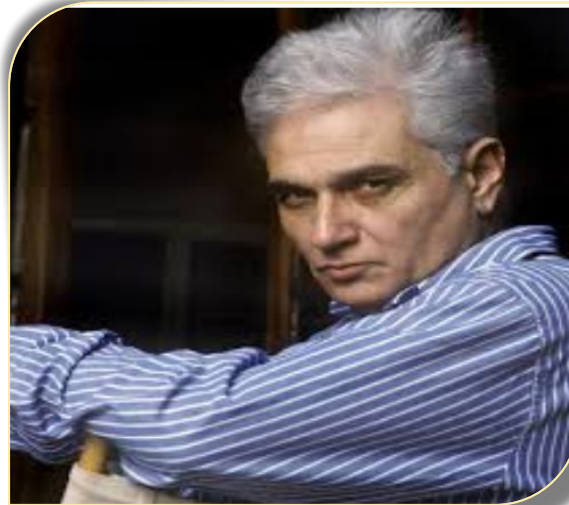


## Synopsis:

JACQUES DERRIDA was one of the most well-known twentieth century philosophers. He was also one of the most prolific. He was the founder of 'DECONSTRUCTION', a way of criticizing not only both literary and philosophical texts but also political institutions.



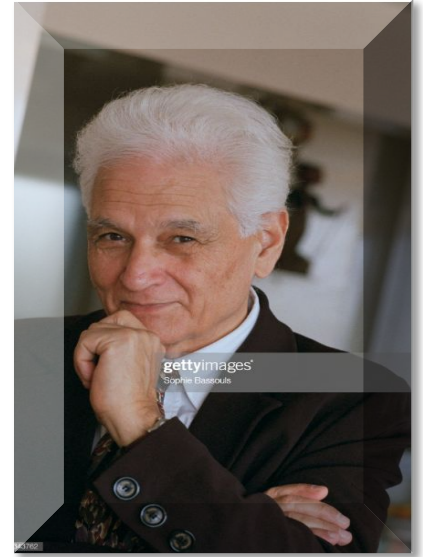
## About Jacques

### Derrida:

Jacques Derrida was a French philosopher. He was born in French Algeria on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 1930. He was born to Sephardic Jewish parents in French governed Algeria.

He educated in the French tradition and went to France in 1949. He studied at the elite Ecole Normale Supérieure(ENS), and taught philosophy.

From the 1960s, he published numerous books and essays on an immense range of topics and taught and lectured throughout the world, including at Yale University & the University of California, Irvine, attaining an international celebrity comparable only to that of Jean-Paul-Sartre a generation earlier.





Derrida was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2003, while reduced his speaking & travelling engagements. He died in a hospital in Paris in the early hours of October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004.



## His Works:

Derrida's work is mostly associated with Post-Structuralism and Post- Modernism. His work has had impact on anthropology, sociology, semiotics, literary studies, etc. He was highly influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger. Derrida was a member of the 'American Academy of Arts and Sciences.'

During his career, Derrida published more than 40 books, together with hundreds of essays and public presentations. In the Anglo sphere, 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. Particularly in his later writings, Derrida addressed ethical & political themes in his work.



Some critics consider “Speech and Phenomena” (1967) to be his most important work. His major works are:

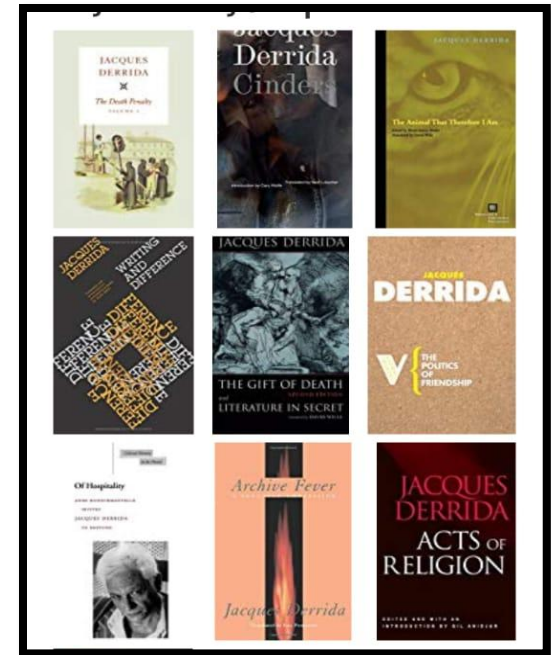
“Of Grammatology” (1967)

“Writing and Difference” (1967)

“Margins of Philosophy” (1972)

These writings influenced various activities and political movements.

He became a well-known and influential public figure, while his approach to philosophy and the notorious abstruseness of his work made him controversial.

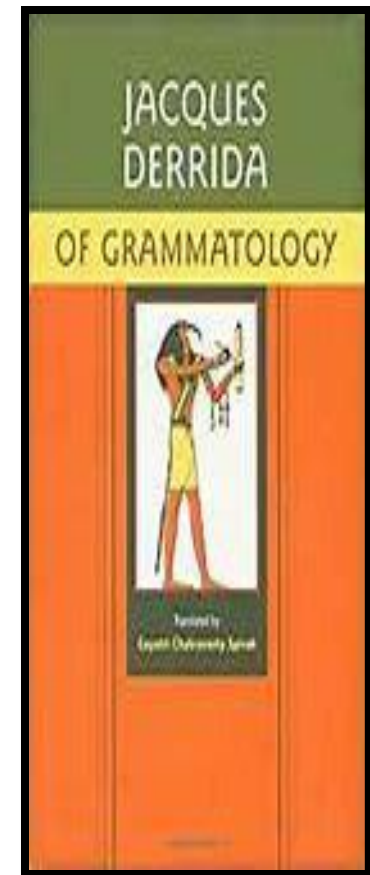


## About His Major

### Works:

#### •'Of Grammatology':

'Of Grammatology' is considered to be a foundational text in the Post-Structuralist Movement. Unlike the structuralist Movement which precedes it, post-structuralism is most concerned with the reader of a text and the context in which something is read. Post-structuralism, therefore, takes into account the influence of culture and society on how we come to understand the world around us.



He argues that structuralism presumes absolute truth. In addition, he questions how we come to derive meaning from language and he critiques how Western philosophy uses language. He believes that speech has become dispossessed from meaning through structuralism. In other words, language gets in the way of what we are trying to say. He coins the phrase “signifier of the signifier” to question what is meant by the language we use. This is based off of the linguistic and philosophical terms “signifier” and “signified”. The signifier is what we use to express meaning. Meanwhile, the signified is the concept or idea behind the signifier. Derrida believes that more often than not, structuralism uses signifiers to point to other signifiers. When this happens there is nothing signified, or there is no meaning behind what is being said.



It is a bit ironic that Derrida writes about how Western philosophy has come to lose its meaning through the use of language, because his writing can be so dense and difficult to understand. However, the ideas are quite simple. What we say does not mean the same thing to everyone. Therefore, a text is not stable and absolute.

Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* is a fundamental work of what has come to be called deconstructionist criticism. "Grammatology" is a term borrowed from **Ignace J. Gelb**, a linguist and ancient historian who first used it in his 'A Study of Writing': *The Foundation of Grammatology* (1952). Derrida's *Of Grammatology* re-examines and aims to replace traditional Western logocentrism. By logocentrism, Derrida means the identification of the words of a text with the truth the text contains.



Language conveys signs, and signs contain two elements: the signifier (the physical symbol) and the signified (the thought beyond the symbol). The signifier and signified are ever present, and they are always distinct from one another. They may be distinct only to a small degree, or they may have a wide separation. For example, the coldness of ice cream might make one person think of winter, another person of a summer at the beach, and a third person of the pain from a sensitive tooth.



It is thus apparent that there is something like a logo centric hierarchy of signification. Things signified have a greater or lesser validity insofar as they approach the universal, or in more metaphysical terms, insofar as they approach a premium signet-the signified that requires no signification. This first and highest signified validates all those that are lower. Furthermore, the primum signatum is “logo logically” essential, and without it a chaos of signifier would make a sign lose all signification.

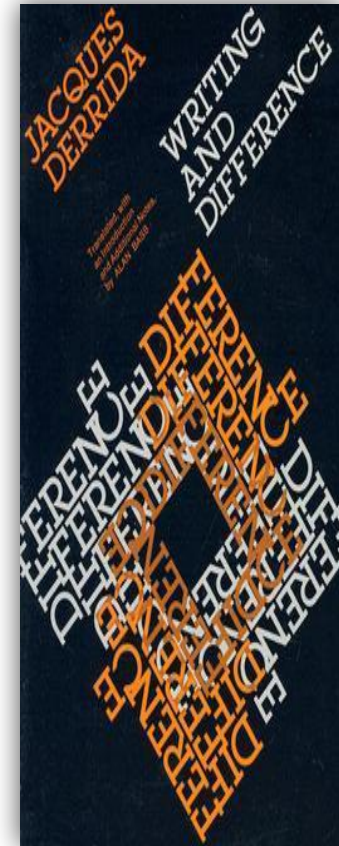


Presence validates the signified because one cannot doubt that which clearly exists; the higher the signified, to greater its degree of presence. Cold as signifier of winter has a greater degree of presence for anyone who has experienced winter. It is likely to be more universal than cold as signifier of ice cream if one has never eaten ice cream.



## 'Writing and Difference':

Jacques Derrida initiated a seismic wave throughout the field of literary criticism with the essays collected in *Writing and Difference*, in particular with the essay "structure, sign, and play in the Discourse of the Human Science," which was first presented at a conference at Johns Hopkins University in October, 1966. Through his challenges to structuralism, Derrida helped give rise to the movement in literary theory known as post-structuralism.



The book presents a series of loosely affiliated essays from earlier presentations and publications, and it ends with a new essay titled “Ellipsis.” Taken together, the essays explore the key strategies of what came to be called deconstruction, despite Derrida’s own insistence that he created no system or school of thought. The essays in the collection reflect ongoing efforts to avoid closure by introducing and then changing the vocabulary through which Derrida interprets a variety of writers, from philosophers to poets. The essays both discuss and demonstrate in various ways the role that writing plays in creating difference.



This crucial term, “difference,” gives rise to the Derridean alternative, “différance.” The change from difference to différance can be read but not heard—that is, while they appear differently on the page, the two words have the same pronunciation, so the neologism can be specified orally only by reference to written language (by uttering a phrase such as “différance with a”). The French verb *différer* means “to differ” (as a thing differs from another thing), “to disagree” (as in the phrase “I beg to differ”), and “to defer.” The noun *différance*, from *différer*, creates a substantive noun from only the first of those meanings. Thus, in the transition from verb to noun, there is meaning fall out of the language. Derrida invents the French word *différance* for two reasons: to create a noun that bears those lost meanings (disagreement and deferral, as well as difference) and to demonstrate the importance of writing over speaking as a way to destabilize fixed meaning and to create spaces in apparently closed structures.



Each of the essays in *Writing and Difference* works with specific texts and examples to find the spaces of difference that are covered up by the surface coherence of writing. Derrida breaks with the philosophical tradition of privileging the spoken word as the marker of absolute metaphysical presence when he turns to writing as the field that initiates human history.

The first essay, “Force and Signification,” reads literary critic Jean Rousset’s “*Forme et signification*”: *Essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel* (1962; form and meaning: essays on literary structures from Corneille to Claudel) in order to destabilize the binary opposition between form and meaning. Derrida’s own title evokes the idea of force, which he identifies as the element absent from Rousset’s structuralist ordering of the authors whom he discusses. Derrida takes pains to reproduce portions of Rousset’s arguments before making his own claim that those arguments rely on external, pseudoscientific systems that constrain rather than interpret the works.



This specific critique of Rousset entails a general critique of structuralist approaches to literature, which privilege the synchrony of form and meaning over the historical force that constantly opens up new readings. Derrida admits that his desire to avoid binary opposition is utopian, but he nonetheless insists that the attempt is necessary. He closes the essay by evoking Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's writing on the union of the Apollonian with the Dionysian, comparing Nietzsche's use of "Dionysian" to his own use of the term "force."



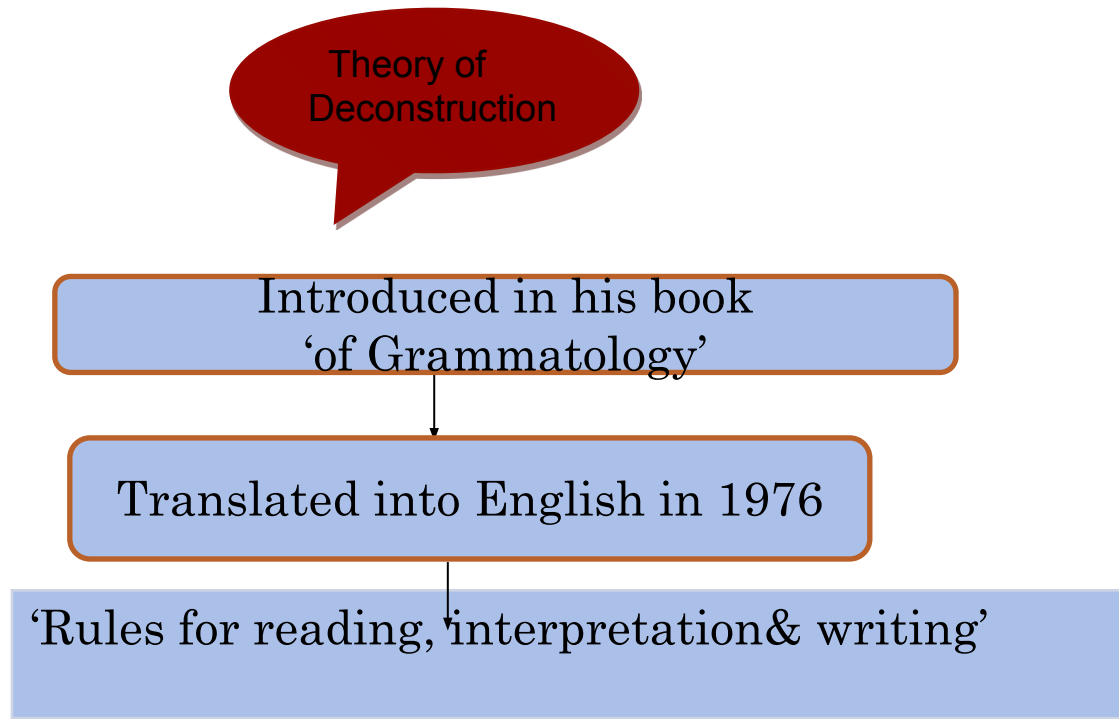
## Deconstruction Theory:

Jacques Derrida introduced the concept of 'deconstruction' in his book 'of Grammatology', published in France in 1967 and translated into English in 1976.

Derrida inaugurated the theory of deconstruction in the late 1960s; it became a great influence on literary studies in the late 1970s. Deconstruction upends the Western metaphysical tradition. It represents a complex response to a variety of theoretical and philosophical movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most notably Husserlian phenomenology, Saussurean & French structuralism and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis.



The term denotes a particular kind of practice in reading and, thereby, a method of criticism and mode of analytical inquiry. Deconstruction can perhaps best be described as a theory of reading which aims to undermine the logic of opposition within texts.



# Critic's Views:

Deconstruction, like critical strategies based on *a* Marxism, feminism, semiotics, and anthropology, focuses not on the themes and imagery of its objects but rather on the linguistic & institutional systems that frame the production of texts.

*“A close and critical reading of a written text to uncover the ways of thinking that constrain our impressions or conceptualization of the world.”*



*“Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the struggle of text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air.”*

**- J. Hillis Miller**



*“Deconstruction effectively displaced other intellectual programs in the minds and much of the work of the literary Avant- Garde.”*

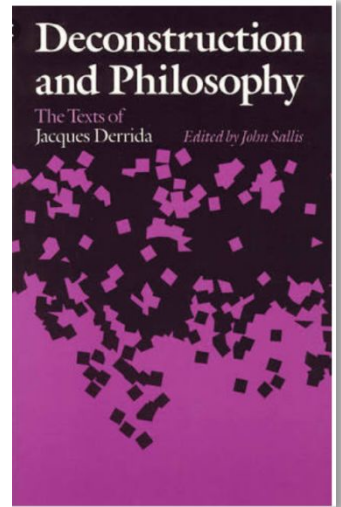
Paul A. Bove



# Derrida's Philosophy: Deconstruction

According to Derrida,  
'All western thought since  
Plato bore a strong desire for a  
centre- a fixed origin, a Truth.'

Derrida found this idea to be problematic  
because a centre attempts to exclude all  
other possible meanings. He believed that  
meaning is unstable and that all  
possibilities should be considered, and his  
beliefs apply to philosophy,  
literature and politics.



Deconstruction is not a method. It develops a rather complicated discourse on the concept of method. Derrida's definition of Deconstruction as,

*“Discourse on the concept of method is an interesting one.”*

According to Derrida, Deconstruction is not a fixed method or system. He picks up various texts & tries to analyse the language and shows how language goes against the very nature of the text. Many critics feel that Deconstruction is parasite that works through other texts. Another interesting aspect of Deconstruction is that all truth articulated in language is in fact an error. Therefore as Derrida believes all truth claims are civilization fantasies to tell a truth is to lie because language is basically a factive medium. Language falsifies the world and creates an illusion of reality.

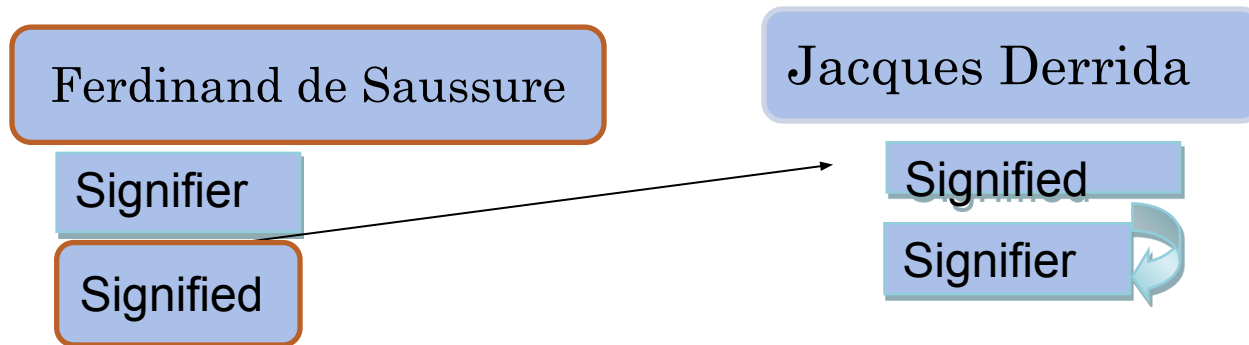


Deconstructive critics look at the way that plural, multiple meanings occur in works of literature, and how those multiple meanings interact with one another. Deconstructive critics also look for ways in which either/ or readings in a given text break down or become unstable.



# How Deconstruction Works?

Deconstruction theory embraces the precept that meaning is always uncertain and that it is not the task of the literary critic to illuminate meaning in a given text. Derrida began with Saussure's ideas of the signified and the signifier: an idea (signified) is represented by a sign (signifier), but the sign can never be the same as the idea. The French term 'différer' used in deconstruction discourse refers both to the difference between signified & signifier and to the way the signified defers meaning to the signifier. The signified contains a trace of the signifier, but also of its opposite.



According to Derrida,

1) The system of language exists in our mind whether it written or spoken.

2) Language works in social order also in a creative way. Derrida says that there is not any difference between writing and speaking.

3) Everything is more or less a language game.

As Derrida points out, ***“There is nothing outside the text.”***

4) Everything for Derrida was a text.



## **Supplement:**

By its very nature, language lacks the centre so Derrida emphasizes the element of supplement.

Roussaeu says:

“Writing is a dangerous supplement.”

According to Roussaeu, writing is supplement of speech. Derrida says that supplement is not to be taken in negative way. In this way, Derrida deconstruct Roussaeu's argument.

## **Binary Oppositions:**

‘Deconstruction’ takes apart such oppositions by showing how the devalued, empty concept lives inside the valued, positive one. The outside inhabits the inside. Consider, for example, the opposition between nature and culture.



The idea of 'nature' depends on the idea of 'culture', and yet culture is part of nature. Its fantasy to conceive of the non-human environment as a pristine, innocent setting fenced off and protected from the products of human endeavour- cities, roads, farms, landfills.

The most critical aspect of Deconstruction is its concept of Aporia (figure of speech). Aporia has been the most misunderstood word. Its English translation "undecidability" does not fully explain its force. One cannot move deliberately to a moment of aporia through one's reading. It is a sort of experience that stabilizes and destabilizes the process of reading.



# **The strategy for Deconstructive reading is:**

- 1) To point out figurative language as contradictory.
- 2) To find out Aporia.

## **Main Characteristics of Deconstruction:**

- 1) Deconstruction is often regarded as undermining all tendencies toward systematization.
  - 2) The most fundamental project of deconstruction is to display the operations of 'logo centrism' in any "text".
- 'Logo centrism' refers to any system of thought which is founded on the stability and authority.



3) Deconstruction tries to reinstate language within the connections of the various terms that have conventionally dominated Western thought: the connections between thought & reality, self & world, subject & object.

4) For deconstructionists, there is no 'truth' or 'reality' which somehow stands outside or behind language: truth is a relation of linguistic terms, and reality is a construct, ultimately religious, social, political, and economic, but always of language, of various linguistic registers.



# 1) Impact of Deconstruction:


2) Takes away from the text because you are looking for what's not there.

3) Makes literature seem like 'word play'.

4) Humanists view it as a 'wedge between life & literature'.

5) Looks for the Ideologies that are in our language.

Either reality is objectively knowable or reality is not objectively knowable. Either absolute truth exists or absolute truth does not exist. Either there is one way to truth or there is no one way to truth. Either there is one way to God or there is no one way to God. Since the second statements in each of these four sentences are clearly false, we must conclude, therefore, that reality is indeed objectively knowable, that absolute truth does indeed exist, that there is indeed one way to truth, and that there is indeed one way to God. Similarly, deconstruction does not claim that concepts have no boundaries, but that their boundaries can be parsed in many different ways as they are inserted into new contexts of judgment.



According to Derrida, the concept of centre goes on changing. In language study the centre which we look for is absent.

**According to Derrida, philosophers assume two positions:**

1) Being that never change.

2) Becoming that is changing.

Classical thoughts give importance to being and Derrida & other deconstructionists give importance to becoming.

Deconstructionists are what  
**M.H.Abrams** calls,

***“Transformers are to subvert conventional meaning.”***


Derrida's views on the nature of language and structure, the importance and ambiguousness of centre, his concept of truth and knowledge are important.



## Analysis:

Here, According to Derrida, 'Deconstruction' is not an analysis, a critique, or a method. It is a constant reminder of the etymological link between 'crises' and 'criticism'. It's a theory to bring out the hidden felicity of law. There are various fields in which we regularly commit mistakes, but are unable to find those out, this theory by its inherent nature helps to find the loopholes.

In a deconstruction analysis, you are looking to reverse the dominant & non-dominant binary oppositions. Derrida derived this method because ***“By deconstructing constraints, he tried to open new ways of thinking and knowing.”*** The deconstructive reader exposes the grammatological structure of the text by locating the moment in the text which harbours the unbalancing of the equation, the sleight of hand at the limit of a text which cannot be dismissed as a contradiction.



## Conclusion:

Since the surfacing of the term 'Deconstruction' in design journalism in the mid-1980s, the word has served to label architecture, graphic design, products, fashion, layered and fragmented forms imbued with ambiguous futuristic overtones. In all the fields it influenced, deconstruction called attention to rhetorical and performance aspects of language use, and it encouraged scholars to consider not merely what a text says but rather on the relationship and potential conflict between what a texts says and what it does.

Finally, the meaning of 'deconstruction' in literature is that “a philosophical movement and theory of literary criticism that questions traditional assumptions about certainty, identity and truth; asserts that words can only refer to other words; and attempts to demonstrate how statements about any text subvert their own meanings.”



- Bibliography:

- French:

- *Lecriture et la difference*

- *De la grammatologie*

- *La dissemination*

*“Speech and Phenomena” and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison

*“Of Grammatology”*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak

*“Writing and Difference”*, trans. Alan Bass

*“Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction ”*, trans. John P. Leavey

## FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

- Looked at language Diachronically.
- He traced words over time looking for the changes in sounds and meanings.



## JACQUES DERRIDA

