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## Signature Pieces

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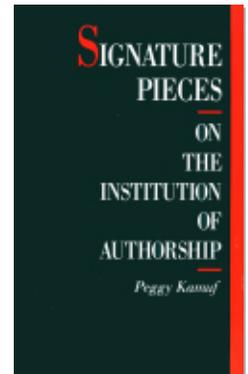
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## CONCLUSION

### Endpiece

The temptation now is to fit these pieces of “Jean-Jacques Rousseau” together or, as we tend to say, *back* together, as if they were the scattered remains of an originally intact whole. In its most familiar version, this temptation assumes the form of a biography of the famous writer and there are more than enough examples of the genre in Rousseau’s case. Biographical narrative appears indeed to be the most economical means of gathering, with some semblance of coherence, the disparate marks left by the practice of writing. More than that, this narrative mode, with its virtually inevitable supposition of some form of psychological determinism, procures the benefit of appropriating to the subject a transcendent position in relation to the texts associated with it through the signature. The biographer or reader “reads” by identifying (with) this position. Rousseau’s biographers have confirmed repeatedly that even the idea of a mad Jean-Jacques is preferable in the end to the alternative lurking around the edges of that idea: a “madness” of words or rather, since even that description relies on a psychological analogy, a functioning of language that remains radically other than the various uses to which it is put and which include reference to, among other things, psychological states. The condition of possibility for reference to a whole, a unity, an identity, or a totality—that is, some kind of intactness that the pieces would be pieces of—is the denial or exclusion of this

otherness, the otherness of language as such. The untenability of this denial signals an exclusion concerning the otherness that can never come to be represented as part of some whole but whose exclusion permits the very concept of the whole to come together. This inexorable logic produces its most visible effects, to be sure, elsewhere in the general sociocultural text and tends to cover its traces within that part of the text called "language" in the strict sense. The problem, however, is precisely that language—in some form or other—is also a means by which one refers to all the rest of the fabric through a kind of folding over of one of its parts. To deny or disregard the difference between language and its referents is always, thus, to risk the suppression of all the different, nonlinguistic eruptions of otherness.

Resisting the temptation, then, to conclude, we leave the pieces of Rousseau's signature where they lie without assembling them in a story or a history. If the disposition we have given them nonetheless traces a pattern, to what does it correspond? Not, we have said, to the determinate and determining psychological configuration that would return to the historical subject Jean-Jacques Rousseau; or to the formal, discursive, and literary configuration of Rousseau's *oeuvre*. If there is a pattern, it takes shape precisely at the articulating limit between these two regimes of signification, between the historical/biographical regime of reference and the regime of formal linguistic/discursive structure. The pattern, in other words, is that of marks left by the one on the other, marks that at once limit and open up both orders of meaning. Rousseau's signatures are neither inimitable singularities nor formal generalities; in that way, they both *are* and *are not* exemplary of the functioning of signatures "in general," a notion that is prevented from coming together precisely by the singular eventuality of each "case" or "example" of signature. To put it in the paradoxical terms required by this double regime, we would have to say that "Rousseau" is exemplary of the limits, the necessary impossibility of its—or "his"—own exemplarity. The pattern traced by that signature is thus precisely not a pattern to be followed, at the same time as it illustrates with many of its traits the double limit on any event of signature.

What are these traits that have been accumulating in the preceding chapters?

First, the act of signing cannot authenticate itself because it depends necessarily on the possibility of its repeatability and thus on the possibility of an inauthentic double: copy, simulacrum, forgery, imitation, false attributions, distortions, and so forth. A signature, that is, cannot determine the limits on its own validity, and there is, theoretically at least, no first or final occurrence of a signature. This is to say that a signature never occurs as a pure event, without precedent and without copy. Its possibility arises only from this limitation on pure singularity. In the course of a work signed "Rousseau," it is possible to see how this limit imposes itself with an insistence more or less in proportion to the inauthentic or false doubles of that signature which accumulate around it and adhere to its surface, threatening always to displace it. Precisely insofar as that signature claims to sign only for the truth (Rousseau's motto: "Vitam impendere vero"), its impetus—the force that sets in motion the act of signing—will have to come more and more from the urgency to dissociate itself from its doubles. It is this necessity that can dictate "mad" declarations of the signature's effective termination which nonetheless remain as just one more proof of the ineffectiveness of such gestures, their essential incapacity to produce the event they describe.

Second, the signature, taken as a sign of property, disarticulates the very relation it appears to name. Laws concerning literary property or copyright, which must suppose a predictably stable functioning of signatures, construct themselves around an analogy with real property. This analogy, rather than stabilizing the notion of literary "property," tends to get overturned—de-limited, its borders opened up—when brought into contact with the work of writing, whose real "properties" must finally return to no one.

Third, as an element functioning within a censorship regime (which is always the flip side of property rights), the signature dissimulates a necessary anonymity. The "criminalization" of Rousseau's signature, by revoking its anonymity, not only precipitates it toward an endless attempt at self-naming, but, more obscurely, brings it to the very edge of the structure of exclusion

in which the law takes shape. At that edge, the search for an "innocent" signature encounters its limit in the crime of representation, where vindication takes the form of repetition. The impossibility that arises here is that of signing from the place of the excluded other.

Finally, as that which survives the signatory, as depository of the name no one can claim, the signature is disseminated, the promised repair of its division deferred into an indefinite future and conferred into the hands of an anonymous *dépositaire* who is faceless, featureless, and therefore not necessarily recognizable as another man or intentional subject. Rousseau's signature, that is, will not take place until it is countersigned, while the spatio-temporal structure of its event remains that of an elsewhere that has both already and not yet occurred. It is this incalculable structure that we call its modernity, for it has left "us moderns" with the task of undoing the promise of its reconstitution, of countersigning "Rousseau" in his absence.

Repeatability, improperness, representation as exclusion, countersignature: all are traits or traces of an otherness that insists in the very place of identity's signature. If they do not form an as yet recognizable set of features, isn't that the way it has to be? For who can sign for the other?