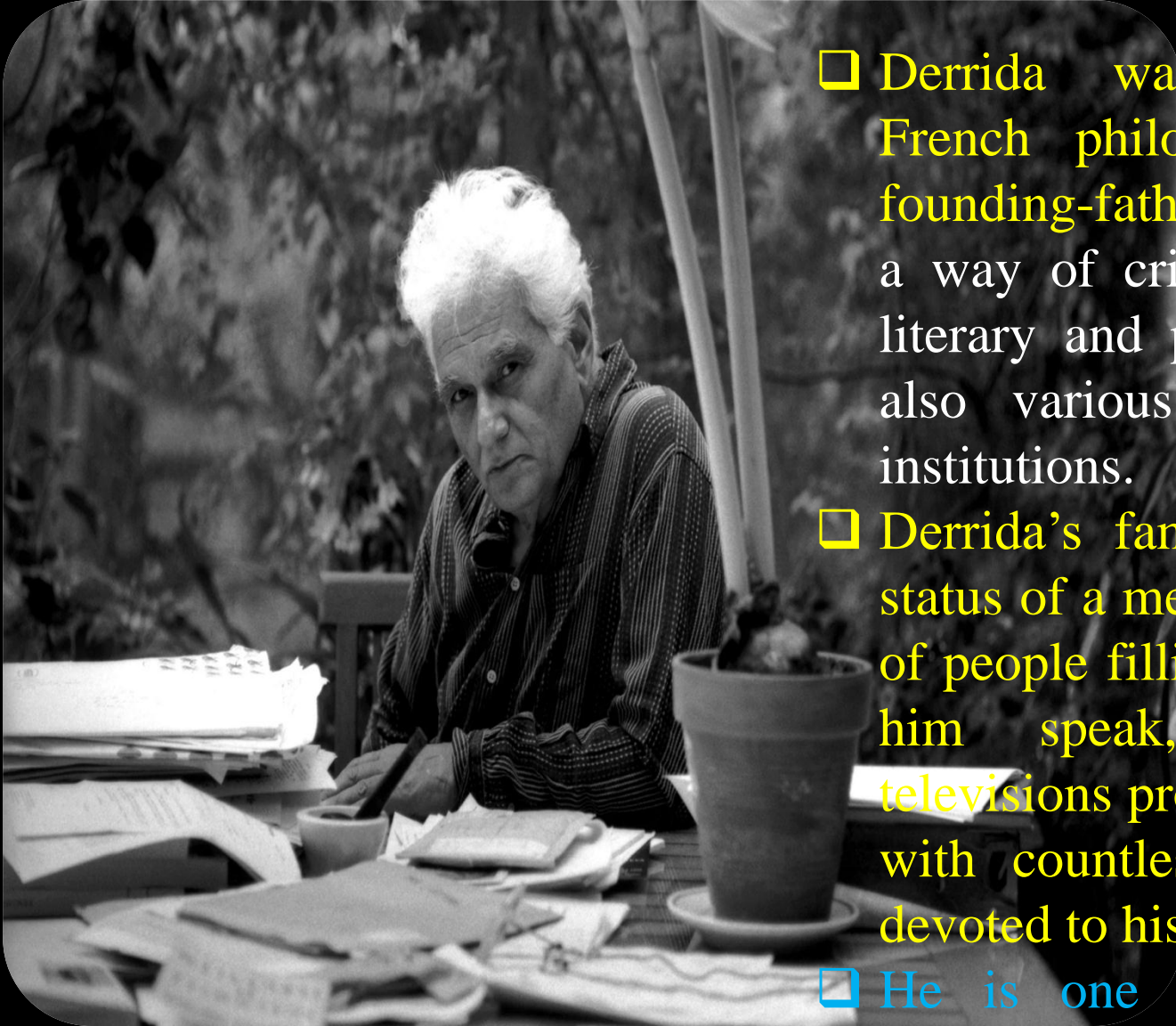


A circular image showing a bright, textured surface, possibly representing a planet or a close-up of a celestial body. The surface is bright and appears to be covered in a complex, organic or crystalline pattern. The image is set against a dark background, and the circular frame is slightly blurred at the edges.

**On the Heart of a
Decentred Planet:
Jacques Derrida and
Deconstruction**

By

~~Arindam~~ Ghosh



- ❑ Derrida was an Algerian-born French philosopher. He was the founding-father of “deconstruction”, a way of criticizing not only both literary and philosophical texts but also various social and political institutions.
- ❑ Derrida’s fame nearly reached the status of a media star, with hundreds of people filling auditoriums to hear him speak, with films and televisions programs devoted to him, with countless books and articles devoted to his thinking.
- ❑ He is one of the major figures associated with **post-structuralism** and **postmodern philosophy**.

Jacques Derrida
(1930-2004)

Influence of Derrida

- During his career Derrida published more than **40 books**, together with hundreds of essays and public presentations. He had a significant influence upon the **humanities and social sciences, including philosophy, literature, law, anthropology, historiography, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychoanalysis and political theory.**
- His work retains major academic influence throughout the world, particularly in debates around **ontology, epistemology (especially concerning social sciences), ethics, aesthetics, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of language.** In the Anglosphere, where analytic philosophy is dominant, Derrida's influence is most presently felt in literary studies due to his **longstanding interest in language and his association with prominent literary critics from his time at Yale University.**

Understanding his Life

- ❑ **In 1930, Derrida was born into a Jewish family in Algiers.** He was also born into **an environment of some discrimination.** In fact, he either withdrew from, or was forced out of at least two schools during his childhood simply on account of being Jewish - **anti-semitism.**
- ❑ While Derrida would resist any **reductive understanding** of his work based upon his biographical life, it could be argued that **these kind of experiences played a large role in his insistence upon the importance of the marginal,** and the other, in his later thought.
- ❑ Derrida's initial work in philosophy was largely **phenomenological,** and his early training as a philosopher was done largely through the lens of **Husserl.** Other important inspirations on his early thought include **Nietzsche, Heidegger, Saussure, Levinas and Freud.** Derrida acknowledges his indebtedness to all of these thinkers in the development of his approach to texts, which has come to be known as **'deconstruction'.**

Socio-Political Events that Shaped Derrida



Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), was fought between France and the **Algerian National Liberation Front**, which led to Algeria winning its independence from France. An important **decolonization war**, it was a complex **conflict characterized by guerrilla warfare**, and the use of torture. The conflict also became a **civil war between the different communities** and within the communities.

Socio-Political Events that Shaped Derrida



Charles de Gaulle was a French army officer and statesman who led the **French Resistance against Nazi Germany** in World War II and chaired the Provisional Government of the **French Republic** from 1944 to 1946 in order to reestablish democracy in France. **He granted independence to Algeria and acted progressively towards other French colonies.**

Socio-Political Events that Shaped Derrida



□ **Beginning in May 1968**, a period of civil unrest occurred throughout France, lasting some seven weeks and punctuated by demonstrations, general strikes, and the occupation of universities and factories. The unrest began with a series of student occupation protests **against capitalism, consumerism, American imperialism and traditional institutions.**

The Age of Totalitarianism: Stalin and Eastern European States



Stalinism (Joseph Stalin (18978-1953)) promoted the escalation of class conflict, utilizing state violence to forcibly purge society of the bourgeoisie, whom Stalinist doctrine regarded as threats to the pursuit of the communist revolution. **This policy resulted in substantial political violence and persecution of such people.** “Enemies” included not only bourgeois people, **but also working-class people with counter-revolutionary sympathies.**

Intellectual Influence upon Derrida: Tel Quel Group

- **Tel Quel**, French avant-garde literary review published from 1960 to 1982 by Éditions du Seuil. Founded by **Philippe Sollers** and other young writers, this eclectic magazine published works by such practitioners of the nouveau roman (“new novel”) as **Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute**, as well as works by these writers’ acknowledged predecessors— e.g., **James Joyce and Francis Ponge**.
- Much influenced by Surrealism, *Tel Quel* had as a goal the evaluation of 20th-century literature; it printed previously unpublished works by **Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, and Ezra Pound**, as well as contemporary literary criticism by Michel Foucault, **Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Lacan**. From 1966 to 1970 *Tel Quel* represented a Maoist view of Marxism.

Intellectual Forces that Shaped Derrida's Life



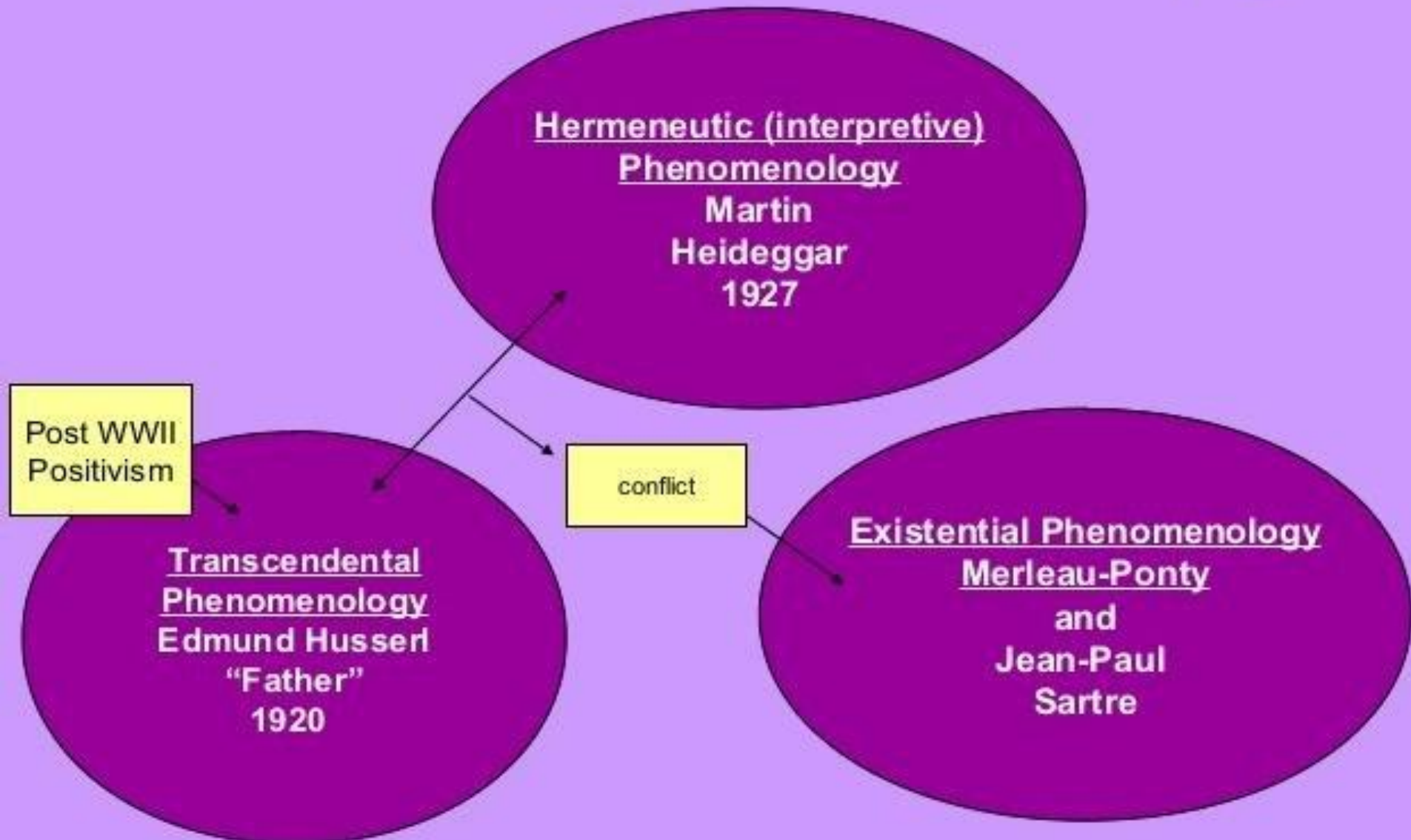
The Tel Quel Group

What is phenomenology?

- Phenomenology examines patterns of subjective experience and consciousness
- Focus upon a systematic reflection on and investigation of the structures of consciousness: *Realist concepts can be examined scientifically*
- Based solely on consciousness
- Individuals will be influenced by others, but not same experience
- Views social world as multiform structure
 - Inner-subjectivity
 - Group understanding/unity

Intellectual Forces that Shaped Derrida's Life

Phenomenology as a Philosophy



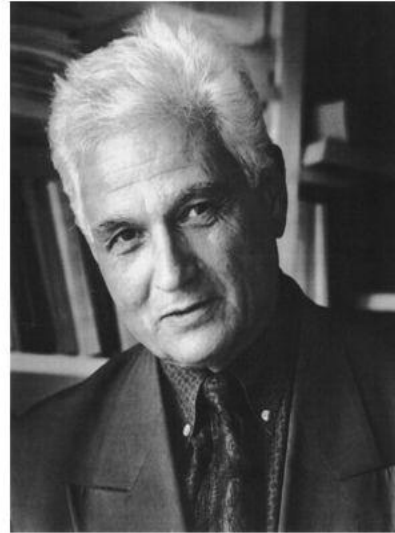
Intellectual Forces that Shaped Derrida's Life

Jacques Derrida

- Developed Saussure's ideas



- There's no link between the signifier and the signified;
- Once a text is written it ceases to have a meaning until a reader reads it;
- There is nothing but the text and that it is not possible to construct something *ab nihilo*.



Impact/Influence of Structuralism

- ❑ **Pre-1920's Belief: Literary Work** – as a closed system
- ❑ **Post 1960's Situation: Text** – as a linguistic construct – Open-ended medium, giving rise to interpretations – **Hermeneutics.**
- ❑ **Anything can be text: Railway Time Table.**

Origins of Deconstruction

- Derrida's main influence for the development of this theory was from the theorist, Martin Heidegger
- In his work called *Being and Time*, Heidegger talks about "destructuring" of previous ontological concepts such as time, history, matter, ect. in order to better understand them.
- Derrida's theory is similar to Heidegger's in that he, too wanted to rethink many of the terms commonly used in philosophical considerations, but Derrida took further steps in creating a workable theory.

Deconstructing language

In our daily lives, most of us take language for granted, assuming that it communicates what we want it to, and if it doesn't, we assume that the fault is in ourselves, not in language. A phrase such as "Mary, please hand John the book" usually results in the desired action, and even when it doesn't we assume that the fault lies not in language but in Mary's or John's failure to understand the request or refusal to act on it. Because we are so used to the everyday patterns and rituals in which language seems to work the way we want it to, we assume that it is by nature a stable and reliable means of communicating our thoughts, feelings, and wishes. Deconstruction's theory of language, in contrast, is based on the belief that language is much more slippery and ambiguous than we realize.

Slippery Quality of Language: The Birth of Deconstruction

Changes in tone of voice and emphasis can further reveal the slippery quality of language. Imagine, for example, that a newscaster was given the following line to read:

President Reagan says the Marines do not have to go to El Salvador.

1. President Reagan says the Marines do not have to go to El Salvador (implying that he's lying).
2. President Reagan says the Marines do *not* have to go to El Salvador (implying that he's correcting a false rumor).
3. President Reagan says the *Marines* do not have to go to El Salvador (implying that some other group has to go).
4. *President Reagan* says the Marines do not have to go to El Salvador (implying that another important person had said that the marines have to go to El Salvador).
5. President Reagan says the Marines do not *have* to go to El Salvador (implying that they can go if they want to).
6. President Reagan says the Marines do not have to go to *El Salvador* (implying that they have to go somewhere else).

Structuralist Proposition of Sign-System

sign = *signifier* + *signified*
(sound, image, gesture, etc.) (concept to which the signifier refers)

Poststructuralist Proposition: Uncertainty Regarding Signified

To avoid this kind of vagueness and ambiguity, let's look at a very simple, concrete phrase uttered in a context so specific that the signifiers should produce a very clear and unambiguous signified. Picture a person standing in an open field pointing to the only tree in sight. In this context, a phrase consisting of the signifiers "This tree is big" seems to imply a single, clear signified: there is only one tree in question, and we know that a claim is being made about its size. Deconstruction, however, asks us to look at the sentence's ambiguities, even when the sentence seems, at first glance, as clear and specific as this one does. When the speaker says, "This tree is big," is she comparing the tree to herself? To another tree? What other tree? Is she surprised by the size of the tree? Or is she merely informing us that the tree is big? Is she informing us so that we will know something about the tree or so that we will understand something about the word *big*? What must she think of us if she believes we need such information? Does she think we are just learning to speak English? Or is she being sarcastic? If so, why?

Slippery Signifiers

If we stopped at this point, we could rewrite the structuralist formula as *sign* = *signifier* + *signified* . . . + *signified*. That is, we could try to explain communication as a sliding accumulation of signifieds. But what does the term *signified* mean? If the signifier is “tree,” then the signified must be the tree in our imagination that we can picture. But what do we understand by this imagined tree? Of what does our concept consist? Our concept of the tree consists of all the chains of signifiers we have come to associate with it over the course of our lives, in my own case, for example, “shade,” “picnics,” “climbing,” “broken collarbone,” “hiking,” “Hocking Hills, Ohio,” “vertigo,” “autumn leaves,” “raking,” “planting Douglas firs,” “pine-needle scale,” “lime sulfur,” and so on. What structuralism calls the signified is really always a chain of signifiers.

Deconstruction: Broken Union between Signifier & Signified

According to deconstruction, then, the word *tree* never reaches the point when it refers to a concept, a signified. The signifier I utter refers to chains of signifiers in my mind and evokes chains of signifiers in the mind of the person who hears my utterance. And each signifier in those chains is itself constituted by another chain of signifiers, and so on. So for deconstruction, language does not consist of the union of signifiers and signifieds; it consists only of chains of signifiers. As Deconstruction thus offers us a radical vision of the activity of thinking. Our mental life consists not of concepts—not of solid, stable meanings—but of a fleeting, continually changing play of signifiers. These signifiers may seem to be stable concepts—they look stable enough when we hear them spoken or see them written down!—but they don't operate in a stable manner in our mind. As we saw earlier, every signifier consists of and produces more signifiers in a never-ending *deferral*, or postponement, of meaning: we seek meaning that is solid and stable, but we can never really find it because we can never get beyond the play of signifiers that is language. In Derrida's words, what we take to be meaning is really only the mental *trace* left behind by the play of signifiers. And that trace consists of the differences by which we define a word. Let me explain.

Deconstruction: Encouraging Alternative Meanings

- ❑ **Deconstruction, and particularly early deconstruction, functions by engaging in sustained analyses of particular texts.** It is committed to the rigorous analysis of the literal meaning of a text, and yet also to finding within that meaning, **perhaps in the neglected corners of the text (including the footnotes)**, internal problems that actually point towards alternative meanings.
- ❑ At the same time, however, deconstruction also famously borrows from Martin Heidegger's conception of a **'destructive retrieve'** and seeks to open texts up to alternative and usually repressed meanings that reside at least partly outside of the metaphysical tradition. **This more violent and transgressive aspect of deconstruction is illustrated by Derrida's consistent exhortation to "invent in your own language if you can or want to hear mine; invent if you can or want to give my language to be understood" (MO 57).** In suggesting that a faithful interpretation of him is one that goes beyond him, **Derrida installs invention as a vitally important aspect of any deconstructive reading.**

Kubla Khan

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

...

**The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;**

Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.

...

**And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!**

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Communication is such a complicated and uncertain thing

- deconstruction look at the sentence's ambiguities, even when the sentence seems, at first glance, as clear and specific.
- any given signifier can refer to any number of signifieds at any given moment.

Language for deconstruction

- language consists only of chains of signifiers.
- language is *nonreferential* because it refers to the play of signifiers of which language itself consist.
- language is what forms us and there is no way to get beyond it.
- language is wholly ideological
- language is 'ground of being'
- language has implications for subjectivity (human being)

Deconstruction: Scope and Impact



JACQUES DERRIDA

DE LA GRAMMATOLOGIE



LES ÉDITIONS DE MINUIT

- ❑ Jacques Derrida's 1967 book *Of Grammatology* introduced the majority of ideas influential within deconstruction. Books showing deconstruction in action or defining it more completely include *Différance, Speech and Phenomena* (1967), and *Writing and Difference* (1967).
- ❑ **Deconstruction contends that in any text, there are inevitably points of equivocation and 'undecidability' that betray any stable meaning that an author might seek to impose upon his or her text.** The process of writing always reveals that which has been suppressed, covers over that which has been disclosed, and more generally breaches the very oppositions that are thought to sustain it.

Violent Hierarchy of Binary Opposites Created in West

BINARY OPPOSITION

- Words have binary opposites like good/evil, mind/body, speech/writing. Usually one side is valued higher than the other. This creates difficulties that deconstruction aims to correct.
- By deconstructing these binary oppositions, we are able to uncover the foundation.
- Derrida argued that philosophical traditions were largely “marginalized,” and with the application of deconstruction, it is possible to express what has been repressed in these traditions.

Deconstruction: How Opposition Creates a Metaphysics of Presence

Words have meaning only because of contrast-effects with other words...no word can acquire meaning in the way in which philosophers from Aristotle to Bertrand Russell have hoped it might—by being the **unmediated expression of something non-linguistic (e.g., an emotion, a sense-datum, a physical object, an idea, a Platonic Form)**". As a consequence, **meaning is never present, but rather is deferred to other signs.** Derrida refers to the—in this view, mistaken—belief that there is a self-sufficient, non-deferred meaning as **metaphysics of presence.** A concept, then, must be understood in the context of its opposite, such as **being/nothingness, normal/abnormal, speech/writing, etc.**

HIGH



LOW

TRUE



FALSE

RIGHT



LEFT

WEST



EAST

MALE



FEMALE

MIND



BODY

INSIDE



OUTSIDE

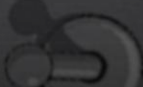
POSITIVE



NEGATIVE

The Horror of Indeterminacy

POSITIVE



NEGATIVE

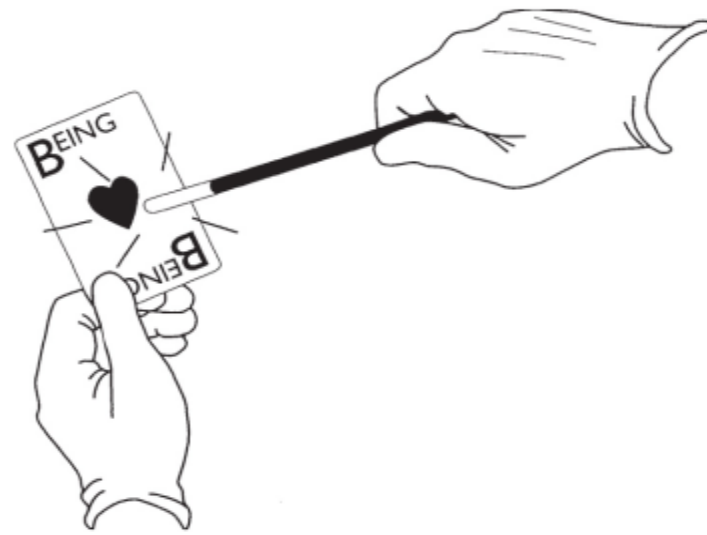
Deconstruction: How Opposition Creates a Metaphysics of Presence

- Further, Derrida contends that **"in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-a-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy.** One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the **upper hand": signified over signifier; intelligible over sensible; speech over writing; activity over passivity, etc.**
- **The first task of deconstruction would be to find and overturn these oppositions inside a text or a corpus of texts;** but the final objective of deconstruction is not to surpass all oppositions, because it is assumed **they are structurally necessary to produce sense.** The oppositions simply cannot be suspended once and for all. The hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself. **Deconstruction only points to the necessity of an unending analysis that can make explicit the decisions and arbitrary violence intrinsic to all texts.**

1 Use binary oppositions: cast the key terms against their opposites. If the question is being, establish “being” against “not-being”. And so on... presence/absence, mind/body, cause/effect, God/man, etc.



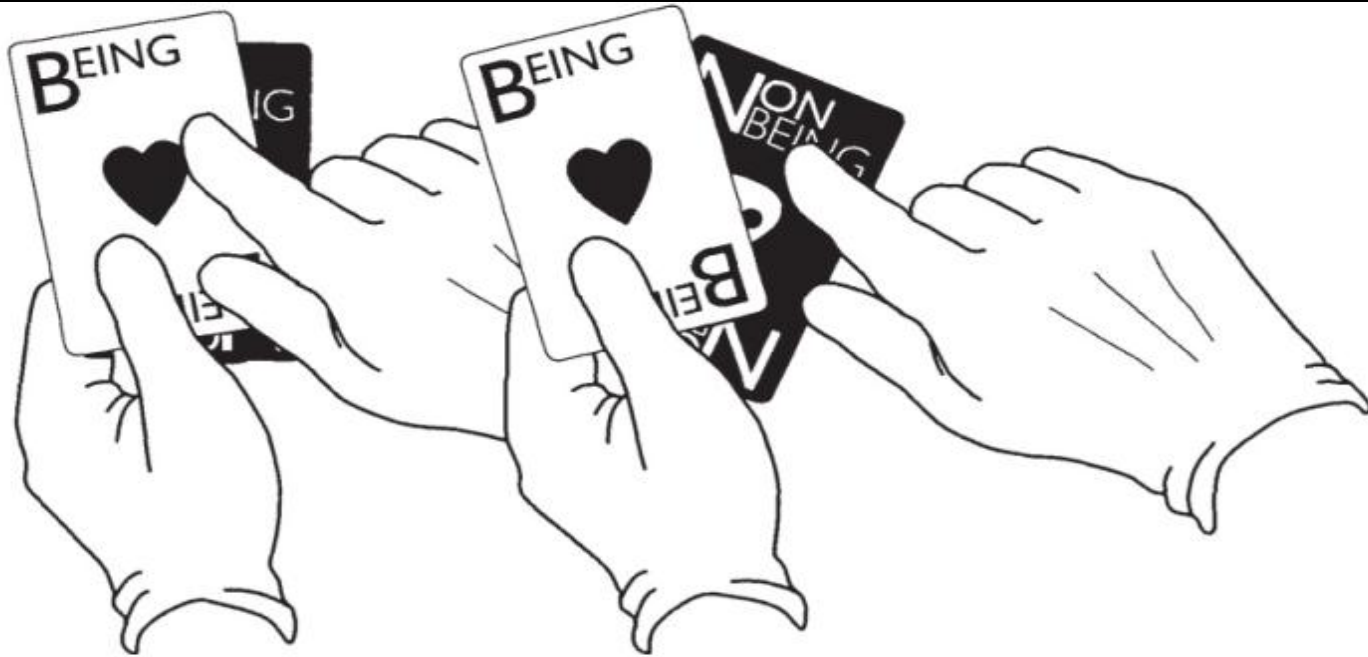
2 Privilege the first term: it's the “groundly” term, the positive term, give it priority. It's the term which articulates the fundamentals, principles or the centre. It's on the side of the *logos*.



3 Subordinate the second term: it has to be negative, or the first term can't be positive. It has to be deficient, lacking, corrupt, or just derivative. It opposes the *logos*, it is its enemy; or it dilutes that truth of truth, attenuates it, bleaches it out.



4 Set up a procedure: always move from the first term towards the second ...



ALL METAPHYSICIANS PROCEED FROM AN ORIGIN, SEEN AS SIMPLE, INTACT, NORMAL, PURE, STANDARD, SELF-IDENTICAL ... TO TREAT THEN OF ACCIDENTS, DERIVATION, COMPLICATION, DETERIORATION. HENCE GOOD BEFORE EVIL, POSITIVE BEFORE NEGATIVE, PURE BEFORE IMPURE, SIMPLE BEFORE COMPLEX, ETC. THIS IS NOT JUST ONE METAPHYSICAL GESTURE AMONG OTHERS; IT IS THE METAPHYSICAL EXIGENCY, THE MOST CONSTANT, PROFOUND AND POTENT PROCEDURE.

From Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 91

- Deconstructionists look for the ways the elements in literature contradict each other.
- Premises:
 - **Words cannot express meaning.**
 - **Every utterance contains a lie by omitting all other possible utterances.**
- Interpretations are sometimes bizarre and contradictory.

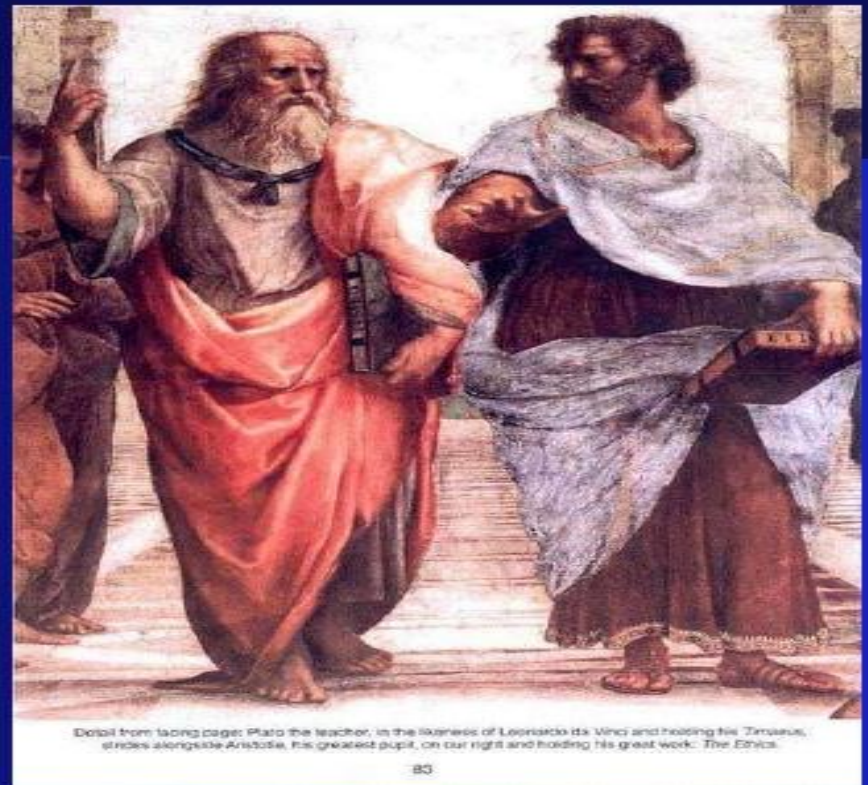
Deconstructionists focus on how language is used to achieve power. Since they believe, in the words of critic **David Lehman**, that
“there are no truths, only rival interpretations

Basic Philosophical Concern of Deconstruction

Derrida's concerns flow from a consideration of several issues:

- ❑ A desire to contribute to the **re-evaluation of all Western values, a re-evaluation built on the 18th-century Kantian critique of pure reason**, and carried forward to the 19th century, in its more radical implications, by **Kierkegaard and Nietzsche**.
- ❑ **An assertion that texts outlive their authors**, and become **part of a set of cultural habits equal to, if not surpassing, the importance of authorial intent**.
- ❑ **A re-valuation of certain classic western dialectics: poetry vs. philosophy, reason vs. revelation, structure vs. creativity, episteme vs. techne, etc.**

- Plato was Socrates' disciple
- Founded the **Academy** in Athens, that lasted until the 6th c. A. D.
- Was Aristotle's teacher
- Plato's most important writings are called **Dialogues**
- Socrates is the protagonist in most **Dialogues**
 - How much content in any given Dialogue is Socrates' point of view or how much is Plato's?



Detail from facing page: Plato the teacher, in the likeness of Leonardo da Vinci and holding his *Timaeus*, strides alongside Aristotle, his greatest pupil, on the right and holding his great work, *The Ethics*.

To this end, Derrida follows a long line of modern philosophers, who look backwards to **Plato and his influence on the Western metaphysical tradition**. Like Nietzsche, Derrida suspects Plato of dissimulation in the service of a political project, namely the education, through critical reflections, **of a class of citizens more strategically positioned to influence the polis**.

Metaphysics of presence

The Critique of Philosophy

- Derrida's writing is a radical critique of philosophy. It questions the usual notions of **truth and knowledge**. It disrupts traditional ideas about **procedure and presentation**. And it questions the **authority of philosophy**.
- Deconstructive interpretation holds that the entire history of **Western philosophy with its language and traditions has emphasized the desire for immediate access to meaning**, and thus built a metaphysics or **ontotheology based on privileging presence** over absence. – which he called **Logocentrism**.

Logocentrism

"Logocentrism" is a term coined by the German philosopher Ludwig Klages in the 1920s. It refers to the tradition of Western science and philosophy that regards words and language as a fundamental expression of an external reality. It holds the logos as epistemologically superior and that there is an original, irreducible object which the logos represents. It, therefore, holds that one's presence in the world is necessarily mediated. According to logocentrism, the logos is the ideal representation of the Platonic ideal. [More at Wikipedia](#)

Logocentrism

- **CENTERS:** God, reason, origin, being, essence, truth, humanity, beginning, end, and self... each can serve as a transcendental signified
- Derrida names **logocentrism:** the belief that there is an ultimate reality or center of truth that can serve as the basis for all our thoughts and actions.
- We live in a logo centric world – We want to believe that everything is grounded.

Logocentrism

"All metaphysicians, from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded in this way, conceiving good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc." - Derrida

For Derrida, **phonocentrism and logocentrism** always valorizes **presence of thought**. According to Derrida **when speech fails to protect presence**, writing becomes necessary. **In this case, writing then serves as a supplement** which takes the place of speech (Derrida, 1976:144).

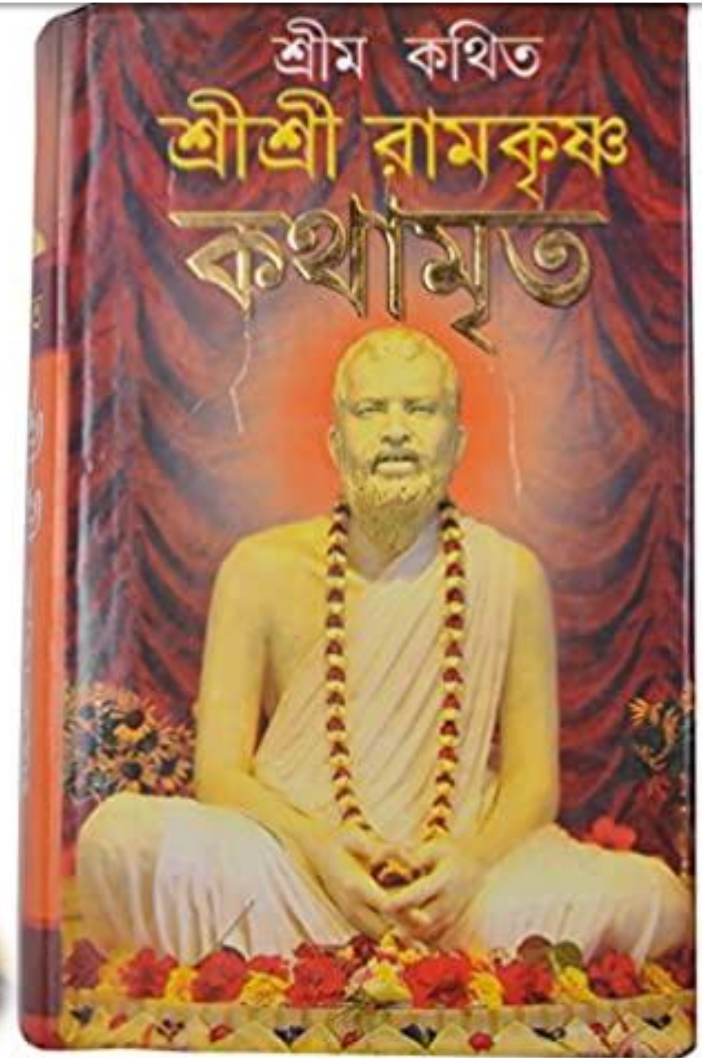
Valorizing the Word/Presence of God: Logocentrism in West and East

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

John 1:1 (ESV)

 BibleGateway

Krishna spoke Bhagavad-gita
to Arjuna on the battlefield of
Kurukshetra.



Plato's Pharmacy

In "Plato's Pharmacy" (1969) Derrida focusses on the *Phaedrus*, a fictionalized conversation between two historical characters: Socrates and Phaedrus, a young Athenian swayed by the rhetoricians. The topic: the relative merits of the lover and the non-lover, as sexual partners and as thinkers. Or perhaps the topic is the relative merits of rhetoric and philosophy (or perhaps, the merits of speech and writing).

SOCRATES

PHAEDRUS



IS WRITING SEEMLY? DOES THE WRITER CUT A RESPECTABLE FIGURE? IS IT PROPER TO WRITE? OF COURSE NOT. BUT SOCRATES IS NOT GOING TO USE RATIONAL ARGUMENT. MYTH WILL STRIKE THE FIRST BLOW...



MY CONCERN IS SPEECH AND WRITING. I EXAMINE THE SHORT FINAL SECTION IN WHICH SOCRATES (WHO NEVER WROTE ANYTHING) CONVINCES PHAEDRUS THAT SPEECH IS SUPERIOR TO WRITING...



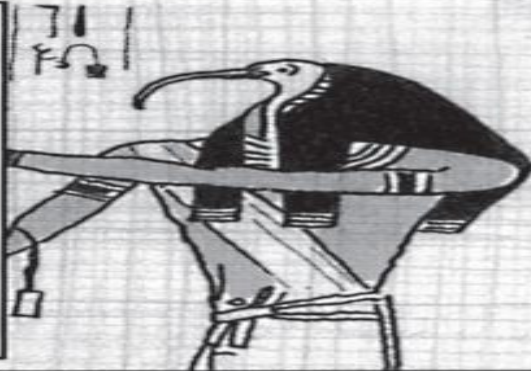
AS FAR AS WORDS ARE CONCERNED, DO YOU KNOW WHAT WOULD MOST PLEASE THE GODS?

NO, I DON'T. DO YOU ?

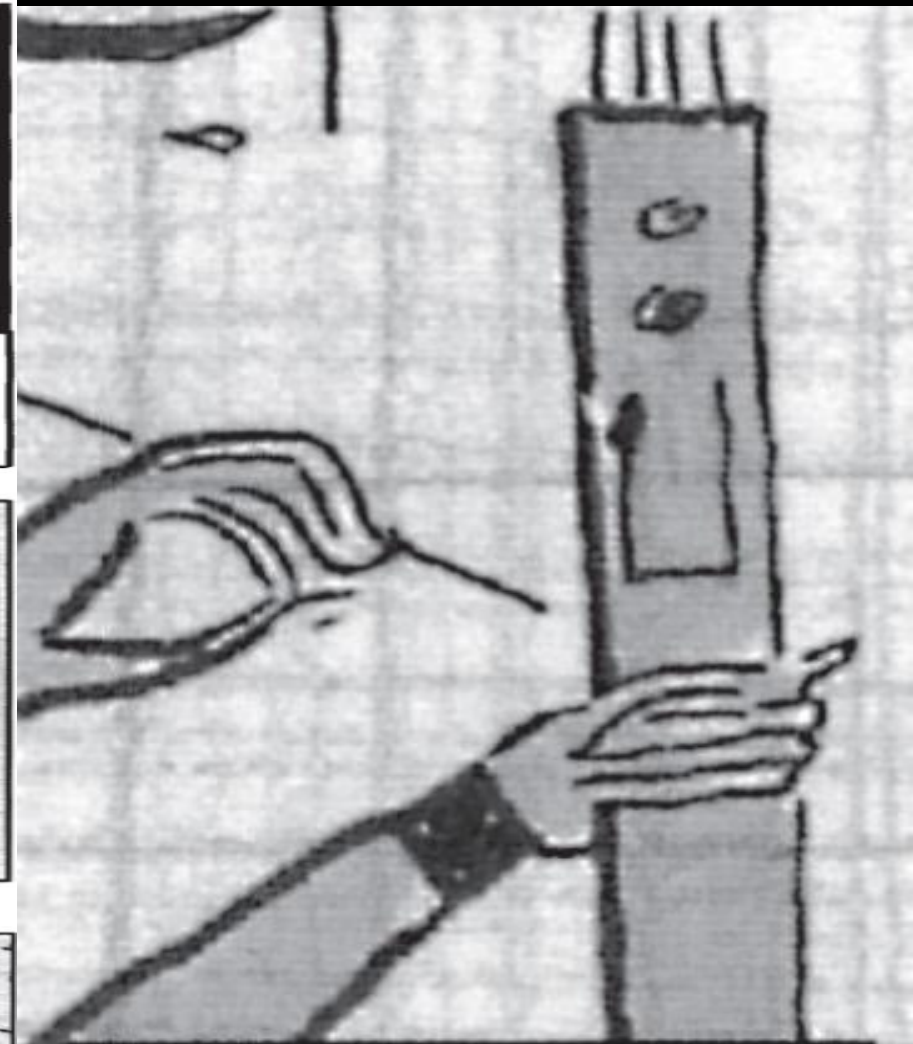


WELL, I CAN TELL YOU
WHAT I'VE HEARD FROM OUR
PREDECESSORS ...

... THEY SAY
THAT THERE
DWELT AT
NAUCRATIS IN
EGYPT ONE OF
THE ANCIENT
GODS OF THAT
COUNTRY, AN
INVENTOR-GOD
WHOSE NAME
WAS THEUTH.



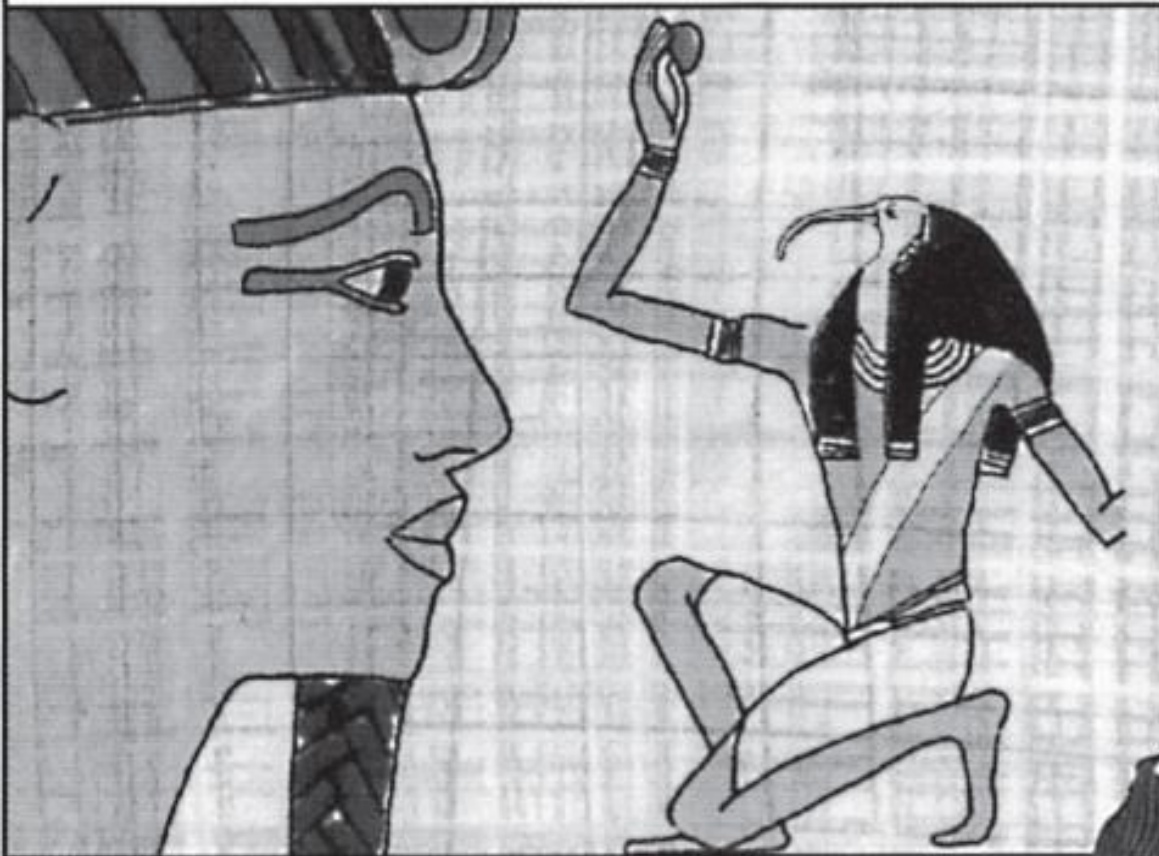
HE INVENTED NUMBERS AND CALCULATION AND
GEOMETRY AND ASTRONOMY, AS WELL AS GAMES OF
DRAUGHTS AND DICE, AND ABOVE ALL ...



... WRITING.

***From Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide by Jeff Collins, Bill
Mayblin, Page: 48***

AT THAT TIME THE GREAT GOD-KING OF ALL OF UPPER EGYPT WAS **THAMUS**. THE GREEKS CALL HIM AMMON. THEUTH CAME TO HIM AND EXHIBITED HIS INVENTIONS, SAYING THAT THEY OUGHT TO BE MADE KNOWN TO ALL THE EGYPTIANS....



HIS INVENTIONS WILL HAVE NO VALUE UNLESS GOD-THE-KING APPROVES OF THEM.



*From **Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide** by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 48*

THAMUS INQUIRED INTO EACH ONE OF THEM, CONDEMNING SOME AND PRAISING OTHERS. IT WOULD TAKE TOO LONG TO GO THROUGH ALL OF THEM. BUT WHEN IT CAME TO WRITING....



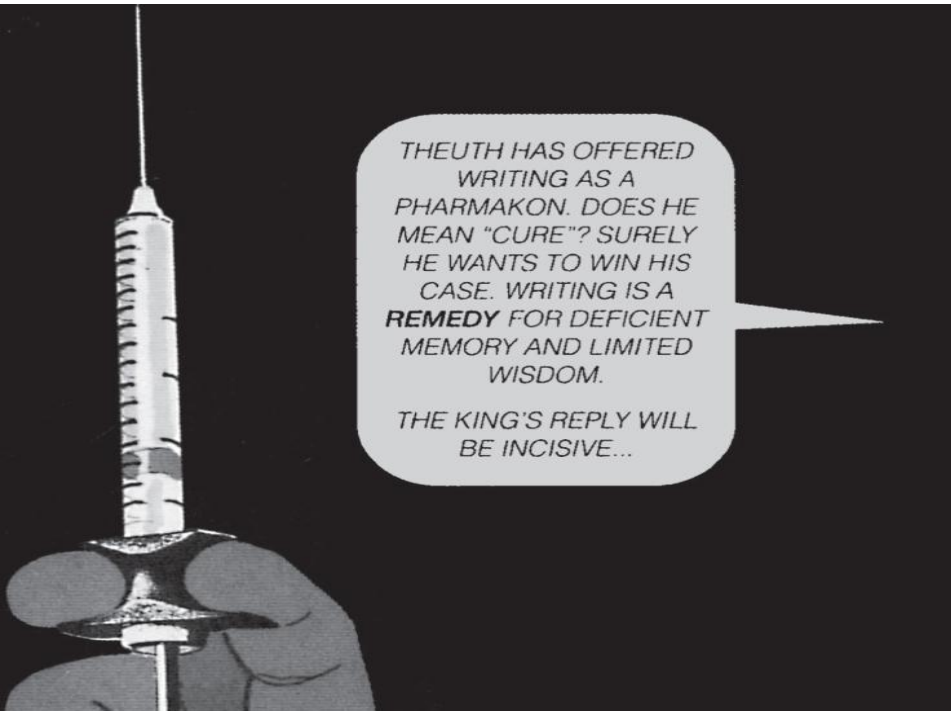
THIS BRANCH OF LEARNING, MY LORD, WILL MAKE THE EGYPTIANS WISER AND IMPROVE THEIR MEMORIES, FOR I'VE DISCOVERED A **PHARMAKON** FOR MEMORY AND WISDOM.



*From **Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide** by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 48*

Pharmakon is a Greek word which could be translated as “magic potion”. Other English translations have used “recipe”, “receipt”, “specific”, “cure” and “remedy”. But as Derrida notes, *pharmakon* is a specially ambiguous word.

In Greek, *pharmakon* means both cure and poison. Like the English word “drug”, it has good and bad aspects. Some translations resolve the word, cutting out one of its poles. But the *pharmakon* is UNDECIDABLE, inhabiting both the curative and the poisonous.



In Plato's *Phaedrus*, the Egyptian god of writing—Theuth or Thoth—offers King Thamus writing as a “remedy” (“*pharmakon*”) that can help memory. Thamus refuses the gift on the grounds that it will only create forgetfulness: for him, it is not a remedy for memory itself, but merely a way of reminding.

From *Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide* by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 48

THE DISCOVERER OF AN ART IS NOT THE BEST PERSON TO JUDGE ITS HARM OR BENEFIT. YOU, THE FATHER OF WRITING, ARE SO FOND OF YOUR OFFSPRING THAT YOU'VE STATED EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT IT WILL DO...

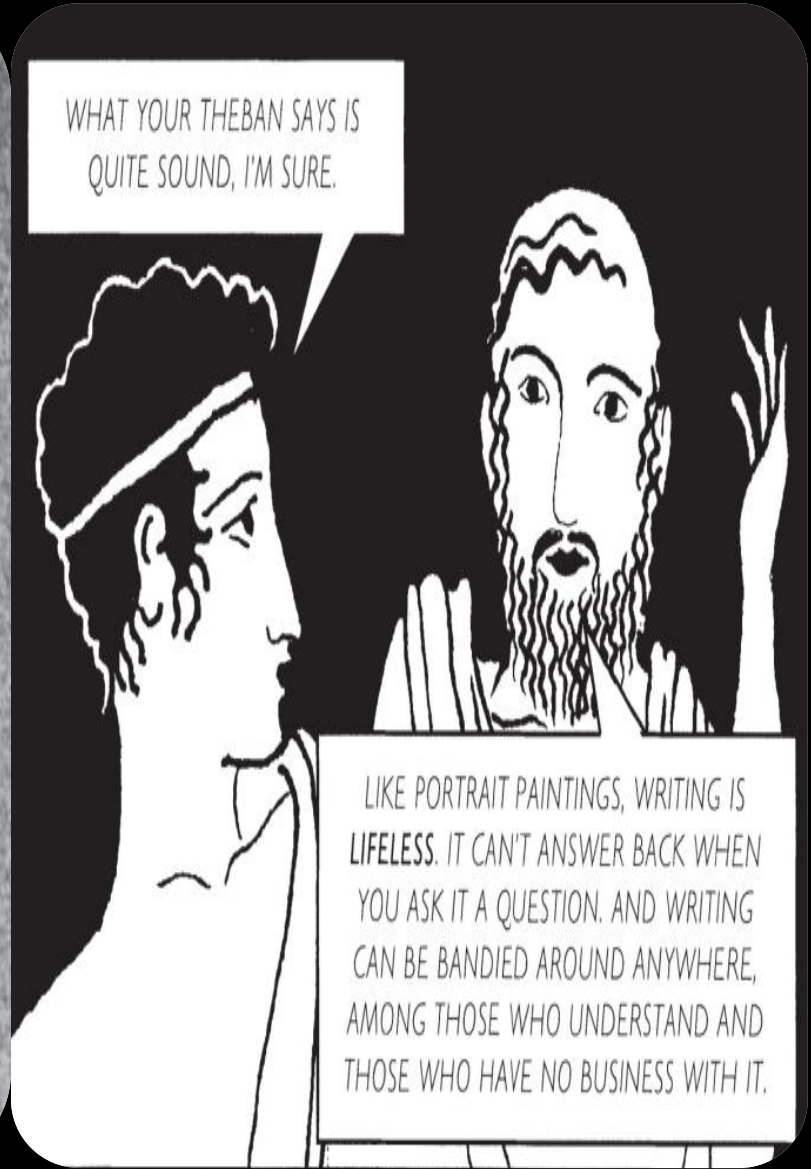


THOSE WHO WRITE WILL STOP EXERCISING THEIR MEMORY AND BECOME FORGETFUL. THEY'LL RELY ON THE **EXTERNAL** MARKS OF WRITING INSTEAD OF THEIR **INTERNAL** CAPACITY TO REMEMBER THINGS. YOU'VE DISCOVERED A **PHARMAKON** FOR REMINDING, NOT FOR TRUE MEMORY...

From Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 48



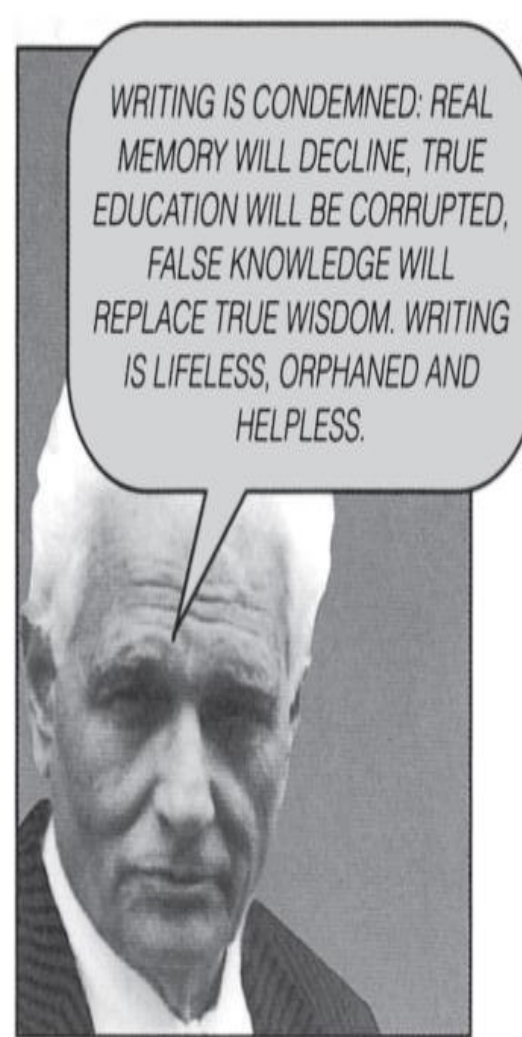
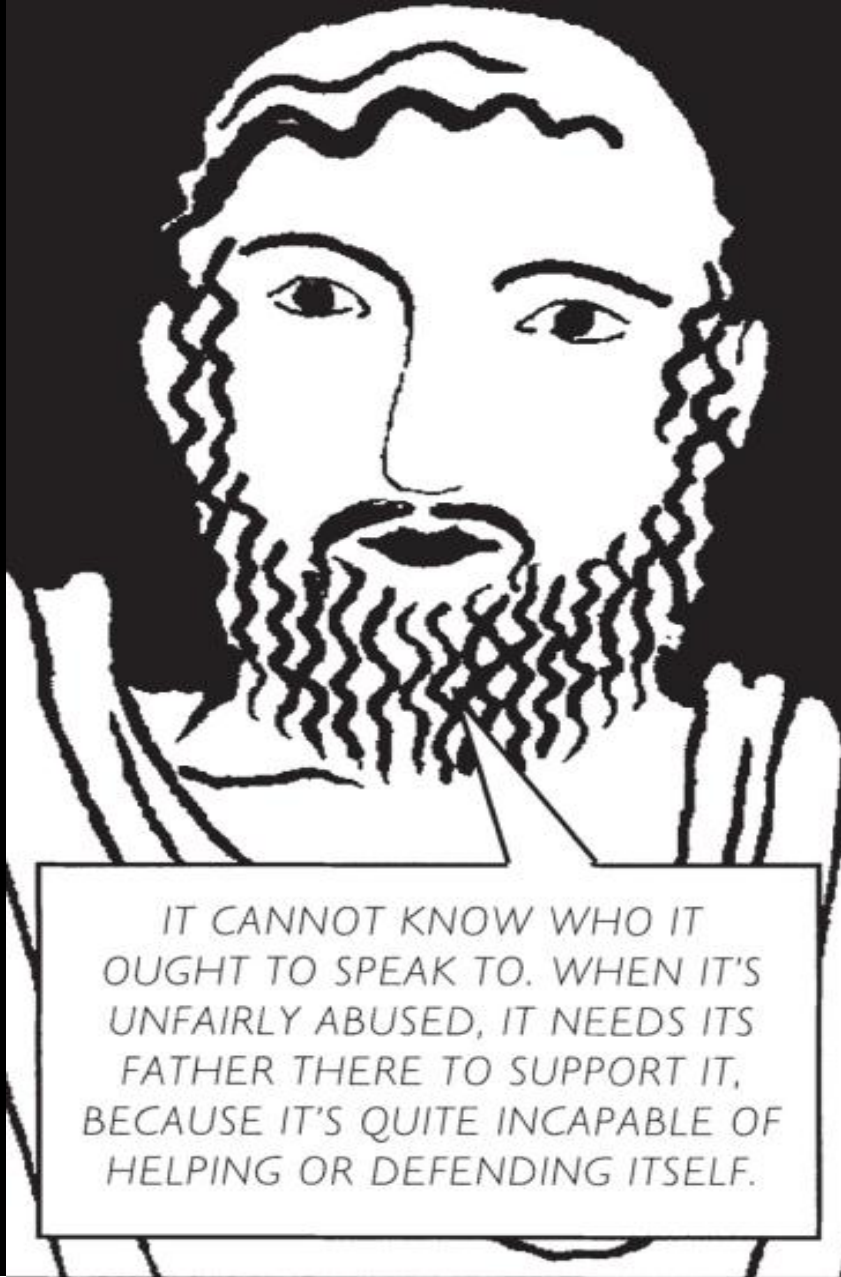
AS FOR WISDOM, YOU OFFER
YOUR STUDENTS A MERE
APPEARANCE OF IT, NOT THE
REALITY. THEY'LL RECEIVE MANY
THINGS FROM YOU, BUT
WITHOUT PROPER INSTRUCTION.
THEY'LL SEEM KNOWLEDGEABLE
WHEN THEY'RE QUITE IGNORANT.
AND THEY'LL BE HARD TO GET
ALONG WITH – THEY'LL CARRY
THE CONCEIT OF WISDOM,
INSTEAD OF BEING REALLY WISE.



WHAT YOUR THEBAN SAYS IS
QUITE SOUND, I'M SURE.

LIKE PORTRAIT PAINTINGS, WRITING IS
LIFELESS. IT CAN'T ANSWER BACK WHEN
YOU ASK IT A QUESTION. AND WRITING
CAN BE BANDIED AROUND ANYWHERE,
AMONG THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND AND
THOSE WHO HAVE NO BUSINESS WITH IT.

*From **Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide** by **Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin**, Page: 48*



But Theuth offered it as a *pharmakon*. Thamus, with all the authority of the king of kings and god of gods, returns it decided. **Writing is a poison!**

From Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 48



THE ONLY SPEECHES THAT ARE WORTHY OF SERIOUS ATTENTION ARE THOSE THAT ARE TAUGHT AND SPOKEN FOR THE SAKE OF LEARNING, AND ACTUALLY **WRITTEN** IN THE SOUL.

WRITING AS **PHARMAKON** CANNOT BE FIXED DOWN WITHIN PLATO'S OPPOSITIONS. THE PHARMAKON HAS NO PROPER OR DETERMINATE CHARACTER. IT IS THE PLAY OF POSSIBILITIES, THE MOVEMENTS BACK AND FORTH, INTO AND OUT OF THE OPPOSITES.

*From **Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide** by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 48*

Logocentrism: Explanation

One way in which I might persuade myself that this is possible is by listening to my own voice when I speak, rather than writing my thoughts down on paper. For in the act of speaking I seem to 'coincide' with myself in a way quite different from what happens when I write. My spoken words seem immediately present to my consciousness, and my voice becomes their intimate, spontaneous medium. In writing, by contrast, my meanings threaten to escape from my control: I commit my thoughts to the impersonal medium of print, and since a printed text has a durable, material existence it can always be circulated, reproduced, cited, used in ways which I did not foresee or intend. Writing seems to rob me of my being: it is a second-hand mode of communication, a pallid, mechanical transcript of speech, and so always at one remove from my consciousness. It is for this reason that the Western philosophical tradition, all the way from Plato to Levi-Strauss, has consistently vilified writing as a mere lifeless, alienated form of expression, and consistently celebrated the living voice. Behind this prejudice lies a particular view of 'man': man is able spontaneously to create and express his own meanings, to be in full possession of himself, and to dominate language as a transparent medium of his inmost being. What this theory fails to see is

Derrida: Supplement

A supplement is something that, allegedly secondarily, comes to serve as an aid to something 'original' or 'natural'. Writing is itself an example of this structure, for as Derrida points out, "if supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement par excellence since it proposes itself as the supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign, taking the place of a speech already significant"

--Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Derrida"

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/#SH3e>

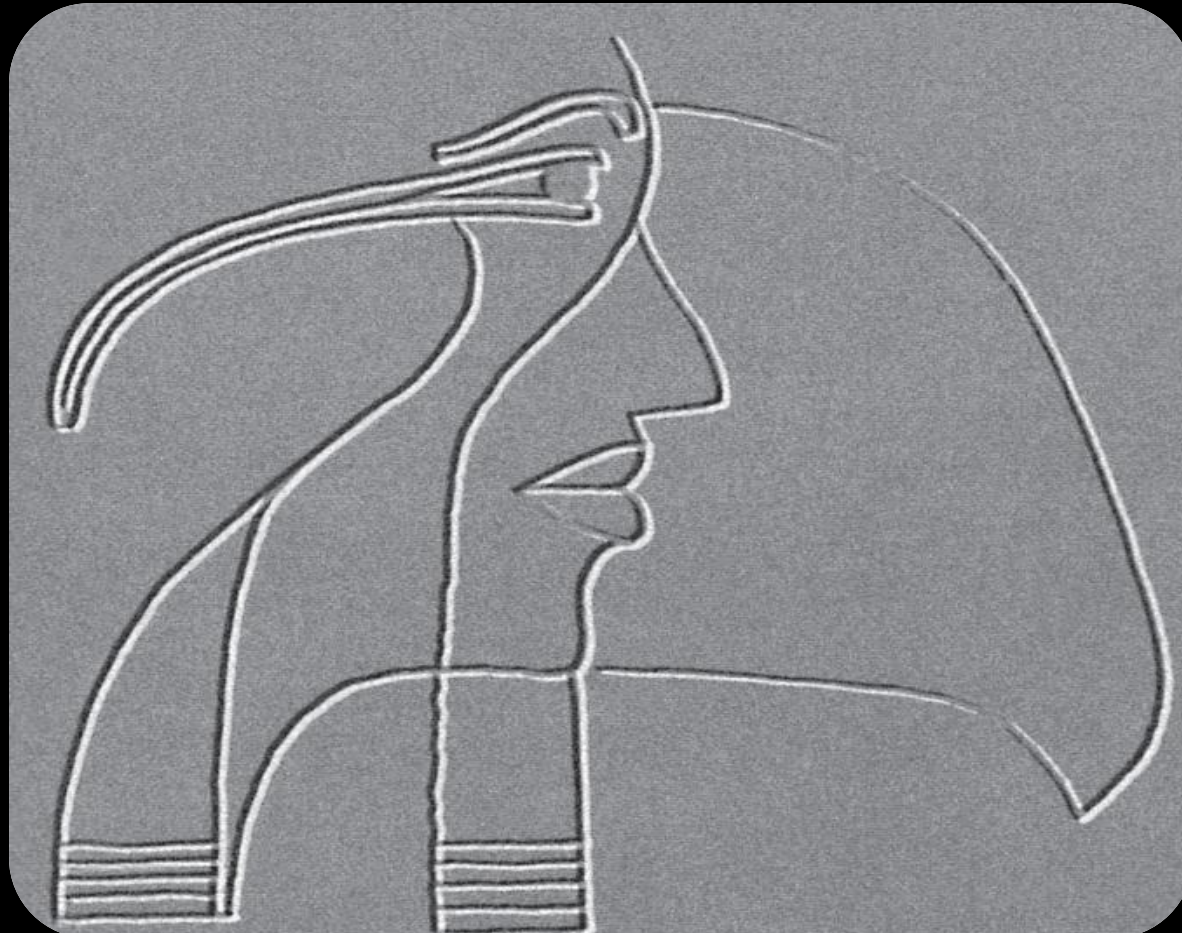
THE MOTHER AS SUPPLEMENT

- For Rousseau the mother is a supplement to mother nature.
- However, Rousseau considers supplementation to be bad in relation to nature, which is inherently good.
- What might this mean for how we can think about nature and nurture, particularly in terms of childcare and education?
- Derrida critiques Rousseau's dislike of supplementation by suggesting that, despite Rousseau's reasoning, human experience is inseparable from a logic of supplementation. This also leads Derrida to imply that any form of 'natural' reasoning is therefore paradoxical: it is itself supplementary and supplementing.

The Supplement

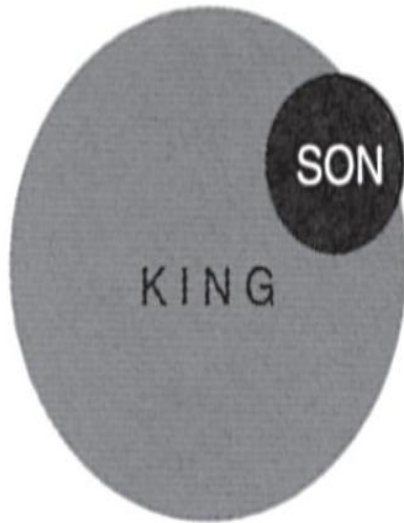
Once the aberrant logic of the *pharmakon* is let loose, it poisons the fixity and clarity of the other oppositions grouped around it. For instance, Plato's argument relies on father/son, Egyptian/Greek, original/derivation. Can we be sure of these?

In Derrida's hands, they start to unravel. He turns to the "original" Egyptian myth where the characters are Thoth and King Ammon. Thoth is the son of the sun god, Ammon.

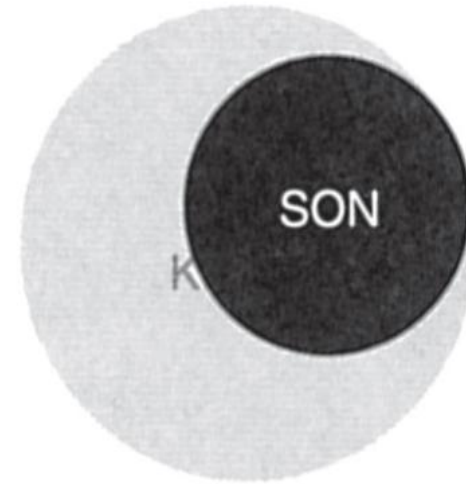


Derrida introduces the SUPPLEMENT. Thoth is the supplement to Ammon. The French word *supplément* means both addition and replacement. The supplement both extends and replaces – as a dietary supplement both adds to the diet and becomes part of the diet.

The supplement obeys a strange logic.



To be an addition means to be added to something already complete ...



The supplement extends by repeating. The king's son has the same blood and is the king's extension. But the supplement opposes by replacing. The king's son will usurp the king, take his place.



...yet it cannot be complete if it needs an addition. The king is complete and has an addition; needing an addition, the king is not yet whole.



The declaration, "The king is dead, long live the king!" must escape the grip of standard logic. It follows the logic of the supplement. The king must be *the same but different*: he is figured twice, as the father-king and the supplement-king.

Metaphysics

In the **'Afterword'** to *Limited Inc.*, Derrida suggests that metaphysics can be defined as:

The enterprise of returning 'strategically', 'ideally', to an origin or to a priority thought to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order then to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc. All metaphysicians, from Plato to **Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded in this way, conceiving good to be before evil**, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. And this is not just one metaphysical gesture among others, it is the metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound and most potent (LI 236).

***From Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide* by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 48**

Derrida's philosophy is chiefly concerned with metaphysics, although he does not define it rigorously, and takes it to be **“the science of presence”**. In his own words:


The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix—if you will pardon me for demonstrating so little and for being so elliptical in order to bring me more quickly to my principal theme—is **the determination of being as presence in all the senses of this word.** It would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated the constant of a **presence—eidos, arché, telos, energia, ousia, aletheia, transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth.** (*Sign, Structure & Play in Human Sciences*, 43)

Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher whose views I have been expounding over the last few pages, **labels as 'metaphysical' any such thought-system which depends on an unassailable foundation, a first principle or unimpeachable ground upon which a whole hierarchy of meanings may be constructed.** It is not that he believes that we can merely rid ourselves of the urge to forge such first principles, for such an impulse is deeply embedded in our history, and cannot - at least as yet - be eradicated or ignored. **Derrida**

Metaphysics in its search for foundations is logocentric.

Logos (Greek) can mean logic, reason, the word, God.





PHILOSOPHY IS FIRST AND FOREMOST
WRITING. THEREFORE IT DEPENDS CRUCIALLY
ON THE STYLES AND FORMS OF ITS
LANGUAGE - FIGURES OF SPEECH,
METAPHORS, EVEN LAYOUT ON THE PAGE.
JUST AS **LITERATURE** DOES.

**The profile of a
joker? Perhaps, if
we're willing to re-
think joking ...**

Ambivalence and Différance

If the *pharmakon* is ‘ambivalent,’ it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (**soul/ body, good/ evil, inside/ outside, memory/ forgetfulness, speech/ writing, etc.**)....The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) **différance**.

Différance, Bricolage and Erasure

Meaning seems to reside in words (or in things) only when we distinguish their *différance* from other words (or things). For example, if we believed that all objects were the same color, we wouldn't need the word *red* (or *blue* or *green*) at all. Red is red only because we believe it to be different from blue and green (and because we believe color to be different from shape). So the word *red* carries with it the trace of all the signifiers it is not (for it is in contrast to other signifiers that we define it).

To sum up, Derrida argues that language has two important characteristics: (1) its play of signifiers continually defers, or postpones, meaning, and (2) the meaning it seems to have is the result of the differences by which we distinguish one signifier from another. He combines the French words for "to defer" and "to differ" to coin the word *différance*, which is his name for the only "meaning" language can have. At this point, you may wonder, why use language at all if it seems to refer to a kind of stable meaning that doesn't really exist? We must use language, Derrida explains, because we must use the tool at our disposal if we don't have another. But even while we use this tool, we can be aware that it doesn't have the solidity and stability we have assumed it has, and we can therefore improvise with it, stretch it to fit new modes of thinking (an activity he calls *bricolage*). Derrida does this stretching activity when he puts words *under erasure*, as he calls it, by writing them and then crossing them out (for example, ~~meaning~~) to indicate that he's using an old word in a new way.

Différance.

- Différance plays on the fact that '*differer*' in French means both to differ and to defer.
- Saussure stated that a sign is made meaningful by its location in a system of differences. Derrida took this a step further by saying that the meaning is also always deferred, and that it is both always present and absent.
- An example I've found of this is that if you look through the dictionary for the word 'letter', you get five meanings. If you pick one of these, such as 'message', you then get more meanings, so the meaning has been deferred. Because the meaning leads you to other meanings, there can be no ultimate meaning, as it is constantly being deferred.

Connection between Différance and Logos: Speech/Writing

This desire for a centre is called 'logocentrism' in Derrida's classic work, *Of Grammatology*. 'Logos' (Greek for 'word') is a term which in the New Testament carries the greatest possible concentration of presence: 'In the beginning was the Word.' Being the origin of all things, the 'Word' underwrites the full presence of the world; everything is the effect of this one cause. Even though the Bible is written, God's word is essentially *spoken*. A spoken word emitted from a living body appears to be closer to an originating thought than a written word. Derrida argues that this privileging of speech over writing (he calls it 'phonocentrism') is a classic feature of logocentrism. What prevents the sign from being a full presence? Derrida invents the term '*différance*' to convey the divided nature of the sign. In French the 'a' in '*différance*' is not heard, and so we hear only '*différence*'. The ambiguity is perceptible only in writing: the verb '*différer*' means both 'to differ' and 'to defer'. To 'differ' is a spatial concept: the sign emerges from a system of differences which are spaced out within the system. To 'defer' is temporal: signifiers enforce an endless postponement of 'presence'. Phonocentric thought ignores '*différance*' and insists upon the self-presence of the spoken word.

/ɪˈreɪʃər/ - e-ras-ure

Erasure

(1) (noun) deletion by an act of expunging or erasing; (2) (noun) a correction made by erasing; (3) (noun) a surface area where something has been erased;

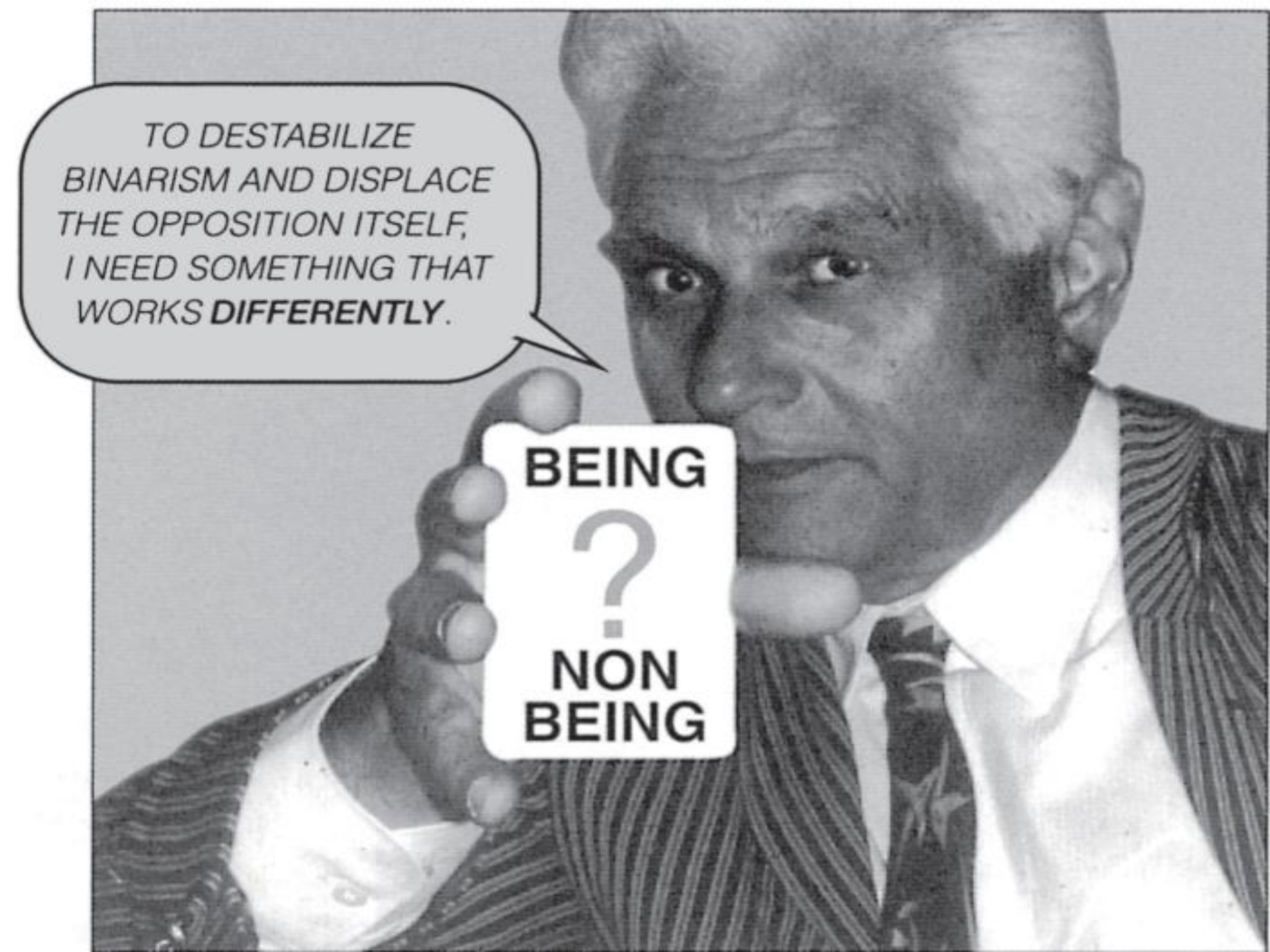
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Being

“Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it is left legible.” Martin Heidegger, in a letter to Ernst Junger, 1956



TO DESTABILIZE
BINARISM AND DISPLACE
THE OPPOSITION ITSELF,
I NEED SOMETHING THAT
WORKS **DIFFERENTLY**.

BEING

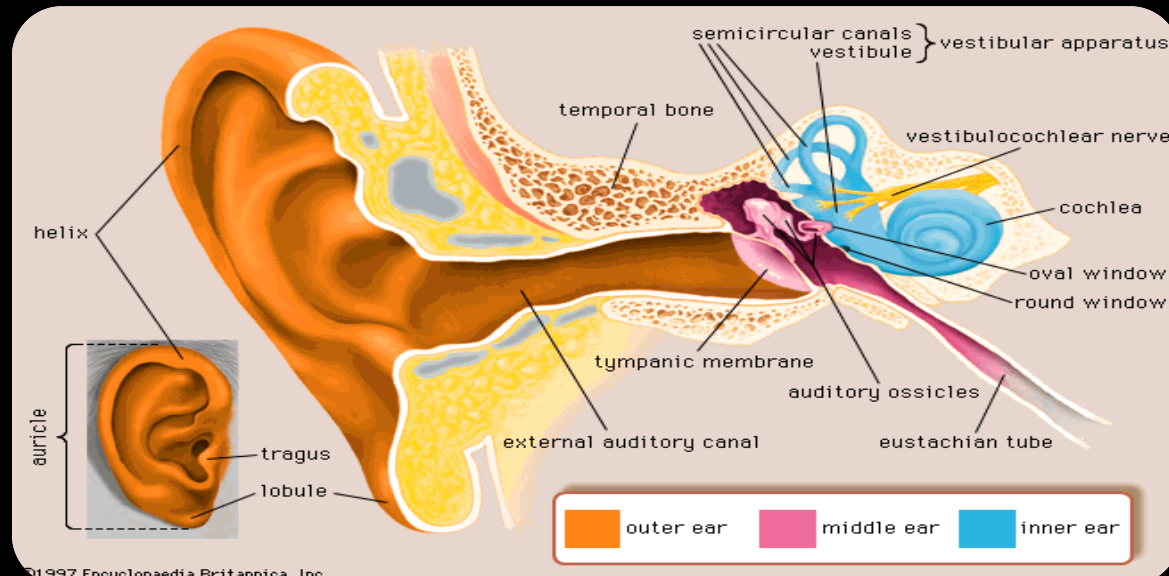
?

**NON
BEING**

Terms denoting Undecidability/ Indeterminacy

Throughout his entire career, to mark the undecidable of all oppositions working across all texts in Western culture, Derrida creates marks such as the **“Pharmakon” (neither remedy nor poison)**, the **“hymen” (neither consummation nor virginity)**, the **“tympan” (neither inside nor outside)**.

- ❑ The hymen is a thin piece of mucosal tissue that surrounds or partially covers the external vaginal opening.
- ❑ Tympanic membrane, also called eardrum, thin layer of tissue in the human ear that receives sound vibrations from the outer air and transmits them to the auditory ossicles.



Arche-writing

- In *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere, Derrida argues that signification, broadly conceived, always refers to other signs, and that one can never reach a sign that refers only to itself. He suggests that “writing is not a sign of a sign, except if one says it of all signs, which would be more profoundly true” (OG 43), and this process of infinite referral, of never arriving at meaning itself, is the notion of ‘writing’ that he wants to emphasise. This is not writing narrowly conceived, as in a literal inscription upon a page, but what he terms ‘arche-writing’. **Arche-writing refers to a more generalised notion of writing that insists that the breach that the written introduces between what is intended to be conveyed and what is actually conveyed**, is typical of an originary breach that afflicts everything one might wish to keep sacrosanct, including the notion of self-presence.
- **Arche-writing refers to an originary breach.**

Trace

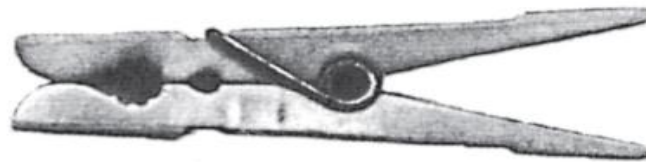
Derrida's argument is that in examining a binary opposition, deconstruction manages to expose a trace. This is not a trace of the oppositions that have since been deconstructed – on the contrary, the trace is a rupture within metaphysics, a pattern of incongruities where the metaphysical rubs up against the non-metaphysical, that it is deconstruction's job to juxtapose as best as it can. **The trace does not appear as such (OG 65), but the logic of its path in a text can be mimed by a deconstructive intervention and hence brought to the fore.**

The sounds don't mean anything in themselves, but we can tell the difference between them. The difference makes possible a different meaning – the concept:



And so on, through other differentiable sounds and concepts:

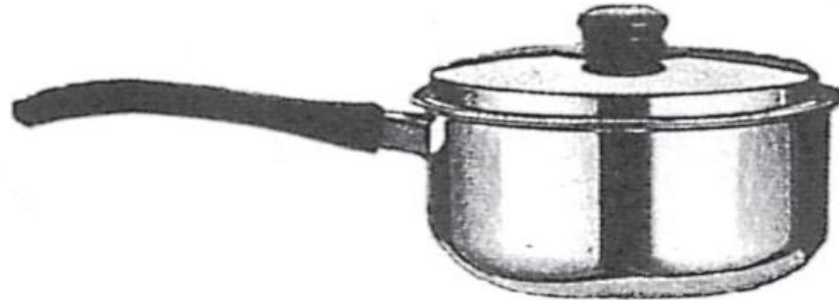
peg



pen



pan



etc.

And for Derrida this is a question of presence...

What happens when *big* circulates as a spoken word? The sound /**b**/ has to be spoken. No /**p**/, it would seem, is present. We will not hear the /**p**/, a speaker cannot say one at the same time. We might say, it is absent. But on the other hand, /**p**/ is not simply absent. *Big*, to be identifiable and meaningful, depends on it, and on all the other sounds from which it differs. Without /**p**/ and the others, it is lost. So the /**p**/ is in a way present, though not simply so. It is carried as a *trace* in the /**b**/, necessarily present in its necessary absence.

The Trace

What does Derrida mean by “trace”? Neither simply present nor simply absent, the trace is an undecidable. The relay of differences (*pig, big, bag, rag, rat, etc*) depends upon a structural undecidability, a play of presence and absence at the origin of meaning. Undecidability at the “origin”, *between* presence and absence.

From Introducing Derrida: A Graphic Guide by Jeff Collins, Bill Mayblin, Page: 130-132

Examples of Trace in Culture Studies



The Hindu god of death, Yama, or Emma in Japanese, Inoji, Kyoto.

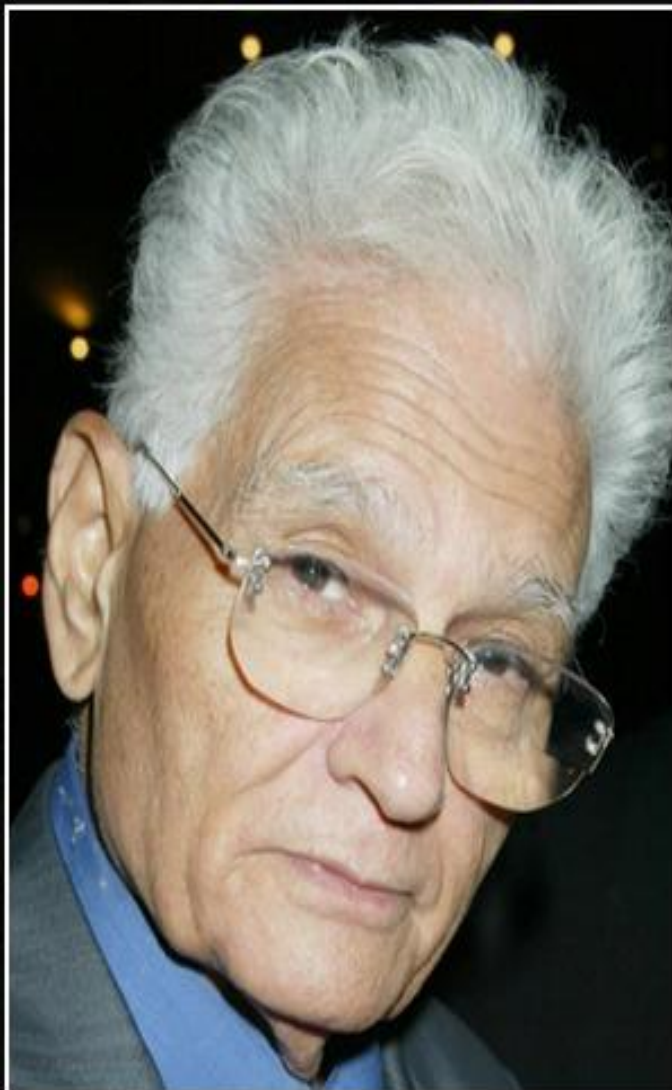


Eight-armed Saraswati, or **Benzaiten**, Enoshima Jinja, Kamakura. **In the 7th-8th century, Japan adopted the eight-armed Saraswati as the defender of the nation.** This description was taken from the "Sutra of Golden Light".



From left to right, **Benzaiten** (Hindu equivalent: Sarasvati), **Kangiten** (Ganesha) and **Bishamonten** (Kubera) in the Daishō-in temple.

Derrida on Trace



The trace I leave to me means at once my death, to come or already come, and the hope that it will survive me. It is not an ambition of immortality; it is fundamental. I leave here a bit of paper, I leave, I die; it is impossible to exit this structure; it is the unchanging form of my life. Every time I let something go, I live my death in writing.

— *Jacques Derrida* —

AZ QUOTES

Iterability

- Plato's description of written speech emphasizes its detachment from the speaker
- Derrida emphasizes this detachment in terms of the survivability of writing
- Writing must be able to survive the absence of "subject" and the intended audience
- He calls this survivability "iterability"



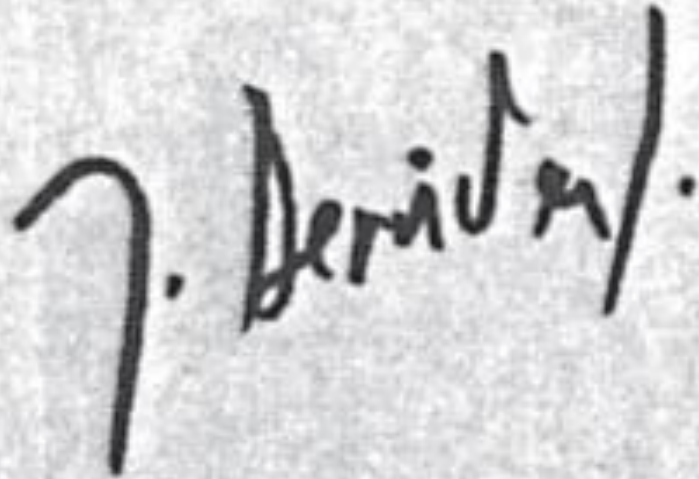
All of which makes the signature dubious. It's always double, because always inhabited by the threat and the necessity of its repeatability. It could never give assurance if it could not be doubted.

The signature is doubtful. Does this destroy it? There are signatures, every day...

*ITERABILITY IS THE CONDITION OF POSSIBILITY OF THE SIGNATURE, BUT IT IS **ALSO THE CONDITION OF ITS IMPOSSIBILITY**, OF THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ITS RIGOROUS PURITY. ITS DETACHABILITY CORRUPTS ITS IDENTITY AND ITS SINGULARITY, DIVIDES ITS SEAL.*

Derrida's "Signature, event, context" ends with Derrida's signature. He signs with an im/pure signature, a paraph and a re-mark.

Writing therefore, if there is any, perhaps communicates, but does not exist, surely. Or barely, hereby, in the form of the most improbable signature.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Derrida/.". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized hand. The "J" is large and loops around the "Derrida". The slash and period are at the end.

(Remark: the - written - text of this - oral - communication was to have been addressed to the Association of French-Speaking Societies of Philosophy before the meeting. Such a missive therefore had to be signed. Which I did, and counterfeit here. Where? There. J.D.)



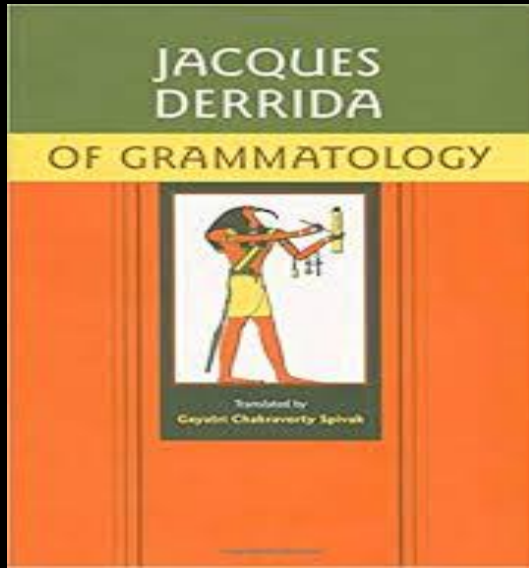
EVERYTHING I HAVE DONE IS DOMINATED BY THE THOUGHT OF A VIRUS, THE VIRUS BEING MANY THINGS. FOLLOW TWO THREADS

ONE, THE VIRUS INTRODUCES DISORDER INTO COMMUNICATION, EVEN IN THE BIOLOGICAL SPHERE – A DERAILING OF CODING AND DECODING.

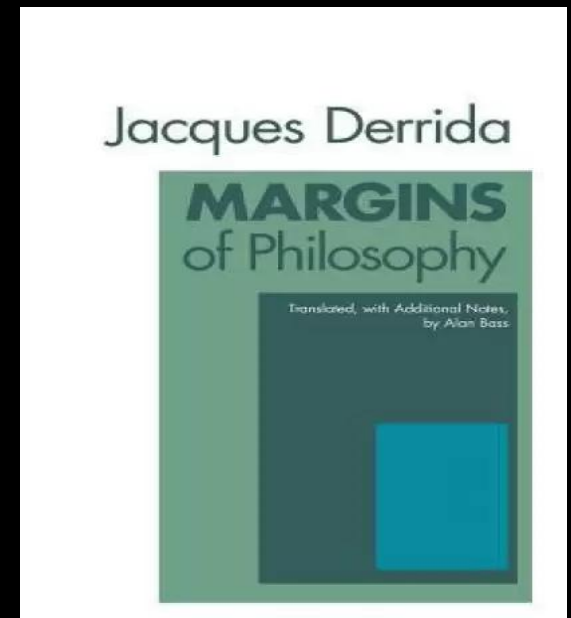
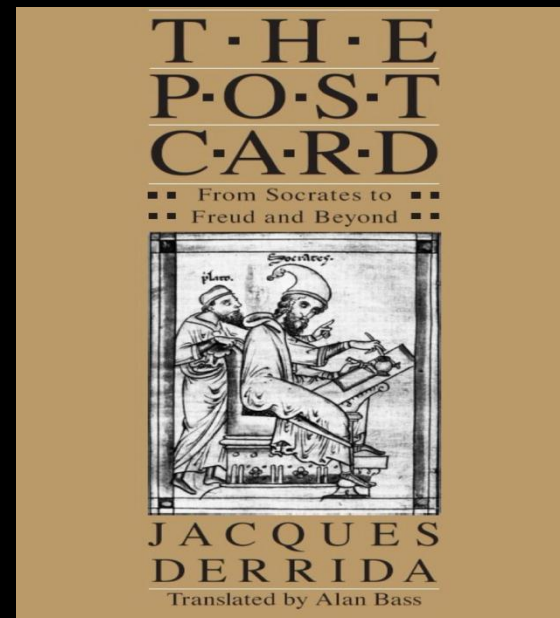
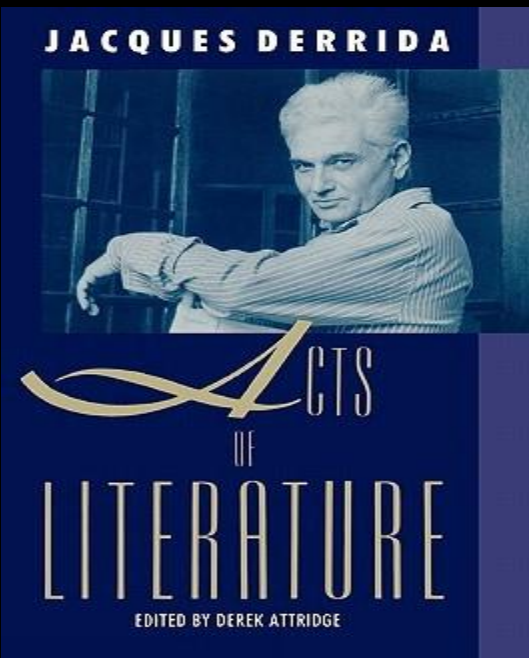
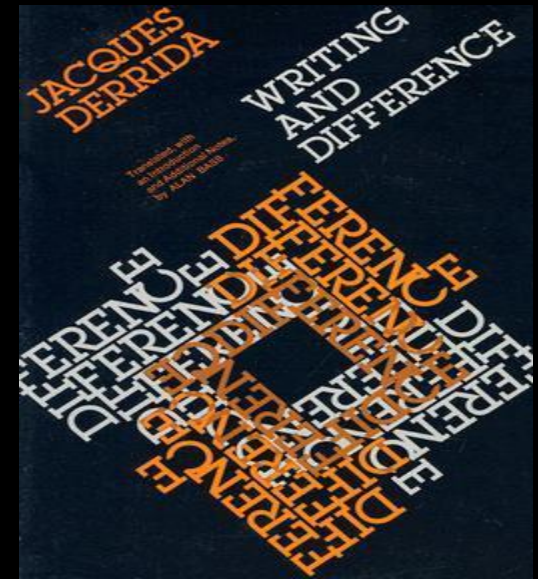
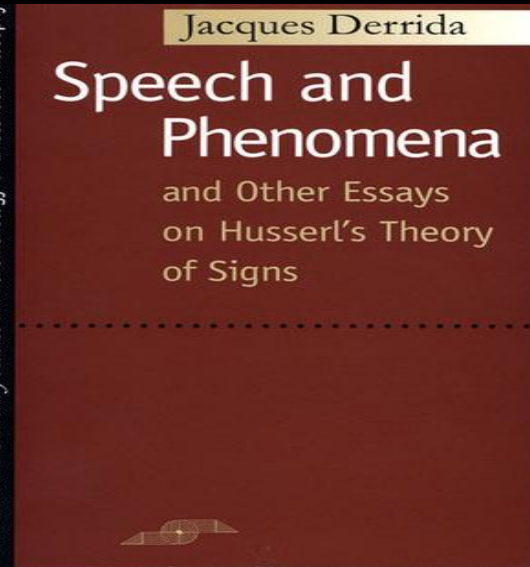
TWO, A VIRUS IS NOT A MICROBE, IT IS NEITHER LIVING NOR NON-LIVING, NEITHER ALIVE NOR DEAD. FOLLOW THESE THREADS AND YOU HAVE THE MATRIX OF ALL I HAVE DONE SINCE I STARTED WRITING.

I STARTED WRITING
MATRIX OF ALL I HAVE DONE SINCE

Books by Derrida



Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy



THERE'S NO NOUN,
NO THING WHICH IS
SIMPLY NAMED —
IT'S ALSO A
CONJUNCTION, AN
ADJECTIVE, ETC.

NO MORE
WORD:

ONE SYLLABLE CAN
SCATTER THE WORD.



BEING
TROUGH
ORIGIN

Thank you!!