What is postmodernism? Here at last is a long overdue graphic study guide to the maddeningly enigmatic concept used to define our cultural condition in the late twentieth century.

Postmodernism claims that "modernity" which began with 'the Enlightenment', industrialism, Darwin and Marx, has collapsed. We now live in an endlessly 'contemporary culture' full of contested meanings. The resulting postmodern culture embodies parody, pastiche and cultural cross-over. It is a virtual world of hyperreality containing such strange phenomena as post-Holocaust amnesia, Disneyland, cyberspace, and Fukuyama's proclaimed 'end of history'.

The author, founding editor of the **'Introducing...'** series of graphic study guides, takes us on a roller coaster ride through structuralism, deconstruction and semiotics in the company of postmodern icons such as Foucault, Levi-Strauss and Barthes. His brilliant text is superbly illustrated by Chris Garratt.

I LOVE YOU MADLY.

HAVE YOU BEEN READING THOSE BARBARA CARTLAND NOVELS AGAIN?

INTRODUCING
Postmodernism

Richard Appignanesi and Chris Garratt
with Ziauddin Sardar and Patrick Curry

A "Real" Postmodernism?

If there is a "real" postmodernism, it is recognizable by three urgent items on its agenda.
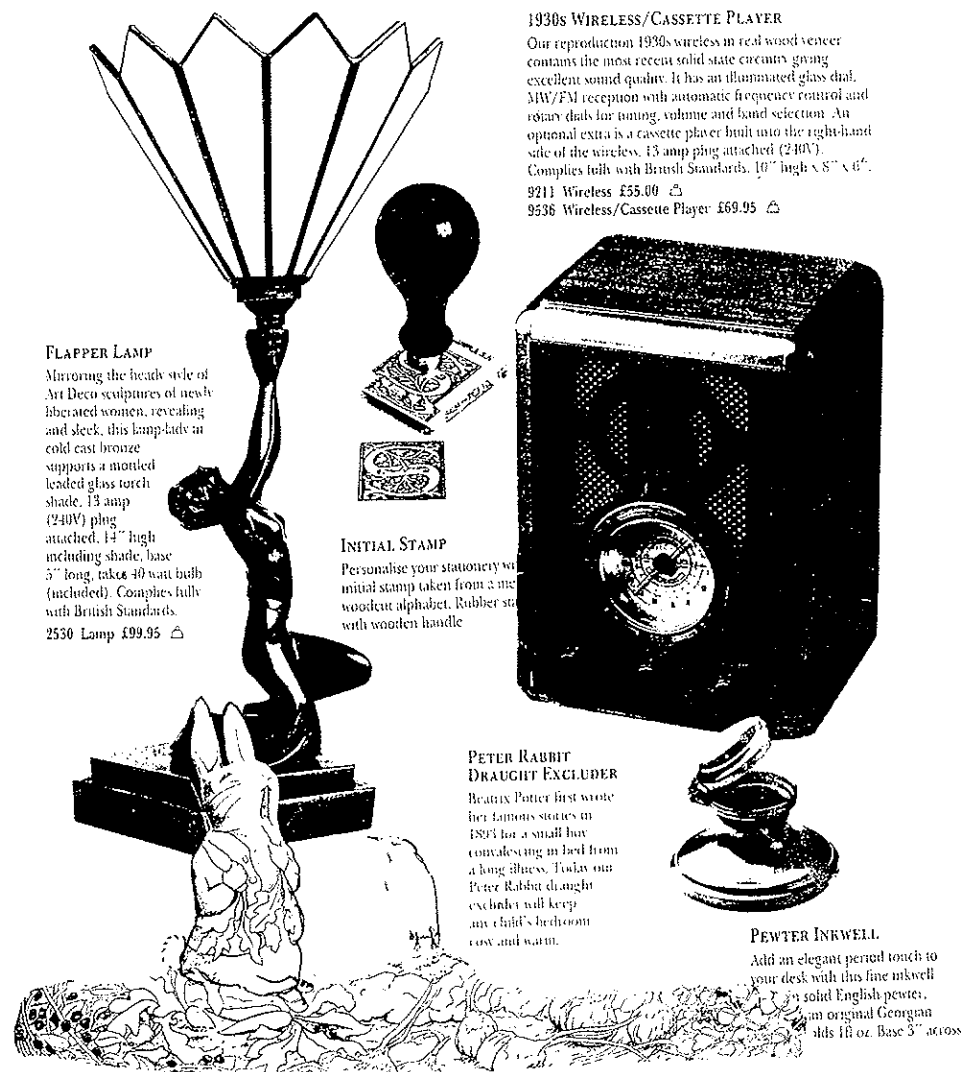
The first item is the dilemma of **reproducibility** in the age of mass consumerism. Walter Benjamin's 1936 prophecy of an elimination of the aura and autonomy of original works of art through mass reproduction has not come true. We have seen it have the opposite effect. Multi-million dollar prices for originals might be said to be proportional to their availability in mass reproduction which has made them all the more desirable to own.

THE MORE VAN GOGH'S "SUNFLOWERS" BECOMES A POSTER CLICHÉ, THE MORE YOU HAVE TO PAY FOR THE **ORIGINAL**.

A **consumerist aura** now extends to anything with a halo of the relic - Marilyn Monroe's panties or Al Capone's Pontiac - or anything with nostalgia value - art deco radios, bracket phones, biscuit tins - because they are the souvenirs of yesteryear's ancient manufacture.

1930s WIRELESS/CASSETTE PLAYER
Our reproduction 1930s wireless in real wood veneer contains the most recent solid state circuitry giving excellent sound quality. It has an illuminated glass dial. MW/FM reception with automatic frequency control and rotary dials for tuning, volume and band selection. An optional extra is a cassette player built into the right-hand side of the wireless. 13 amp plug attached (240V). Complies fully with British Standards. 10" high x 8" x 6".
9211 Wireless £55.00
9538 Wireless/Cassette Player £69.95

FLAPPER LAMP
Mirroring the heady style of Art Deco sculptures of newly liberated women, revealing and sleek, this lamp-lady in cold cast bronze supports a mottled leaded glass torch shade. 13 amp (240V) plug attached. 14" high including shade, base 5" long, takes 40 watt bulb (included). Complies fully with British Standards.
2530 Lamp £99.95

INITIAL STAMP
Personalise your stationery with initial stamp taken from a woodcut alphabet. Rubber stamp with wooden handle

PETER RABBIT DRAUGHT EXCLUDER
Beatrix Potter first wrote her famous stories in 1893 for a small boy convalescing in bed from a long illness. Today our Peter Rabbit draught excluder will keep any child's bedroom cosy and warm.

PEWTER INKWELL
Add an elegant period touch to your desk with this fine inkwell in solid English pewter, from original Georgian moulds 18 oz. Base 5" across.

This is **image consumerism**. The reproduced is taking the place of reality or **replacing it as hyper-reality**.
We are living what has **already** been lived and **reproduced** with no reality anymore but that of the cannibalized image.
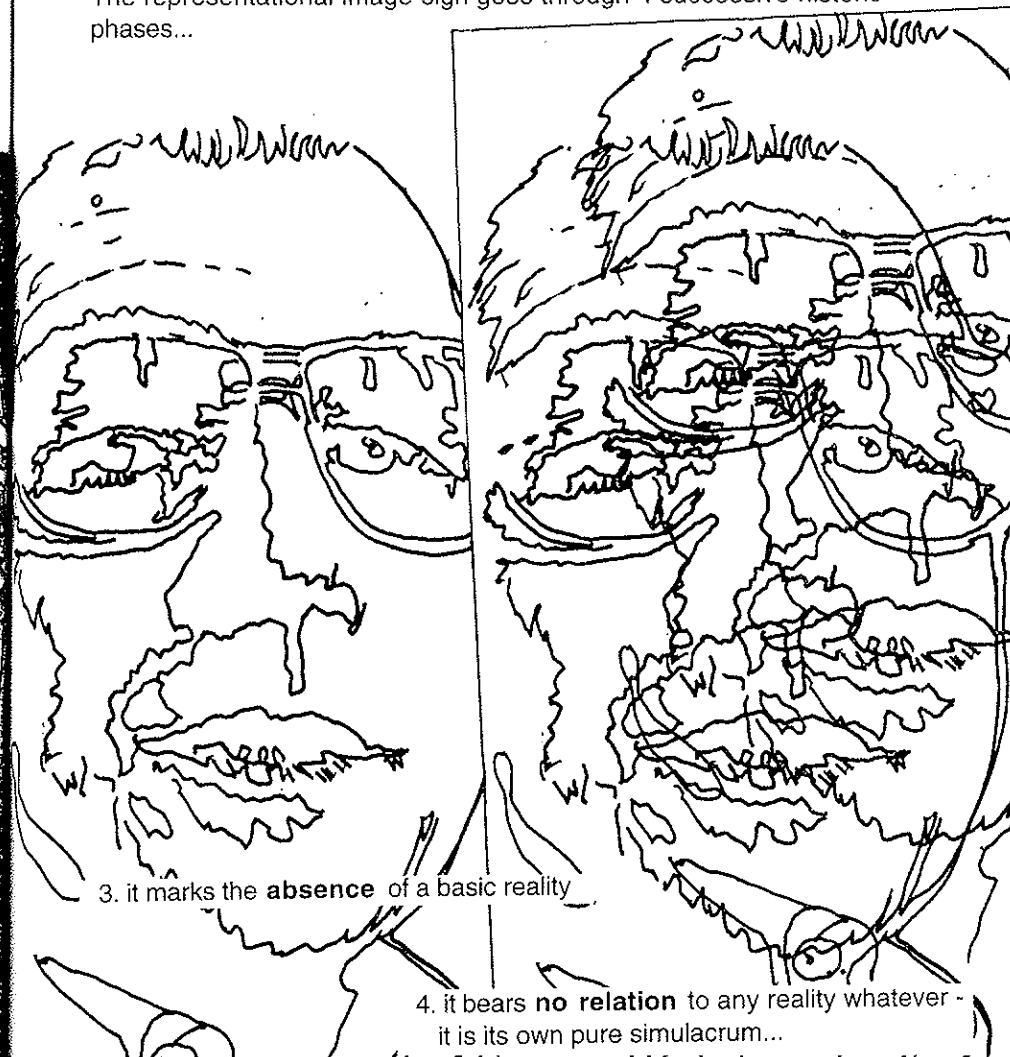
The Simulacrum

It seems that the genealogy of postmodern art can only be disconnected from the modern **in theory.** Theory is not in this sense a culmination but a **negation**, literally, an "end of art." Let's look at the extreme postmodernist conclusion advanced by French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, that the representational image-sign goes through **4 successive historic phases...**

> ART TODAY HAS TOTALLY PENETRATED REALITY.

1. it is the **reflection** of a basic reality

2. it **masks** and **perverts** a basic reality

He means that the border between art and reality has utterly vanished as both have collapsed into the universal **simulacrum**.

The simulacrum is arrived at when the distinction between representation and reality - between signs and what they refer to in the real world - breaks down.
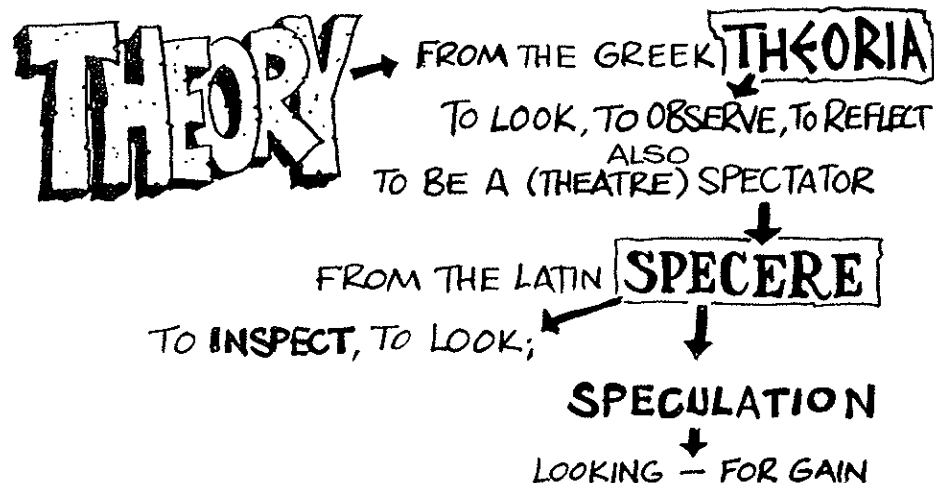
The representational image-sign goes through 4 successive historic phases...

3. it marks the **absence** of a basic reality

4. it bears **no relation** to any reality whatever - it is its own pure simulacrum...
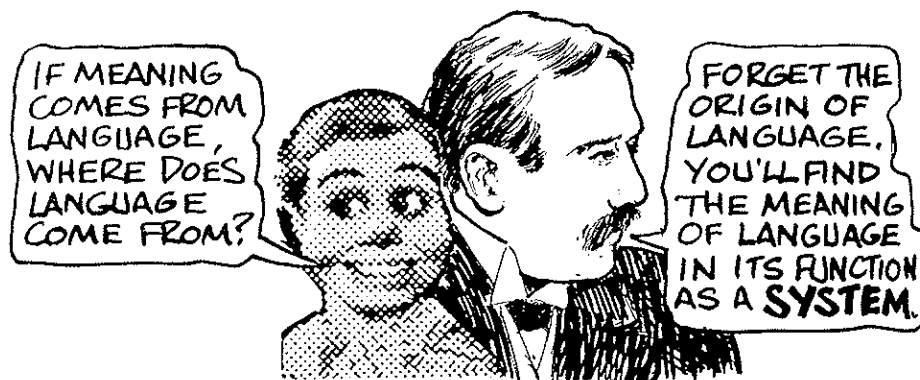
Reality becomes redundant and we have reached **hyper-reality** in which images breed incestuously with each other without reference to reality or meaning.

How is it possible to arrive at the **nullification** of reality, even "in theory"? And what is the **genealogy of a theory** that leads to such a radical conclusion?

PART TWO: THE GENEALOGY OF POSTMODERN THEORY

THEORY → FROM THE GREEK **THEORIA**

TO LOOK, TO OBSERVE, TO REFLECT
ALSO
TO BE A (THEATRE) SPECTATOR

FROM THE LATIN **SPECERE**

TO INSPECT, TO LOOK;
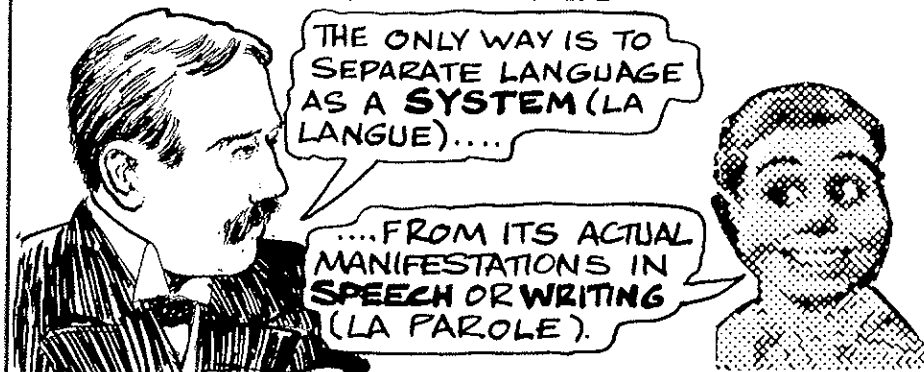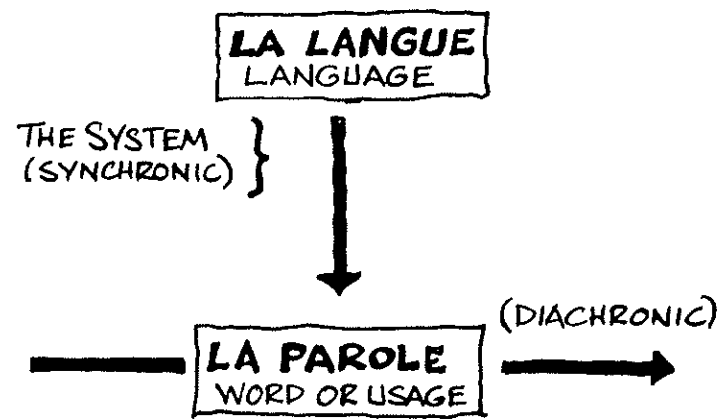
SPECULATION

LOOKING — FOR GAIN

Postmodern theory is a consequence of this century's obsession with language. The most important 20th century thinkers - Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger and others - shifted their focus of analysis away from **ideas** in the mind to the **language** in which thinking is expressed. Philosophers or logicians, linguists or semiologists, they are all language detectives who seem to agree about one thing. To the question, "What permits meaningful thinking?", they reply in different ways, "The structure of language."

IF MEANING COMES FROM LANGUAGE, WHERE DOES LANGUAGE COME FROM?

FORGET THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE. YOU'LL FIND THE MEANING OF LANGUAGE IN ITS FUNCTION AS A **SYSTEM**.

Postmodern theory has its roots in one school of formal linguistics, **structuralism**, chiefly founded by a Swiss professor of linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913).
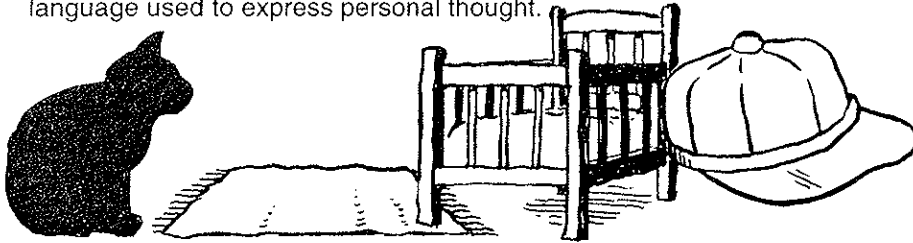
Structuralism

Linguistics before Saussure tended to get bogged down in the search for the historical origins of language which would reveal meaning. Saussure instead viewed the meaning of language as the **function of a system**. He asked himself: how do you isolate a coherent object of linguistics from a confusing morass of language **usages**?

LA LANGUE
LANGUAGE

THE SYSTEM (SYNCHRONIC)

LA PAROLE
WORD OR USAGE

(DIACHRONIC)

THE ONLY WAY IS TO SEPARATE LANGUAGE AS A **SYSTEM** (LA LANGUE)....

....FROM ITS ACTUAL MANIFESTATIONS IN **SPEECH OR WRITING** (LA PAROLE).

• Look for the underlying rules and conventions that enable language to operate.
• Analyze the social and collective dimension of language rather than individual speech.
• Study grammar rather than usage, rules rather than expressions, **models** rather than **data**.
• Find the infrastructure of language common to all speakers on an unconscious level. This is the "deep structure" which need not refer to historical evolution. Structuralism examines the **synchronic** (existing now) rather than the **diachronic** (existing and changing over time).
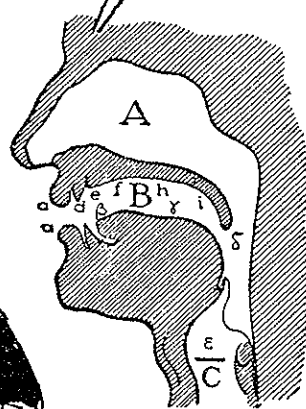
Meanings and Signs

In Saussure's view, the entire set of linguistic meanings (whether past, present or future) is effectively generated from a very small set of possible sounds or **phonemes**. A phoneme is the smallest unit in the sound system that can indicate contrasts in meaning. The word **cat** has 3 phonemes: /c/, /a/, /t/, which differ minimally from **mat,cot,cap,** etc., each generating other meanings that combined grammatically and syntactically can produce extended speech or **discourse**, the code of language used to express personal thought.
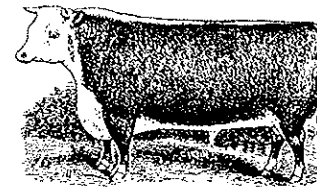
Signification

Saussure proposed that within the language system, the **signifier** (e.g. the word or acoustic image, **ox**) is that which carries meaning, and the **signified** (the concept, **ox**) is that to which it refers.

Signifier and signified together $\}\ \dfrac{Sr}{Sd}\ \}$ make up a SIGN.

Signification is the process which binds together signifier and signified to produce the sign. A sign must be understood as a **relation** which has no meaning outside the system of signification.

The choice of sound is not imposed on us by meaning itself (the animal **ox** does not determine the sound **ox** - the sound is different in different languages: **ox** -English, **bue** - Italian).

> A DISTINCTION IS MADE BETWEEN **SIGNIFICANT UNITS**, —WORDS, OR **MONEMES** — EACH ONE ENDOWED WITH ONE "VALUE"....

> ...AND **DISTINCTIVE UNITS** — SOUNDS, OR **PHONEMES** — PART OF THE FORM BUT WITH NO DIRECT "VALUE".

> THE RELATION BETWEEN $\dfrac{Sr}{Sd}$ MUST BE ARBITRARY.

> NON! WHAT IS ARBITRARY IS THE RELATION BETWEEN THE SIGNIFIER AND THE **THING** WHICH IS SIGNIFIED.

> YOU WON'T FIND THE CONNECTION IN THE 'MEANING' OF THE CONCEPT (AS A STAND-IN FOR A THING) BUT IN ITS **USE** IN SOCIAL PRACTICE.

Note the extreme economy of human language: with only 21 distinctive units American Spanish can produce 100,000 significant units.

The problem is - does the signified refer to the image or concept "ox" or to the ox **itself** as thing?

The association of sound and **what it represents** is the outcome of collective learning (use in social practice, or what Wittgenstein calls "language games") - and this is **signification**.

Meaning is therefore the product of a system of representation which is itself **meaningless**.

The Binary Model

Saussure bequeathed a decisive **binary model** to postmodern theory. Language is a sign system that functions by an operational code of **binary oppositions.** We have seen one binary opposition: Sr/Sd. Another crucial binary opposition is **syntagm/paradigm**, which operates as follows.
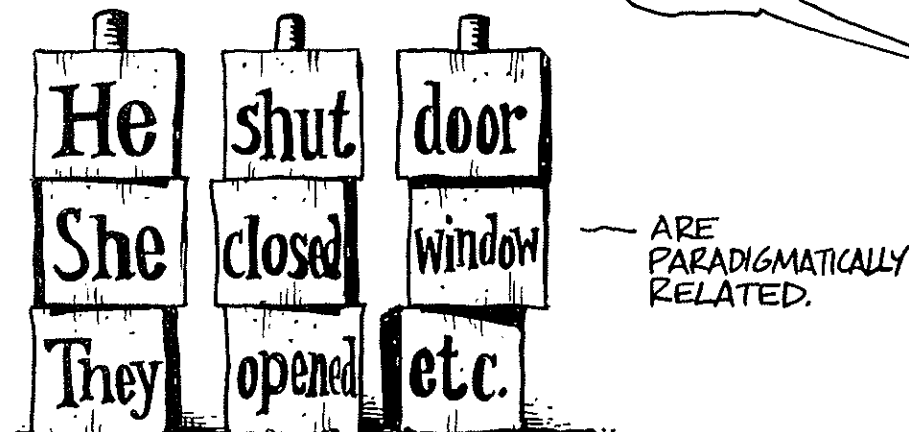
syntagmatic series (also called **contiguity** or **combination**) - the linear relationships between linguistic elements in a sentence

paradigmatic series (also called **selection** or **substitution**) - the relationship between elements within a sentence and other elements which are syntactically interchangeable

SYNTAGMATIC (COMBINATION)

He | shut | THE | door — SUBJECT, VERB AND OBJECT SYNTAGMATICALLY RELATED.

PARADIGMATIC (SUBSTITUTION)

He	shut	door
She	closed	window
They	opened	etc.

— ARE PARADIGMATICALLY RELATED.

WOULD YOU PLEASE MAKE UP YOUR MIND? - IT'S FREEZING IN HERE!

## Figures of Speech: Metaphor and Metonymy

This apparently simple binary contrast of substitution and combination generates higher degrees of complexity and might be said to account for the imaginative or symbolic use of language - in other words, the possibility of meaningful **fictions**.

For instance: paradigmatic substitution involves a perception of **similarity** which can generate **METAPHOR** - "a tower of strength", "a glaring error" - descriptions that are not literally true.

Syntagmatic combination involves a perception of **contiguity** which can generate **METONYMY** (naming an attribute or adjunct of the thing instead of the thing itself - "crown" for royalty, "turf" for horse-racing) or **SYNECDOCHE** (naming the part for the whole - "keels" for ships).

SYNECDOCHE

50 keels ploughed the deeps...

METONYM   METAPHOR

Roman Jakobson (1895-1982), a Russian-born linguist, applied Saussure's binary model to **aphasia**, a severe speech disorder caused by brain damage. Jakobson identified two distinct kinds of aphasic disturbance.

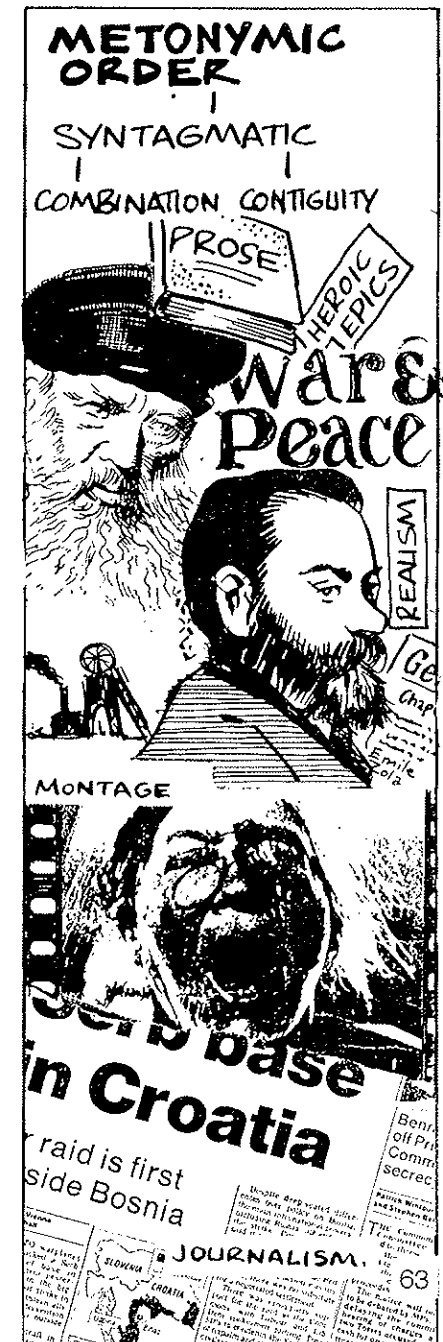EXAMPLE: ASKED TO IDENTIFY 'BLACK', HE MAY RESPOND –

–DEATH.
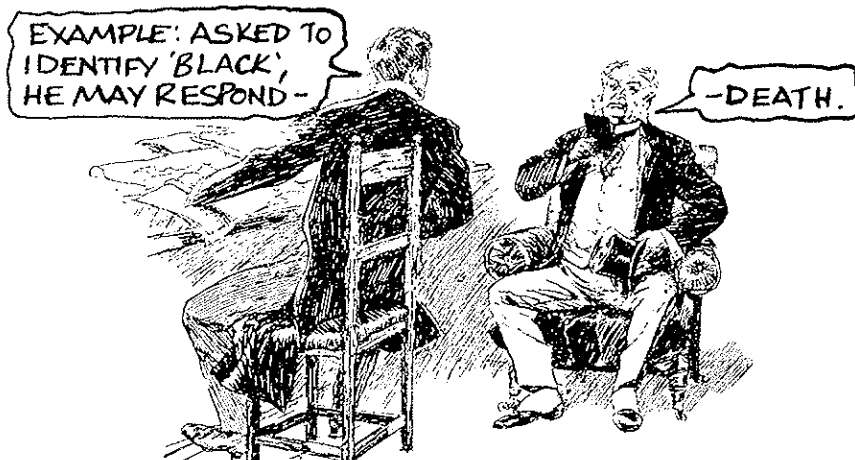
Aphasics who suffer from (paradigmatic) substitution deficiency will resort to metonymic expressions.

Those deficient in (syntagmatic) combination are confined to using similarity or metaphor.

GASLIGHT?

FIRE.

What does this tell us? There are two opposed forms of mental activity underlying the use of metaphor and metonymy.

In traditional literary criticism, metaphor and metonymy had always been thought of as related figures of speech. They are not related but opposed. The consequence of this is **extended discourses** in which either the metaphoric or metonymic order predominates...

METAPHORIC ORDER

PARADIGMATIC

SUBSTITUTION SELECTION

POETRY

LYRICAL SONGS

ROMANTICISM

FILMIC   METAPHOR

SURREALISM

METONYMIC ORDER

SYNTAGMATIC

COMBINATION CONTIGUITY

PROSE

HEROIC EPICS

War & Peace

REALISM

MONTAGE

base in Croatia

raid is first side Bosnia

JOURNALISM.

Structural Anthropology

Claude Lévi-Strauss (b. 1908), following Saussure and the Slavic linguists Roman Jakobson and N.S. Trubetzkoy, developed **structural anthropology** in the late 1950s which systematized a semiology of culture.

At this time in the 1950s, the binary code had been applied in **cybernetics** and the rapid development of **digital computers.** Digitalism operates on the binary or base-number 2 system, rather than our usual decimal base 10 system and has a notation 1 and 0 (10 = 2, 1001 = 9, 11001 = 25, etc.). Computer information-processing operates on an "on" switch (a magnetized dot = 1) and "off" switch (absence of a magnetized dot = 0).

ANTHROPOLOGY IS A CULTURAL MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING HOW THE HUMAN MIND UNIVERSALLY FUNCTIONS.
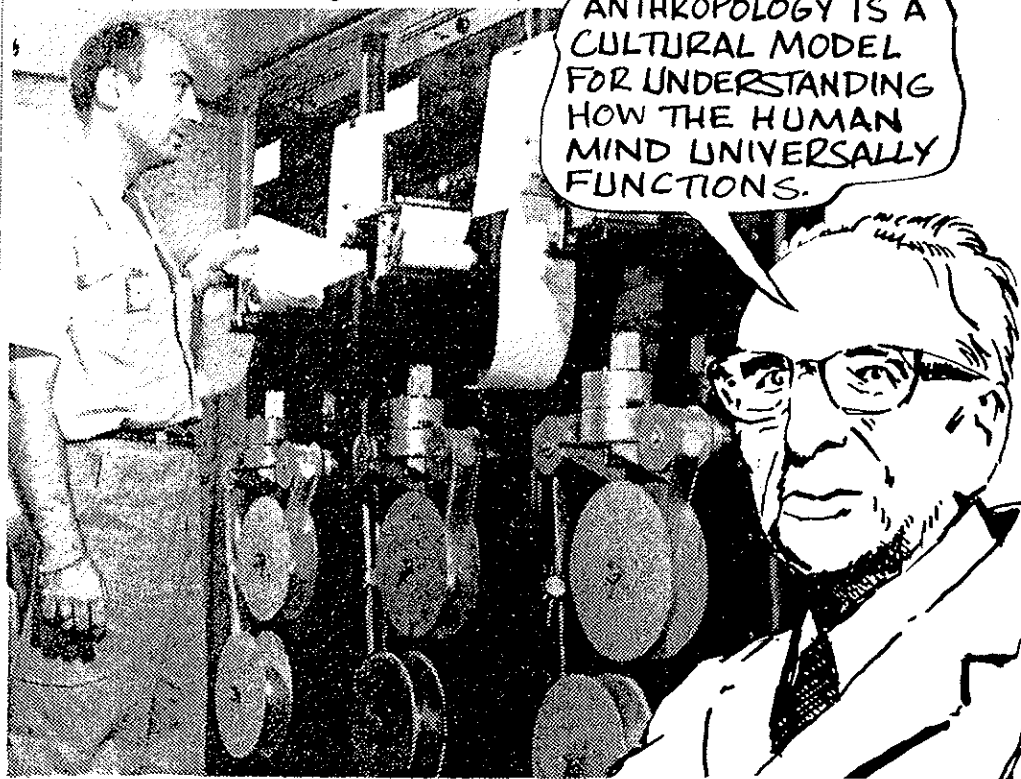
This technological binarism - the digitalized aspect of Information Theory - influenced Lévi-Strauss towards a mechanical theory of communication.
How does it work?

Language is the system that permits thinking. Thinking is the "system-output" that occurs in the interaction between human subjects (situated within culture) and the environment (nature) which is the object of thinking.

binarism

nature<-------------->culture
(non-human)   (human)

Thinking can therefore occur because language allows us (1) to form **social relationships** and (2) to **categorize** our environment as represented by symbols.

Among many primitive peoples it is the custom for each tribe or family to adopt some object from Nature as their special symbol, or totem. This totem may be an animal or plant, or a carving in wood or stone, and is supposed to be helpful to the tribe it represents. Tribes which have an animal totem will never kill that special animal, while those that have adopted a plant as their symbol abstain from eating others of the same species. Poles surmounted by grotesque carvings are often set near the encampments of North American Indians as totems, while among the aborigines of Australia totemism is almost universal.

THIS TRADITIONALIST, EUROCENTRIC VIEW IS MISLEADING...

*TOTEMISM IS NOT SOME BIZARRE 'PRIMITIVE' SUPERSTITION, BUT A BASIC INSTANCE OF **LOGIC**. IT IS THINKING.*
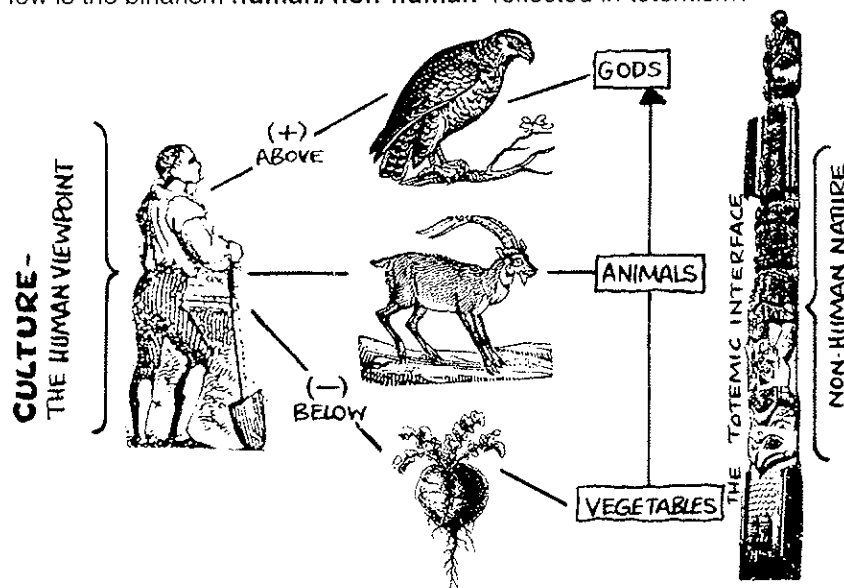
Totems are categories that specify (divide up) what's "out there" as symbols for thinking, in other words, binary classifications.

What can or cannot be eaten (and why).
Who can or cannot be married (and why).

Thinking in this sense is literally (re)**producing society**.

How is the binarism **human/non-human** reflected in totemism?

Tribal societies apply **substitutions** (metaphors) and **combinations** (metonyms) to "think" about non-human nature. Animals and vegetables aren't simply things to eat but are **read as codes** that link nature to human society by way of the "higher" (non-human) gods. This is a code-chain that runs two ways.
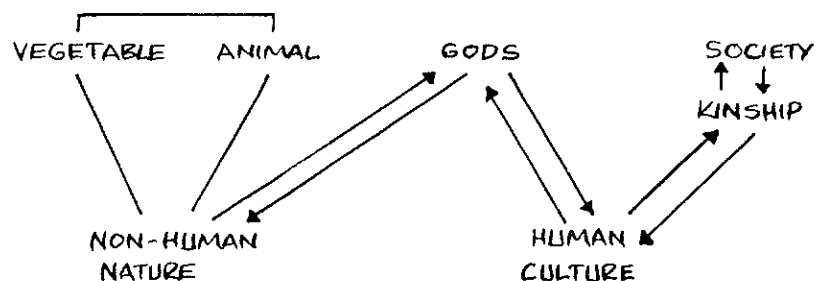
The human mind functions in model binary sets - noise/silence, raw/cooked, naked/clothed, light/darkness, sacred/profane and so on.

Minds working logically (that is **culturally**) unconsciously duplicate nature. An example. Why have we chosen the colours green, yellow and red for our traffic-light sign system?
Because it is a "fact of nature" that our colour code signals for **Go - Caution - Stop** mimick the same structure found in the spectrum.
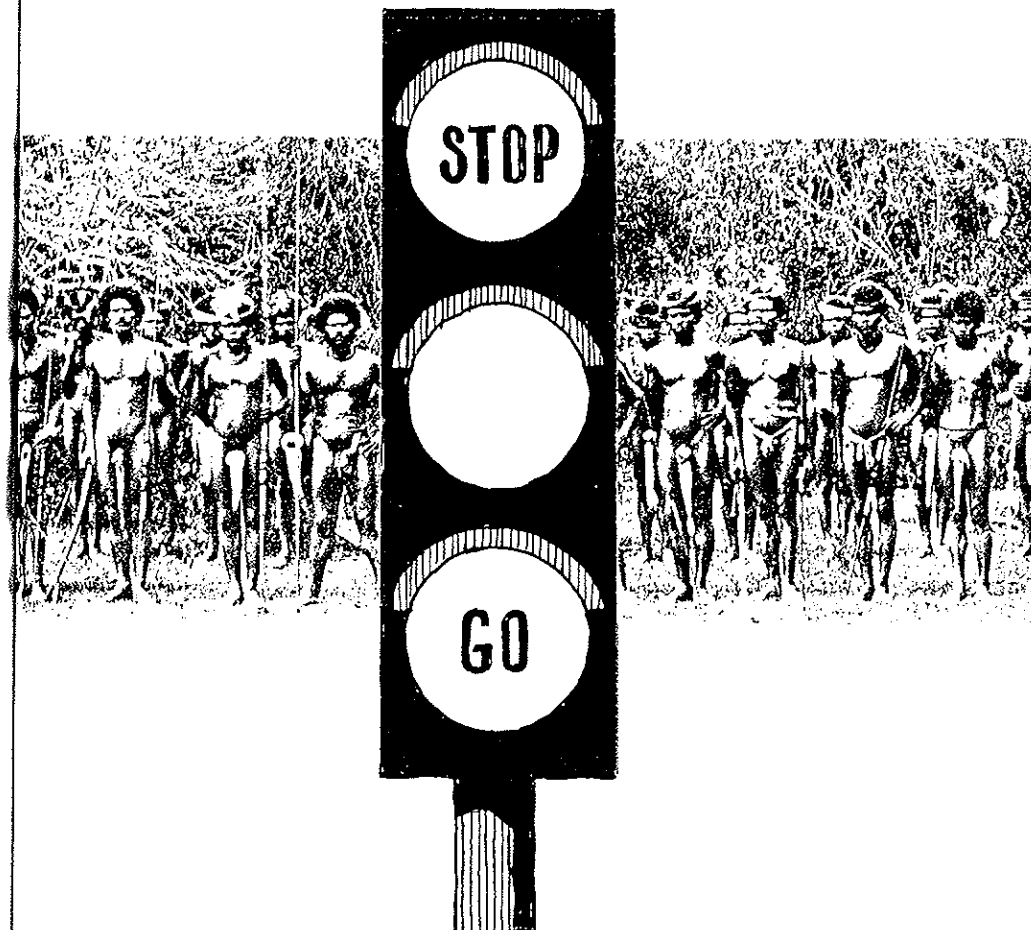
Green is a short wavelength, red is long and yellow lies midway.

The brain searches for a **representation** of the binary opposition (go) +/- (stop), and finds green and red and also the intermediate colour term (/) caution, yellow.

Brief Critique of Structuralism

The positive benefits of structuralist analysis are undeniable. But so are its negative shortcomings.

### 1. Dematerialization and formalism

Saussure's language system eliminates **material origins**; it also **de**-psychologizes, since it need not posit an "unconscious" motivation even on a biological level.

Although Saussure speaks of "deep structures", these have nothing to do with the unconscious in a Freudian sense. Structuralist analysis is an abstract "surface" reading as opposed to a Marxian or Freudian "deep" reading which thinks in terms of **symptoms** - origins, causes and cures. In contrast, structuralism is value-free of such "medical" ambitions.

Similarly, although Jakobson does not deny the material (neurological) origin and reality of aphasia, his analysis tends to de-materialize and formalize it.

Structuralism opens out a formal area of inquiry - a non-dimensional space of abstraction - which might seem to resemble philosophy ("thinking about thinking") and its exclusive reliance on the **rules** of reasoning to arrive at a general picture of the world.

Structuralism goes much further in the direction of **hyper-rationalism**. It claims that "meaning" is a product of signification, a process maintained by timeless and universal structures forming a stable and self-contained system based on binary oppositions. The elements of the system, or signifiers, carry meaning only in relation to each other; their relationship to the signified - whether concepts or things or actions - is arbitrary, based purely on convention.
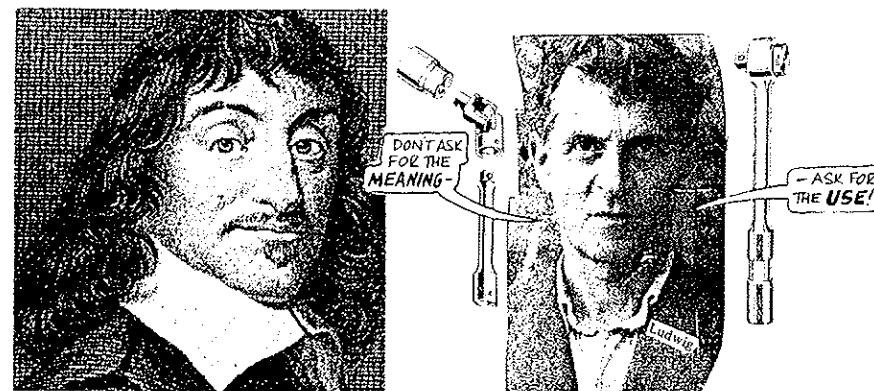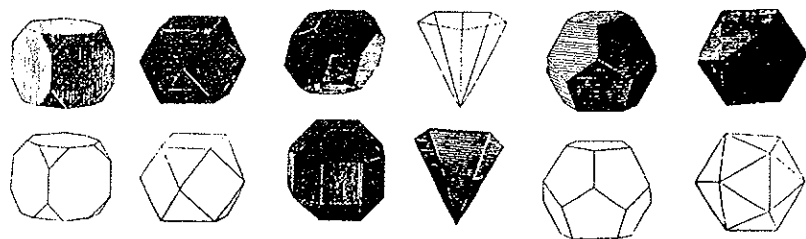
2. Formalizing the human

"I think therefore I am." What happens to this famous Cartesian proof of self-identity in the structuralist view?
The "I" or unitary human subject - the very cornerstone of Western logic and philosophy - dissolves into a **signifying language-user**. The "I" is a language fiction, signified by **use**, not **meaning**, and generated in much the same way as metaphor or metonymy.

Structuralism is unhelpful in explaining what **motivates** the language-using subject, i.e., the individual.

The logic of the system entirely surpasses and evades the subject's **reasons** for using language. Saying, "to communicate his personal thought", is not good enough. How did "personal thought" get into the system, anyhow?

3. Non-historical

Structuralism is non-historical, or more accurately, **a**-historical. Its analysis is valid (in principle) no matter what is historically present. This is consistent with its discarding of historical origins and motivations. These features of structuralism's rigorous abstract intellectuality mark it as a typically modernist project - and yet as an instant flip-over into postmodern theory. As we noted before, "modern must inevitably become **post**modern".

We can witness this happening by seeing what actually happened to structuralism in its own heyday in the 1960s.

Poststructuralism

We can see the beginnings of a po mo attitude in the mid-60s with the overlap of structuralism and the "post"-structuralist second thoughts of **Roland Barthes** (1915-80).

> ...WE MUST NOW FACE THE POSSIBILITY OF INVERTING SAUSSURE'S DECLARATION: LINGUISTICS IS NOT A PART OF THE GENERAL SCIENCE OF SIGNS, EVEN A PRIVILEGED PART, IT IS SEMIOLOGY WHICH IS PART OF LINGUISTICS...

> ♫ ..ARE YOU WARM, ARE YOU REAL, MONA LISA....♪

> DARLING, I LOVE YOU MADLY...

> LITERATURE IS WHAT GETS TAUGHT.

> HAVE YOU BEEN READING THOSE BARBARA CARTLAND NOVELS AGAIN?

Barthes in the mid-60s doesn't go quite so far - but almost. He notes that semiology itself can be added to Jakobson's classification of **metaphoric types**, along with lyrical songs, Chaplin's films and Surrealism. Barthes explicitly states...

"The metalanguage in which the semiologist conducts his analysis is **metaphorical**..."

Barthes is (partly) responding to a higher degree of **reflexivity**, a typically postmodern penance paid for modernist intellectual arrogance.

Barthes is saying that semiological analysis **collapses back** into language - a forerunner of Baudrillard's more radical notion of "art totally penetrating reality", of the border between art and reality vanishing as the two collapse into the universal simulacrum. A collapse into **total semblance.**

Reflexivity doesn't mean simply to "reflect on" (which usually comes later, or too late) but is an immediate critical consciousness of what one is doing, thinking or writing. However, since it is impossible to do anything innocently in our age of lost innocence, reflexivity can easily slide into ironic self-consciousness, cynicism and politically correct hypocrisy.

The Death of the Author

Barthes was an early and elegant exponent of semiotics who recognized that anything in culture can be decoded - not just literature but fashion, wrestling, strip tease, steak and chips, love, photography and even Japan Incorporated.

GRUNT!

Continu Live Sh

THE GESTURE OF THE VANQUISHED WRESTLER CORRESPONDS TO THE MASK OF ANTIQUITY MEANT TO SIGNIFY THE TRAGIC MODE OF THE SPECTACLE - OUCH!

CREAK!

In 1967, Barthes caused a sensation by proclaiming "the death of the author". He meant that readers create their own meanings, regardless of the author's intentions: the texts they use to do so are thus ever-shifting, unstable and open to question. This applies equally to the scientific or structuralist author who cannot stand outside such interpretation.

74

Writing: Degree Zero

Unstable interpretations are inevitable because writing tends to a "zero degree" of sense. What does Barthes mean?

YOU CAN READ A TEXT FOR PLEASURE AND SENSE... BUT YOU'RE FINALLY LEFT WITH A SENSE OF ENIGMA, A **FINAL** SENSE WHICH THE TEXT DOESN'T EXPRESS OR REFUSES TO SURRENDER - A SORT OF UNYIELDING **THOUGHTFULNESS**, IT IS LIKE THE THOUGHTFULNESS OF A FACE WHICH TEMPTS ONE TO ASK... "WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?"

.....OR JUST A COLD AND LONELY, LOVELY WORK OF ART?

IM THINKING IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU GOT ME ANOTHER DRINK.

This is the zero degree of writing - a closure, a retreat and a suspension of meaning.

75

...Poststructuralist Blues...

No Exit from Language

> HOW FAR HAVE WE GOT WITH RESOLVING THE **BIG 3 PROBLEMS** - -REPRESENTATION, REPRODUCTION AND LEGITIMATION?

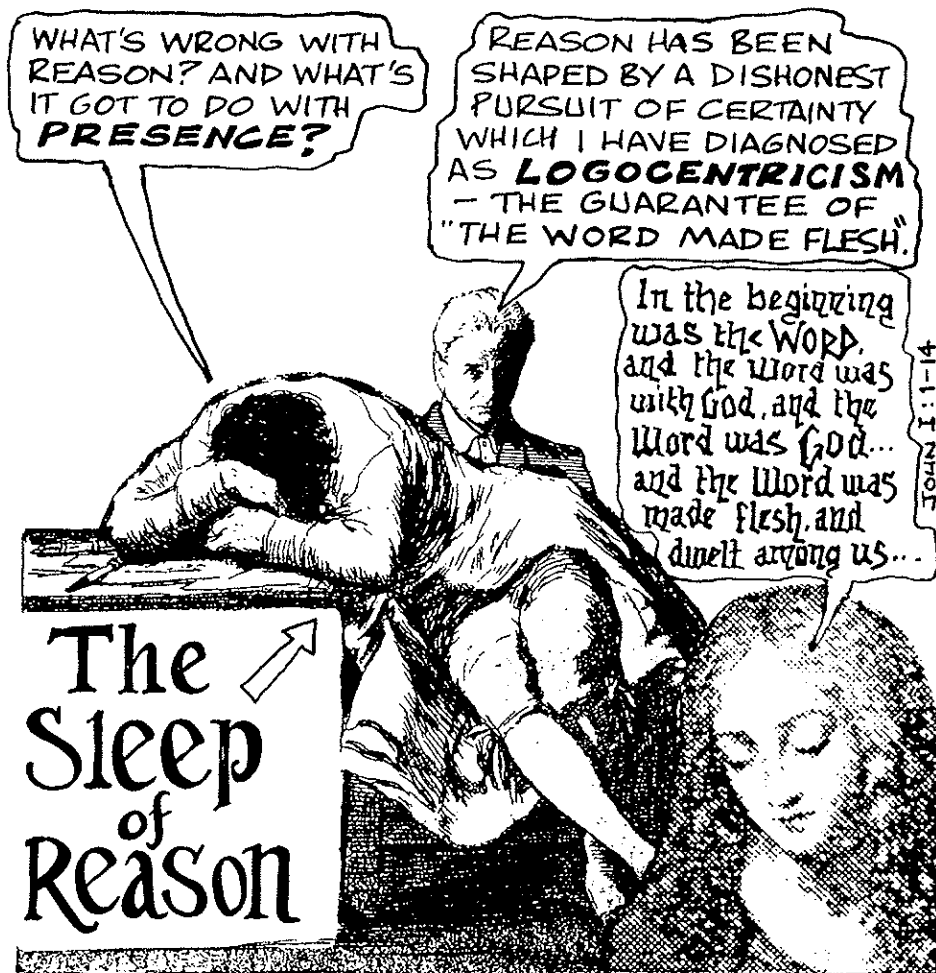> FAR ENOUGH TO BE DISILLUSIONED WITH META-LANGUAGES TO RESOLVE THEM.

A **metalanguage** is a technical language, such as structuralism, devised to describe the properties of ordinary language. Wittgenstein had already come up against the limits of logic as a metalanguage in the 1920s.

> YOU CAN'T STAND OUTSIDE LANGUAGE TO UNDERSTAND IT.
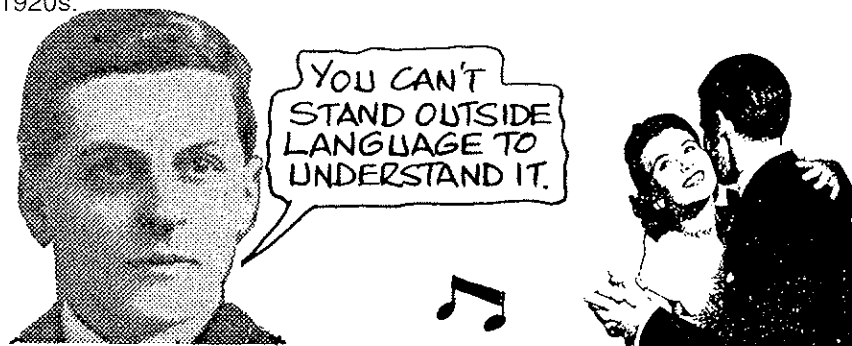
A privileged or "meta"-linguistic position is a mirage created by language itself. Structuralism, semiology and other forms of metalinguistics which promised liberation from the enigma of meaning, only lead back to language, a no exit, and the consequent dangers of a relativist or even nihilistic view of human reason itself. **Deconstruction**, an offshoot of poststructuralism, has often been accused of "relativizing everything". What is deconstruction?

76

Deconstruction

One of the most influencial postmoderns, the philosopher Jacques Derrida (b.1930) has waged a one-man "deconstructionist" war against the entire Western tradition of rationalist thought. In particular, Derrida has targeted Western philosophy's central assumption of **Reason** which he sees as dominated by a "metaphysics of presence".

> WHAT'S WRONG WITH REASON? AND WHAT'S IT GOT TO DO WITH **PRESENCE?**

> REASON HAS BEEN SHAPED BY A DISHONEST PURSUIT OF CERTAINTY WHICH I HAVE DIAGNOSED AS **LOGOCENTRICISM** – THE GUARANTEE OF "THE WORD MADE FLESH".

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us... *JOHN 1:1-14*
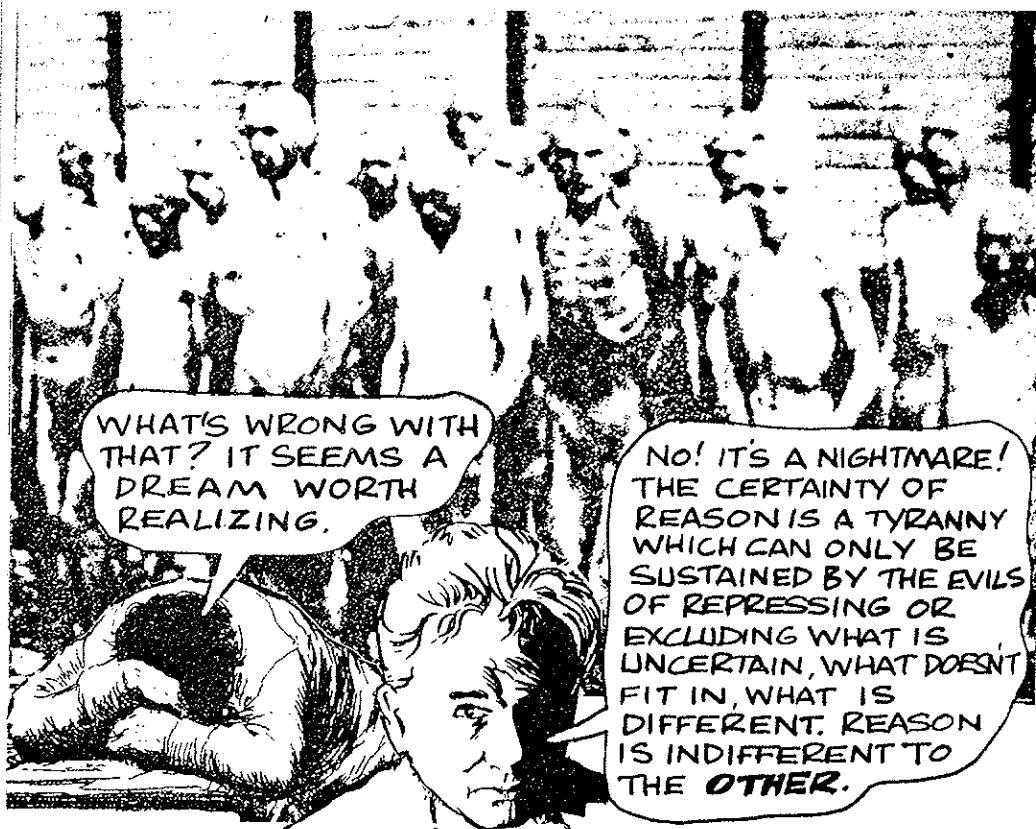
The Sleep of Reason

The history of philosophy from Plato, its founding father, and Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, right up to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, has been a constant logocentric quest. Logocentricism derives from the Greek **logos**, "the word by which the inward thought is expressed" or "reason itself".
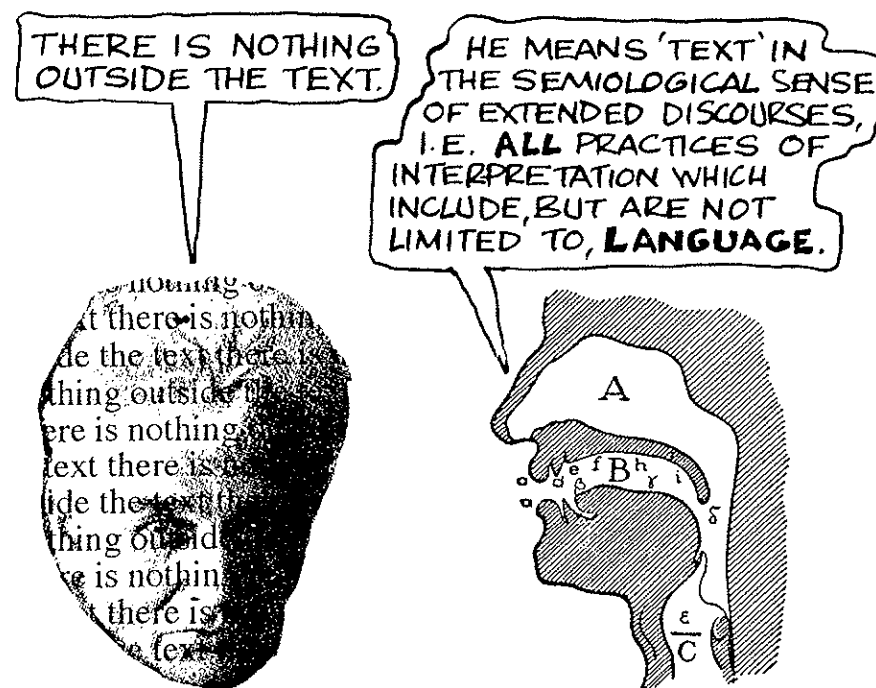
77

J'ACCUSE!

Logocentricism desires a perfectly rational language that perfectly represents the real world. Such a language of reason would absolutely guarantee that the **presence** of the world - the essence of **everything** in the world - would be transparently (re)**present**(ed) to an observing subject who could speak of it with complete certainty. Words would literally be the Truth of things - the "Word made flesh", as St. John puts it.
Pure communion with the world - that is the seduction of logocentric Reason.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT? IT SEEMS A DREAM WORTH REALIZING.

No! IT'S A NIGHTMARE! THE CERTAINTY OF REASON IS A TYRANNY WHICH CAN ONLY BE SUSTAINED BY THE EVILS OF REPRESSING OR EXCLUDING WHAT IS UNCERTAIN, WHAT DOESN'T FIT IN, WHAT IS DIFFERENT. REASON IS INDIFFERENT TO THE *OTHER*.

Derrida is outraged by the totalitarian arrogance implicit in the claims of Reason. His anger does not seem so eccentric when we recall the shameful history of atrocities committed by rationalist Western cultures - the systematic "rationality" of mass extermination in the Nazi era, the scientific rationalism of the A-bomb and the Hiroshima holocaust....

Against the essentialist notion of certainty of meaning, Derrida mobilizes the central insight of structuralism - that meaning is not inherent in signs, nor in what they refer to, but results purely from the relationships between them. He draws out the radical "post-structuralist" implications of this point - that structures of meaning (without which nothing exists for us) include and **implicate** any observers of them. To observe is to interact, so the "scientific" detachment of structuralists or of any other rationalist position is untenable.

THERE IS NOTHING OUTSIDE THE TEXT.

HE MEANS 'TEXT' IN THE SEMIOLOGICAL SENSE OF EXTENDED DISCOURSES, I.E. **ALL** PRACTICES OF INTERPRETATION WHICH INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO, **LANGUAGE**.

Structuralism's insight to this extent was correct. It was incorrect to suppose that anything **reasoned** is ever universal, timeless and stable. Any meaning or identity (including our own) is provisional and relative, because it is **never exhaustive**, it can always be traced further back to a prior network of differences, and further back again...almost to infinity or the "zero degree" of sense. This is **deconstruction** - to peel away like an onion the layers of constructed meanings.

"Différance"

Deconstruction is a strategy for revealing the underlayers of meanings "in" a text that were suppressed or assumed in order for it to take its actual form - in particular the assumptions of "presence" (the hidden representations of guaranteed certainty).

Texts are never simply unitary but include resources that run counter to their assertions and/ or their authors' intentions.

Meaning includes identity (what it is) and difference (what it isn't) and it is therefore continuously being "deferred". Derrida invented a word for this process, combining difference and deferral - **différance**.

Derrida has tried to extract a positive benefit from the disillusioning failure of a structuralist metalanguage by upholding its subversive merits. In so doing, he has left himself open to accusations of relativism and irrationalism.


The Accuser Accused...
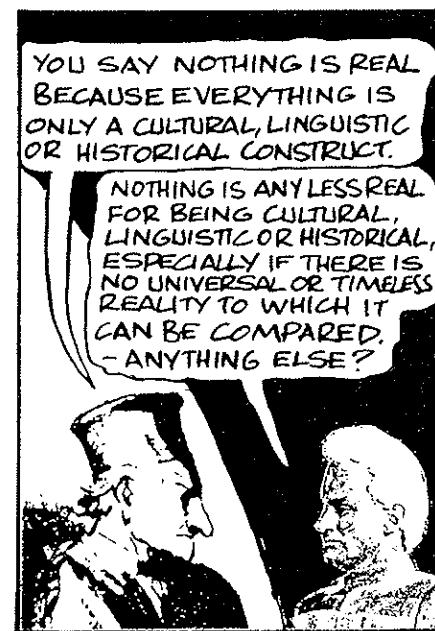
The Structures of Power/Knowledge

The historian Michel Foucault (1926-84) is the postmodern theorist most directly concerned with the problems of power and legitimation. He tackles power from the unusual angle of **knowledge** as systems of thought which become controlling, that is, socially legitimated and institutional. Foucault initially called his investigations of knowledge an "archaeology" of **epistemes** (from the Greek **epistomai**, "to understand, to know for certain, to believe", which gives us **epistemology**, the verification theory of knowledge concerned with distinguishing genuine from spurious knowledge).

Foucault's episteme is a system of possible discourse which "somehow" comes to dominate each historical era. He concentrates on the "somehow" by which an episteme dictates what counts as knowledge and truth and what doesn't.
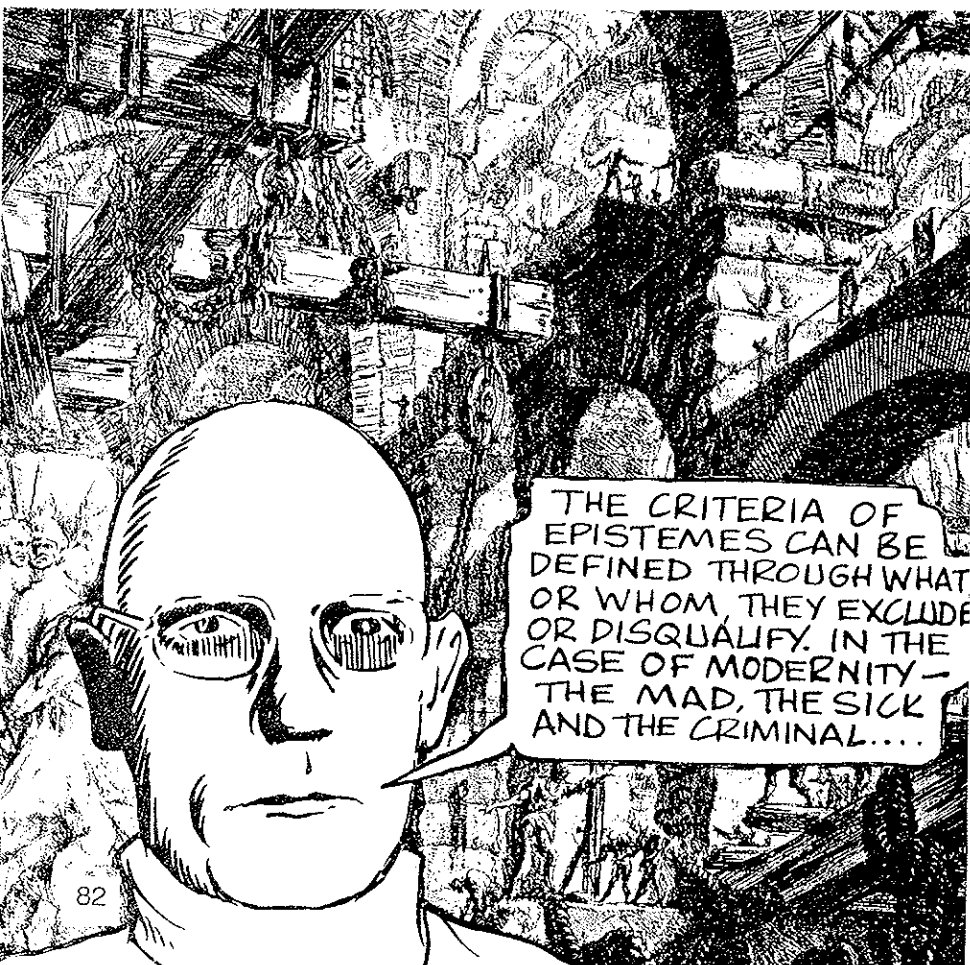
Foucault completely upsets our conventional expectations of history as something linear - a chronology of inevitable facts that tell a story which makes sense. Instead, he uncovers the underlayers of what is kept suppressed and unconscious **in** and **throughout** history - the codes and assumptions of order, the structures of exclusion that legitimate the epistemes, by which societies achieve their identities.

> THE CRITERIA OF EPISTEMES CAN BE DEFINED THROUGH WHAT OR WHOM THEY EXCLUDE OR DISQUALIFY. IN THE CASE OF MODERNITY - THE MAD, THE SICK AND THE CRIMINAL....

> THERE IS NO "HISTORY" BUT A MULTIPLE, OVERLAPPING AND INTERACTIVE SERIES OF **LEGITIMATE Vs. EXCLUDED** HISTORIES.

By the mid-70s, Foucault moved away from "archaeology" towards the "genealogy" of what he now called "power/knowledge" and he focused more on the "microphysics" of how power moulds everyone (and not only its victims) involved in its exercise. He showed how power and knowledge fundamentally depend on each other, so that the extension of one is simultaneously the extension of the other. In so doing, the reason of rationalism requires - even creates - social categories of the mad, criminal and deviant against which to define itself. It is thus sexist, racist and imperialist in practice.

Art and Power/Knowledge

Literature and art are closely linked to knowledge in Foucault's view of history, not situated within the episteme but rather articulating its limits. Art is **meta-epistemic**: it is **about** the episteme as a whole, an allegory of the deep arrangements that make knowledge possible.
An example. Suppose Foucault were looking at Picasso's **Demoiselles d'Avignon**; what would his archaeology make of the "deformed" nude prostitutes on show?
There are structural disparities to consider.

1. Picasso's own **male narcissism** is put at risk. (a) by the threat of syphilis contagion from the prostitutes (degeneration and death) and (b) by the strange **virile asymmetry** of their bodies (formal aesthetic and gender transgressions)

2. The African mask-like faces *(right)* signal and reinforce this "strange virility", a sense of disordered Otherness echoed by the demoiselles' masculine arms, legs and torsos.

This strikingly articulated asymmetry is proclaiming something about a **social category of exclusion**.
What is it?

Eugenics: measuring the excluded inferior

Fear of racial degeneration in Western societies marked the early 1900s, a danger posed by the epidemic consequences of syphilis, but especially by the threat of **criminal sub-types**.
Eugenics, a pseudo-science of "racial improvement" based on Darwin's idea of natural selection, drew on the new sciences of neurology, psychiatry and anthropology to distinguish the fit from the unfit. **Anthropometrics** (an applied branch of physical anthropology) measured the shapes of countless heads, noses, ears and limbs to classify the ideally proportioned (healthy/superior) human types and the degenerate sub-types. In the sub-types belonged the savage (non-European) races, the insane, criminals and prostitutes, all classifiable by **asymmetrical features**.

included (FIT) humans
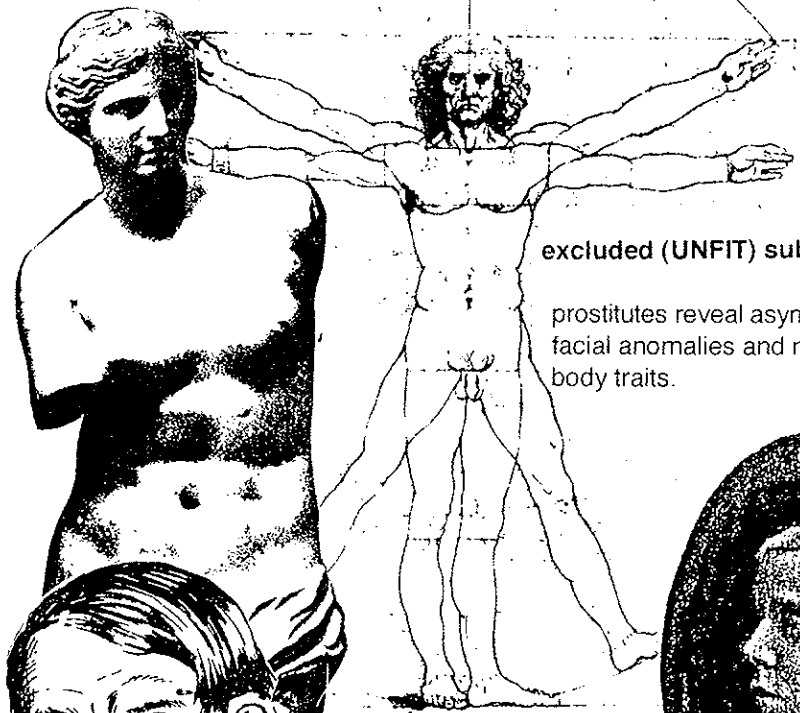
excluded (UNFIT) sub-humans

prostitutes reveal asymmetrical facial anomalies and masculine body traits.

I VISITED THE HOPITAL ST. LAZARE IN PARIS TO OBSERVE THE PROSTITUTES INTERNED THERE.

Some possible conclusions

-Racialist eugenics is an essential component of modernity's **episteme** - its system of dominant knowledge - which leads to Nazism's Final Solution by mass extermination of "unfit types".

-Picasso's painting is **meta-epistemic**: it disturbingly allegorizes the whole episteme by including what it excludes.

-It is "about" the problem of representation in modernity - how knowledge of the Self and Other is constituted, reproduced and legitimated.

> MODERN ART IS NOT A CONFIRMATION OF MODERNITY BUT AN ARTICULATION OF ITS **LIMITS**.
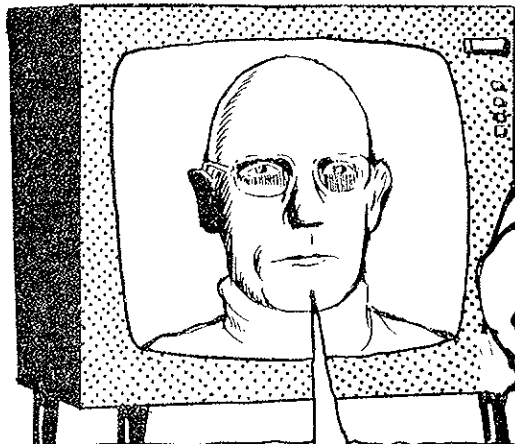
> THEORY DOES NOT EXPRESS, TRANSLATE OR SERVE TO APPLY PRACTICE: IT **IS** PRACTICE. BUT IT IS LOCAL AND REGIONAL...NOT TOTALIZING...IT IS NOT TO 'AWAKEN CONSCIOUSNESS' THAT WE STRUGGLE, BUT TO **SAP POWER**...IT IS AN ACTIVITY CONDUCTED ALONG-SIDE THOSE WHO STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND NOT THEIR ILLUMINATION FROM A SAFE DISTANCE.

Avantgarde modern art which supposedly begins with Picasso's **Demoiselles d'Avignon** can be seen as originating in protest and **reaction against** the unlimited totalizing project of modern rationalism.
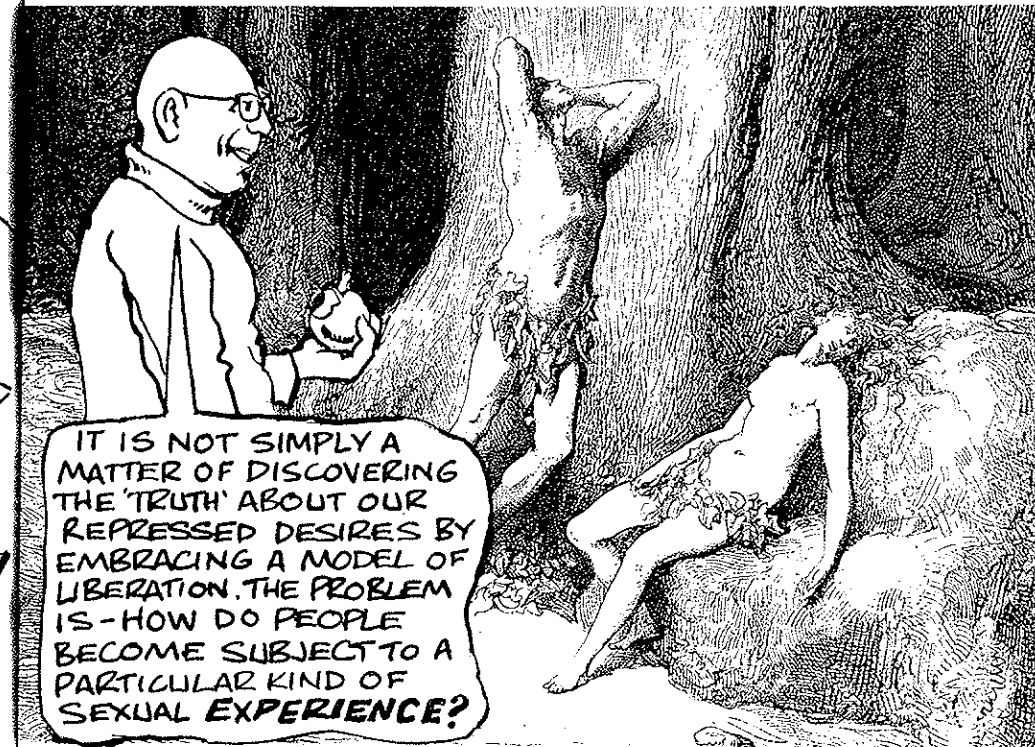
What is Power?

Power cannot only be coercive. It also has to be productive and enabling.

> POWER WOULD BE A FRAGILE THING IF ITS ONLY FUNCTION WERE TO **REPRESS**.

Foucault criticized the Marxist-Freudian liberation model of sexuality as a natural instinct repressed by authoritarian familial and social institutions.

> IT IS NOT SIMPLY A MATTER OF DISCOVERING THE 'TRUTH' ABOUT OUR REPRESSED DESIRES BY EMBRACING A MODEL OF LIBERATION. THE PROBLEM IS - HOW DO PEOPLE BECOME SUBJECT TO A PARTICULAR KIND OF SEXUAL **EXPERIENCE?**

How is an "experience" articulated in a system of rules and constraints so that we can recognize ourselves as subjects of a sexuality which opens into optional fields of knowledge?

Foucault is saying that power isn't what some possess and others don't, but a tactical and resourceful **narrative**. Power is in the texture of our lives - we **live** it rather than **have** it.

The Fiction of the Self

French psychoanalyst **Jacques Lacan** (1901-81) led a "back to Freud" movement after being himself expelled from the orthodox International Psychoanalytical Association. Lacan's notoriously obscure writing is modelled on the arcane style of the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-98) and also harks back to wilful Surrealist provocation (some of his early work in the 1930s appeared in the Surrealist journal **Minotaure**).
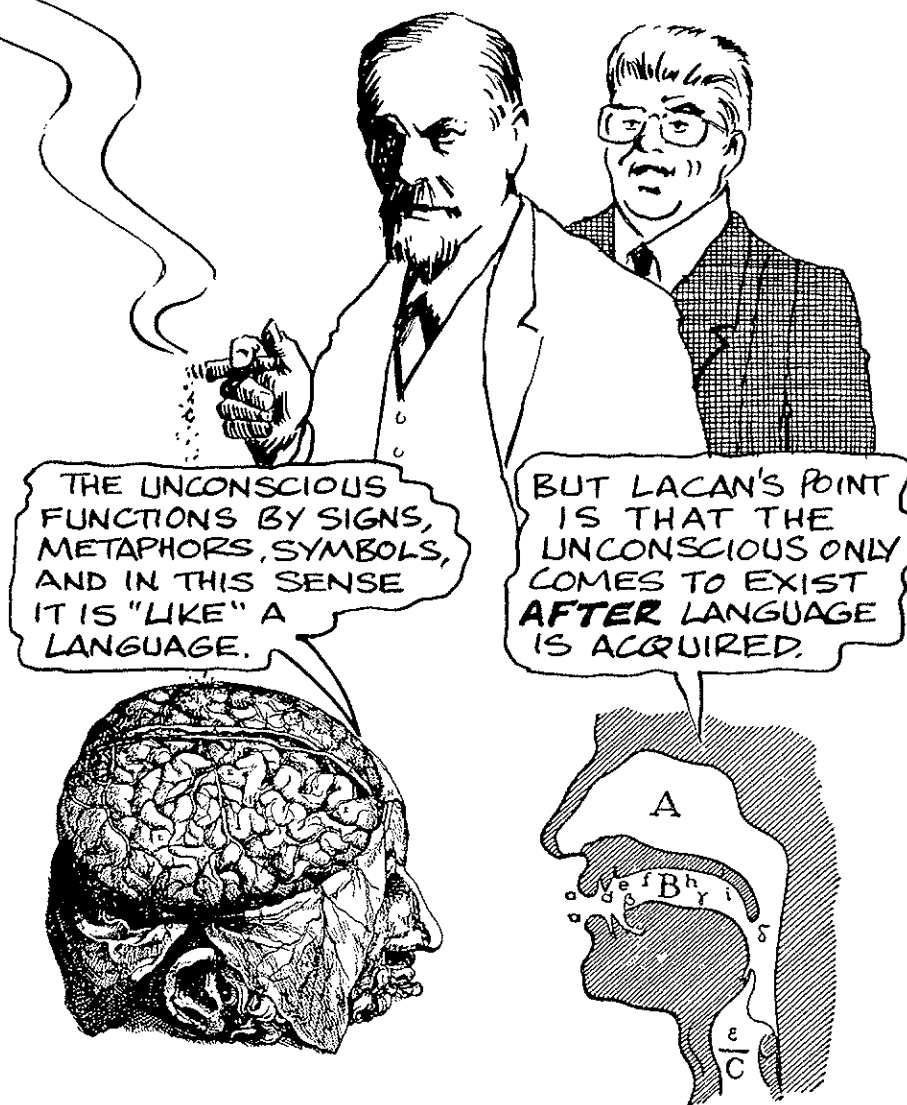
THE UNCONSCIOUS IS STRUCTURED AS A LANGUAGE.

THIS IS LACAN'S MOST FAMOUS PRONOUNCE-MENT. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? HOW CAN THE UNCONSCIOUS, WHICH IS INSTINCTUAL AND, BY DEFINITION, UNKNOWABLE TO THE SUBJECT, BE STRUCTURED AS A **LANGUAGE?**

Whereas Freud keeps faith with a materialist biology of mind, Lacan applies Saussure's linguistics to explain how the mind comes to be structured and inserted in a social order.

Lacan replaces Freud's classic trinity of the psyche - Id, Ego and Superego - with structures of the **Imaginary**, the **Symbolic** and the **Real** which represent the stages of human psychic maturation.

THE UNCONSCIOUS FUNCTIONS BY SIGNS, METAPHORS, SYMBOLS, AND IN THIS SENSE IT IS "LIKE" A LANGUAGE.

BUT LACAN'S POINT IS THAT THE UNCONSCIOUS ONLY COMES TO EXIST **AFTER** LANGUAGE IS ACQUIRED.

The Imaginary or "Mirror Phase"

Between 6 to 18 months, the infant makes its first startling discovery of itself in the mirror as an image which appears total and coherent.

THE INFANT IMAGINARY PHASE PRECEDES LANGUAGE AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE WAY WE ACQUIRE IT.

A sense of self arrives externally, from a **reflection**, or from the imaginary. Identity comes from **mis**-recognition, a false persuasion of Self, which remains with us as an ideal ego for the rest of our lives. The mirror supplies the first **Signified** and the infant itself acts as the **Signifier**.

Lacan is saying that we are all imprisoned not in reality but in a hall-of-mirrors world of signifiers

$\dfrac{Sr}{Sd}$ (THE SIGNIFIER) CHILD ——— ADULT ⟩ THE
(THE SIGNIFIED) $\dfrac{\text{IMAGE}}{\text{CONCEPT}}$ ——— SELF ⟩ SIGN

IT IS THROUGH LANGUAGE THAT THE CHILD ENTERS THE SOCIAL WORLD, —THE SYMBOLIC ORDER —AS AN "I"....

....BUT WITH A CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE FOR THE **MALE** AND **FEMALE** SUBJECTS.