stamp. The literal reference to the word *papers*, in the sense of legal justification, certainly depends on the language and usages of particular national cultures (in France and Germany, for instance). But when in

the United States for example, the word *undocumented* is used to designate analogous cases, or *undesirables*, with similar problems involved, it is the same axioms that carry authority: the law is guaranteed by the holding of a “paper” or document, an identity card (ID), by the bearing or carrying [*port*] of a driving permit or a *passport* that you keep on your person, that can be shown and that guarantees the “self,” the juridical personality of “here I am.” We shouldn’t be dealing with these problems, or even approaching them, without asking questions about what is happening today with international law, with the subject of “human rights and the citizen’s rights,” with the future or decline of nation-states. The earthquake touches nothing less than the essence of politics and its link with the culture of paper. The history of politics is a history of paper, if not a paper history—of what will have preceded and followed the institution of politics, bordering the “margin” of paper. But here too, there are processes of technological transition at work: the recording of marks of identification and signatures is computerized. Computerized but, as we were saying, via the inherited norms of “paper” that continue to haunt electronic media. It is computerized for citizens and their citizen status (consider what happens at passport controls), but it can also be computerized for the physical-genetic identification of any individual in general (digitalized photography and genetic imprints). In this, we are all, already, “paperless” people.

LES CAHIERS DE MÉDIOLOGIE: Recently, you did a book of interviews with Bernard Stiegler in which you reflect on television. Without taking up once again the usual denunciation of its crimes, you are manifestly attentive to some things that are promised and performed by the audiovisual, since TV is both behind and ahead of the book. Elsewhere, you have often insisted on the importance of computers and word processing. At present these screens are clearly distinct from one another, but they will become compatible, and we frequently go between them in our search for information. Being yourself an indefatigable paper worker, do you think of yourself as someone nostalgic for this support, or do you envisage for instance using e-mail for certain types of letters, debates, or publications? Couldn’t it be said that archives taken from oral contributions and “published” on the internet for example (cf. Gilles Deleuze’s seminars recently made available on the Web) bring about the emergence of a new “written-oral” status?

DERRIDA: Definitely, and this “new status” gets displaced from one

technological possibility to another; for several years now it's been transforming so quickly, been so far from static, this status, that for me, as for any number of people, it becomes an experience, a test, or a debate that is going on every minute. This destabilization of the status of "written-oral" has not just always been an organizing theme for me, but first of all—and these things are indissociable—the very element of my work. "Indefatigable [*acharné*] paper worker," you say. Yes and no. At any rate, I'd take this word *acharnement* literally, in the code of the hunt, the animal, and the huntsman.³⁰ In this work *on paper*, there is a sort of wager of the body or flesh—and of the bait, that taste of flesh that a huntsman gives the dog or birds of prey (simulacrum, fantasy, trap for taking hold of consciousness: to be preyed on by paper). But if we think about it, this "status" was already unstable under the most unchallenged rule of paper, and paper alone—which can also be regarded as a screen. For anyone who speaks or writes, and especially if they are "meant" for or "specialized" in this, whether professionally or in another capacity, in the sometimes undecidable limit between private space and public space (this is one of the subjects of *The Post Card*)—well, the passage from oral to written is *the* place for the experience, exposure, risk, problems, and invention of what's always a *lack of fit*.³¹ We don't need the "audiovisual performances" of TV and word processors to have experience of this vertiginous metamorphosis, the instability of the situation or "status" itself, and thus to feel some nostalgia, among other feelings of noncoincidence or lack of adaptation. Nostalgia is always in there. Exile was already there in paper; there was "word processing" in writing with a quill or a pencil. I'm not saying this to run away from your question or neutralize it. Nostalgia, another nostalgia, a "grief" or *chagrin* for paper itself?³² Yes, of course, and I could offer numerous signs of this. The pathos of paper already obeys a law of the genre; it is just as coded—but why not yield to it?³³ It is an inconsolable nostalgia for the book (about which, however, I wrote, more than thirty years ago, and in a book, that it had been coming toward its "end" for a long time).³⁴ It is nostalgia for paper before the reproducible "impression," for paper once virginal, both sensitive and impassive, both friendly and resistant, both very much on its own and coupled to our bodies, not only with every mechanical impression, but before any impression not reproducible by my hand. It is nostalgia for the proffered page on which a virtually inimitable handwriting creates a path for itself with the pen—a pen which, not so long ago, I still used to dip in ink at the end of a pen holder; a nostalgia for the color or weight, the thickness and the resistance of a sheet—its folds, the

back of its recto-verso, the *fantasies* of contact, of caress, of intimacy, proximity, resistance, or promise: the infinite desire of the copyist, the cult of calligraphy, an ambiguous love for the scarcity of writing, a fascination for the word incorporated in paper. These are certainly *fantasies*. The word condenses all together image, spectrality, and simulacrum—and the weight of desire, the libidinal investment of affect, the motions of an appropriation extended toward that which remains inappropriable, called forth by the inappropriable itself, the desperate attempt to turn affection into auto-affection. These fantasies and affects *are* effectiveness itself; they constitute the (virtual or actual) activation of my commitment to paper, which never guarantees more than a *quasi* perception of this type. It expropriates it from us in advance. It has already ruled out everything that these fantasies seem to give back to us, and render perceptible for us—the tangible, the visible, intimacy, immediacy. Nostalgia is probably inevitable—and it's a nostalgia that I like, and that also makes me write: you work *on nostalgia*, you work at it and it can make you work. With regard to what comes after paper, it doesn't necessarily mean rejection or paralysis. As for the *biblion* (writing paper, exercise book, pads, jotter, book), this "nostalgia" is thus not only derived from some kind of sentimental reaction. It is justified by the memory of all the "virtues" rooted in the culture of paper or the discipline of books. These virtues or requirements are well known, even often celebrated in a backward-looking tone and with backward-looking connotations; but this should not prevent us from reaffirming them. I am one of those who would like to work for the life and survival of books—for their development, distribution, and sharing, as well. The inequalities we were talking about a little while ago also separate the rich and the poor, and one of the indicators of this is "our" relationship to the production, consumption, and "waste" of paper. There is a correlation or a disproportion there that we should continue to think about. And among the benefits of a hypothetical decline of paper, secondary or not, paradoxical or not, we should count the "ecological" benefit (for instance fewer trees sacrificed to becoming paper) and the "economic" or techno-economic-political benefit: even deprived of paper and all the machinery that goes with it, individuals or social groups might nonetheless gain access by computer, television, and the internet to a whole global network of information, communications, education, and debate. Although they are still expensive, these machines sometimes get through more easily; they are more easily appropriated than books. And they get hold of the actual "market" (purchasing, sales, advertising), which they are also part of, much more quickly—there's a massive

discrepancy—than they get hold of the world of “scientific” communication and, a fortiori, from a great distance, the world of “arts and letters,” which are more resistant in their link to national languages. And therefore, so often, to the tradition of paper.

Writing, literature, even philosophy—as we think we know them—would they survive beyond paper? Survive beyond a world dominated by paper? Survive the time of paper? Survive “these ‘paperies,’ as Françoise called the pages of my writing”—books of notes, jotting pads, bits stuck on, large numbers of photographs?³⁵ If it seems impossible to deal with these inexhaustible questions, that is not only because we are short of time and space—in more ways than one. At any rate they would stay that way, impossible to deal with, as *theoretical* questions, on a horizon of knowledge—on a *horizon*, quite simply. The response will come from decisions and events, from what the writing of a future that cannot be anticipated will make of it, from what it will do *for* literature and *for* philosophy, from what it will do *to them*.

And then nostalgia, even “action” on behalf of book culture does not oblige anyone to confine themselves to it. Like many people, I make the best of my nostalgia, and without giving anything up, I try, more or less successfully, to accommodate my “economy” to all the paperless media. I use a computer, of course, but I don’t do e-mail, and I don’t “surf” the internet, even though it is something I use as a theoretical topic, in teaching or elsewhere. A matter of abstention, abstinence—but also of self-protection. One of the difficulties is that nowadays any public discourse (and sometimes any private action, any “phenomenon”) can be “globalized” in the hour after it happens, without it being possible to exercise any rights of control. This is sometimes terrifying (and once again, new not so much in its possibility as in its power, the speed and the scope, the objective technicality of its phenomenality), and sometimes it’s funny. It is always leading to new responsibilities, another critical culture of the archive—in short, another “history.”

But why should one sacrifice one possibility at the point of inventing another one? To say farewell to paper, today, would be rather like deciding one fine day to stop speaking because you had learned to write. Or to stop looking in the rearview mirror because the road is in front of us. We drive with both hands and both feet, looking both in front and behind, speeding up at some points and slowing down at others. Presumably it is not possible *at the same time*, in one single, indivisible instant, to look behind *and* in front; but if you drive well you dart in the blink of an eye from

the windshield to the mirror. Otherwise, you're blind or you have an accident. You see what I'm getting at: the end of paper isn't going to happen in a hurry.

Two more points, to finish, on my "paper spleen."

First, when I dream of an absolute memory—well, when I sigh after the keeping of everything, really (it's my very respiration)—my imagination continues to project this archive *on paper*. Not on a screen, even though that might also occur to me, but on a strip of paper. A multimedia band, with phrases, letters, sound, and images: it's everything, and it would keep an impression of everything. A unique specimen from which copies would be taken. Without me even having to lift my little finger. I wouldn't write, but everything would get written down, by itself, right on the strip.³⁶ With no work: the end of the "indefatigable worker." But what I would thereby *leave* to write *itself* would not be a book, a codex, but rather a strip of paper. It would roll itself up, on itself, an electrogram of everything that had happened (to me)—bodies, ideas, images, words, songs, thoughts, tears. Others. The world forever, in the faithful and polyrhythmic recording of itself and all its speeds. Everything all the same without delay, and *on paper*—that is why I am telling you. On paperless paper. Paper is in the world that is not a book.

Because on the other hand, I also suffer, to the point of suffocation, from *too much paper*, and this is another spleen. Another ecological sigh. How can we save the world *from* paper? And its own body? So I *also* dream of living paperless—and sometimes that sounds to my ears like a definition of "real life," of the living part of life. The walls of the house grow thicker, not with wallpaper but with shelving. Soon we won't be able to put our feet on the ground: paper on paper. Cluttering; the environment becoming litter, the home becoming a stationery store. I'm no longer talking about the paper on which, alas, too little of my illegible writing is written with a pen; but the kind that just now we were calling "secondary": printed paper, paper for mechanical reproduction, the kind that remains, paper *taken from* an original. Inversion of the curve. I consume this kind of paper and accumulate a lot more of it than I did before computers and other so-called "paperless" machines. Let's not count the books. So paper expels me—outside my home. It chases me off. This time, it's an *aut aut*: paper or me.³⁷

Another dilemma about hospitality to "paperless" people: who is the host or guest or hostage of the other?