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## Thinking in/of/with the book: the role of the book as the medium for philosophy in Deleuze, Derrida, and Smith

Scott Ziegler

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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THINKING IN/OF/WITH THE BOOK:  
THE ROLE OF THE BOOK AS THE MEDIUM FOR PHILOSOPHY IN DELEUZE,  
DERRIDA, AND SMITH

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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by  
Scott Ziegler  
B.A. Louisiana State University, 2006  
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## ABSTRACT

In this Thesis, I explore the role of the book as a medium for philosophy in Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. I begin by framing the debate in terms of the role of media in affecting the message. I then claim that while both Deleuze and Derrida must attempt to separate their own work from the traditional role of the book, they both fail to take the book itself into consideration.

I claim that both Deleuze and Derrida accept the book as medium which reinforces a particular form of thought, and that their philosophies require a break from this form. However, they do not take the medium of the book itself seriously. Deleuze is only concerned with the text within the book, and Derrida treats the book as a metaphor for total knowledge. Against both these thinkers I juxtapose the artist Keith Smith, who does offer examples of thinking in terms of the book itself, and how doing so can affect the text within, and thus thinking.

The failure on the part of Deleuze and Derrida are particularly striking given the emphasis they place on the need to separate their philosophies from the modes of thought books traditionally enforce. Due to their understanding of the importance of the book in the tradition of philosophy, I claim this investigation of the specific use and ability of the book is of vital importance.

## CHAPTER 1: THE END OF THE BOOK AND THE BEGINNING OF BOOK ARTS

At least since Nietzsche, and for all sorts of reasons that no doubt come together in the reason I invoke, philosophy is at odds with its “form,” that is with its “style,” which is to say, finally with its address. How does thinking address itself to itself, to thinking (which also means: how does thinking address itself to everyone, without its being a matter of a “comprehension” or “understanding” that might be called “common”)? How is thinking addressed?<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Introduction

This epigraph introduces two important concerns that will be addressed in this thesis. First is the concern of the form of philosophy. That is, how a philosophy is delivered, the form of its address, is not insignificant. Certain forms are conducive to certain thoughts, and indeed some thoughts are only possible given particular forms. In keeping with this, Nancy begins his book, *Being Singular Plural*, by noting how traditional forms of ontological treatises are not conducive to his project. Secondly, this concern for forms is a historical development. Nancy invokes Nietzsche as the starting point. We will see how the particular form explored in this thesis, the book, is affected by the historical development of mass media, and how Deleuze and Derrida attempt critiques of the traditional form of the book in hopes of enabling new types of thought.

In the opening chapter of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, entitled “The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing,” he argues that the “end of the book,” also known as the “death of the book,” is symptomatic of a wider change befalling civilization. This change, the moving away from phonetic writing as the central aspect of knowledge and experience is also, I believe, the driving force of Deleuze’s discussion of the book. Both Derrida and Deleuze question the role of the book and offer critiques of the thought the book has traditionally enforced. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. xv

introduction, we will briefly examine the “end of the book,” focusing on the communication theorist Marshall McLuhan. As a central figure in the debate over the influences of new media over the older tendencies of phonetic writing, a discussion of McLuhan will serve as a starting point for our examination of the treatment of the book in Deleuze and Derrida.

We will then turn to an introduction of book arts. I will restrict, for our purposes, the field to bookworks which must be in book form, and those that happen to be in book form, but could also work in another form. This section will be akin to art history, and as such its connection to the philosophy to come may be hard to see. To mitigate this concern, I will further restrict our discussion of book arts to those in codex form and with text. I will argue this gives us an easier bridge back to philosophy, as well as offering a discussion (chapter 4) of how attention to the book can change writing.

## 1.2 The End of the Book

To speak of the end of the book is to claim that the role the book once played has been, or is being, replaced by something else. It is not to say that no one will read books, or that they will cease to be produced. In this section we will see how the argument works, focusing on the communication and social critic Marshall McLuhan. We will begin by an examination of how the medium of phonetic writing shaped the thinking of Western civilization since the Ancient Greeks. We will then follow McLuhan’s examination of the change new media is bringing about, and how he claims this is moving us from an individualistic society to a global village.

McLuhan begins his investigation of the new media with a discussion of environments. “Environments,” McLuhan writes, “are not passive wrappings, but active processes.”<sup>2</sup> Environments are the configuration of the media of the society in which one lives. An

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<sup>2</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. vii



environmental change is of vital importance for the values and mentality of a society. Indeed, the media of a society absolutely affects the entire society. Different media expand different part of the human faculty. McLuhan writes:

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments. All media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical.<sup>3</sup>

For this reason, a change in media is a change in our social and cultural orientation. No change in environment, furthermore, happens without a substantial change in the population of the environment.

As for our own age, the “electronic age,” “a totally new environment is has been created.” The content of this new environment of the electronic age is “the old mechanized environment of the industrial age.”<sup>4</sup>

The new environment reprocesses the old one as radically as TV is reprocessing the film. For the “content” of TV is the movie. TV is environmental and imperceptible, like all environments. We are only aware of the “content” of the old environments.<sup>5</sup>

Our own age, McLuhan claims, is a new environment whose content is the previous environment.

The new environment, the electronic environment, is replacing the older one based on phonetic writing. It is with this new environment that we see what is considered the “death of the book.” This does not mean that books are completely excluded from this new environment, only

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<sup>3</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 26

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

that the conceptual tools founded on the phonetic writing associated with books is ill-equipped to deal with the electronic age. McLuhan:

It is true that there is more material written and printed and read today than ever before, but there is also a new electric technology that threatens this ancient technology of literacy built on the phonetic writing. ... [E]lectric technology seems to favor the inclusive and participational spoken word over the specialist written word. Our Western values, built on the written word, have already been considerably affected by the electric media of telephone, radio, and TV.<sup>6</sup>

To this list of electric media we can certainly add the computer and the internet. The “Western values built on the written word” include an emphasis on the visual over the auditory and a move from a collective to an individualistic mentality. Phonetic writing served to move the emphasis of social orientation from the auditory to the visual. “The dominant organ of sensory and social orientation in pre-alphabetic societies,” McLuhan writes, “was the ear – ‘hearing was believing.’”<sup>7</sup> The new environment – alphabetic writing – shifted the emphasis to the visual. This shift, as a new media and environment, altered social orientation.

The orientation to the eye from the ear heralded a new individualistic mentality. Whereas with hearing, many people can hear the same thing all at once, with the eye and the written word individuals started having personal experiences not otherwise experienced. Writing on many of the same concerns, Walter Ong puts the point this way:

Thirty persons simultaneously reading copies of the same book side-by-side in a library do not constitute a group of the sort formed by thirty persons listening to the same direct live oral presentation or to the same taped oral presentation on radio or on television. Sound forms community as reading alone cannot.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 84-85

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 44

<sup>8</sup> Walter J. Ong, “Reading, Technology and the Nature of Man: An Interpretation,” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 10, Literature and Its Audience, I Special Number. (1980), pp. 132-149; p. 140

The environment of phonetic writing, with the emphasis on the eye, enables individualism in a manner not possible in societies with the auditory orientation.

What is important for our purposes is the closure of this environment and the beginning of another. The electronic media which McLuhan draws attention to favors the spoken word over the written, and for this reason is a return to the emphasis on the ear over the eye. This return is also a return to the communal over the individualistic.<sup>9</sup> This is the “end of the book.” It is the end of an environment oriented around the written word, an environment being replaced by new media with its orientation to the ear. This is also, I believe, the driving force behind Deleuze and Derrida’s questioning of the book.

While it does appear to theorists in many fields that the age of the book – tied to the dominance of the written word – is being superseded by another age, the role of writers is not clear. That is, philosophy – which is a development within the age of writing and is tied, for Deleuze and Derrida, to the idea of the book – must come to grips with the idea that the book does not demand the same monopoly it once enjoyed. The questioning of the book as carried out by Deleuze and Derrida is an extension of the “end of the book.” This is explicit in Derrida, but perhaps more implicit in Deleuze, and for this reason our orientation toward the end of the book will serve to frame the debate in the coming chapters. Put another way: it is the medium of philosophy that Deleuze and Derrida must challenge in order to come to grips with the role of their own philosophies, which attempt a break from traditional ways of thinking.

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<sup>9</sup> Both McLuhan (*Understanding Media*, introduction, p. viii) and Ong (p. 138) cite Erik Havelock’s work *Preface to Plato* to show how the communal mentality of pre-writing is again being fostered through electronic media’s emphasis on non-visual orientation, to a “global village,” as McLuhan says.

### 1.3 Book Arts

“Book arts” is a field of art works in which an original piece of art is created in a book form. Each piece will be known, for our purposes, as a bookwork.<sup>10</sup> The field of book arts is large and varied. We will restrict ourselves to two main strands: bookworks which are simply in books, and bookworks which rely on the book form to work.<sup>11</sup> Ann Moeglin-Delcroix, discussing these same two options within book arts, makes the distinction between using the book as support, and using the book as content.<sup>12</sup> A book as support is a book which happens to hold a text or image. It is this type of book that lends itself easily to a separation between the text/image<sup>13</sup> and the book – the text/image is “held” within the book, the book is a container. Moeglin-Delcroix says of the book as container: “one loses here the perception of the book as a book.”<sup>14</sup> The book as content, on the other hand, uses the form of the book; the work itself is dependent on the form of the book.

Furthermore, we will restrict our investigation of book arts to works which use the codex form of the book. This, again, is to help focus our discussion toward the philosophical figures to follow. So, within book arts we will examine works which use the book as content, instead of as support, and which use the codex as the book form. I will argue that Keith Smith offers important examples of how such bookworks can function.

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of book arts and the problems of definitions, see Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artist's Books*, (New York: Granary Books, 1995); Betty Bright, *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 2005)

<sup>11</sup> This distinction is meant to be purely descriptive, with no value judgment of the particular bookworks implied.

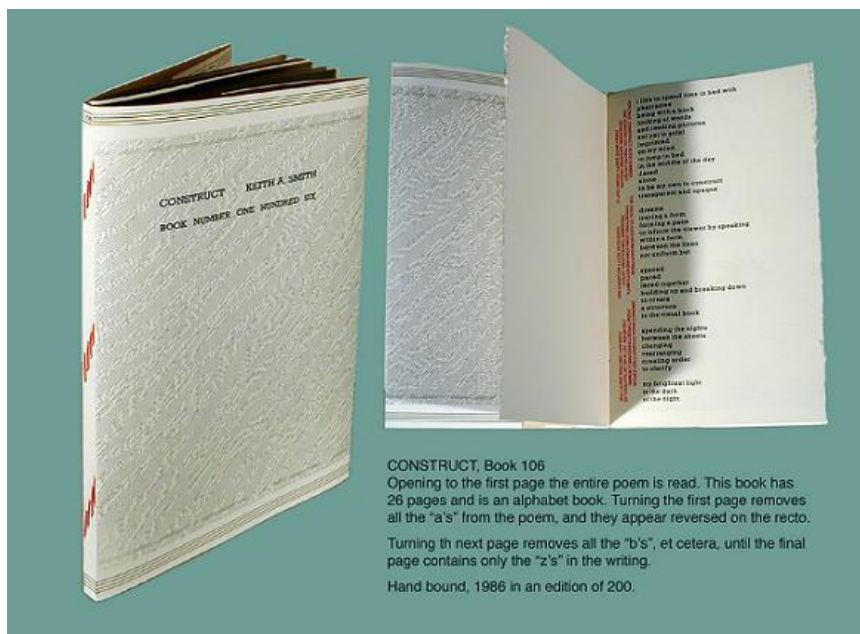
<sup>12</sup> Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, *Esthétiques du livres d'artistes, 1960-1980* (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> I use “text/image” instead of simply either “text” or “image” because the book form is conducive to both. As we shall see, an emphasis on bookworks which use text help ease the path back into a discussion of philosophy.

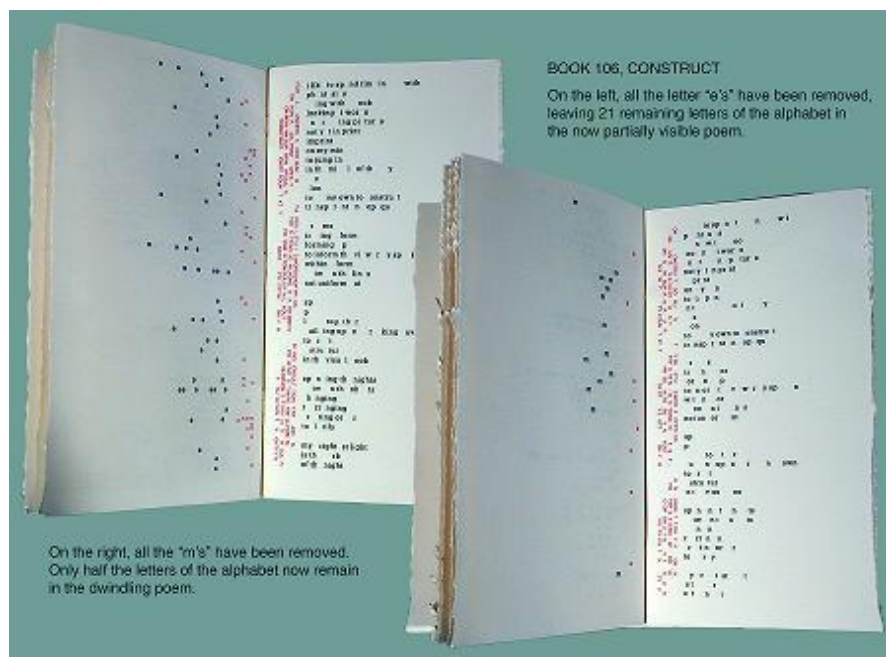
<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.334. Translations of this text are my own.

Examples of bookworks which are in books, but which function in other forms, include any work which can be taken from the book and hung on a wall, say, with no detrimental effect on the art. An example of such a bookwork would be a book of photographs. Though the collection of photographs maybe an original work of art, that is, it is not simply a reproduction of photographs which already exists, it is not necessarily the case that such a work needs to be in book form.

Contrary to this, bookworks which need to be in book form, figures 1 and 2, Keith Smith's *Book 106, Construct*, rely on the structure of the book to work. Upon opening the cover, the entirety of the text is visible. Turning the pages removes a letter from the poem, leaving a gap where the letter was. Turning the first page removes all the "a's", placing them in reverse on the verso. Each page, when turned takes away another letter, until only the "z's" remain on the final page.



**Figure 1 Keith Smith, *Book 106, Construct*, 1985. Poetry. Offset edition of 200. 22.8 x 13.3 cm. Keith Smith Books.**



**Figure 2 Keith Smith, *Book 106, Construct*. 1985.** As the pages are turned, letters are moved from the poem, on the recto to the verso. With each page turn more and more gaps appear in the poem.

Smith's *Book 106* represents a bookwork which utilizes the specific function of the codex book. The turning of the pages itself is what allows this work to function. It is not the case that the individual pieces could be separated from the book and hung on a wall. This work requires it's placement within a book. Instead of being merely a container for the texts, *Book 106* uses the book as content.

Another example is Smith's *Book 126* (Figures 3 and 4). Here Smith uses transparent pages. This ensures that the book form is necessary to the bookwork. Of this work, Smith writes:

This book has a transparency before each paper print of picture and text. When the page on the left is placed back over the photo, the combined texts of the transparency and paper reads, "Damp, my eyes glisten/ Transparent alibis/ torn by your eyes/ words not spoken/ remain/ mistakenly merciful" But when those words or partial words on the transparency are removed by turning the page, the abridged text says something very different:  
 "My eyes listen/ to/ words not spoken/ take me"<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Keith Smith, private correspondence. This book, along with the others appearing in this thesis are discussed in Keith Smith, *200 Books: An Anecdotal Bibliography* (Keith Smith Books, 2000).

It is the act of moving through the book which alters the text and the images. This act is possible precisely because the work is in book form.



**Figure 3 Keith Smith, *Book 126, In Between Lines*, 1988. Edition of 15. Silver prints and texts on transparencies. Supported Concertina binding with clam shell. 34.9 x 27.9 x 4 cm.**



**Figure 4 Keith Smith, *Book 126, In Between Lines*, 1988. The movement through the book alters the text and image. This is an example of using the book as content.**

Smith's *Book 106* and *Book 126* represent examples of bookworks which use the book as content. These bookworks only work in books. Contrarily, to think of a book as support leads to theories of separating the text from the book. The book as content does not lend itself to such questions: it is not a matter of having a text which is simply placed within a book, a text which just as easily could be hung on a wall or read on a computer; rather, it is to think of the book as being a special medium whose function can be used to enhance specific elements of texts or images.

#### 1.4. The Coming Terrain

Armed with the ideas presented in sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this chapter we can now move on to examine the treatment of the book in Deleuze and Derrida. In section 1.2 we saw that the “death of the book” was a prevalent thought among theorists during the rise of TV and electronic media.



This pervades both Deleuze's and Derrida's treatment of the book. In section 1.3 we saw how the book could be treated as content, as opposed to container or support.

Our examination of the two thinkers to come will vary based on their treatment of the book. We will see that while Deleuze writes on the possibilities of the book, he never gets beyond thinking only of the text within the book. For this reason, we will begin by examining his treatment of literature, how his distinction between difference *in* literature and difference *as* literature works. We will then apply this same distinction to this discussion of the book. Whereas with literature he is concerned with difference, we will see that in terms of the role of the book, he is concerned with the connection it makes in the world. These connections are explored in relation to his idea of the rhizome, which can connect any point with any other point. From this we can ask about rhizomes *in* books and rhizomes *as* books. Deleuze's own terminology leaves a gap where a discussion of the book, as a book, could be.

Similarly, Derrida, while he writes a good deal about the book, continues to treat it as a metaphor for total knowledge. For this reason, we will begin with his treatment of the history of writing, and how a shift from phonetic writing signals a move away from the book – again, as total knowledge. We will then examine later writings by Derrida, in which he reflects back on his writing on the book as metaphor and attempts to think of the book itself. Here again, we will see, he continues to slip into a discussion of the book as metaphor. He never treats the book as concrete physical object. I will argue this is because he begins by thinking of the book as support. Such a starting point leads to questions on possible separations of the book and text.

Against both Deleuze and Derrida's treatment of the book, I will make the case that Keith Smith represents a way to think with the book. Paralleling the distinction between the book as support and the book as content, we will see a distinction Smith makes between the "running

manuscript” and the “book experience.” The former is a single strand of text, which is then put “in” a book. As such, the book is merely a support for the text. Alternately, the book experience is the use of the book in conjunction with the text; it is to use them both. We examine Smith’s case for this distinction by following his examples from the use of the spacing of words, through the structure of the page, and finally the relation of the pages to each other.

The restriction of our scope to bookworks with words and in the codex form is meant to help bridge the gap between the philosophy and the art. I believe Keith Smith gives us reason to think treating the book as content can alter the way writing is done. For this reason, I believe the treatment of the book in Deleuze and Derrida is philosophically interesting. If it is correct that thinking of the book in terms of content – and not only in terms of the text within the book or the book as a metaphor – can change writing, the question of the treatment of the book is a very important idea.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Though outside the scope of this thesis, the notions explored here of form and content are interesting, I think, in terms of Heidegger’s discussion of the work of art. Heidegger’s attempt to break with the hylomorphic sense of art (where form is imposed upon matter) could benefit from exploring the use of form, in book arts in general and Keith Smith particularly, in that the form is made in conjunction with the content. See “Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971).

## CHAPTER 2: DELEUZE AND THE BOOK

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the use of literary examples in Deleuze's work *Difference and Repetition* and Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze uses these examples to illustrate how it is possible to think difference-in-itself. After a brief discussion of difference, as well as Deleuze's inclusion of the virtual and the actual as part of reality, I will look at various literary examples he offers, and make a distinction between difference *in* literature and difference *as* literature. This is an implicit distinction in Deleuze's discussion of literature, and its explication will aid us in understanding how Deleuze, like McLuhan, takes the medium to be an important aspect in determining thought. In section 2.3 I will very briefly outline the role of literature in Aristotle. This will place the difference Deleuze attempts to illustrate in clear contrast. I will then discuss difference in literature, focusing on Deleuze's examples of Proust and Borges. In section 2.4, I will make a case for thinking of Joyce as exemplifying difference as literature, wherein literature does not serve as the stage in which talk about difference occurs, but rather the form of literature displays difference. That is to say, difference as literature serves to make explicit difference itself through the medium of language.

In the second part of this chapter, I will argue that the "in/as" distinction introduced in our discussion of literature can function regarding materiality of the book as discussed in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. That is, Deleuze and Guattari examine the medium of the book and claim that the thought which books have traditionally enforced – linearity, etc. – can be replaced if the book is changed. In 2.5 I examine Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between the root-book, the fascicular book and the rhizome book. In 2.6 I will discuss the role of

the book as a rhizome meant to make connections in the world and how Deleuze and Guattari claim even Joyce does not go far enough. Materiality, I will argue in 2.7, has the capacity to do work, but is overlooked in Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the book. This oversight is odd, and indeed glaring, given the distinction they make between natural reality and spiritual reality, which they use to evaluate both root-books and fascicular books. I will end by examining how the idea of rhizome books works particularly well in relation to theories of hypertext. From this, I conclude that the form of the book serves as a detriment to Deleuze's idea of the rhizome. That is, because he focuses on the text within the book, and not the book itself, the rhizome structure he seeks is better found through hypertext. It is merely an unfortunate necessity that a book is required for the text at all. Instead of focusing on the medium of the book, as they set out to, Deleuze and Guattari only focus on the medium of writing.

## 2.2 Difference-in-Itself

By difference, Deleuze means the variations which enable our conceptions of objects and ideas. Difference-in-itself is an attempt to think of difference without relying on predicates or identities. I will follow his discussion of difference from *Difference and Repetition*,<sup>17</sup> juxtaposing it with Plato's notion of difference as deviation from an idea.<sup>18</sup> By understanding difference as Deleuze thinks it, we can understand how it is meant to work in literature and in relation to books.

To understand difference itself, Deleuze claims we must break with the history of philosophy, which, from Plato to Heidegger,<sup>19</sup> made difference the difference *between* objects. Where the objects are self identical, the difference represents a lack, a relation of different

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<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze also distinguishes his notion of difference from that of Aristotle (Ibid. pp. 30-35), Hegel and Leibniz (Ibid. pp 42-50).

<sup>19</sup> The inclusion of Heidegger in this history, justified in *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 64-66, may be controversial, but for our purposes it is necessary only to note the tradition Deleuze takes himself to be in contrast with.

objects to each other. The subordination of the different to the same has been the project of philosophy, to break from this is to think difference-in-itself. Deleuze writes,

The whole of Platonism ... is dominated by the idea of drawing a distinction between 'the thing itself' and the simulacra. Difference is not thought in itself but related to a ground, subordinated to the same and subject to mediation in mythic form. Overturning Platonism, then, means denying the primacy of the original over copy, of model over image; glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflections.<sup>20</sup>

To overturn Platonism is to rethink the role of difference; from thinking difference as the relation between objects to thinking of it as a dynamic force in its own right.

What then becomes of unity? How can we think of difference itself and objects at the same time? Deleuze claims that the unity of objects is a secondary order to difference.

While the history of philosophy took identity as primary, as coming first, difference is in fact the beginning of identity.

That identity not be first, that it exists as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle *become*; that it revolve around the Different: such would be the nature of a Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept, rather than being maintained under the domination of a concept in general already understood as identical.<sup>21</sup>

From difference comes identity. Difference, rather than being relegated to the role of difference between, or lack of sameness, can be thought in itself. Identity, which has been the starting point of philosophy, takes a secondary role, in this account, to difference.

To understand how identity can arise from difference, Deleuze invokes the notions of the virtual and the actual. Both the virtual and the actual, he claims, are included in reality.

The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual.* ... Indeed, the virtual must be defined as

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<sup>20</sup> *Difference and Repetition*, p. 66

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41

strictly a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension.<sup>22</sup>

The virtual is as much a part of reality as the actual. The virtual here is not the same as the possible. As opposed to the possible, which is the actual minus existence, the virtual is real. “The possible,” Deleuze writes, “is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a ‘realization’. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is that of actualization.”<sup>23</sup> In terms of the actual and the possible the possible is not real, it is the actual that needs to be “realized,” or brought into the real. Contrary to this, the virtual is already real; the process by which identities come from the virtual is “actualization.”

Furthermore, the virtual is unlike potential in that the identity (the actual) which result from the virtual is not predicable. Unlike the possible, which is in the likeness of the real (when it is “realized” it is like the real), the virtual is actualized through difference. The virtual is the process which enables the actual as the product. The product does not resemble the process.

The actualization of the virtual ... always takes place by difference, divergence and differentiation [the expression of the actualization of the virtual]. Actualization breaks with resemblances as a process no less than it does with identity as a principle. Actual terms never resemble the singularities they incarnate.<sup>24</sup>

The virtual is a field of difference from which the process of actualization enables the emergence of objects.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp 208-209

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 211

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 212; for a discussion of differentiation and differentiation, a discussion I believe we can avoid for our purposes, see p. 209

Deleuze uses examples from literature and art to convey the notions of virtual and actual, of difference-in-itself. James Williams writes:

In order to convey the sensual aspect of this relation between the virtual and the actual, [Deleuze] dramatizes the role played by the virtual in real thought through an artistic form and through examples from aesthetics.<sup>25</sup>

We will focus on the literary examples Deleuze uses to dramatize the role of difference and the virtual. By difference in literature, I will mean that the literature in question represents a field in which difference – the virtual out of which various products arise – is displayed. Difference as literature will mean that the form of literature – the words, sentences, syntax – will represent a break from the actual and a return to the virtual. That is, the structure of the literature, the medium of literature, will be such to draw attention to the virtual field of difference behind the actual products.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.3 Difference in Literature

In this section, I will focus on the examples of Proust and Borges, and show how these articulate the idea of difference within literature. In section 2.4, I will offer Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* as an example of difference as literature. But first, for the purposes of contrast I will briefly sketch a more traditional, Aristotelian model of literature. This will set in stark contrast Deleuze's own view.

For Aristotle, literature offers a catalog of typologies. This typology was an epistemological saving grace for literature according to Aristotle. In *Poetics*,<sup>27</sup> Aristotle uses

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<sup>25</sup> James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 198

<sup>26</sup> There is a sizable vocabulary shift between *Difference and Repetition* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. For our purposes, we will continue to speak of difference and the virtual even for the examples for *A Thousand Plateaus*, explaining any new vocabulary as it arises.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, especially 1451 b 4-6. The role of typology in Aristotle's work is outlined helpfully in G.F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Arguments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957).

*Oedipus* as an example. The role of literature is to show what a type of person would do in a certain situation. Oedipus, the character, represents a type of person – we can call this type X. X represents people who, like Oedipus, have certain qualities, such as nobility, courage, intelligence and hot-headedness. Literature tells what a person in type X would do, or would probably do, if they were in Oedipus' situation. They would be courageous enough to try to thwart fate by fleeing their home. They would be noble enough to want to find the individual responsible for the plague. They would get angry at Teiresias' manner of speech. And, as a result, type X would probably, in some manner, share a similar fate as Oedipus'.

For Aristotle, then, the role of literature is to provide a model of similitude. A value of literature, in so far as it has value, is that it provides an epistemologically valid model of types by which we can learn what certain people would (probably) do in certain situations.<sup>28</sup> Aristotle's emphasis on similitude is easily juxtaposed against Deleuze's own view. For Deleuze (some) literature exemplifies difference. Instead of serving as a model for typology, for Deleuze literature serves the epistemological role of revealing difference-in-itself.

We are now in a position to discuss the role of difference in literature. Deleuze mentions Proust often in *Difference and Repetition*. Deleuze uses *In Search of Lost Time* to illustrate aspects as varied as hidden, symbolic representation<sup>29</sup> and time consciousness and remembrance.<sup>30</sup> The point for our purposes, however, is the manner in which Deleuze believes Proust explicates the qualities of difference-in-itself.<sup>31</sup> It is the characters and events in the novel,

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<sup>28</sup> For our purposes, we can overlook the additional virtue of "catharsis," which Aristotle also ascribes to poetry.

<sup>29</sup> *Difference and Repetition*, p. 17

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 208-209; Deleuze explains the virtual via Proust's example of resonance: "Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract."



the circumstances and situations, which explain difference. That is, within Proust's work, there are elements that can, when read in a Deleuzian manner, help explain difference.

Marc Seem, in his article, 'Liberation of Difference: Toward a Theory of Antiliterature,'<sup>32</sup> discusses a passage of Proust's work and how Deleuze uses it to explain difference in itself. The following passage is from Volume 2 of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*:

Among all these people ... [were] the girls whom I noticed, with that mastery over their limbs which comes from perfect bodily condition and a sincere contempt for the rest of humanity ... advancing straight ahead, without hesitation or stiffness, performing exactly those movement which they wished to perform, each of their members in full independence of the rest, the greater part of their bodies preserving that immobility which is so noticeable in a good waltzer. ... Although each was of a type totally different from the others, they all had beauty; but to tell the truth, I had seen them for such a short time, and without venturing to look at them straight in the face, that I had not yet individualized any of them ... (according to the order in which their series met the eye, marvelous because the most different aspects came new on another...). ... And this want in my vision, of the demarcations which I should presently establish between them sent flooding over the group a wave of harmony, the continuous transfusion of beauty fluid, collective and mobile.<sup>33</sup>

Seem claims this scene exemplifies difference. Seem says this scene illustrates, "a nebulous beginning, nondifferentiation of the group (where each girl contains in a way the essence of the others), where the "colors and shapes of the girls intermingle," but where singularities and difference exists. That is, this scene provides a collection of pure difference. Before the girls are individualized for the narrator, before he distinguishes "between them," their beauty exists in field of "transfusion... fluid, collective and mobile." This fluid collective is similar to Deleuze's notion of the virtual and is what serves as an example of difference.

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<sup>32</sup>Marc D. Seem, "Liberation of Difference: Toward a Theory of Antiliterature," in *New Literary History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, What is Literature?. (Autumn, 1973), pp. 119-133.

<sup>33</sup> *Within a Budding Grove*, pp. 596-97. Quoted in Seem, his italics.

For our purposes, it is enough to note that the passage quoted above is meant to convey a sense of difference. Within the medium of literature, difference exists. The medium, however, is not fundamentally altered: the sentences are of standard construction; the scene conveys a thought that moves in one direction. In short, the scene above carries the reader through a scene. This is what I call difference in literature, in that difference is shown within literature.

Borges' story, 'The Garden of Forking Paths'<sup>34</sup> is the second example of difference in literature. In the story, a book is written which is also a labyrinth. It represents numerous possibilities, of which all outcomes happen. In the book (entitled *The Garden of Forking Paths*) the story is fractured, and the ancestor of the author complains that "it is an indeterminate heap of contradictory drafts... in the third chapter the hero dies, in the fourth he is alive."<sup>35</sup> The book is contradictory because it represents time as an infinite collection of possibilities that are simultaneously occurring.

In terms of Deleuze's notion of difference and the virtual, this story represents difference through the maze-like contradictions of the events. That is, the book in the story, which contains many unformed possibilities, acts similar to the virtual, which enables many actual outcomes. But what is even more significant, for our purposes, is the role difference plays within the story itself – within Borges' literature. Difference is exemplified *within* the story, but not *by* the story. The story itself – the medium of the literature – is not an example of difference; rather the book within the story serves that purpose. For this reason, I call this difference *in* literature. Literature serves as field within which difference is displayed.

Deleuze uses examples from the writings of Proust and Borges in his description of difference. The point to stress is that difference appears within these stories; it is not the form of

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<sup>34</sup> Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths, Selected Stories and Other Writings*, (New York: New Directions, 1962).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 24

these stories. That is to say there are examples of difference in these stories, but the stories themselves are not examples of difference.

#### 2.4 *Finnegan's Wake* and Difference as Literature

In this section, I will use James Joyce's novel, *Finnegan's Wake*, as an example of difference as literature. Deleuze mentions Joyce's work at several points in *Difference and Repetition*, specifically noting the role of difference within the language. Speaking of Joyce's novel, Deleuze writes, "The identity of the object read really dissolves into divergent series defined by esoteric words, just as the identity of the reading subject is dissolved into the decentred circles of possible multiple readings."<sup>36</sup> That is, the virtual is dramatized through the language itself.

Difference as literature is difference in literary form. *Finnegan's Wake* is an example of such difference. As Deleuze writes,

"Joyce's work ... [is a] question of drawing together a maximum of disparate series ... (here, esoteric words, portmanteau words) which rely upon no prior identity, which are above all not 'identifiable' in principle, but which induce a maximum of resemblance and identity into the system as a whole, as though this were the result of the process of differentiation of difference in itself..."<sup>37</sup>

Whereas Borges and Proust use language to write about difference, Joyce's very form demonstrates the virtual field of difference. The use of obscure and invented words, along with paradoxical story arches reveals the virtual processes behind the actual products.

Take, for example, the two opening paragraphs of *Finnegan's Wake*.

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.

Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passencore rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to weilderfight his penisolate woar: nor had topsawyer's rocks by

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<sup>36</sup> *Difference and Repetition*, p. 69

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121

the stream Oconee exaggerated themselves to Laurens County's gorgios  
while they went doubling their mumper all the time: nor avoice from afire  
bellowed mishe mishe to tauftauf thruartpatrick: not yet, though  
venissoon after, had a kidsad buttended a bland old Isaac: not yet though  
all's fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot  
a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to  
the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.<sup>38</sup>

The portmanteaus in this passage serve to sever the virtual from the actual. The form of the literature is not tied to the actual, but rather remains in the virtual. The reader is not able to read Joyce's paragraphs in the manner in which she could read, say, the Borges quoted above. The obvious difference between the two is Joyce's use of language. It is the language itself that exemplifies difference-in-itself.

The language and the events of Joyce's work set it against the work of Borges and Proust. While these former write difference *in* literature, Joyce uses difference *as* literature. His words and story exemplify difference itself. Thus Joyce differs from the other writers in that his literature is difference. In terms of mediums: Joyce's use of the medium is what exemplifies difference, whereas Proust and Borges work within the medium without altering it.

## 2.5 Deleuze and the Book

I have argued in favor of seeing literature as working with difference in two ways: difference *in* literature and difference *as* literature. I now want to turn the same in/as distinction to Deleuze and Guattari's use of the book. I take Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the book to be necessary. That is, they must attempt to rethink the book given the emphasis on difference instead of identity. Just as *Finnegan's Wake* displayed difference through the form of the literature, Deleuze and Guattari must make a case for the book being able to display difference through its form. It is because the mode of communication affects what can be communicated that Deleuze and Guattari must attempt a re-thinking of the book. If the traditional book favors a

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<sup>38</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*, (The Viking Press, 1937).

particular mode of thought, a break from this traditional book is necessary. Just as the form of literature is the words, sentences and syntax, the form of the book is the materiality of the physical book. It is precisely in relation to the necessity of thinking of the form that they fail, I argue, because while they criticize “traditional” books in terms of their materiality, they do not do the same for what they call the “rhizome book.”

To understand how Deleuze and Guattari fail in this regard, I will parallel the question of the book to the question of literature. To parallel this question in relation to the book, we must ask what Deleuze and Guattari claim the book can do then ask if there is a similar in/as distinction. As we shall see, Deleuze and Guattari think of the book as exemplifying the virtual<sup>39</sup> through its connections with the world. We would thus expect a discussion of the book to ask how the material make-up of the book, that is, the form of the book – what Deleuze and Guattari will call the “natural reality” of the book – can enhance the book’s connection with the world. We will see that Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between three types of books, and even *Finnegan’s Wake* fails to make the necessary connections with the world to constitute the highest potentiality of the book.

Deleuze and Guattari open *A Thousand Plateaus* with a discussion of the book. They write:

A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters [*matières*], and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters [*matières*], and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements.... There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made. Therefore a book also has no object.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Again, here we are glossing over many vocabulary shifts which occur between *Difference and Repetition* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Where necessary I will use the vocabulary from the latter with an explanation of the terms, but for the most part keeping with the former will serve our purposes.

<sup>40</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 3-4, bracketed French is my addition from *Mille Plateaux*, p. 9.

Here Deleuze and Guattari are moving beyond the traditional mode of book, what they call the root-book. They are also, however, doing something more. *Matière*, translated as ‘matters’ in the above passages, has the alternate English translation of ‘materials’. *Matière* is translated as matter in other contexts,<sup>41</sup> and similar treatment in the case of books enhances a deeper discussion of books in *A Thousand Plateaus*, or so I shall argue. For books, the materiality is the form, in the same manner in which language is the form of literature. This then raises the question not only of the use of the subject and object of books – what books are about, the subjectivity of the author, and how they should be read – but also of the materiality, or form, of books. This, I believe, is a deeper topic related to Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of the book. Before the implications are examined, however, we need to understand more about their view of the role of books.

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between three types of books: the root-book, the fascicular book and the rhizome book. Furthermore, a distinction is introduced between the natural and spiritual reality of the book. The former is the actual material construction of the book; the latter is the construction of the ideas the book produces. Deleuze and Guattari examine not only the traditional role of books, but also some recent attempts to manipulate the material form of the book.

Root-books are the traditional form of books, both in construction and in purpose. They represent the root-tree type of thought; the linear thought wherein one thought must follow another. Deleuze and Guattari write,

Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centers of significance and subjectivication, central automata like organized memories. In the

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 292. *Matière* is rendered ‘materials’ in the discussion of “involution”.

corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths.<sup>42</sup>

The arborescent system, the system of tree roots, represents a system of specified path-ways. This is to say, traditional books focus on the products of the actual, ignoring the process of the virtual. Identities are given primacy; difference is relegated to difference between identities. The pre-established paths of the roots are directly contrary to the various connections available to the virtual, or, as we shall soon see, the rhizomatic.

As Bonta and Protevi write, a “root-book may be a world unto itself (the final word, the decisive treatment); the development of themes from beginning to end.”<sup>43</sup> This book is one that represents reality; it argues effectively and has the final say in the matter at hand. This representation is seen in both the natural and spiritual realities of the book:

[T]he book as a natural reality is a tap-root, with its pivotal spine and surrounding leaves. But the book as a spiritual reality, the Tree or Root as an image, endlessly develops the law of the One that becomes two, then the two that become four ... Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree.<sup>44</sup>

In the root-book both the nature and spirit of the book work to represent the word through logical steps. In terms of the relation to the virtual and the actual, the root-book represents only the actual. It does not exemplify difference-in-itself. Indeed, in its logical procession, it serves to cover over the virtual in terms of the actual.

For our purposes, it is important to note the use of the natural reality, the physical make-up of the book, in Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the root book. While they claim the root book represents traditional, linear, fixed thought, they focus on the materiality of the book – the

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<sup>42</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 16

<sup>43</sup> Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 5

form of the book – to enhance this claim. That is, the form of the book represents the manner of thought as much as the “spiritual reality” of the book.

The second type of book, the fascicular book, operates slightly differently. Here the form of the book is altered. This book is not necessarily constructed of a “pivotal spine and surrounding leaves,” like the root-book. In this case, “natural reality is what aborts the principal root.”<sup>45</sup> However, the spiritual reality remains unaltered. Though the form of the book has changed, the idea remains the same. Deleuze and Guattari use as an example William Burroughs’s cut-up method. This method, used in his novel *Exterminator!*, among other works, uses cut up pages of text reattached at various points.

The effect is similar to collages in painting, and flash-forwards and flash-backs in film. For instance, one page from late in a novel and a page from early in a novel could be cut up and rearranged and appear in the middle of the novel. When the new page is reached some of the text is familiar, some is not, but the whole page is different and clearly out of place.<sup>46</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s point must be that while the pages are cut and moved around the basic unity of the text remains. That is, this manipulation of the pages must still fail to connect with the virtual. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari claim neither the root-book nor the fascicular book fully depart from the traditional modes of the book.

In contrast to these, Deleuze and Guattari characterize the rhizome book as one that does escape the trappings of traditional books. Rhizomes create connections; they connect at all points to any other points. Wherein root-books move in only one direction, rhizome books are characterized by connections and flexibility. They can be read starting at any point, and all points

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of this method and its roots in the Dada artists, see Jenny Skerl, *William S. Burroughs* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985).



in the book connect with all others. Furthermore, the rhizome book “is good if it works for a certain purpose, not necessarily if it sounds pretty or argues effectively.”<sup>47</sup> Rhizome books, then, are about connections and creating a connection with the reader in a manner that root-books are not. That is, they act similarly to the virtual field in which connections and fluidity are a defining aspect; it is difference in books, similar to how the Proust and Borges stories were difference in literature. And, of course, *A Thousand Plateaus* is meant to be a rhizome book.

The rhizome book, however, is not subject to the same discussion of natural reality. When discussing rhizome books, Deleuze and Guattari refer only to rhizome *writings*, passing over any mention of the construction of such a book.<sup>48</sup> They mention that they “have been criticized for overquoting literary authors.”<sup>49</sup> It seems we must here add to such criticisms. Instead of discussing the natural reality, that is, the materiality, of rhizome books, Deleuze and Guattari resort to examples of literary works. Our question now becomes: Why was materiality passed over in the discussion of rhizome books? And, in relation, is there any benefit to an increased emphasis on the materiality of the book?

## 2.6. Rhizomes in Books

To answer this question, we need to look again at the role of what Deleuze and Guattari call the spiritual reality of the book. By spiritual reality, I believe they mean the role the book insofar as it makes connections. It is the effect that the medium has on thought. Traditional books are conducive to traditional modes of thought – thinking the actual to the detriment of the virtual; the same to the detriment of difference. Similar to Deleuze’s use of literary examples to dramatize the relation of the virtual and the actual, I take his emphasis on the spiritual reality of the book as

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<sup>47</sup> Deleuze and Geophilosophy, p. 64

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 6-7

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 4

a parallel dramatization. For example, the spiritual reality of a root-book serves the purpose of postulating a hierarchical tree of thought. This hierarchy posits a reality through the book, a reality of binary logical thought. The emphasis, then, is on the purpose of the book; the way it interacts and creates connection (or fails to do so).

Again, this is Deleuze and Guattari's criticism of the fascicular book. Though the material construction of the book is changed, the underlying relation between the book and the world – that is, the spiritual reality – remains the same. And, in fact, in this regard they do not think even Joyce goes far enough:

Joyce's words, accurately described as having "multiple roots," shatter the linear unity of the word, even of language, only to posit a cyclic unity of the sentence, text, or knowledge.<sup>50</sup>

The alteration of the natural reality of the book is not enough. Though Joyce uses the medium of literature to dramatize difference, he does not exemplify rhizome books. It seems then, that in terms of the book, the medium would be explored. Deleuze and Guattari, however, are not concerned with the structure of the book in terms of the pages and spine; they focus on the connections between the world and book – the thought and actions that the book encourages. This connection occurs at the level of the spiritual reality. Even Joyce, whose language dissolves so much, continues to "posit a cyclic unity" of knowledge. That is, his books do not go far enough in connecting with the outside word.

It is at this point that we can understand how the in/as distinction introduced and defended above can be applied to the book. Only a select sample of literature served as examples of difference in literature. In the same way, only books that function in the world in a particular

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 6. It is not clear which of Joyce's books are meant here, though probably the whole corpus.

way can serve as examples of rhizomes in books. Joyce's books cannot. The question is, which books can?

It should come as no surprise that *A Thousand Plateaus* is supposed to connect to the world in such a way as to constitute a rhizome book. So what does it mean to make connections with the world? Deleuze and Guattari write,

Contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn reterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can).<sup>51</sup>

A territory is a habit of motion and action. To deterritorialize is to break with that habit, reterritorialization is the formation of a new one. Similar to a move from the actual to the virtual, and back again to a reformed actual product, this is a recall to difference itself. Furthermore, this means that the rhizome book works in such a way that the world is altered by its presence. That is, there is a flash or connection between the reader and the book such that the world is reconstituted for the reader, a rewiring of the brain. Then the book is reterritortialized by the world in its now altered state. Deleuze and Guattari continue this thought:

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject. In short, we think that one cannot write sufficiently in the name of an outside.<sup>52</sup>

The book is not a representation of the world. It is not a closed system of knowledge. Rather it is a collection of assemblages, of connections.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 11

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 23

Take, for example, *A Thousand Plateaus*. The point is to have the book connect for the reader in a manner that changes the world for the reader. The book is to make connections at all points of the world. A rhizome is supposed to connect at any point: “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.”<sup>53</sup> These connections are similar to the virtual field which we used to investigate the role of literature as dramatizations of the virtual field and difference-in-itself. In much the same way difference in literature offered a place to think difference, without the medium being difference, so, it seems, the rhizome book offers a place to show difference without using the medium itself.

## 2.7 Rhizome as Books

We can now return to the questions that ended section 2.5. Why, in the discussion of rhizome books is materiality passed over? Both root-books and fascicular books are subject to a distinction between natural and spiritual reality. Even when the fascicular book moved beyond the traditional construction of writing it was criticized for maintaining the traditional spiritual reality of the book. Burroughs was an example of this. However, when Deleuze and Guattari move to the discussion of the rhizome book, they continue to slide into literary examples.

The in/as distinction set up in the discussion of literary examples is an emphasis on the form of the medium. Difference as literature uses the form – the language – to dramatize difference. The lack of the same emphasis in the discussion of the book is glaring. Why are the first two types of book critiqued in terms of their material structure if the rhizome book is not? I propose that Deleuze and Guattari are not interested in the book, but only in the writing in the book. To understand why this might be the case, let us turn to an example of how Deleuze and Guattari propose a rhizome book could possibly work, then to some theory on hypertext.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 7

In speaking of the ideal of a book, Deleuze and Guattari claim that books can work in a similar manner as a plane of consistency. A plane of consistency is the flat plane in which lines of flight occur. It is flat because in that there are no added dimensions, there are only the lines of flight. Lines of flight are possible deterritorializations. They are connections that lead to new creations and novel reterritorializations. That is, they are similar to a departure from the actual into the virtual, which enables new actualizations. Deleuze and Guattari write:

The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.<sup>54</sup>

Ideally, then, the book could function as a plane of constancy when all laid out on a large, single sheet.

It is here that we see how the material reality of the root book is not an issue. There is no concern for the form of the book. In fact the form of the book may be a liability – ideally, there would be no pages, only a single, flat sheet. This is not merely to say, that a sheet of this sort described here is not a book. As we saw above, Deleuze and Guattari claim books are made of different matters/materials. Rather, what we are claiming is that though Deleuze and Guattari take *A Thousand Plateaus* to be a rhizome book, it has nothing to do with the form of the book because ideally it would be much different in form.

Another reason to doubt the importance of the physical form of the book to the notion of rhizomatics (the study of rhizomes) is apparent through theories on hypertext. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, much has been written on the rhizomatic nature of hypertext and other

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 9

phenomena newly possible due to the Internet.<sup>55</sup> Stuart Moulthrop points out how hypertext, or the “information technology consisting of individual blocks of text, or lexias, and the electronic links that join them,”<sup>56</sup> can be linked to Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus* can be thought of as “an incunabular hypertext.”<sup>57</sup> That is, *A Thousand Plateaus* in its construction as plateaus, which can be read in any order, is a proto-hypertext. Though Deleuze and Guattari were writing before technology allowed for rhizomatic innovations available today, they characterized such writing in the printed word. And indeed, it seems that Deleuze and Guattari would have been better off doing their rhizome writing with hypertext instead of with a book. The book form seems to be nothing but the most convenient place for a text they take to be rhizomatic.

We can see, then, through the ideal nature of the book as a single sheet of flat paper and through theories of hypertext as rhizomatic, that the book itself has nothing to do with rhizome writing. Again, Deleuze and Guattari’s own project required them to separate their work from that of “traditional” books. But the nature of the book that they put forth, as traditional books reinforcing traditional thought, seems specified to enable them to juxtapose their own writing against it. But this does not seem to have anything to do with the book itself. In fact, it seems that the book is a regrettable necessity for them. That is, their text would have worked better in other forms, but because it shared a similar form to more traditional books, those books had to be separated from what they took themselves to be doing.

Deleuze and Guattari, we have seen, understood the need to critique the medium of books. This is because they take the medium to be conducive to particular forms of thought. This

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, *Hyper/Text/Theory*, George P. Landow, ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994)

<sup>56</sup> George P. Landow, “What’s a Critic to Do?: Critical Theory in the Age of Hypertext,” in *Hyper/Text/Theory*, p. 1 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

<sup>57</sup> Stuart Moulthrop, “Rhizome and Resistance,” in *Hyper/Text/Theory*, p. 304; for a critique of this view, see Martin E. Rosenberg, “Physics and Hypertext: Liberation and Complicity in Art and Pedagogy,” in the same volume.

need is exactly where they fail, however, in that they do not consider the book itself but only the writing within the book.

## CHAPTER 3: DERRIDA AND THE BOOK

### 3.1 Introduction

The role of the book in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*<sup>58</sup> arises in his examination of the ethnocentrism and logocentrism of phonetic writing. Phonetic writing is ethnocentric because it is generally thought to be the highest form of writing, the end toward which non-phonetic writing tends, making the West the culmination of a progression of history; logocentric because it privileges the logos, or thought, as the center and origin of all signifiers – first the voice and, by extension, writing. We will see that the movement of writing away from phonetic writing – that is, the use of the term “writing” for things other than phonetic signification – is symptomatic of a move away from phonetic writing as the center of thought. This de-centering of phonetic writing has far-reaching effects for the metaphysics based on this system of writing.

In section 3.2 we will explain what Derrida sees as the epoch of exterior writing, as he traces the dominant theme of writing as a “signifier of a signifier.” In section 3.3 we will see how the idea of the sign carries with it the signifier and the signified, as well as the sensible and intelligible. We will outline Derrida's claim that the entirety of Western metaphysics is possible only within a system that already makes these distinctions. Section 3.4 will show the historical distinction Derrida points out between “good” and “bad” writing, and the use of the metaphorical book to represent totality of knowledge. Against this “good” writing – God's writing on the heart of man, the book of Nature, etc. – Derrida juxtaposes his notion of writing, which is devoid of such totality. Furthermore, we shall see that this distinction is used in Derrida not only in *Of Grammatology*, but also in *Writing and Difference* and *Positions*.

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<sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976).



The distinctions made in all these works between a metaphorical notion of the book and writing leaves room, I shall argue in section 3.5, for questioning the lack of attention to the book as a concrete, physical object. That is, while writing is subject to discussion in both its “good” and “bad” aspects, the book is only treated as a metaphor. We will also see how, years after writing *Of Grammatology*, Derrida takes up the question of the “book to come,” and asks about the many supports a book can adopt. This emphasis on the book as support, as a container for the text within, leads Derrida to slide back into a metaphorical discussion of the book. Once the support is taken as something added onto text, it becomes a question of liberating the latter from the former. Derrida, like Deleuze, understands the importance of the medium of the book in affecting thought and thus must separate what he’s doing from what books have traditionally done. Like Deleuze, I will argue that Derrida fails to take the book itself into consideration, and for this reason fails to truly explore the use of the medium to achieve an affect on thought.

### 3.2 The Epoch of Exterior Writing

Derrida’s examination focuses on “a situation [that] has always already been announced,”<sup>59</sup> but which is more prominently evident today. The exhaustion of the epoch of the superiority of speech over writing is seen through the “death of the book,” which calls for a new mutation in the understanding of writing. That is, the death of the book – which should be understood as Hegel’s “end of religion,” or “end of art,” which is not to say practices which fall under such titles will cease to operate, but rather that they have reached their completion and have been surpassed by other means of fulfilling similar needs – opens a new understanding of writing, in which it is not subservient to the operations of the book. As we shall see, Derrida has a particular notion of the “operations of the book.” Before we turn to these, let us see how he characterizes the exhaustion of the epoch of exterior writing.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p.9

“For some time now,” Derrida writes, “one says ‘language’ for action, movement, thought, reflection, consciousness, unconsciousness, experience, affectivity, etc.” Language served as the conceptual tool through which we understood not only the relation to the voice, but many things in the world.

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.”<sup>60</sup>

That “writing,” is said of things which are alien to the voice is the exhaustion of the epoch of exterior writing. For reasons we will see in the next section, the epoch in question relies on a signifying regression from writing (as phonetic writing) through the voice to thought. Before we move on to this, it is important to look more closely at the change in the relation of writing to the voice that allows Derrida to outline its closure.<sup>61</sup>

Christopher Johnson’s study of the *Grammatology* makes explicit the sources of Derrida’s widened notions of writing. Though it may sound abstract and isolated,

It should not be thought that Derrida’s questioning concerning writing is restricted to a purely metaphysical problem, of interest only to philosophers. In fact, from the very start of the *Grammatology*, Derrida situates his enquiry in a context wider than that of the academic discipline of philosophy itself. His own focus on writing, he insists, is not an isolated gesture, but reflects and is part of a more general revolution in modern thought.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> I say “outline its exhaustion,” rather than “declare it dead,” or “call for its end,” because, as Derrida says, “Perhaps it [the ages of the sign] will never *end*. Its historical *closure* is, however, outlined.” *Of Grammatology*, p. 14

<sup>62</sup> Christopher Johnson, *Derrida* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 44

Writing, then, has already been extended to areas disassociated with the voice before Derrida ever came on the scene, in such fields as cinematography and choreography, but also in theoretical mathematics. Derrida writes,

Why is it [the situation of expanded “writing”] today in the process of making itself known *as such* and *after the fact*? ... I have already alluded to *theoretical* mathematics; its writing ... has never been absolutely linked with a phonetic production. Within cultures practicing so-called phonetic writing, mathematics is not just an enclave. ... This enclave is also the place where the practice of scientific languages challenges intrinsically and with increasing profundity the ideal of phonetic writing and all its implicit metaphysics (metaphysics *itself*) ...<sup>63</sup>

The elements which challenge phonetic writing are present already in the system itself.

Theoretical mathematics is just one example of how a system of notation, completely separated from the voice, functions.

The difference between the role of phonetic writing and that of theoretical mathematics may be sharpened with a discussion of what Michael Lynch calls “rhetorical mathematics.”<sup>64</sup> In relation to diagrams within text, and how the system of signification alters from the text to the picture, Michael Lynch claims the move from the text to the pictures creates a “hermeneutic passage.” Such a passage, he writes, “involves a movement through which the reader departs from a written reference to the figure, examines the figure while being guided by the text’s directions, and then returns to the point of departure armed with resources for resuming the reading.”<sup>65</sup> The “notational devices,” of theoretical spaces “are not *identical* to the discursive text

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<sup>63</sup> *Of Grammatology*, pp 9-10

<sup>64</sup> Michael Lynch, “Picture of Nothing? Visual Construals in Social Theory,” *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 1. (Spring, 1991), pp. 1-21

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p.7

they accompany, they do not function simply as decorative ornaments,” rather they give a new way of thinking of the arguments and ideas.<sup>66</sup>

The space on the page, separated from the text, which a diagram, or “theory picture,” inhabits Lynch refers to as “rhetorical mathematics.” He writes:

Although theory pictures are neither naturalistic nor mathematical representations, they evoke an impression of mathematicity. Theory pictures often take the form of contingency tables and path-analytic diagrams. They also make use of lines, points, and regular geometric figures to depict spatial levels, cognitive dimensions, categorical boundaries, and structural axes. In an important way, however, these usages are metaphorical, *not* mathematical, because often it is difficult to imagine how numerical coefficients ever could be assigned to the structural axes and causal pathways. Yet theory pictures are not simply “qualitative” or nonmathematical representations, because they use the formal devices associated with mathematics to present and elaborate their arguments.<sup>67</sup>

The space of theoretical diagrams, then, is mathematical in a metaphorical sense – in that there are no numerical coefficients –yet aptly considered mathematical – in that they use formal devices associated with mathematics (lines, points, etc.). Lynch’s analysis helps us understand how theoretical mathematics – an example of writing within the phonetic system that does not utilize the phonetic elements – can serve as an example of non-phonetic understanding. Lynch’s “rhetorical mathematics” serves as a middle ground between the phonetic writing of the text, and what actual theoretical mathematics does. That is, the hermeneutic passage from the text to the picture is a microcosm of the difference between how thinking could operate within and outside of phonetic writing. Though his examples favor the text (the diagrams are used to understand the arguments), they are a first step in understanding how a change in writing is a change in thinking.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 11

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. pp 11-12

Other symptoms of the exhaustion of the epoch include the movement of information retrieval and the human sciences. Derrida writes,

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... This development, coupled with that of anthropology and 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.<sup>68</sup>

Theoretical mathematics, along with information retrieval, anthropology and the human sciences, show a de-centering of the thought on phonetic writing; phonetic writing, instead of being the *telos* of all writing, is only one possibility, “limited in space and time.” That Derrida call phonetic writing a medium in the above passage is telling. Phonetic writing is conducive to a particular form of thought; it carries with it its own notion of a center. As we shall see, signification of the sign tends toward a transcendental signified. The de-centering of the phonetic sign is a de-centering of the signified toward which it moves. To understand the danger this de-centering holds for the metaphysics which rely on the system of phonetic writing, we need now to turn to the function of the sign.

### 3.3 The Sign

The Saussurean notion of a sign is split between the signifier and the signified, and carries with it notions of the sensible and the intelligible.<sup>69</sup> All signs have both a sensible aspect – the voice can be heard, writing can be seen – and an intelligible aspect: the referent which is being called to mind. For instance, the word ‘table,’ when spoken, has the sensible quality of the sounds of the

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<sup>68</sup> *Of Grammatology*. p. 10

<sup>69</sup> Derrida develops his critique based on the writings of Saussure, but sets out to show how they apply to the field of linguistics as a whole; see *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

word, and the intelligible aspect of the idea of a table. The written word ‘table,’ also has a sensible aspect, the marks on the page, but its referent – its intelligible aspect – is not only the idea of table, but also the spoken word ‘table.’<sup>70</sup> Writing, then, is separated from the immediate thought, exterior to the body, and refers to the voice just as much as to the idea.

Because phonetic writing’s reference contains both the voice and the idea it is traditionally thought of as a “signifier of a signifier.”<sup>71</sup> That is, phonetic writing is a signifier which signifies another signifier – the voice. The voice in turn signifies thought, which is the traditional signified. Because of the proximity of the voice to thought, the voice has been given preference over writing. This is what Derrida means by phonocentrism: “the absolute proximity of the word and being.”<sup>72</sup> The thought, or logos, is the origin of all signifiers and toward which all signifiers refer. The thought is expressed (almost) immediately in speech, but is deferred and delayed in writing. As a signifier of a signifier, writing has traditionally been excluded as a sometimes necessary, but potentially dangerous, technique.

The metaphysical significance of this phonocentrism is far reaching. As Derrida writes:

The difference between signified and signifier belongs in a profound and implicit way to the totality of a 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.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> In terms of Frege’s distinction, both the spoken word and phonetic sign ‘table’ have the same referent, but different senses. The overlap between the Saussure’s and Frege’s theories is, I take it, in Frege’s notion of the disconnected sense or thought. That is, Frege takes the sense or thought of a proposition to be independent from any linguistic function, and thus resembles Saussure’s intelligible side of the sign. For a very concise discussion, see Kevin C. Klement, “Gottlob Frege” The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/f/frege.htm#H4>, March 17, 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 10. Derrida is using the terminology of Rousseau to expose long-standing continuity of thought on phonetic writing in particular and signs in general.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 13

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

The idea of the sign as consisting of sensible and intelligible aspects carries with it the notion of a pure signified, “able to ‘take place’ in its intelligibility, before its ‘fall,’ before any expulsion into the exteriority of the sensible here below.”<sup>74</sup> That is, a signifier always signifies, and that which is signified in its purity, which does not signify anything else, is thought to be the origin of all signification. “This absolute logos,” Derrida writes, “was an infinite creative subjectivity in medieval theology: the intelligible face of the sign remains turned toward the word and the face of God.”<sup>75</sup>

### 3.4 Good and Bad Writing

Even when not explicitly related to a creator God, the notion of the sign is related to logos in general wherein the signifier is second to the signified. The signifier receives its meaning only from the signified, it is an unfortunate necessity that a signifier stands between us and the signified. When the case seems otherwise, when it seems that the signifier is not relegated to secondary position, it is a matter of metaphor.

[T]he writing of truth in the soul, opposed by *Phaedrus* (278a) to bad writing (writing in the “literal” [*propre*] 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 found 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.<sup>76</sup>

The only exception to the historical degradation of writing as a “signifier of a signifier” is writing taken as a metaphor for total knowledge. Good writing, the metaphorical writing, is distinguished from bad writing, or “literal” writing: “there is therefore a good and bad writing:

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p15

the good and natural is the divine inscription in the heart and the soul; the perverse and artful is the technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body.”<sup>77</sup>

Good writing is pure knowledge understood immediately and entirely.

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.<sup>78</sup>

Comprehended, that is, in both senses of the term. Not only understood, as good writing is understood in totality – with nothing mysterious or alien – but also “comprehended” as contained. Good writing is contained, “in a volume or a book,” in a closed system in which nothing alien is allowed. He continues:

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 logocentrism against the disruption of writing ...<sup>79</sup>

That is, the disruption of bad writing, which stands against good writing. Good writing, being comprehended in a volume or book, represents the idea of totality – of total and complete understanding. As such, it signifies a totality – a total signified – which must exist before and independent of the signifier book. It is in this way that the idea of the book props up the notion of the transcendental signified – a “pure signified,” which exists before the “fall,” of any sensible signifier.

Derrida offers several examples of the metaphorical use of the book:

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 17

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 18

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



Galileo: "It [the book of Nature] is written in a mathematical language."

Descartes: "...to read in the great book of Nature..."

Bonnet: "It would seem more philosophical to me to presume that our earth is a book that God has given to intelligences far superior to ours to read, and where they study in depth the infinitely multiplied and varied characters of His adorable wisdom."<sup>80</sup>

In these examples, the book is only metaphorical. That is, there is no book in the concrete sense of an actual, physical book. As metaphorical, these notions of the book carry with them the historic prejudice of phonetic writing: that signs (in this case nature) signify transcendental signifiers (the logos of God).

The metaphorical book is explicated further in *Writing and Difference*.<sup>81</sup> Derrida discusses Leibniz and Mallarmé in connection with the metaphorical book. Leibniz: "There is only one Book, and this same Book is distributed throughout all books."<sup>82</sup> That is, there is one Book (the capitalized, encompassing Book), which houses the absolute Logos of God, and all books can only tend toward the Book. Similarly, Mallarmé writes, "I will go even further and say: the Book for I am convinced that there is only One, and that it has [unwittingly] been attempted by every writer, even by Geniuses."<sup>83</sup> He continues:

...revealing that, in general, all books contain the amalgamation of a certain number of age-old truths; that actually there is only one book on earth, that is the law of the earth, the earth's true Bible. The difference between individual works is simply the difference between individual interpretations of one true and established text, which are proposed in a mighty gathering of those ages we call civilized or literary.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 16, Derrida claims the procession of the metaphorical writing is important to trace the emergence of the privilege of presence in modernity. For our purposes, it is sufficient to point out the use of metaphorical writing in so far as it ignores the book in favor of a metaphorical book of absolute knowledge.

<sup>81</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1978).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 8

<sup>83</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Poems, Essays and Letters*, trans. Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), p. 15; quoted in *Writing and Difference*, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> *Writing and Difference*, p. 10

In both Leibniz and Mallarmé the Book represents a pre-existing reference toward which individual books tend. There is only one Book, and books differ only “between individual interpretations” of the “one true and established text.”

The Book serves in this case as a transcendental signified, with books as signifiers which refer to the Book. Again this system is distinguished from writing. Derrida:

To write is not only to know that through writing, through the extremities of style, the best will not necessarily transpire, as Leibniz thought it did in divine creation, nor will the transition to what transpires always be *willful*, nor will that which is noted down always infinitely *express* the universe, resembling and reassembling it. It is also to be incapable of making meaning absolutely precede writing: it is thus to lower meaning while simultaneously elevating inscription. The eternal fraternity of theological optimism and of pessimism: nothing is more reassuring, but nothing is more despairing, more destructive of our books than the Leibnizian Book. On what could books in general live, what would they be if they were not alone, so alone, isolated worlds?<sup>85</sup>

With the notion of the Book, in both Leibniz and Mallarmé, meaning precedes writing. The best writing can do, then, is to come as close as possible to this meaning. Writing, in Derrida’s sense, is to know that there is no meaning before it is written. “Meaning,” Derrida writes, “must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning.”<sup>86</sup>

In *Writing and Difference*, then, Derrida uses both Leibniz and Mallarmé as examples of writers who think in terms of a single Book. We can ask at this point, however, about the inclusion of Mallarmé here. It is true that Mallarmé writes of the book in a metaphorical sense, claiming, “all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book.”<sup>87</sup> But he is also very

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. pp. 10-11

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 11

<sup>87</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, “The Book: A Spiritual Instrument,” in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, Mary Ann Caws, ed. (New York: New Directions Books, 1982), p 80

influential for his work in experimental typography and book design.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Mallarmé claims the book must be distinguished from the newspaper in that the latter “inflicts the monotonousness of its eternally unbearable columns, which are merely strung down the pages by hundreds.”<sup>89</sup> The book, in contrast to this, should make more use of the space of the page and the placement of the text. That is, in terms of the special format of the book in distinction to a newspaper, Mallarmé says, “the work of art – which is unique or should be – must provide illustrations.”<sup>90</sup> It is instructive here to point out that Derrida groups Mallarmé with Leibniz in terms of thinking of the metaphorical book, but does not mention Mallarmé’s concern with the physical constructs of a book. This is symptomatic of Derrida’s own take on the book as an idea rather than an object.<sup>91</sup>

In an interview with Henri Ronse, published in *Positions*<sup>92</sup>, Derrida again makes the distinction between the book as a unified whole and writing. Ronse asks if Derrida’s books “do not form a single Book...” to which Derrida responds:

No. In what you call my books, which is first of all put in question is the unity of the book and the unity “book” considered as perfect totality, with all the implication of such a concept. And you know that these implications concern the entirety of our culture, directly or indirectly... Under these titles it is solely a question of a unique and differentiated textural “operation,” if you will, whose unfinished movement assigns itself no absolute beginning, and which, although it is entirely consumed

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<sup>88</sup> For a discussion on Mallarmé’s influence on book arts and concrete poets, see Betty Bright, *No Longer Innocent: Book Arts in America 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 2005), pp. 34-38

<sup>89</sup> “The Book: Spiritual Instrument,” p. 83

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Derrida does site Mallarmé again in his talk “The Book to Come,” cited below, and again fails to mention Mallarmé’s exploration of the book as a book – and not merely as a metaphor.

<sup>92</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. trans Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 1981.

by the reading of other texts, in a certain fashion refers only to its own writing.<sup>93</sup>

Here Derrida separates his writing from the metaphorical notion of the book. His writing is a “textual ‘operation,’” and it refers only to itself. This is easily opposed to the idealized book outlined above. Derrida is quick to distinguish his writing from a book because he understands the medium of the book as traditionally favored a form of thinking that he wishes to escape.

We have seen through *Of Grammatology* (good vs. bad writing), *Writing and Difference* (Books vs. books) and *Positions* (books vs. textual operations) that Derrida distinguishes the book from writing. The distinction we noted first in *Of Grammatology* is an important strand through many of Derrida’s writings.

### 3.5 The Non-Idealized Book

For our purposes, it is important to note that while writing is discussed in different ways – as both “literal,” and “metaphorical,” – the book is only “metaphorical.” That is, Derrida only discusses the “idea of the book,” never as the notion of an actual, concrete book. We saw this first, and in these terms in *Of Grammatology*, and the same procedure is followed in *Writing and Difference* and his interview in *Positions*. This point is stated by Derrida himself years later in a talk.

What I then called “the end of the book” came at the close of a whole history: a history of the book, of the figure of the book, and even what was called “the book of nature” (Galileo, Descartes, Hume, Bonnet Von Schubert, and so on). In speaking of the ongoing “end of the book,” I was referring to what was already in the offering, of course ... but mainly I meant the onto-encyclopedic or Hegelian model of the great total book, the book of absolute knowledge linking its own infinite dispersion to itself, in a circle.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 3

<sup>94</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2005). p. 14

That is, of course, exactly the point in question. When Derrida wrote about the book in *Of Grammatology*, and, I have argued, in *Writing and Difference* and *Positions*, what he means is the idea of a total book, of total knowledge. In this section I will argue that though in this later piece, he does set out to discuss the book as a physical object, he continues to slip – through the same metonymic shift he diagnosis in others – into thinking of the book in terms of the idealized notion of absolute knowledge.

On the question of the “Book to Come,” Derrida claims that to question the book we must separate the book from other elements. The question of the book should be kept separate from writing, technologies of writing, and notions of work.<sup>95</sup> Also, and this is the key for our purposes, the book should not be confused with the question of supports:

[T]he question of the book should not be conflated with that of supports. Quite literally, or else metonymically, (but we will continually be concerned with these *figures* of the book, with these metonymical, synechdochic, or simply metaphorical movements), it is possible and this has certainly been done, to speak of books that have the most different kinds of support – not just the classical ones but the quasi immateriality or viruality of electronic and telematic operations of “dynamic supports” with or without screens.<sup>96</sup>

There are two important points to pull from this. First, the question of supports seems to be the question of the form of the book – the materiality of the book. Thinking in terms of books and support, of books having different possible supports, and not being restricted to any one support, Derrida’s claim, rightly I think, allows us to think of the book as a physical object. At the same time, thinking of the book itself as support, he creates a dichotomy between the physical make-up of the book, and the text within. This is a first step in asking how the text within can be liberated. In other words, if the book is approached as a support for what is held within – and I

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. pp. 4-5

take Derrida's claim that books can have "the most different kinds of support," to claim that "books" are not the physical object, but rather that which is "held" by the support – it is little more than a container. It is then a question of freeing the contained from the container.

The second point in the above quote that will occupy us – and move us away from the first point – is the metonymical shift. Derrida outlines the shift in meanings that lead the Greek *Biblion* from bark to paper to book. A similar metonymy would be necessary, Derrida claims, if the word "library" is kept even when the building moves to house more electronic texts than bound books. The metonymy that concerns us, however, is Derrida's own. Though he starts by speaking of the book as a physical object, with supports, with materiality, he then goes on to tie books with totality:

What then do we have the right to call "book" and in what way is the question of *right*, far from being preliminary or accessory, here lodged at the very heart of the question of the book? This question is governed by the question of right, not only in its particular juridical form, but also in its semantic, political, social, and economic form – in short, in its total form. And the question of the book, as we shall see, is also that of *a certain totality*.<sup>97</sup>

The question of the book – of what we have a right to call a book, given the different forms books can take – metonymically shifts into the question of totality. This is because for Derrida, the book is still the ideal of total knowledge, even when he begins by examining the materiality, the physical object, of the book. It is still the idea of totality, only contained within the support of the book.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 5; italics added.

Another example of Derrida's neglect of the book form is pertinent for purposes of juxtaposition against Keith Smith in the next chapter. In an interview on the effects of the computer on philosophy and philosophical thought,<sup>98</sup> Derrida says:

People often ask me, "Has your writing changed since you have been writing on the computer?" I'm incapable of replying. I don't know what criteria to measure it by. There's certainly a change but I'm not sure that it affects what is written, even if it does modify the way of writing.<sup>99</sup>

The computer, for Derrida, modified "the way of writing," that is, the manner in which the document is arranged and edited. It had no effect on what is written, however.<sup>100</sup> The point is pressed home when Derrida goes on to say that while the computer, for many writers, is a first chance to break with the styles of linear writing, such possibilities for him were exhausted before the computer's advent. He says:

It was well before computers that I risked the most refractory texts in relation to the norms of linear writings. It would easier for me now to do this work of dislocation or typographical invention – of grafting, insertions, cuttings and pasting – but I'm not very interested in that any more from that point of view and in that form. That was theorized and that was done – then. ... what I was able to try to change in the matter of page formatting I did in the archaic age, if I can call it that, when I was still writing by hand or with the old typewriter.<sup>101</sup>

The computer, then, does not represent for Derrida a break from the linear constricts of the typewriter. Such breaks were possible, albeit less easily, before the computer. This is particularly

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<sup>98</sup> "The Word Processor," and interview with *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, in *Paper Machine* (op. cit.) pp. 19-32

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 25

<sup>100</sup> The "what" in question here is doubly strange. For our purposes, we need only point out that Derrida does not allow the developments of writing apparatuses alter his connection with the physical structure of the apparatus of the book. It is also of interest to note that Derrida should not have a "what" he is writing. As we have seen in previous sections of this chapter, there is no possibility for a transcendental signified for Derrida, though that seems to be what this "what" is.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

true of *Glas*.<sup>102</sup> Though Derrida famously juxtaposes the work of Hegel and Genet through manipulation of the text, each page continues to be only a container for the text. The specific functions of the format of the book are not explored. As we shall see in the next chapter, Keith Smith represents a writer whose writing is affected by the possibilities of the computer, for the manipulation of the text on the page, but also for the form of the book itself.

We must conclude, then, by claiming that Derrida never examines the non-idealized book, even though a discussion and critique of the book is necessary. It is necessary for Derrida for the same reason it is necessary for Deleuze: they both understand the medium of the book to enhance and encourage a particular form of thought.

Though Derrida begins a discussion of the book as a physical object, many years after his initial analysis of the metaphorical book, he shifts back to metaphor, back to the book as totality. I claim he does so because he begins his examination of the book as support, which leads to the question of allowing the text to escape the support of the bound book. This metonymy keeps him from thinking of the book as a book, and thus thinking of the possible ways of thinking when the medium of the book is taken seriously. Furthermore, in the discussion of the effects of the computer, we see that Derrida, though concerned with the spacing of the text on the page, does not extend his interest to the book – to the relation of multiple pages, as they function in a book. The medium of the book, which Derrida attempts to distance himself from, is not explored, rather Derrida only thinks of the metaphorical book.

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<sup>102</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Paris : Éditions Denoël/Gonthier, 1981). For another example of the use of the text to operate outside of standard margins , see Jacques Derrida, “Parergon” in *Truth in Painting* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1987).



## CHAPTER 4: SMITH AND THE BOOK

### 4.1 Introduction

We have seen how the treatment of the book in both Deleuze and Derrida overlooks the book for the sake of the text (Deleuze) and the metaphorical nature of the idea of the book (Derrida). We have also seen how these oversights are surprising considering both Deleuze and Derrida's understanding of the book form to be a medium which reinforces particular forms of thought. In this chapter we will examine the treatment of the book in the works of the artist Keith Smith. I will argue that Smith uses the book as a physical object in an interesting way, and that by this examination we can highlight how both Deleuze and Derrida overlooked a potentially important manner of thinking of the book. We will see how Smith begins by examining the space of the page and alterations within text to manipulate meaning of the written word. We will then see how he extends these concepts to the interaction between the pages, and itineraries through the book. Because many of Smith's examples are only possible because he is writing in a book, I will use photographs and images where appropriate.

### 4.2. Running Manuscript and the Book Experience

In chapter 1 we investigated Moeglin-Delcroix's distinction between the book as content and the book as support. The book as support is merely a container for the images or text within the book. The book simply "holds" the texts. The book as content, on the other hand, integrates the book form with text or image. Examples of the book as content were Smith's *Book 106* and *Book 126* (Figures 1-4). Speaking in terms of the relation between text and book, Smith makes a similar distinction between the running manuscript and the book experience.

The running manuscript is a continuous strand of text which is then placed in a book. The idea of the running manuscript is that the text takes precedent, with no notice of the book it will

later be fitted within. The book in this case becomes simply a container for the completed manuscript. This thesis is an example of a running manuscript. The ideas are being conveyed with little note of the formatting or medium on which it will be presented. When a running manuscript is fitted in a book as many pages are used as necessary; the pages merely hold the pre-existing text.

A book experience, on the other hand, is the use of the book itself<sup>103</sup> in relation to the text. That is, the book is in mind when the text is being written. Whereas a running manuscript treats the book as a shell, Smith writes,

[A] book, that is the format, can be *more*. It can be utilized by the poet, or writer of prose, or even the writer of instructional or technical manuals, to reinforce the text. The art of oratory assists the speaker in conveying a message. An investigation of the inherent properties of the book format hints of ways the vehicles can efficiently, vividly, and with clarity, aid the revelation of the written work. It can open the process of writing for the writer to include a possibility of visual layout assisting what is said, as opposed to typing a running manuscript.<sup>104</sup>

The book experience, Smith claims, can aid the clarity and effect of the writing. The book form, far from being a mute medium, can be utilized to enhance the writing. The idea of the book being more than a mute medium is precisely what fuels the critiques of the book we saw in Deleuze and Derrida. The book form can be used not only for poets, but for other sorts of writers, and, I would like to claim, for philosophy as well.

Smith's notion of the book experience corresponds closely with that of the book as content. Both attempt to think of the book as more than a storage place for text or image. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 3, when Derrida speaks of the book to come, he begins with thinking of the book as support. It is precisely this reason that he continues to slide into thinking of the book as

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<sup>103</sup> Again, as we saw in chapter 1, though the book comes in many different forms, we will confine our discussion to the codex with text.

<sup>104</sup> Keith Smith, *Text in Book Format* (Rochester, NY: keith a smith BOOKS), 2<sup>ND</sup> Ed. 1997. p. ix

metaphor. When the book is taken as only a support for a text, it is natural to ask how the text can be liberated from such support. When, on the other hand, the book is taken as an indispensable property of a writing – the text having been written for the form of the book – the book must be thought as a necessary component of the work.

Furthermore, Smith, like Deleuze, Derrida and McLuhan, understand that thinking of the book in this way is due to specific historical developments. About the benefits of the advent of computers, Smith writes

The advantage of a home computer is *not* that it does the same thing [as a pencil or typewriter] more easily and faster. It does neither. Composing on the computer allows the writer to be visual, to compose the page, as well as the text.<sup>105</sup>

Where previously a writer would turn over the manuscript to the publisher, having the latter arrange the text in the book, now the author can be in charge of the text and the book. The computer enables new possibilities when it comes to book formatting, but it also brings into contrast how books have previously been made. It is only with new possibilities that we are able to notice our own environments. Indeed even this thesis would not be possible without the developments which first brought the role of the book to the forefront, but also enabled the use of photographs to be assimilated into word files. That I am able to discuss a thinking only possible through the use of the book while writing a document on a computer which will be stored in an electric database is evidence of the importance of historic developments to thinking and what can be thought.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 11

### 4.3 New Possibilities in Writing

In this section we will examine some of the examples Smith gives in his discussion of the book experience. He begins with a discussion of how writing can do more than what is heard. He writes,

Text may be so written that hearing the words is only part of what the writer has said. Then, format must be experienced. Incorporating the format as part of the content is an extension of the statement. ... Space between, even space within words, can change what is said:

stiFLED  
gaTHEREd  
sNAKED away<sup>106</sup>

In these examples we see more than what would be audible had these words been read aloud.

“Words-within-words are meant to be seen and not heard.”<sup>107</sup>

Words-within-words deal only with the font and text of a specific site of a page. This is the beginning, but by no means the entirety, of thinking of the book experience. Smith extends his thinking of the specific function of the book to the spacing between pages. That is, the book has a specific form which, when emphasized, enables certain possibilities lost in a running manuscript. One such possibility is the manipulation of the pacing of the book. The extension of a text through multiple pages can have different affects on the pacing of the reading, depending on the layout and number of words on each page. Concerning the extension of text over several pages, Smith writes,

It might be a full page of text, a paragraph, sentence or only a single word that crosses the gutter or the fore edge to compose the following page. Now the page is not relegated to support, but has been composed in keeping with the text it contains. The book reinforces, and therefore is part of the statement.<sup>108</sup>

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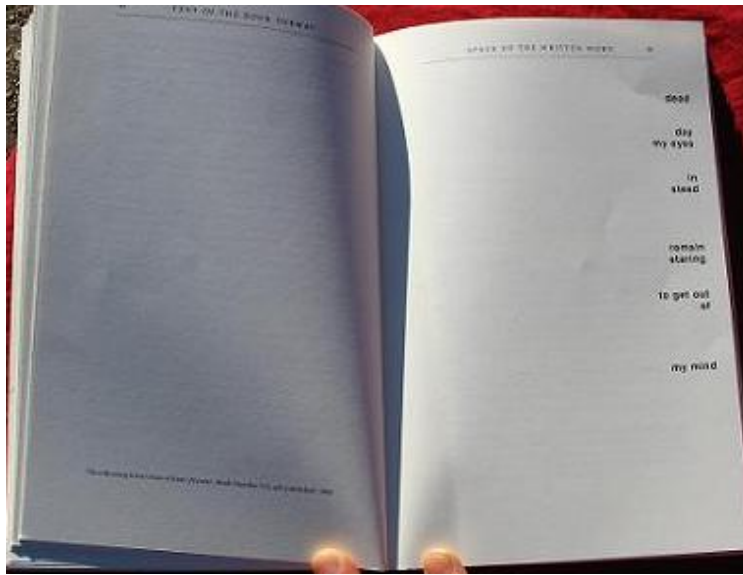
<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 21

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Such experimentation with typology bring to mind Mallarmé, hence the concern in chapter 3 that Derrida may have overlooked the more material-minded aspects of Mallarmé’s work.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 44

Here again the book is more than merely a support for the text. The text and the book come together as a book experience. The text works with the format. Figure 5 shows the spread of pages 40-41. The text printed on the edge of page 41 reads:

dead/ day my eyes/ in stead/ remain staring/ to get out of/ my mind<sup>109</sup>



**Figure 5 Keith Smith, *Text in Book Format*. Photograph of pp. 41-42. (Photograph by author.)**

Figure 6 shows the next spread, pages 42 and 43. The text on the edge of page 42 reads:

of winter/ breaks open/ pain fast I lie/ bedfast my body refuses/ so late/  
flashes from ...<sup>110</sup>

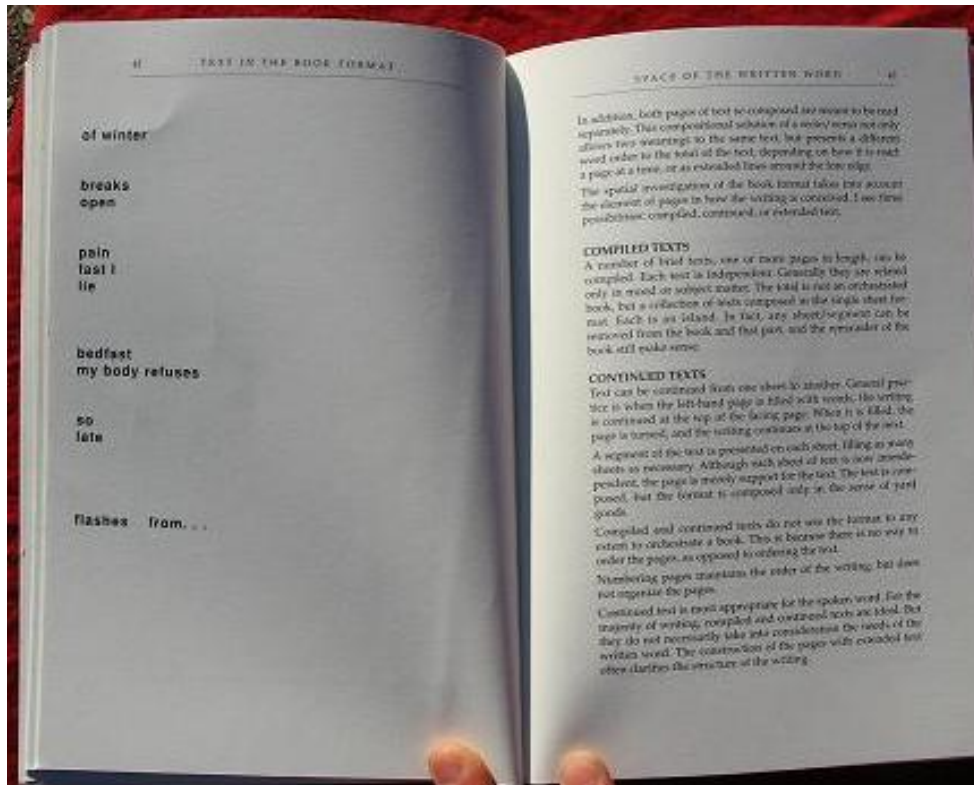
The format in this example serves a specific purpose. Smith writes:

The reader turns the page to read the first line existing on the front and back of the sheet. Then the reader must return to the initial page to start the next line which continues around the edge. ... The exaggeration of

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p. 41, where the “/” indicates at least double space from the following line.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 42, where the “/” indicates the same.

turning pages back and forth purposely sets up tension, conflict or confusion. It emphasizes the writing is created with format in mind.<sup>111</sup>



**Figure 6 Keith Smith, *Text in Book Format*. Photograph of pp. 42-43. (Photograph by author.)**

Furthermore, the text on the edge of the page can be read as inclusive to either side, or read together. This creates a different meaning for the words, depending on whether they are read together or not. For example, turning the pages to read around the edge, one would read:

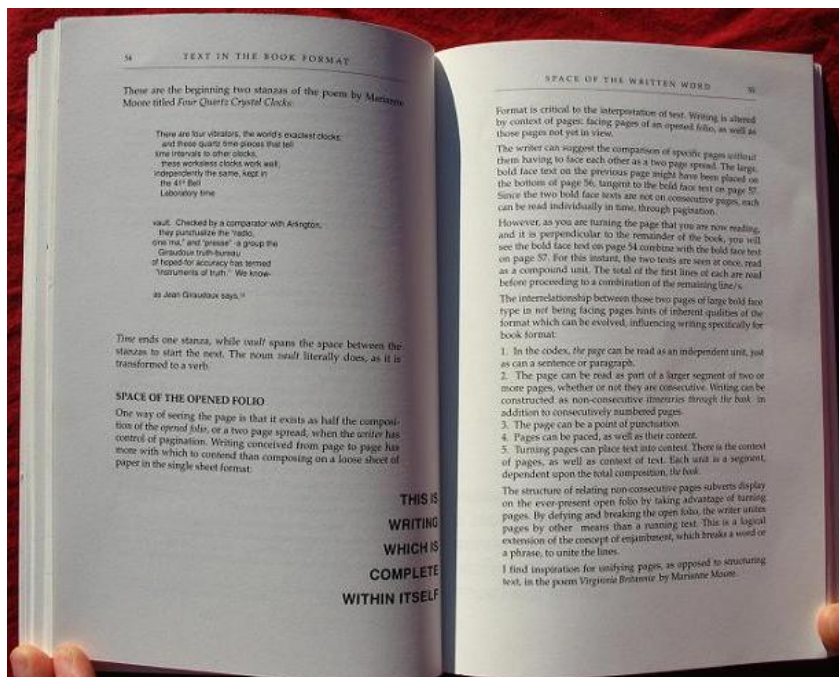
dead of winter/ day breaks/ my eyes open/ in pain/ stead fast I lie/ remain  
bedfast/ staring my body refuses/ to get out so/ of late/ my mind flashes  
from...<sup>112</sup>

Thus the poem can be read entirely on page 41, entirely on 42, or with the text together. All three options enable the meaning of the text to change when combined, and all three can stand alone.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p. 39

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. pp. 41-2; where the “/” is a horizontal line break.

Another example of the interaction of the book format and text is shown in figures 7, 8 and 9. In figure 7 we see writing near the gutter of the book in bold on page 54 (“This is writing which is complete in itself”). Figure 8 shows page 57, in which another set of writing in bold (“Seeing the page as a segment – always dependent in needing a context from page to page”). Figure 9 shows the turning of the page, which reveals both sets of writing simultaneously. “Since the two bold face texts are not on consecutive pages,” Smith writes, “each can be read individually in time, through pagination.”<sup>113</sup> The two texts, however, are combined through the turning action of the page: “for this instance the two texts are seen at once, read as a compound unit.”<sup>114</sup>



**Figure 7 Keith Smith, *Text in Book Format*. Photograph of pp 54-55. A first set of bolded writing is visible with this spread. (Photograph by author.)**

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p. 55

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

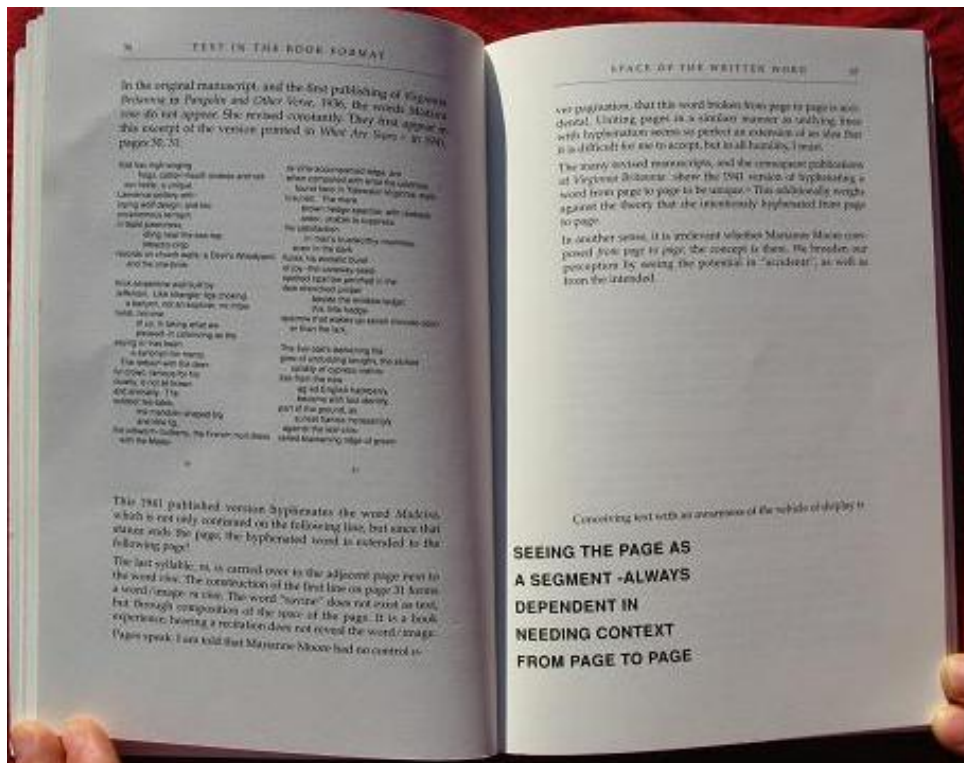


Figure 8 Keith Smith, *Text in Book Format*. Photograph of pp56-57. Here we see the second set of bolded writing. (Photograph by author.)

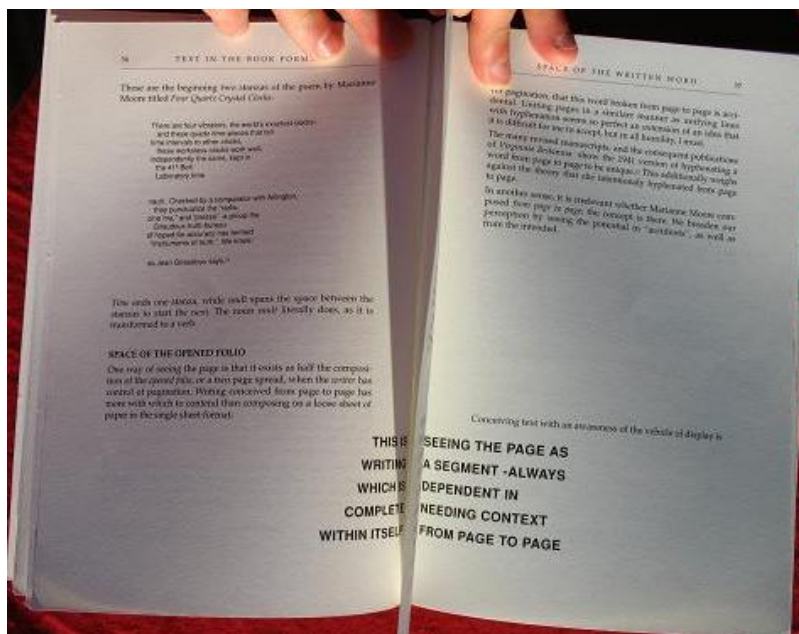
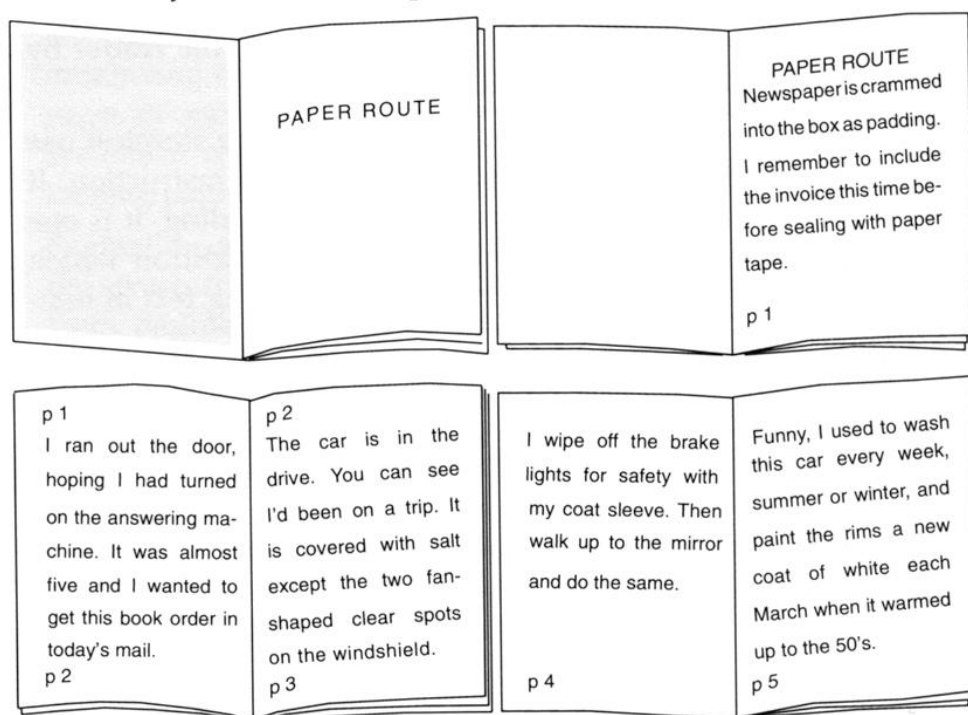


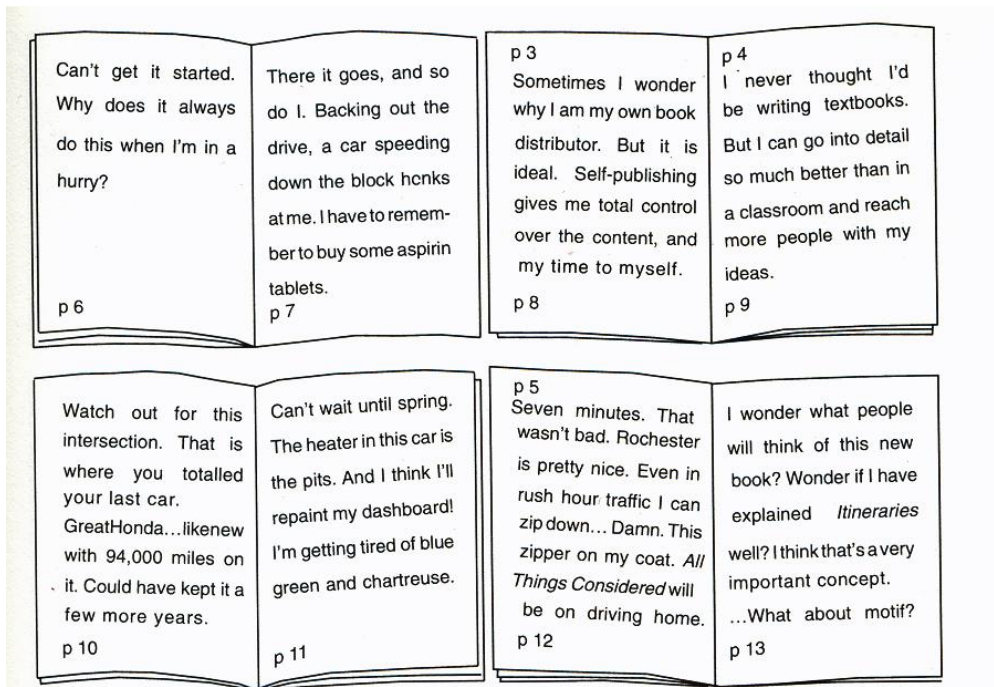
Figure 9 Keith Smith, *Text in Book Format*. Photograph of pp 54-57. Turning the page exposes both sets of text at the same time. Despite their initial separation, the format of the book can be used to make such connections. (Photograph by author.)



These examples show how the format of the book – the movement of the pages – enables particular reading depending on the placement of the text. The idea of the movement through the book is also a feature of what Smith calls the “itineraries through a book.” Smith discusses various itineraries through the book; that is, various ways of moving through the book. For our purposes we will focus only on the possibilities of multiple readings. Texts can be compiled in such a way that the format allows for multiple readings. Smith provides several examples of short texts which can be read in numerous ways. In Figures 10 and 11 we see an image of a book which can have a primary and secondary reading. The primary is depicted by the pagination at the bottom of each page in the image; the secondary by the number at the top. To follow the pages on the bottom would be to read the entire text. The pagination on the top represents a secondary reading, or synopsis of the text.



**Figure 10 Keith Smith, *Paper Route*, in *Text in Book Format*, p. 68; Primary and secondary reading.**



**Figure 11 Keith Smith, *Paper Route in Text in Book Format*, p. 69; Primary and secondary reading.**

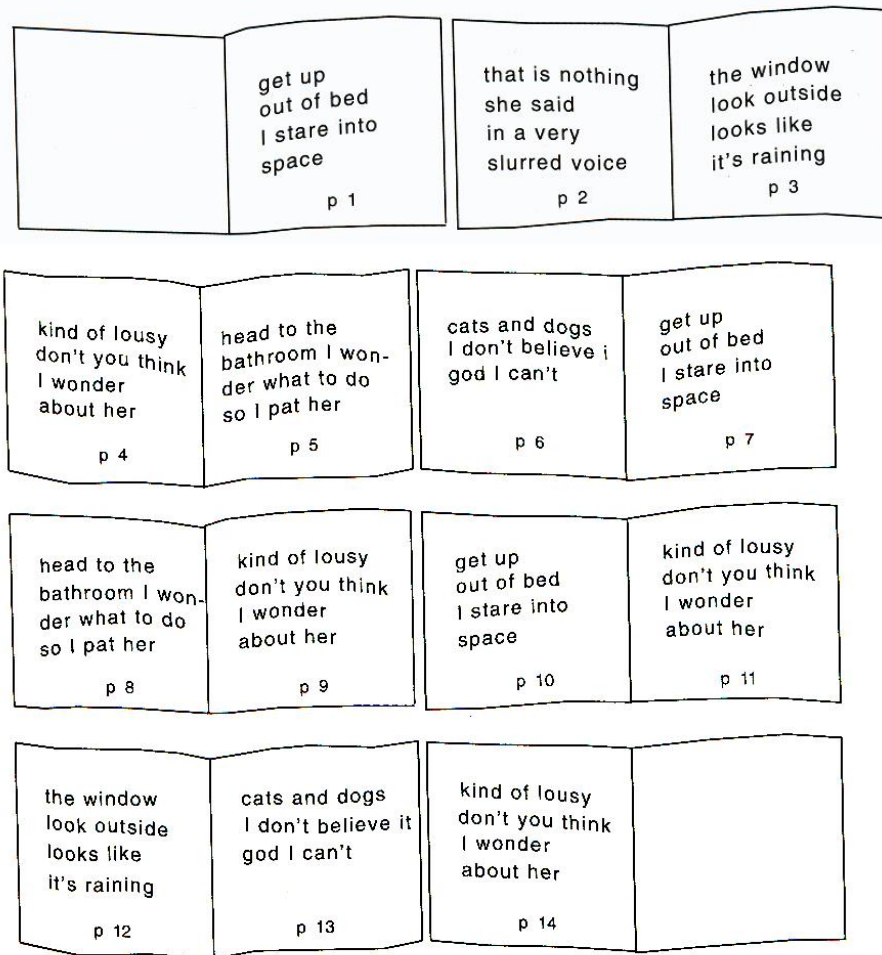
The pages of the book enable different readings, as seen in these examples. Following the primary reading, the pagination at the bottom, would result in all the text being read. The secondary reading allows for a synopsis; large sections of the text would be left out. The use of the pages as they function in a bound codex is even more pronounced in the Figures 12-14. Here the overlapping process of flipping back and forth in a book is explored. The ordering can be manipulated because of the specific form of the book. The directionality of the book is used as an interactive tool with the reader. While it is possible to configure a text to move in one direction through a book, Smith shows us how a text can also be used in conjunction with the book. Figure 12 is a short text whose ordering is explored in Figures 13 and 14.



Figure 12 Keith Smith, *Kind of Lousy in Text in Book Format*, p. 79.



Figure 13 Keith Smith, *Kind of Lousy in Text in Book Format*, p. 80. Here the reader is given clues to possible readings by the pagination at the bottom. Though only six physical pages, the book becomes a fourteen page text.



**Figure 14 Keith Smith, *Kind of Lousy*, in *Text in Book Format*, pp 80-81. Here the book format is extended to fourteen physical pages, and the need to return to previous pages is eliminated.**

The book format offers various opportunities to manipulate the itineraries, or movement through the book's pages. Whereas figure 12 leaves the motion and meaning of the text nearly completely to the reader due to a complete lack of pagination, figures 13 and 14 give more structure to the process through the book. Figure 13, moreover, gives a special emphasis by way of numerous returns. This layout, Smith writes, "has a sense of performance in the contingently leafing through the book to find the next segment of the plot."<sup>115</sup> That is, the reader will have to return to the same place numerous times to re-read the text. Figure 14, alternately, reduces the

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p. 80

physical repetition of returning to the same page, but maintains the overlap of the text. In this case, the reader moves through the book's pages consecutively, textual repetitions appearing on different pages, as the need arises. In all cases, however, the form of the book is utilized to manipulate the role of the text. That is, the pages and the directionality of the book are what enable variations of the reading. The book is understood as an integral part of the text and the text's relation to the reader.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

Smith offers us a way to think of the book as more than simply a shell for pre-existing text.

Through the examples discussed here we see how an emphasis on the book – as book experience, or book as content – can affect writing. Smith writes:

These previous examples hint of different way of writing which explores the format as part of the conceived text. The book influences, even creates the content by placing the words into context. The form is part of what is written. *How* the book is constructed can determine *what* is said in the text. Meaning is more than writing.<sup>116</sup>

It is precisely this way of thinking of the book – as concrete physical object, whose alterations can affect the text within – that I juxtapose against the role of the book discussed in Deleuze and Derrida. We have seen that both Deleuze and Derrida understood the book as a medium which affects thought. Furthermore, we have seen that both Deleuze and Derrida fail to think of the book in their treatments of the book. Where Deleuze focuses only on the text within the book, Derrida only thinks of the book as a metaphor for total knowledge. Smith, as we have seen, investigates the book as format which offers important possibilities for writing. The book experience is a conjunction of the writing and the format which both Deleuze and Derrida overlook.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p. 82

The role of the book is more than simply formal. Deleuze and Derrida, like McLuhan, take the medium of knowledge to be a very important factor in the way thinking can occur. That is, thought is shaped by the medium it uses. For this reason the medium is not mute. What is at stake for both Deleuze and Derrida is the role of philosophy, which has always been tied to the book. To distinguish their philosophy from traditional thought they must distinguish their books from the traditional medium of the book. They must make the case that the books they are writing are different from how books have previously worked.

It is the necessity of this project which makes their failure so evident: they are not thinking of the book, they do not take the book as a medium to be altered. Rather they deal only with the writing within the book or the book as metaphor for total knowledge. Smith, however, does think of the book in terms of a medium. By combining the text with the book – by thinking of the book with the text – he offers examples of how the medium of the book can be used to affect the text within. This is no mere formality, in the sense of form over content. Rather, the content of the text is affected by the form of the book.

This, I believe, is important for philosophy. If thought is altered by the medium, and if Deleuze and Derrida think this alteration is important enough to attempt a separation from the traditional notions of book, I take it to be obvious that understanding how the medium of the book can work with and affect the text is imperative. If it is worth changing the medium to change the thought, we should learn to think of the book on its own terms.

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## VITA

Scott Louis Ziegler was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1982. He moved to Memphis, Tennessee, in 1990 and remained there through high school. He received his Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from Louisiana State University in 2006.