

A painting of a person with short, light-colored hair, seen from behind, sitting on a blue wooden chair. They are looking out a window with a dark frame at a landscape with trees and a building. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn. The overall mood is contemplative and quiet.

Phallogo/Logo/Anthropo  
-centrism

Thinking (at) the Limits  
of the Metaphysics of Presence

It could be argued that few developments in the somewhat recent history of Western thought have been more controversial, and more transformative, than the advent of deconstruction, in particular as it crystallized in the early writings of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). Whether we are concerned with the theory of sense and meaning, the boundaries of the concept of life, the ontological purview of ethnocentrism, or the possibility of anything being truly proper and inalienable to any entity or being—these are questions whose stakes were significantly altered after Derrida’s powerful irruption in the French philosophical scene with the publication in 1967 of *De la grammatologie* (*Of Grammatology*), *La voix et le phénomène* (*Voice and Phenomenon*), and *L’écriture et la différence* (*Writing and Difference*).

This course embarks on an intensive study of some of Derrida’s earlier works with the goal of seeking some clarity regarding the following questions: What does Derrida call “the metaphysics of presence”? And how does Derrida establish a relation between the “metaphysics of presence” and the many centrism (“logo-,” “phono-,” “phallogo-,” “anthropo-,” “ethno-,” “carno-,”) that he coined throughout his career in order to track the hegemonic ontological and epistemic structures that inform the historical worlds that we have inherited, characterized as they are by the expansion of European (onto)logics at the very moment in which European imperialism, in its traditional guise, would appear to be a thing of the past.

While exploring these questions through a careful attention of three major early works of Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Glas*, we will also pay attention to Derrida’s interrogation of the linguistic turn, his compelling rethinking of representation and the possibilities of singularity in language (including the very status of the proper name). We will try to get a sense of deconstruction’s own *mise en écriture* as a translational, trans-medial practice that is constantly rewriting the self (and its self) otherwise, in a way that is animated by the desire for a radical transformation of the (ethico-political, onto-epistemic) conditions of existence that shape the present, while reaffirming its debt to the best of the West’s intellectual heritage and remaining accountable to the worst for which this tradition is responsible.

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