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Contemporary
Continental Thought

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Jacques Derrida

Jacques Derrida was born in Algeria in 1930 and moved to France in the 1950s. After studying with Levinas and at the École Normale in Paris, in 1967 he published three groundbreaking books that catapulted him into academic stardom. One of the most widely read and influential thinkers of the last forty years, Derrida has had a major impact on thought in philosophy, literary theory, social-political thought, feminism, and psychoanalysis. His ideas on deconstruction have been adopted in fields as diverse as law, architecture, and accounting. He has held positions at the École Normale Supérieure, Johns Hopkins, and Yale, and is currently Director of Studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris) and professor of humanities at the University of California, Irvine. Author of more than forty books, Derrida's latest publications have focused primarily on ethical and social issues concerning hospitality, immigration, and the future of political relations.

The position for which Derrida is best known—deconstruction—is developed thematically in his works from the late 1960s and 1970s. For example, in Of Grammatology (1967) he argues that Western philosophy privileges a logic of identity and simplicity in which distinctions (e.g., sensible-intelligible, ideal-real, internal-external, fiction-truth, nature-culture, speech-writing) are instituted as original starting points. But since the origin of oppositionality itself cannot be accounted for without appealing to something other than itself, Western metaphysics has to invoke principles that undermine the self-sufficiency of its meaning-centered ("logocentric") claim that thought-speech or presence has primacy over writing. Unlike hermeneutics (which strives to retrieve a meaning or truth), deconstruction aims not to resolve such paradoxes but to allow them to produce further creativity.

As Derrida notes in "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing," the effort to overcome metaphysics begins by rejecting its essential and dominating feature, logocentrism, the tendency to establish an origin, foundation, or principle to guarantee the truth of claims to knowledge. This metaphysics of presence supports the search for the immediate, the self-certifying. It privileges reason and perception as means to reach a world outside of experience, just as it privileges the immortal soul over the body, the unchanging God and Forms over the changing world of sense, the male over female—in short, the self-possessed, self-accessible, self-knowing and intentional author.

Derrida's critique of a metaphysics of presence requires that we recognize that no original presence, privileged standpoint (e.g., the author, the real world), or mediated experience or transcendental signifier is identifiable other than in virtue of its graphic displacement. The displacement marks or writes the difference in an "archi-writing" that differentiates writing and speech in a redundant act of writing. Every attempt to make language "proper" (i.e., independent of this act) is undercut by language itself in its attempt to erase this trace of its origin (which is, of course, the origin of the origin).

Logocentrism attempts to promote such an erase by privileging spoken language over writing, presence over absence, the totalizing comprehension of the book over the opportunely differentializations of writing. But as Derrida tells Richard Kearney, the self-identity of logocentric metaphysics presupposes the other: "Identity presupposes alterity. [...] the other precedes philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject. [...] It is in this rapport with the other that affirmation expresses itself." (Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers, pp. 117-18). Deconstruction does not therefore suspend reference, since its search for the other of language is based on the recognition that language is summoned by this other. So instead of dispensing with the subject, deconstruction merely resituates it.

In a sense, then, deconstruction is still "in" metaphysics insofar as each speaker and each expression is in a determinate language. This does not mean, though, that an outside or metalanguage can be thought of as the site for thinking about metaphysics. The alternative to the logic of identity cannot simply be another logic, for that would treat the other as if it were something with an identity, when what is really called for is the invocation of difference "itself." All that one can do is allude to it while erasing the self-informing gesture that gives it an identity: that is the point of Derrida's use of "differance." Meaning is deferred differentiation, the deferment of the differentiation by which something becomes meaningful. Without the supplement of differentiation, the prioritized term lacks fullness; it needs the supplement, so the supplement becomes prior. Speech tries to invoke a meaning without drawing attention to itself as the graphic (written) enunciation by which the meaning originates. It tries to erase its very presence by displacing itself with more speech. However, speech is unintelligible apart from the inscribing activity by which the contrast of speech and writing (and thus the erase) occurs. That is why it must be understood as "writing under erasure."

This irreducible and generative multiplicity of meaning ("dissemination") is the "free play" of signifiers in the metaphoricity of philosophy, the (de)construction of metaphysics in terms of the very same metaphors of argumentation. Every signifier serves as a metaphor for a signified that can never be situated outside language. Writing displays this fact, so it is metaphoricity itself. In contrast to the immediacy of present thought, writing is endlessly reproducible: and in fact, it is that reproducibility that accounts for the possibility of the essences that are claimed to exist apart from writing. But those essences are intelligible only in virtue of their differences in sound, which means that their differences must exist prior in a form of archi-writing.

In this sense Derrida's "differance" means both to defer and to differ: it is a non-concept that cannot be defined in terms of oppositional predicates. It is neither this nor that; it has no meaning apart from its inscription in language. As such,
philosophy is not so much metaphoric (assuming the association of one meaning-

ful term with another) as it is catachetic (substituting one improper term for
another improper term), and it is this violent production of meaning that charac-
terizes the founding concepts of metaphysics such as 

Deconstruction thus subverts the Whiggish claims of enlightenment superior-
ty and rejects the primacy of reason, the objectivity and validity of the natural sci-
ences as the paradigm of truth, the autonomy and natural rights of the self, and
the inevitability of scientific, moral, and political progress. It signals the end of meta-
physics and humanistic efforts to identify an essence of man. It deniess that con-
sciousness constitutes the transcendental conditions for being—it is thus
antiphenomenological—and reveals how hermeneutic attempts to discern a
meaning or intention through interpretation cannot appeal to theoretical structures
without assuming logocentrism. It highlights the metaphysical characteristics of political ideologies and outlines, in a "politics of exodus," suspicions about political terminologies.

In "Structure, Sign, and Play," Derrida explains how, in order to think of the structurality of structure, we have to acknowledge how the use of signs in discourse destabilizes the distinction of signifier and signified. Indeed, the absence of a foundational principle, center, or origine—a transcendental or transcendental signified—extends the domain and play of signification indefinitely, since even to imagine a difference between signifier and signified is to treat the signifier as a metaphysical concept, when in fact it is simply the event of differentiation that inscribes the structure.

The distinction of the sensible and intelligible is a mythic assumption, an at-
tempt to inscribe an origin, center, or author outside philosophy that grounds the play of supplementarity in and as history without acknowledging the ahistorical play of the inscription itself. Play disrupts presence, since it is what makes the differentiation of presence and absence possible. In play, the past is not present as the past but is rather the present erasure of the present. In contrast to hermeneutics—which nostaligically longs to decipher a humanistic, metaphysical, onto-theological presence, foundation, origin or truth outside sign and play (even a historically, linguistically mediated self)—deconstruction affirms this play as the inscrutable condition of interpretation, structure, and sign.

Like efforts to undermine the history of metaphysics, the effort by ethnology (the study of comparative cultures) to critique ethnocentrism falls into the self-
delusion of thinking that "old concepts" (e.g., method vs. truth, or the nature-
culture distinction) can be used as means by which the critique can be pursued. If history is understood in terms of the ruptures or displacements of structures, then no account can be given for such ruptures. Even to imagine history in terms of ruptures or structural displacements is to fall into the very structuralist vocabulary such an effort dispels (unless one takes seriously the concepts of chance and discontinuity).

This means, for Derrida, that discourse is always a bricolage, a throwing to-
gether of already significant elements. Because there is no privileged center or
origin, language emerges complete in one fell swoop. The account of its origin
must therefore be framed in mythological discourse as opposed to a structural
epistemological) discourse on myth. In this sense, even the person who creates out of
nothing is himself or herself a myth, a bricolage thrown together from what is
available, a creation of the bricolage. The sign may take the place of the center,
but it cannot function as a replacement for the lack of a transcendent signified,
since it is by its very nature as a sign a supplement for the signified. As always
already a bricolage whose overabundance precludes a determinate signification,
the signifier is a supplement for a signifier. In the end this means that the signifier
simply signals the lack of the possibility that there can be a proper signifier.

In "Toward an Ethic of Discussion" and more recent publications, Derrida sug-
gests that even in the absence of a signifier that is proper, it is still possible to
appeal within a deconstructive mentality to notions of truth, knowledge, ethical
responsibility, and political progress without falling into relativism. The key is to
recognize how "rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good
faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy" are always contextual and never
legitimated by absolute, extracultural, or nonpolitical criteria. We should think of
the possibilities of cultural improvement or advances in social justice in terms of that which is better
than (but always relative to) the status quo. In that way we could always imagine
better laws, better ways of doing things, without having to identify an absolute
best.

Select Bibliography of Works by Jacques Derrida


"The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing"
by Jacques Derrida

Socrates, he who does not write.1 Nietzsche

However the topic is considered, the problem of language has never been simply one problem among others. But never as much as at present has it become a discourses, prospects or shadows, it is itself still a sign: this crisis is also a symptom. The inflation of the sign itself, absolute inflation, inflation upon us, it betrays a loose vocabulary, the finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear, when it ceases to be self-assured, contained, and guaranteed by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it.

The Program. By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing. By a hardly perceptible necessity, it seems as though the concept of writing—no longer indicating a particular, derivative, auxiliary form of language in general (whether understood as communication, relation, expression, signification, constitution of meaning or thought, etc.), no longer designating the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier, the signifier of the signifier—is beginning to go beyond the extension of language. In all senses of the word, writing thus comprehends language.

Footnotes:

history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the inside and the outside, ideality and non-ideality, universal and non-universal, transcendental and empirical, etc.

With an irregular and essentially precarious success, this movement would apparently have tended, as toward its telos, to confine writing to a secondary and instrumental function: translator of a full speech that was fully present (present to itself, to its signified, to the other, the very condition of the theme of presence in general), technics in the service of language, spokesman, interpreter of an origin-ary speech itself shielded from interpretation.

Technics in the service of language: I am not invoking a general essence of technics which would be already familiar to us and would help us in understanding the narrow and historically determined concept of writing as an example. I believe on the contrary that a certain sort of question about the meaning and origin of writing precedes, or at least merges with, a certain type of question about the meaning and origin of technics. That is why the notion of technics can never simply clarify the notion of writing.

It is therefore as if what we call language could have been in its origin and in its end only a moment, an essential but determined mode, a phenomenon, an aspect, a species of writing. And as if it had succeeded in making us forget this, and in willfully misleading us, only in the course of an adventure: as that adventure itself. All in all a short enough adventure. It merges with the history that has associated technics and logoscenteric metaphysics for nearly three millennia. And it now seems to be approaching what is really its own exhaustion: under the circumstances—and this is no more than one example among others—of this death of the civilization of the book, of which so much is said and which manifests itself particularly through a convulsive proliferation of libraries. All appearances to the contrary, this death of the book undoubtedly announces (and in a certain sense always has announced) nothing but a death of speech (of a so-called full speech) and a new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing. Announces it at a distance of a few centuries. It is on that scale that we must reckon it here, being careful not to neglect the techniques to which we have just mentioned, which has also taken over the word "writing," and that not fortuitously. For some time now, as a matter of fact, here and there, by a gesture and for motives that are profoundly necessary, whose degradation is easier to denounce than it is to disclose their origin, one says "language" for action, movement, thought, reflection, consciousness, unconsciousness, experience, affectivity, etc. Now we tend to say "writing" for all that and more: to designate not only the physical gestures of literal pictographic or ideographic inscription, but also the totality of what makes it possible: and also, beyond the signifying face, the signified face itself. And thus we say "writing" for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural "writing." One might also speak of athletic writing, and with even greater certainty of military or political writing in view of the techniques that govern those domains today. All this to describe not only the system of notations secondarily connected with these activities but the essence and the content of these activities themselves. It is also in this sense that the contemporary biologist speaks of writing and program in relation to the most elementary processes of Information within the living cell. And, finally, whether it has essential limits or not, the entire field covered by the cybernetic program will be the field of writing.

If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to oust all metaphysical concepts—including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory—until recently severed to separate the machine from man, we must conserve the notion of writing, trace, gramme [written mark], or grapheme, until its own historicometaphysical characteristic is also exposed. Even before being determined as human (with all the distinctive characteristics that have always been attributed to man and the entire system of significations that they imply) or nonhuman, the gramme—or the grapheme—would thus name the element [the written mark]. An element without simplicity. An element, whether it is understood as the medium or as the irreducible atom, of the arch-synthesis in general, of what one must forbid oneself to define within the system of oppositions of metaphysics, of what consequently one should not even call experience in general, that is to say the origin of meaning in general.

This situation has always already been announced. Why is it today in the process of making itself known as such and after the fact? This question would call forth an interminable analysis. Let us simply choose some points of departure in order to introduce the limited remarks to which I shall confine myself. I have already alluded to theoretical mathematics: its writing—whether understood as a sensible graphie [manner of writing] (and that already presupposes an identity, 1)

1 I shall deal with this problem more directly in La Voix et le phénomène (Paris, 1967) [Speech and Phenomenon] (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
therefore an ideality, of its form, which in principle renders absurd the so easily admitted notion of the "sensible signifier"), or understood as the ideal synthesis of signifiers or a trace operative on another level, or whether it is understood, more profoundly, as the passage of the one to the other—has never been absolutely linked with a phonetic production. Within cultures practicing so-called phonetic writing, mathematics is not just an enclave. That is mentioned by all historians of writing; they recall at the same time the imperfections of alphabetic writing, which passed for so long as the most convenient and "the most intelligent" writing. This enclave is also the place where the practice of scientific language challenges intrinsically and with increasing profundity the ideal of phonetic writing and all its implicit metaphysics (metaphysics itself), particularly, that is, the philosophical idea of the épistémé (Greek: knowledge); also of istoria [history], a concept profoundly related to it in spite of the dissociation or opposition which has distinguished one from the other during one phase of their common progress. History and knowledge, istoria and épistémé have always been determined (and not only etymologically or philosophically) as detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence.

But beyond theoretical mathematics, the development of the practical methods of information retrieval extends the possibilities of the "message" vastly, to the point where it is no longer the "written" translation of a language, the transporting of a signified which could remain spoken in its integrity. It goes hand in hand with an extension of phonography and of all the means of conserving the spoken language, of making it function without the presence of the speaking subject. This development, coupled with that of anthropology and of the history of writing, teaches us that phonetic writing, the medium of the great metaphysical, scientific, technical, and economic adventure of the West, is limited in space and time and limits itself even as it is in the process of imposing its laws upon the cultural areas that had escaped it. But this nonfortuitous conjunction of cybernetics and the "human sciences" of writing leads to a more profound reversal. The Signifier and Truth. The "rationality"—but perhaps that word should be abandoned for reasons that will appear at the end of this sentence—which governs a writing thus enlarged and radicalized, no longer issues from a logos [discourse]. Further, it inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of truth. All the metaphysical determinations of truth, and even the one beyond metaphysical ontotology that Heidegger reminds us of, are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos, in whatever sense it is understood: in the pre-Socratic or the philosophical sense, in the sense of God's infinite understanding or in the anthropological sense, in the pre-Hegelian or the post-Hegelian sense. Within this logos, the original and essential link to the phoné has never been broken. It would be easy to demonstrate this and I shall attempt such a demonstration later. As has been more or less implicitly determined, the essence of the phoné would be immediately proximate to that which within "thought" as logos relates to "meaning," produces it, receives it, speaks it, "composes" it. If, for Aristotle, for example, "spoken words (ou en tê phonê) are the symbols of mental experience (pathêmas tes psychê) and written words are the symbols of spoken words" (De interpretatione, 1, 16a 3), it is because the voice, producer of the first symbols, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind. Producer of the first signifier, it is not just a simple signifier among others. It signifies "mental experiences" which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance. Between being and mind, things and feelings, there would be a relationship of translation or natural signification: between mind and logos, a relationship of conventional symbolization. And the first convention, which would relate immediately to the order of natural and universal signification, would be produced as spoken language. Written language would establish the conventions, interlinking other conventions with them.

Just as all men have not the same writing so all men have not the same speech sounds, but mental experiences, of which these are the primary symbols (semêla phônês), are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images. (De interpretatione, 1, 16a. Édels added)

The feelings of the mind, expressing things naturally, constitute a sort of universal language which can then efface itself. It is the stage of transparency. Aristotle can sometimes omit it without risk.6 In every case, the voice is closest to the signified whether it is determined strictly as sense (thought or lived) or more loosely as thing. All signifiers, and first and foremost the written signifier, are derivative with regard to what would wed the voice indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense, indeed to the thing itself (whether it is done in the Aristotelian manner that we have just indicated or in the manner of medieval

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6 This is shown by Pierre Aubenque (Le Problème de l’être chez Aristote [Paris, 1966]), pp. 106 ff.)

In the course of a provocative analysis, to which I am here indebted, Aubenque remarks: "In other texts, to be sure, Aristotle designates as symbol the relationship between language and things: 'It is not possible to bring the things themselves to the discussion, but, instead of things, we can use their names as symbols.' The intermediary constituted by the mental experience is here suppressed or at least neglected, but this suppression is legitimate, since mental experiences behaving like things, things can be substituted for them immediately. On the other hand, one cannot by any means substitute names for things" (pp. 107-8).
This epoch of the logos thus debases writing considered as mediation of mediation and as a fall into the exteriority of meaning. To this epoch belongs the difference between signified and signifier, or at least the strange separation of their "parallelism," and the exteriority, however externalized, of the one to the other. This appurtenance is organized and hierarchized in a history. The difference between signified and signifier belongs in a profound and implicit way to the totality of the great epoch covered by the history of metaphysics, and in a more explicit and more systematically articulated way to the narrower epoch of Christian creationism and infinitism when these appropriate the resources of Greek conceptuality. This appurtenance is essential and irreducible; one cannot retain the convenience or the "scientific truth" of the Stoic and later medieval opposition between signans [signifier] and signatum [signified] without also bringing with it all its metaphysico-theological roots. To these roots adheres not only the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible—already a great deal—with all that it controls, namely, metaphysics in its totality. And this distinction is generally accepted as self-evident by the most careful linguists and semiotists, even by those who believe that the scientificity of their work begins where metaphysics ends. Thus, for example:

As modern structural thought has clearly realized, language is a system of signs and linguistics is part and parcel of the science of signs, or semiotics (Saussure's semiology). The medieval definition of sign—"aliquid quod pro aliquo"—has been resurrected and put forward as still valid and productive. Thus the constitutive mark of any sign in general and of any linguistic sign in particular is its twofold character: every linguistic unit is bipartite and involves both aspects—one sensible and the other intelligible, or in other words, both the signans [signifier] (Saussure's signifiant) and the signatum [signified] (signifié). These two constituents of a linguistic sign (and of sign in general) necessarily suppose and require each other.9

But to these metaphysico-theological roots many other hidden sediments cling. The semiotic or, more specifically, linguistic "science" cannot therefore hold on to the difference between signifier and signified—the very idea of the sign—without the difference between sensible and intelligible, certainly, but also without retaining, more profoundly and more implicitly, and by the same token the reference to a signified able to "take place" in its intelligibility, before its "fall," before any expulsion into the exteriority of the sensible here below. As the

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2 Ibid., p. 341.
Thus, within this epoch, reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos. Even when the thing, the "referent," is not immediately related to the logos of a creator God where it began by being the spoken/thought sense, the signified has at any rate an immediate relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing. When it seems to go otherwise, it is because a metaphoric mediation has insinuated itself into the relationship and has simulated immediacy, the writing of truth in the soul, opposed by (Plato's) Phaedrus (278a) to bad writing (writing in the "literal" and ordinary sense, "sensible" writing, "in space"), the book of Nature and God's writing, especially in the Middle Ages; all that functions as metaphor in these discourses confirms the privilege of the logos and founds the "literal" meaning then given to writing: a sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an eternal verity, eternally thought and spoken in the proximity of a present logos. The paradox to which attention must be paid is this: natural and universal writing, intelligible and nontemporal writing, is thus named by metaphor. A writing that is sensible, finite, and so on, is designated as writing in the literal sense; it is thus thought on the side of culture, technique, and artifice; a human procedure, the rise of a being accidentally incarnated or of a finite creature. Of course, this metaphor remains enigmatic and refers to a "literal" meaning of writing as the first metaphor. This "literal" meaning is yet unthought by the adherents of this discourse. It is not, therefore, a matter of inverting the literal meaning and the figural meaning but of determining the "literal" meaning of writing as metaphoricity itself.

In "The Symbolism of the Book," that excellent chapter of European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, E. R. Curtius describes with great wealth of examples from the Phaedrus to Calderon, until it seemed to be "precisely the reverse" by the "newly attained position of the book."

10 But it seems that this modification, however important in fact it might be, conceals a fundamental continuity. As was the case with the Platonic writing of the truth in the soul, in the Middle Ages too it is a writing understood in the metaphoric sense, that is to say a natural, eternal, and universal writing, the system of signified truth, which is recognized in its dignity. As in the Phaedrus, a certain fallen writing continues to be opposed to it. There remains to be written a history of this metaphor, a metaphor that systematically contrasts divine or natural writing and the human and laborious, finite and artificial inscriptions. It remains to articulate rigorously the stages of that history, as marked by the quotations below, and to follow the theme of God's book (nature or law, indeed natural law) through all its modifications.

exemplariness of the "Rousseauist" moment, which we shall deal with later, begins to be explained. Rousseau repeats the Platonic gesture by referring to another model of presence: self-presence in the senses, in the sensible cogito, which simultaneously carries in itself the inscription of divine law. On the one hand, representative, fallen, secondary, instituted writing, writing in the literal and strict sense, is condemned in [Rousseau's] Essay on the Origin of Languages (it "enervates" speech; to "judge genius" from books is like "painting a man's portrait from his corpse," etc.). Writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death; it exhausts life. On the other hand, on the other face of the same proposition, writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing, is venerated; it is equal in dignity to the origin of value, to the voice of conscience as divine law, to the heart, to sentiment, and so forth.

The Bible is the most sublime of all books... but it is not at all in a few sparse pages that one should look for God's law, but in the human heart where His hand deigned to write (Rousseau, Lettre à Varennes). If the natural law had been written only in the human reason, it would be little capable of directing most of our actions. But it is also engraved in the heart of man in ineffable characters... There it cries to him (Rousseau, L'Etat de guerre).

Natural writing is immediately united to the voice and to breath. Its nature is not grammatical but pneumatological. It is hieratic, very close to the interior holy voice of the Profession of Faith, to the voice one hears upon retreating into oneself—full and truthful presence of the divine voice to our inner sense: "The more I retreat into myself, the more I consult myself, the more I feel that I resemble to myself. In the depths of my heart written by nature in characters which nothing can efface."19

There is much to say about the fact that the native unity of the voice and writing is prescriptive. Arche-speech is writing because it is a law. A natural law. The beginning word is understood, in the intimacy of self-presence, as the voice of the other and as commandment. There is therefore a good and a bad writing: the good and natural is the divine inscription in the heart and the soul; the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body. A modification well within the Platonic diagram: writing of the soul and of the body, writing of the interior and of the exterior, writing of conscience and of the passions, as there is a voice of the soul and a voice of the body.
"Consciousness is the voice of the soul, the passions are the voice of the body." 26 One must constantly go back toward the "voice of nature," the "divine voice of nature," that merges with the divine inscription and prescription; one must encounter oneself within it, enter into a dialogue within its signs, speak and respond to oneself in its pages.

It was as if nature had spread out all magnificence in front of our eyes to offer its text for our consideration. . . . I have therefore closed all the books. Only one is open to all eyes. It is the book of Nature. In this great and sublime book I learn to serve and adore its author.

The good writing has therefore always been comprehended. Comprehended as that which had to be comprehended: within a nature or a natural law, created or not, but first thought within an eternal presence. Comprehended, therefore, within a totality, and enveloped in a volume or a book. The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier. This totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logoscentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and, as I shall specify later, against difference in general. If I distinguish the text from the book, as it is now under way in all domains, it is only to acknowledge book and text. That necessary violence responds to a violence that was no less necessary.

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From "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" by Jacques Derrida

We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things. Montaigne

Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an "event," if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural—-or structuralist—thought to reduce to or to


26 ibid., 249.