Writing and existence: Sartre, Derrida and the challenge of value

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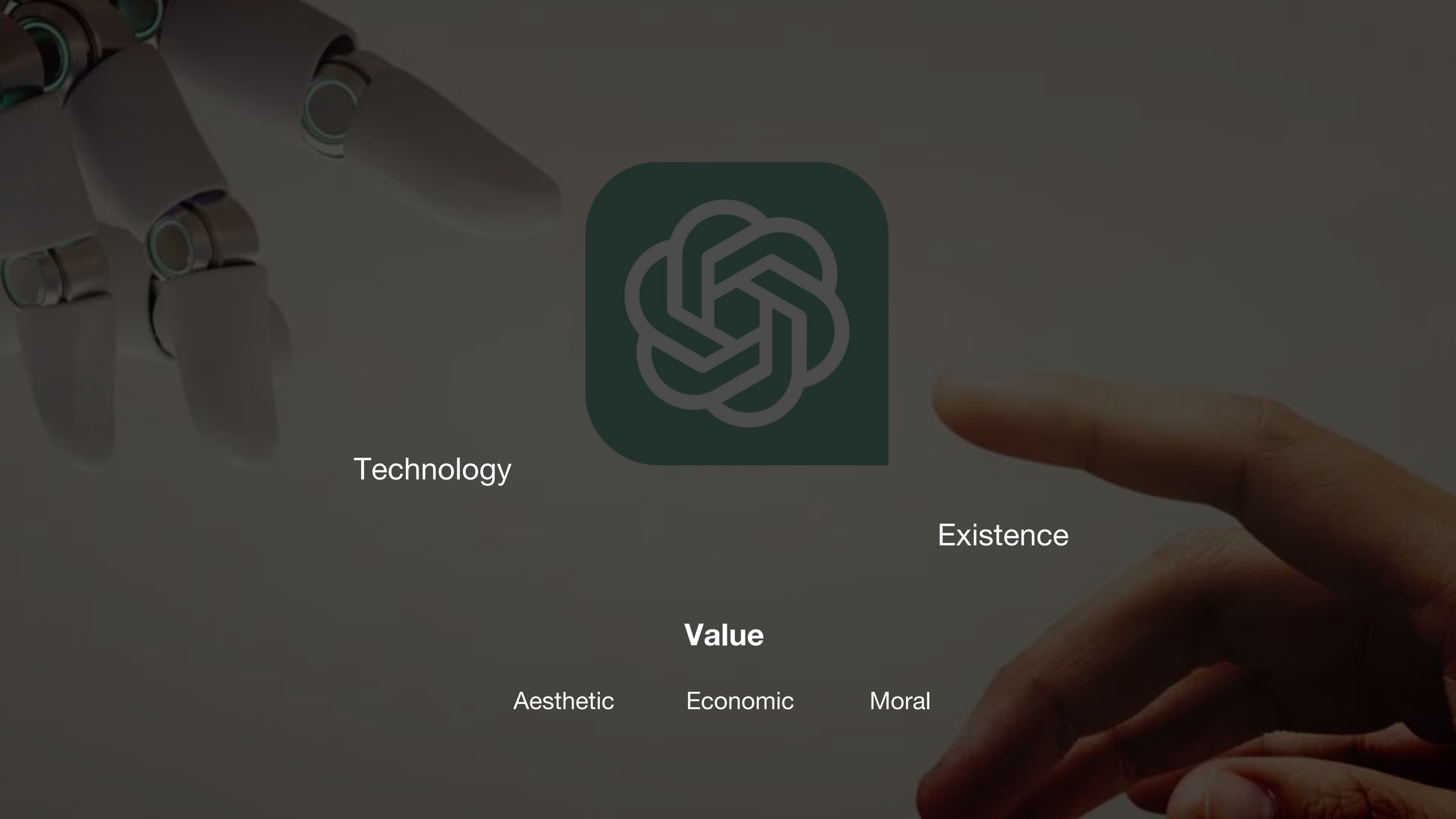


Technology

Existence

Value

Aesthetic Economic Moral

Technology
Existence
Value
Aesthetic
Economic
Moral

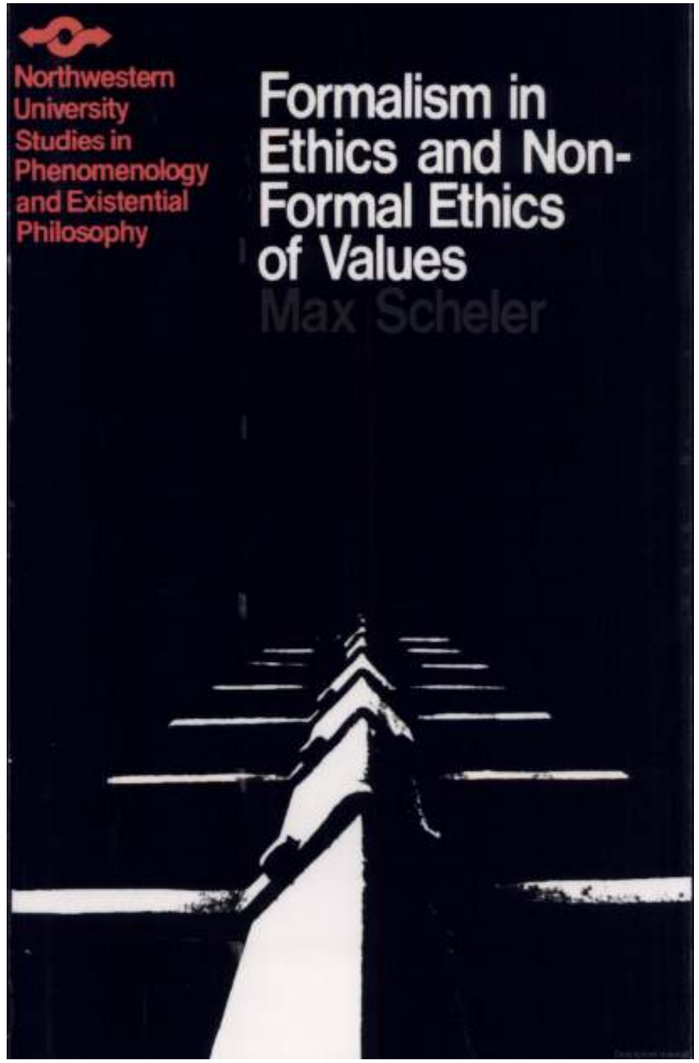
Technology
Existence
Value
Writing

1. Value, consciousness and agency (Sartre)

Agency

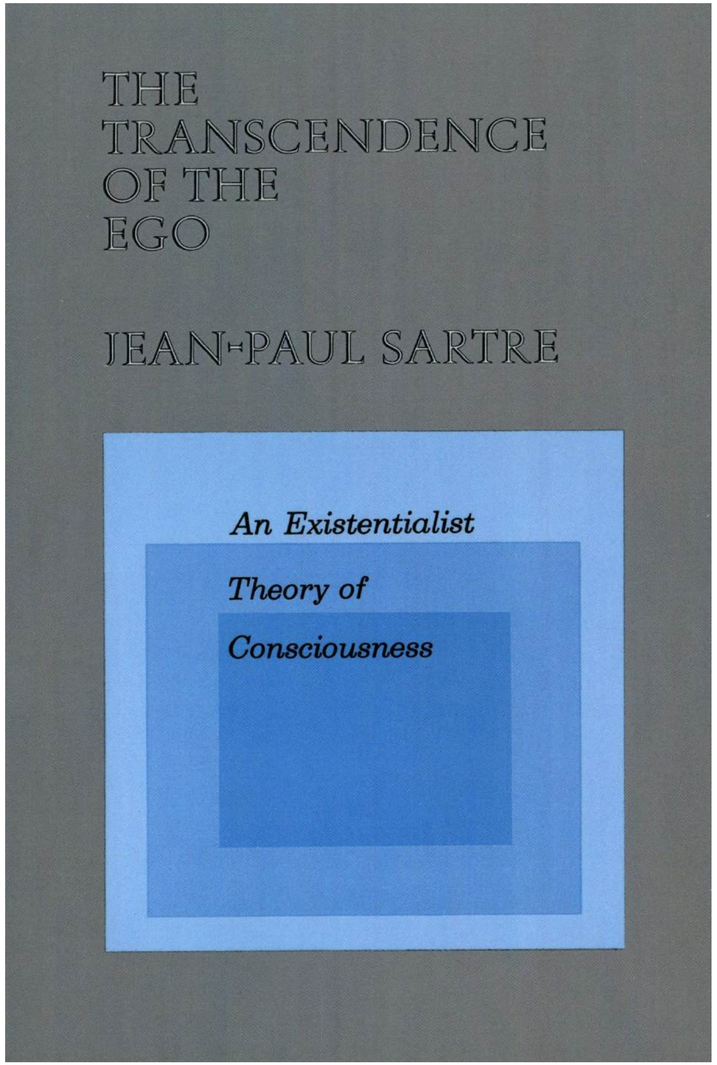
Freedom

Engagement
Activity



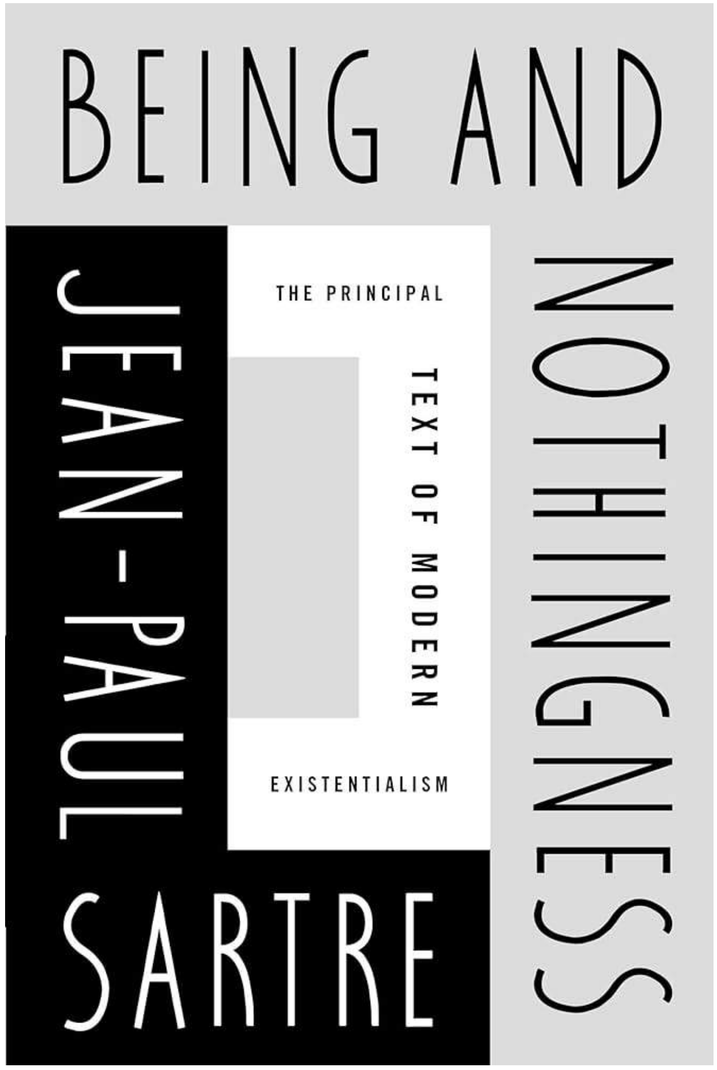
"It is a phenomenological fact that in feeling a value, the value is given as distinct from its being felt [...]. For this reason the disappearance of this feeling does not cancel the being of this value"

Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, p. 244



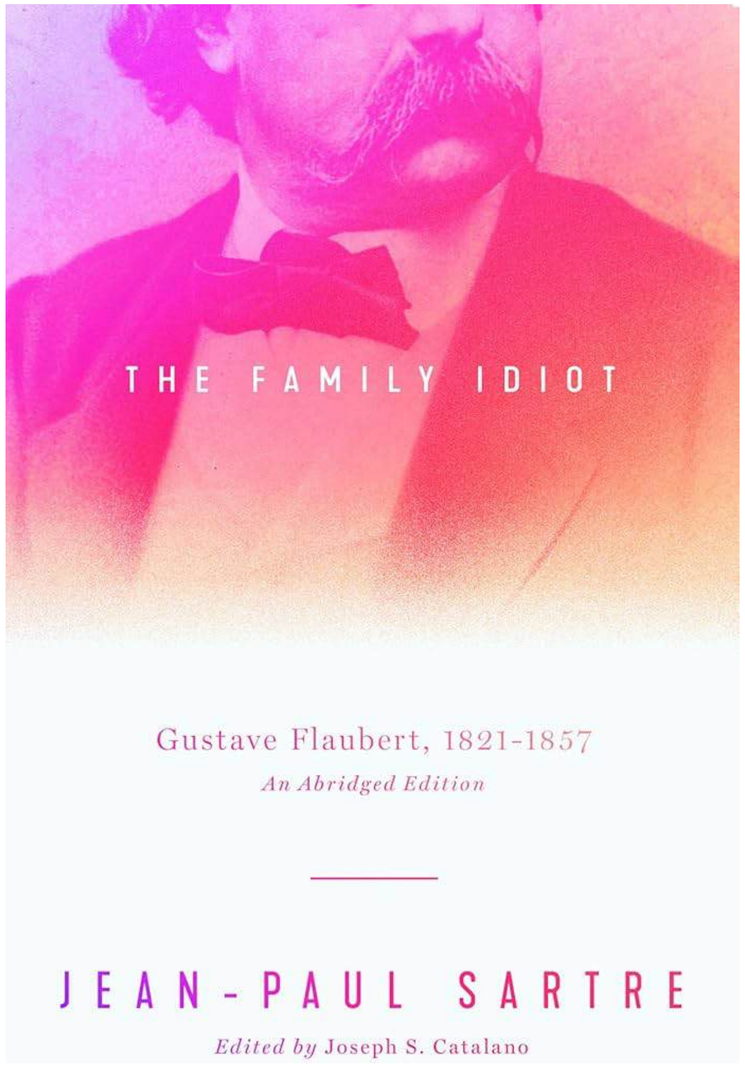
"(…) as if these qualities were forces that performed certain actions on us."

The transcendence of the ego, p. 11



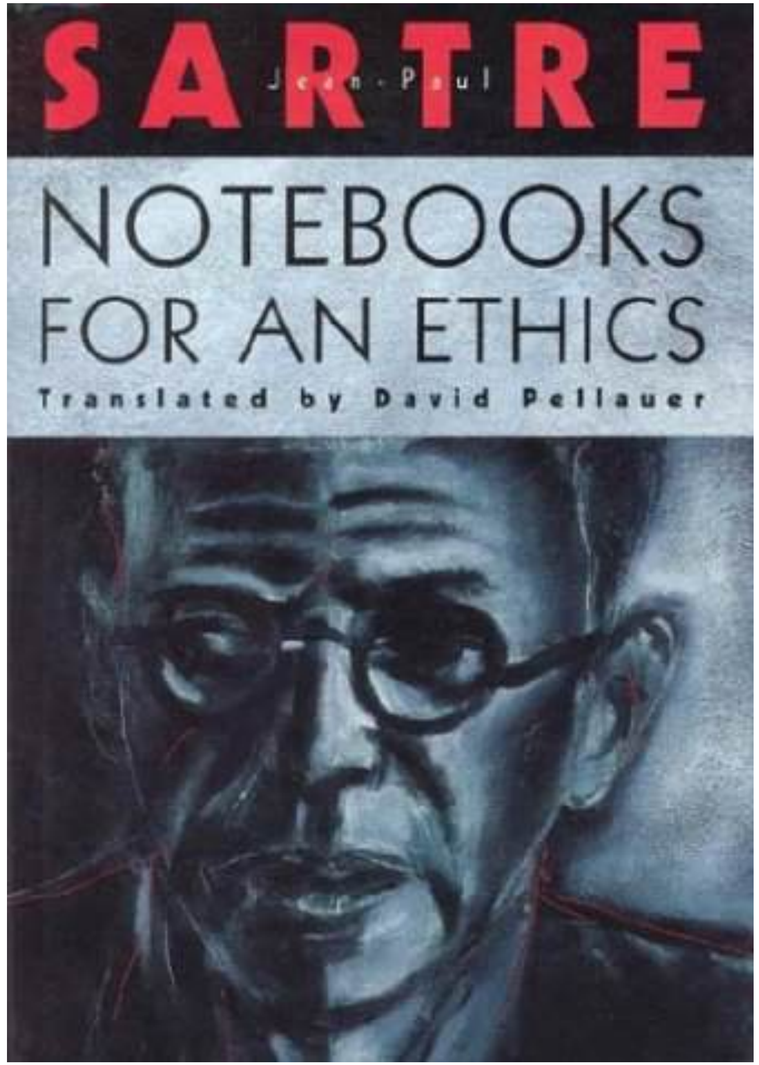
"(…) human reality is that by which value comes to the world.

Being and Nothingness, p. 117



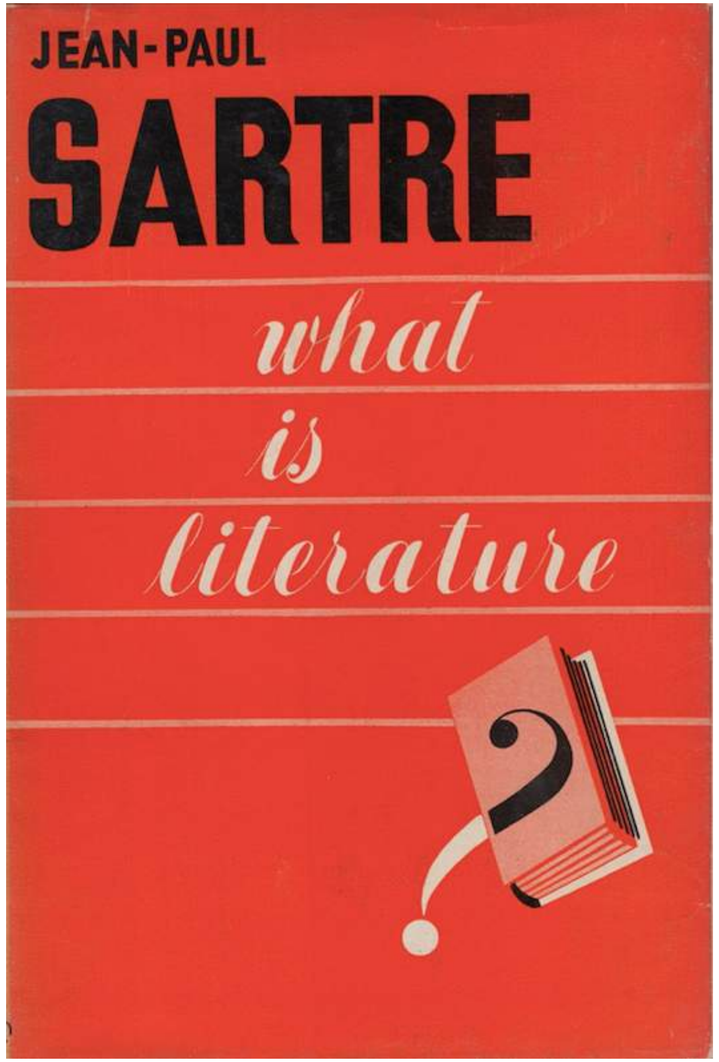
Valorisation, malaise, ennui

L'idiot de la famille, p. 162, 174



Each value “is not hidden in things waiting to be discovered, it has to be created.”

Notebooks for an Ethics, p. 119



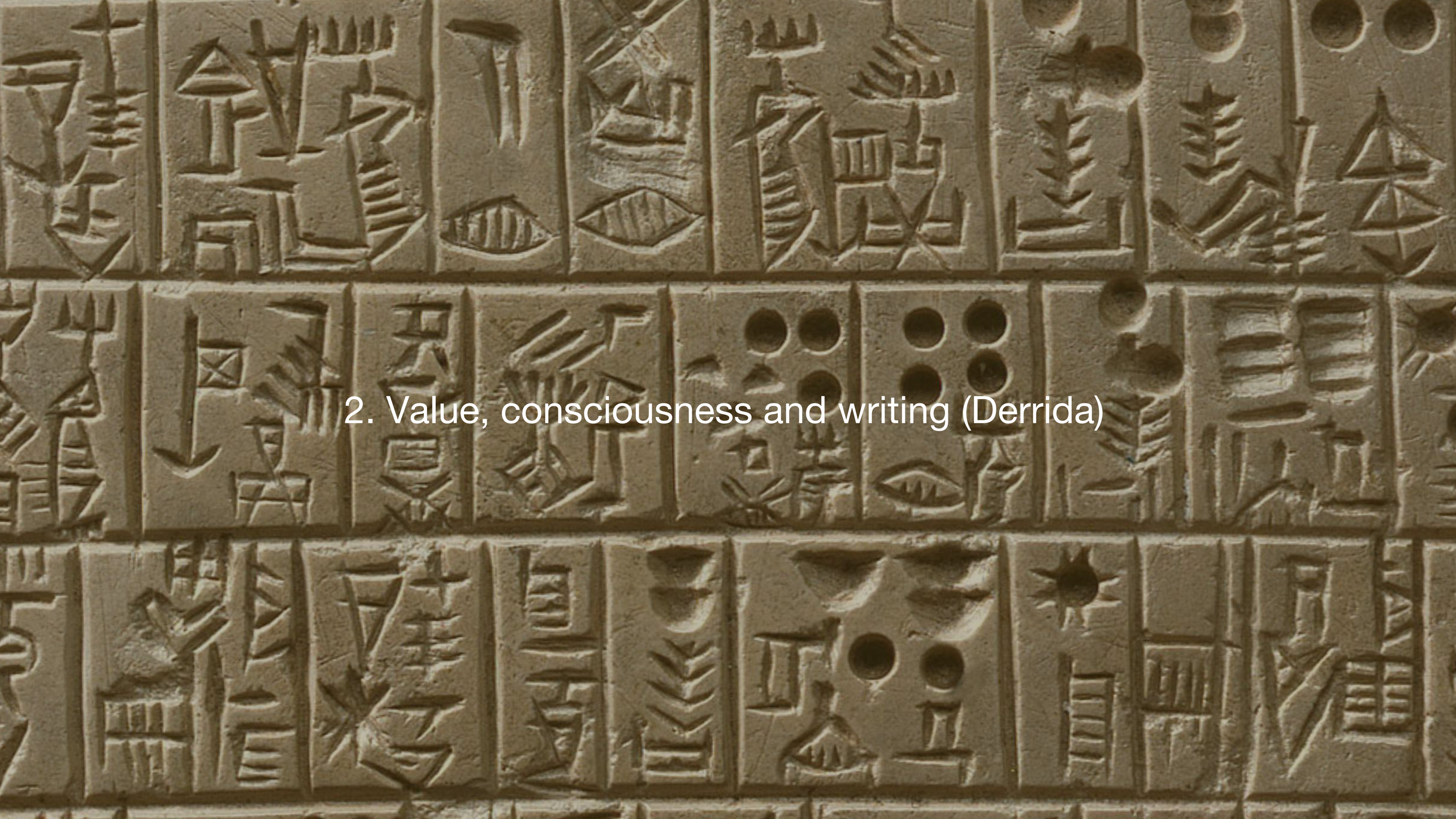
Torricelli *invents* the gravity of air.

What is Literature?, p. 236

➔ Conceptual chain #1

Consciousness – Agency – Value

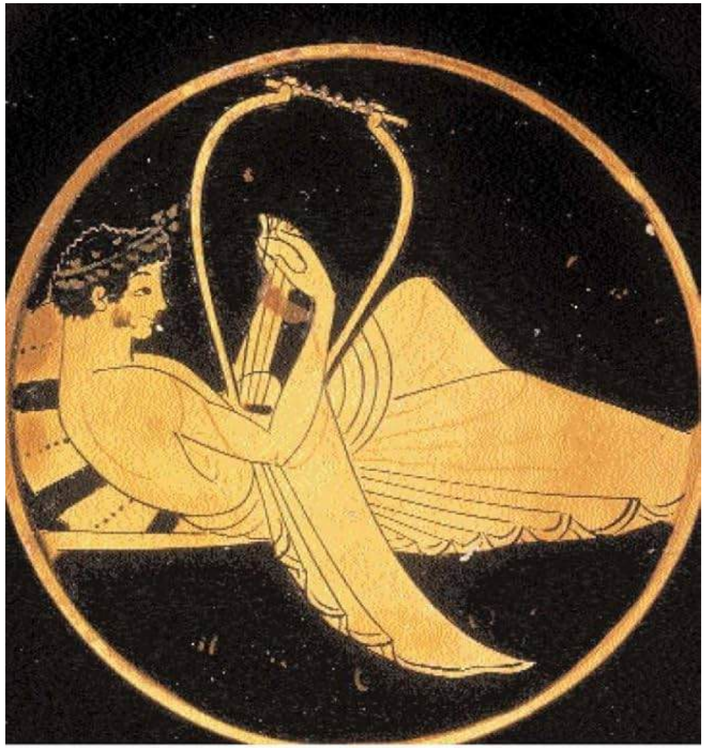
But valorisation is not *active*



2. Value, consciousness and writing (Derrida)

Plato's Pharmacy

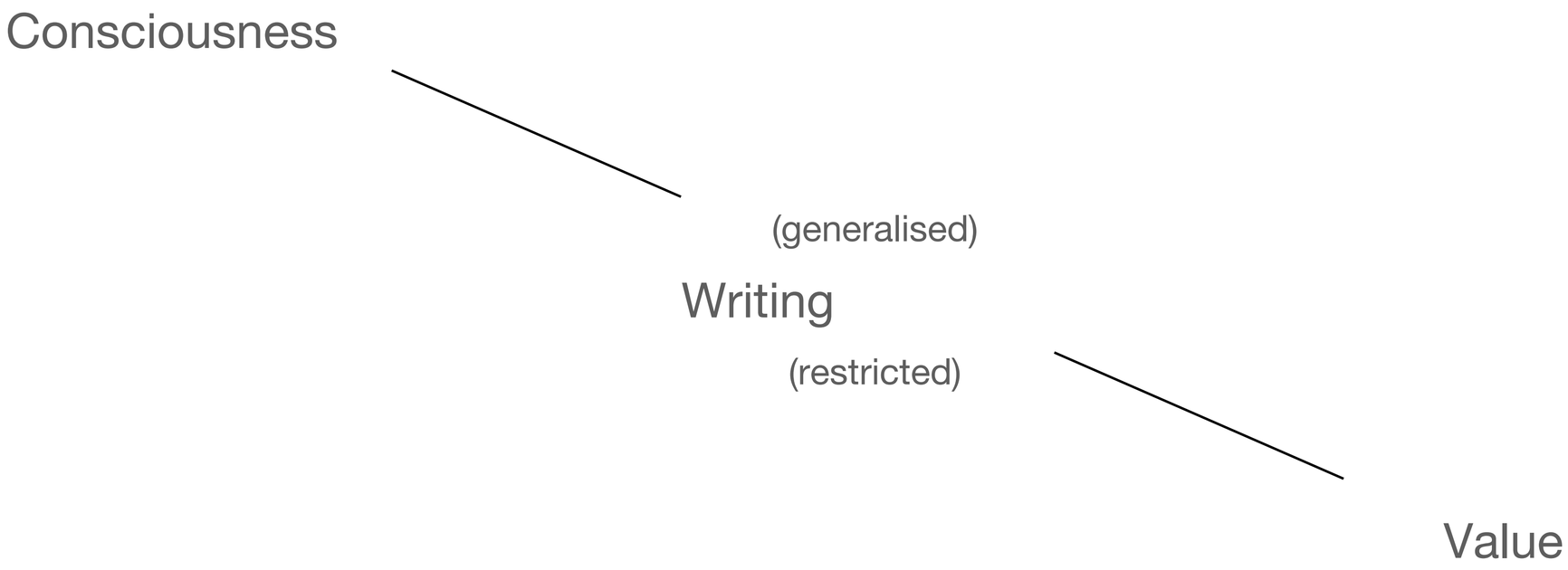
First version published in *Tel Quel*, nos 32 and 33, 1968.

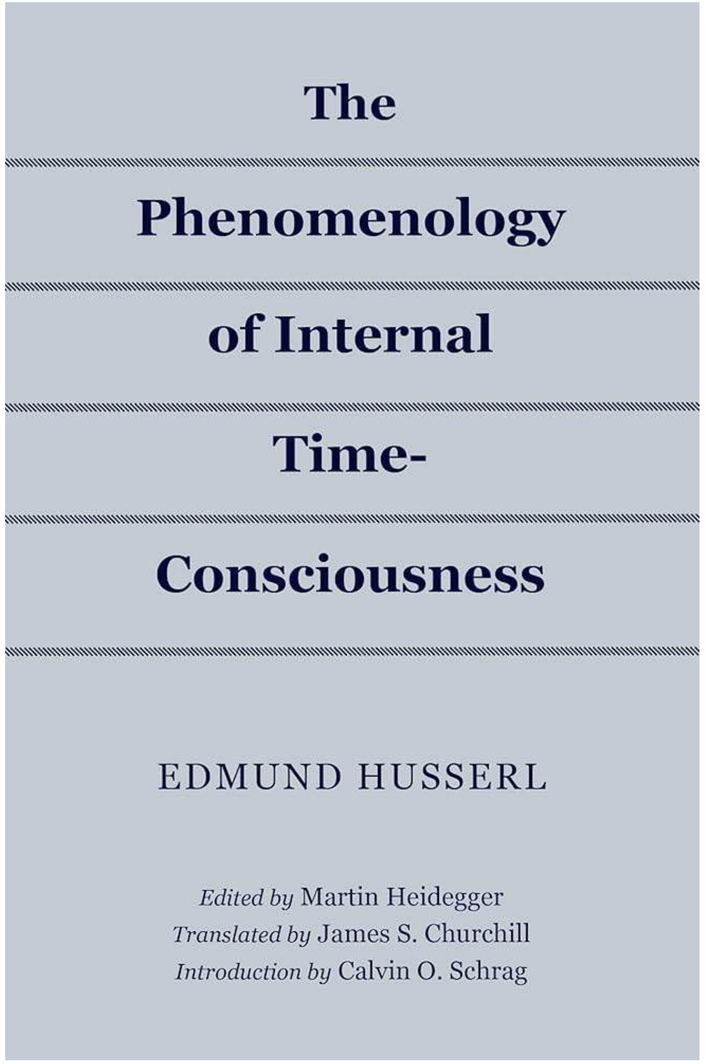


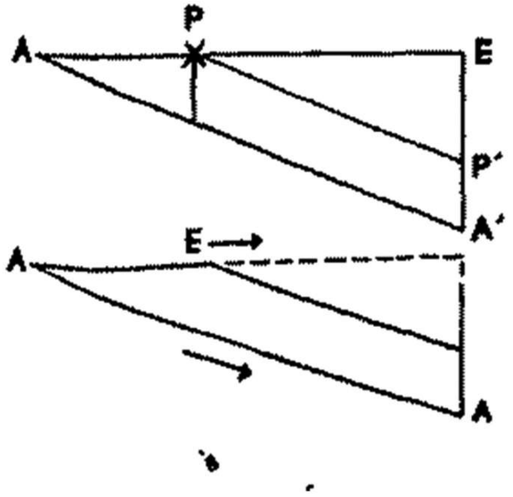
PENGUIN CLASSICS

PLATO

Phaedrus


Consciousness
(generalised)
Writing
(restricted)
Value



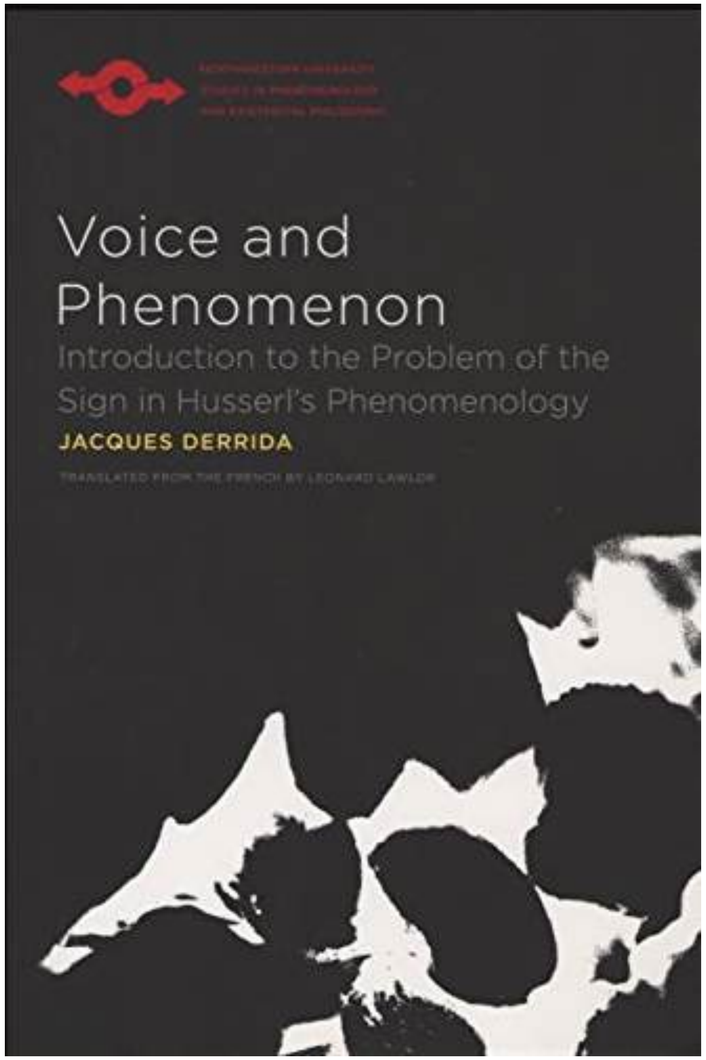


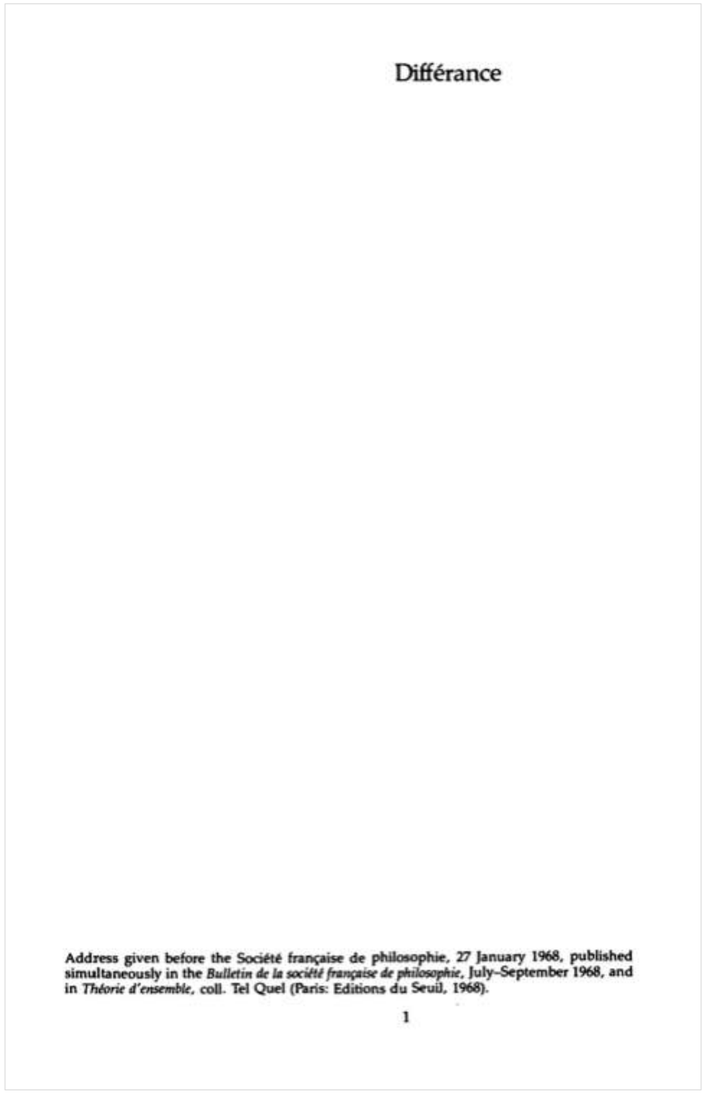
AE – The series of now points.

AA' – Sinking into the past.

EA' – Continuum of phases (Now-point with horizon of the past).

E→ – The series of nows perhaps filled with other objects.


Voice and
Phenomenon
Introduction to the Problem of the
Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology
JACQUES DERRIDA



Différance

Address given before the Société française de philosophie, 27 January 1968, published simultaneously in the *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie*, July–September 1968, and in *Théorie d'ensemble*, coll. Tel Quel (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968).

1

"Language is not a function of the speaking subject" (Saussure), rather, the subject is "inscribed in language, is "function" of language, becomes a speaking subject only by making its speech conform (…) to the system of the rules of language as a system of differences"

"Différance", in *Margins of Philosophy,* p. 15

➔ Consciousness: an ‘internal technology’ of traces

Trace

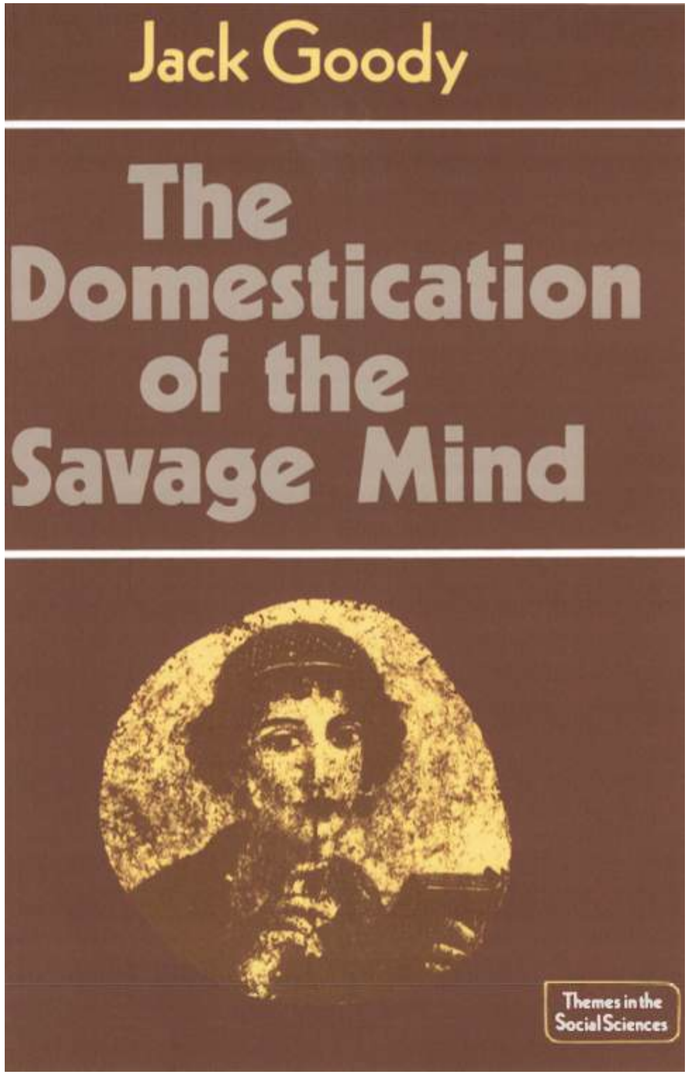
“Generalised writing”

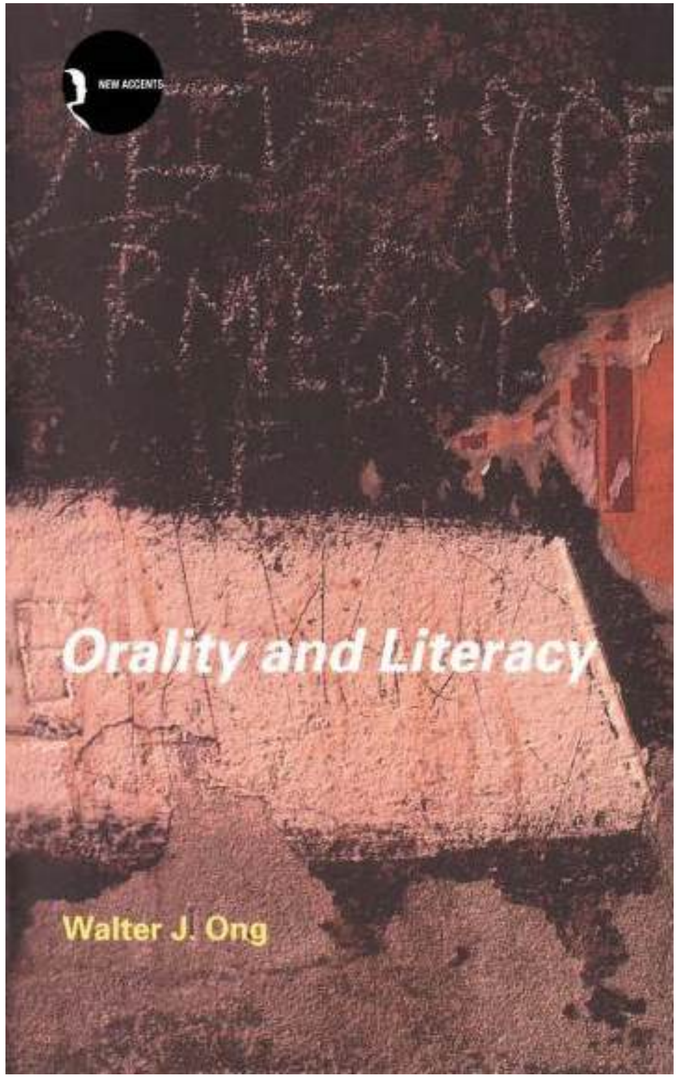
Writing

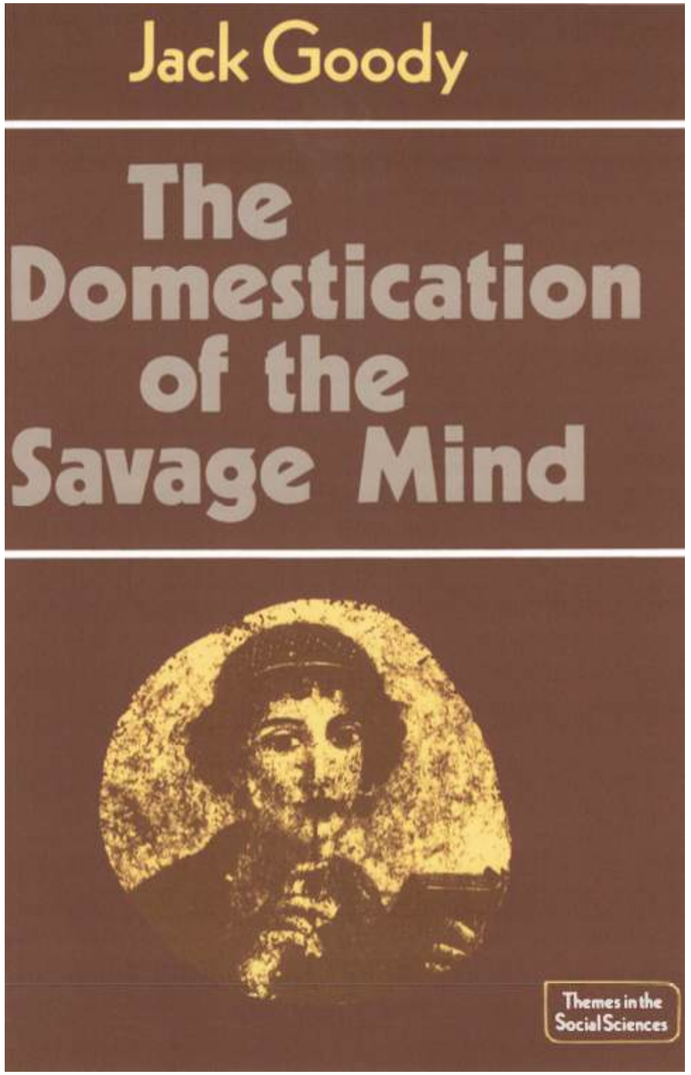
“Restricted writing”

“The fact that access to the written sign assures the sacred power of keeping existence operative within the trace and of **knowing** the general structure of the universe; that all **clergies**, exercising political power or not, were constituted at the same time as writing and by the disposition of graphic power; that **strategy**, **ballistics**, **diplomacy**, **agriculture**, **fiscality**, and **penal law** are linked in their history and in their structure to the constitution of writing; that the origin assigned to writing had been — according to the chains and **mythemes** — always analogous in the most diverse cultures and that it communicated in a complex but regulated manner with the distribution of political power as with familial structure; that the possibility of **capitalization** and of **politico-administrative organization** had always passed through the hands of scribes who laid down the terms of many wars and whose function was always irreducible (…); that the very sense of power and effectiveness in general, which could appear as such, as meaning and mastery (by idealization), only with so-called “symbolic” power, was always linked with the disposition of writing; that **economy**, monetary or pre-monetary, and graphic calculation were co-originary, that there could be no law without the possibility of trace (…) all this refers to a common and radical possibility that no determined science, no abstract discipline, can think as such.”

Of Grammatology, p. 92-93

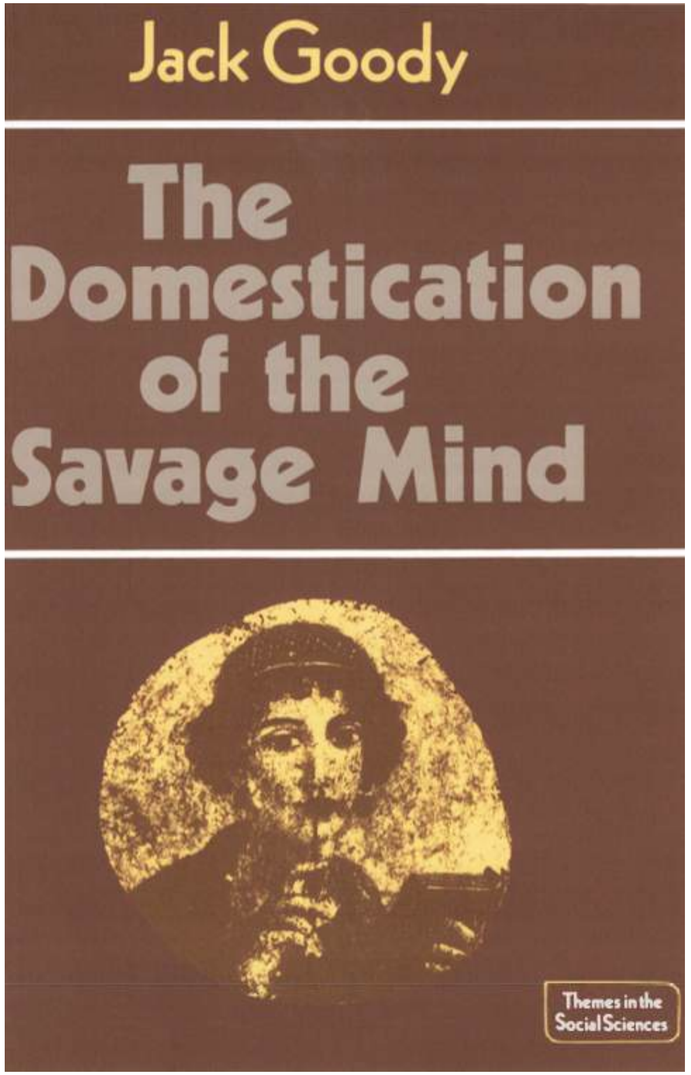

Jack Goody
The Domestication of the Savage Mind
Themes in the Social Sciences


NEW ACCENTS
Orality and Literacy
Walter J. Ong



Sales, purchase, rentals, lending, wills, taxations, tax return, etc.: “Three quarters of all the extant cuneiform inscriptions, numbering some 150,000 in all, fall in this class.”

Goody, *The domestication of the savage mind*, p. 79



"It is illuminating to find that all the goods thus brought in, grain, cattle, wine, linen, are invoiced indiscriminately as "labour."

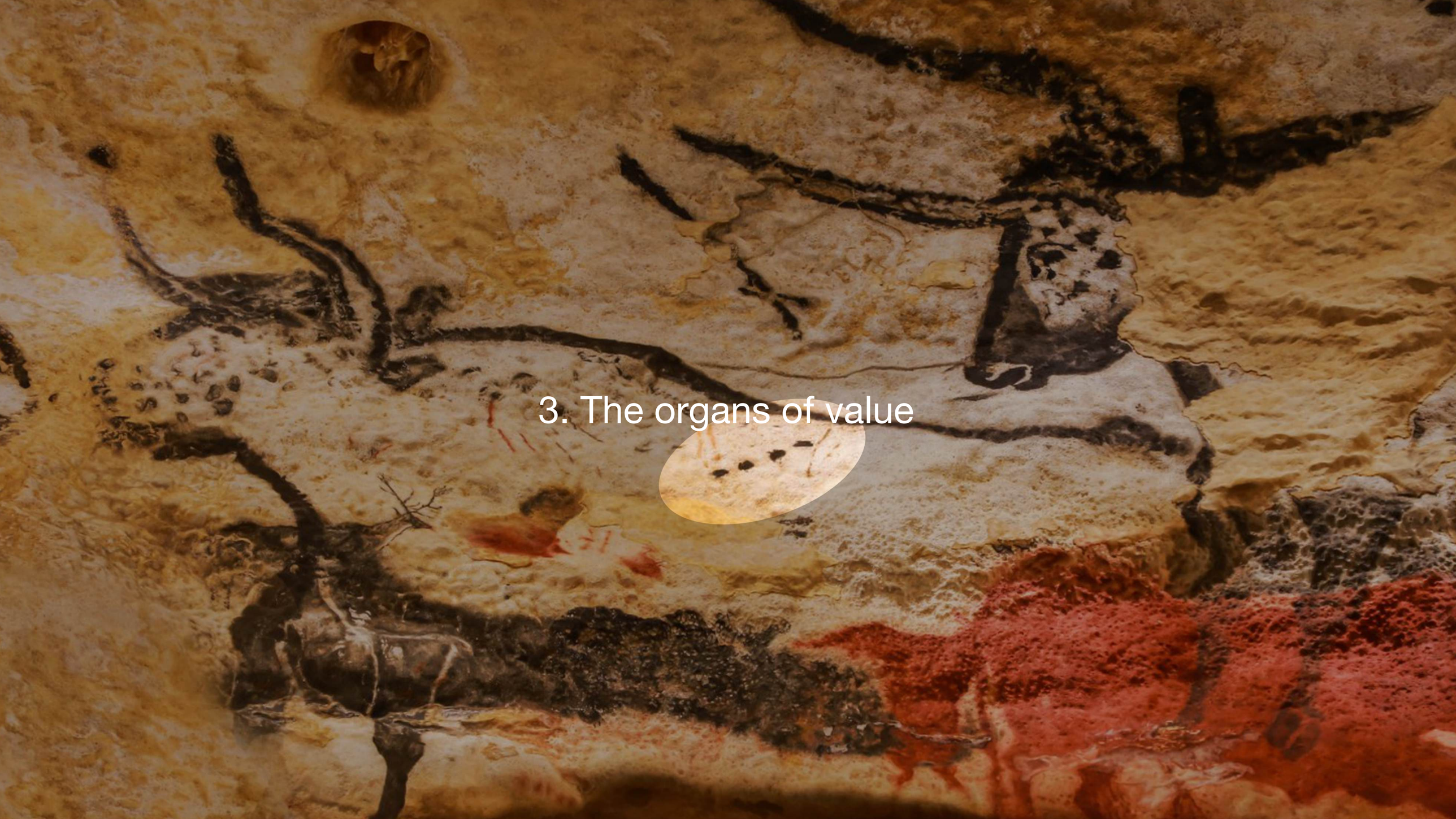
Wolley, *"The beginnings of civilization"*, p. 624

"In this way accounting procedures can be used to develop a generalised system of equivalences even in the absence of a generalised medium of exchange."

Goody, *The domestication of the savage mind*, p. 88

➔ Conceptual chain #2

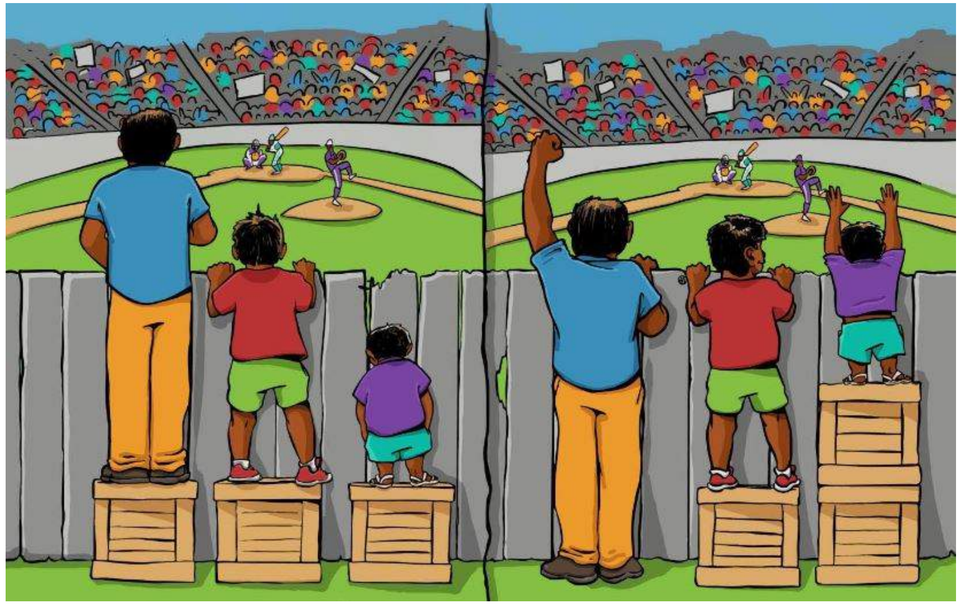
Consciousness – Writing – Value



3. The organs of value

Polysemy of *value*

1



2

Polysemy of *value*

3

The Poetics of Morality:
The Notion of Value in the Early Sartre

KONSTANZE BARON

'C'est dans la connaissance des conditions authentiques de notre vie qu'il nous faut puiser la force de vivre et des raisons d'agir' states Simone de Beauvoir at the outset of her plea for an existentialist ethics in ***Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté***.[1] Surely, very few philosophers would disagree with her. A correct understanding of the 'human condition' has always been held indispensable to the formulation of any moral philosophy, and it seems all the more necessary in the context of an existentialist theory which, in denying the existence of a common human nature, places all the emphasis on the self-made aspect of human life.

It is the aim of this study to investigate the relationship of ontology and moral theory, of the 'se choisir' and the 'choisir' in the early Sartre, in particular with regard to the difficulties Sartre experienced in trying to develop, in the ***Cahiers pour une Morale***, an ethics based on the ontology exposed ***in L'Etre et le Néant***. Ultimately, I intend to show that no such ethics is possible, and to illustrate the reasons for this by focussing my analysis on the treatment of the notion of 'value', since it is in this notion that the ontological and moral strands of Sartre's philosophy converge.

I am going to argue that in ***L'Etre et le Néant*** the term 'value' is used by Sartre both for moral values, and for the structure of consciousness, defined as 'Self' or 'meaning', by which he understands a particular relationship of subjectivity and objectivity. This double sense is maintained in the later work, but not without undergoing a substantial reinterpretation. I am going to maintain that this reinterpretation is symptomatic of certain difficulties encountered in ***L'Etre et le Néant***, but that even on this new basis, no coherent ethical position is conceivable.

Sartre Studies International, Volume 7, Issue 1, 2001 – 43 –

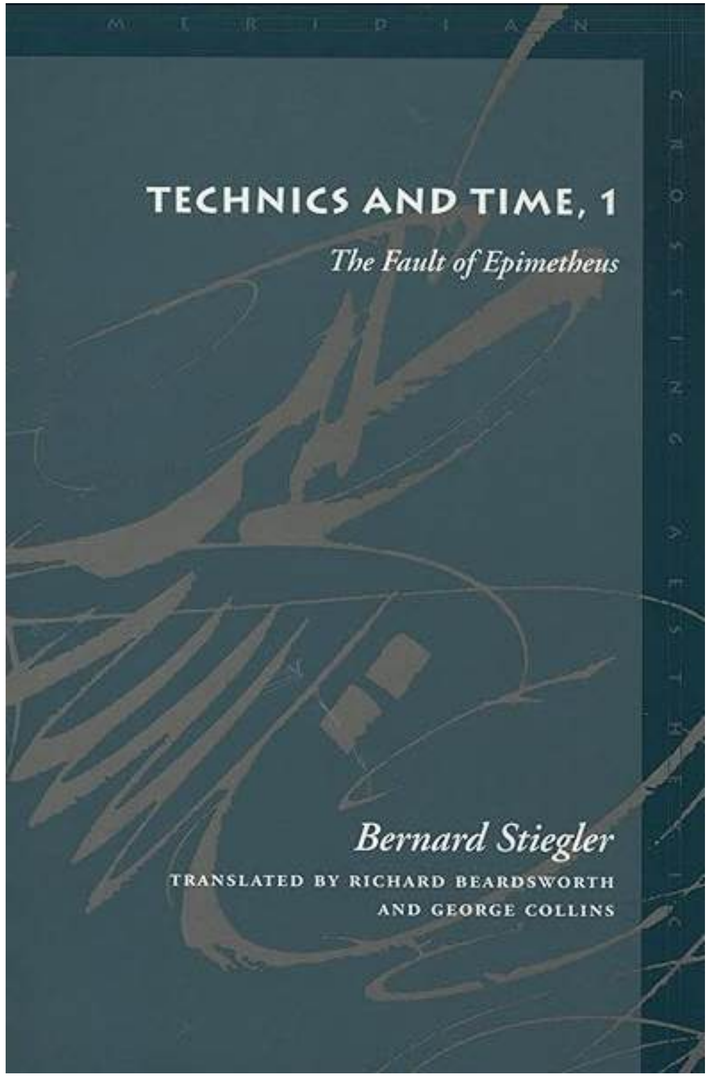
"Every revelation implies an ordering and discriminating activity: because it is a nothingness, because it can stand back and adopt an attitude towards the world, consciousness is an evaluation of the world. It is always selection (point of view) and discrimination (evaluates things in the light of their meaning or purpose)."

Baron, "The Poetics of Morality:
The Notion of Value in the Early Sartre", p. 46-47

Consciousness
= Valuation

Consciousness
= instance of generalised writing

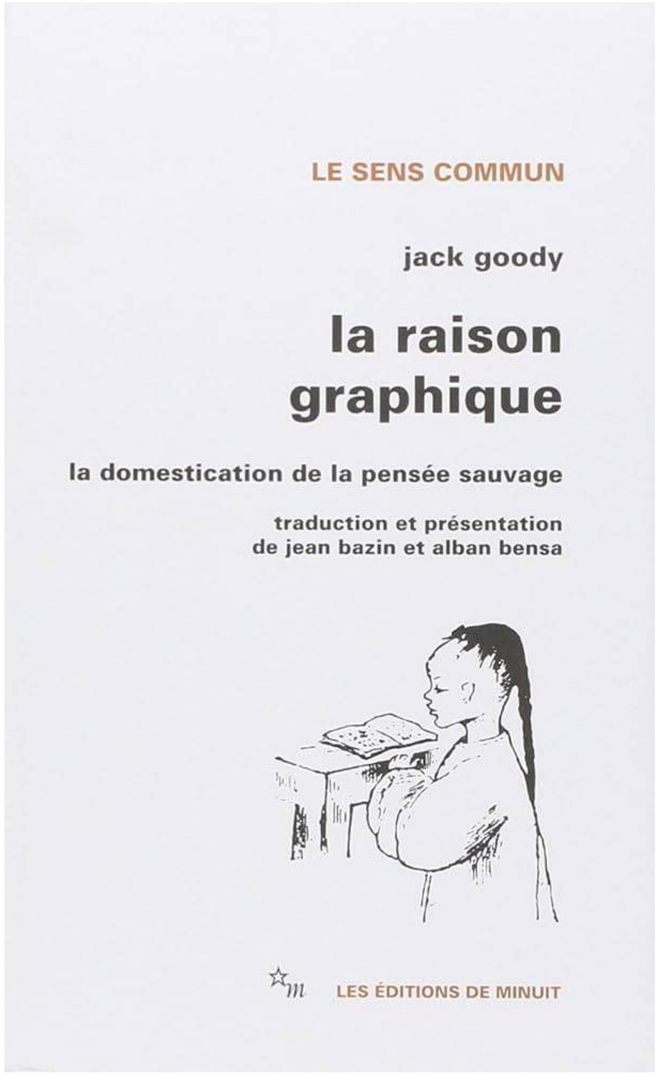
Restricted writing
= *the* technology of values



‘Exosomatic organs’

Stiegler, *Technics and Time*

➔ Writing: *organ* of our valorisation?

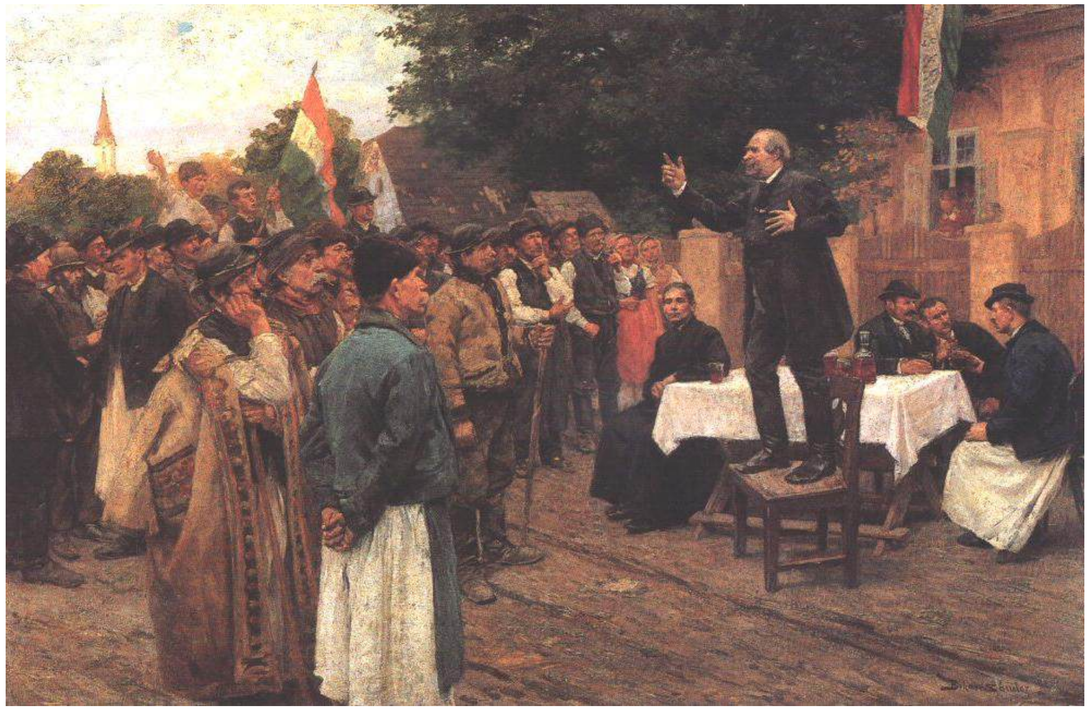


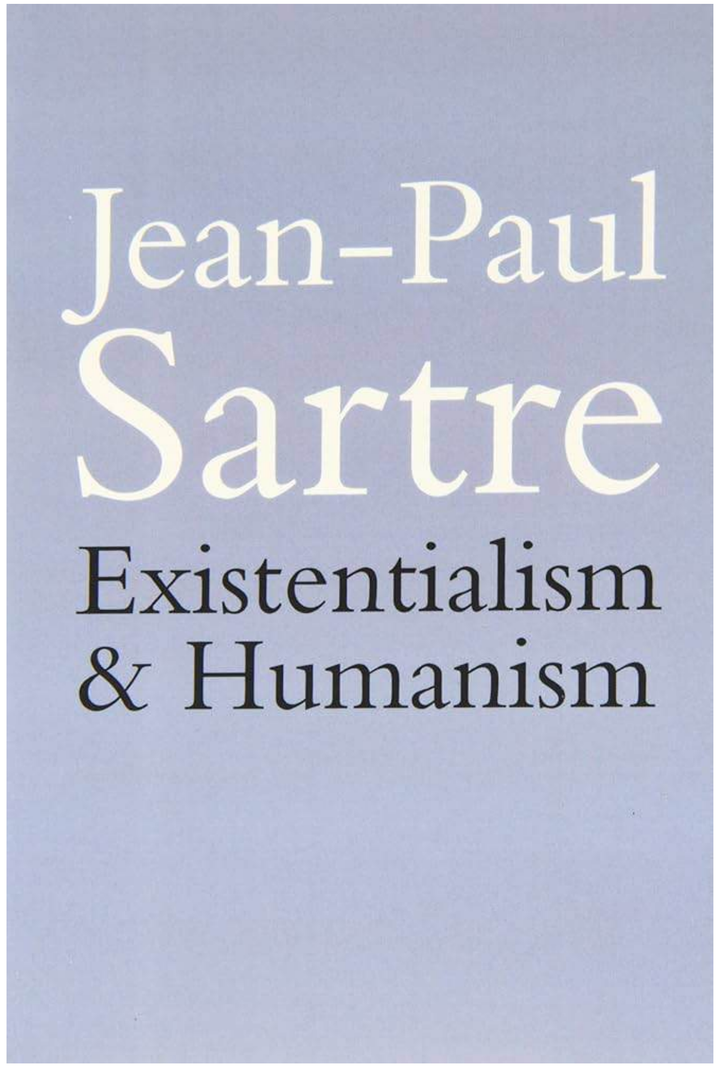
“Le pays connaît un accroissement de la productivité dû au système d'irrigation et de canalisation sous contrôle de l’Etat : le surplus agricole accumulé vient s’entasser dans les dépôts et les greniers urbains, ce qui oblige à tenir une comptabilité des biens parvenant dans les villes ainsi que des produits manufacturés qui en partent vers la campagne.”

Goody, *La raison graphique. La domestication de la pensée sauvage*, p. 152

Polysemy of *value*

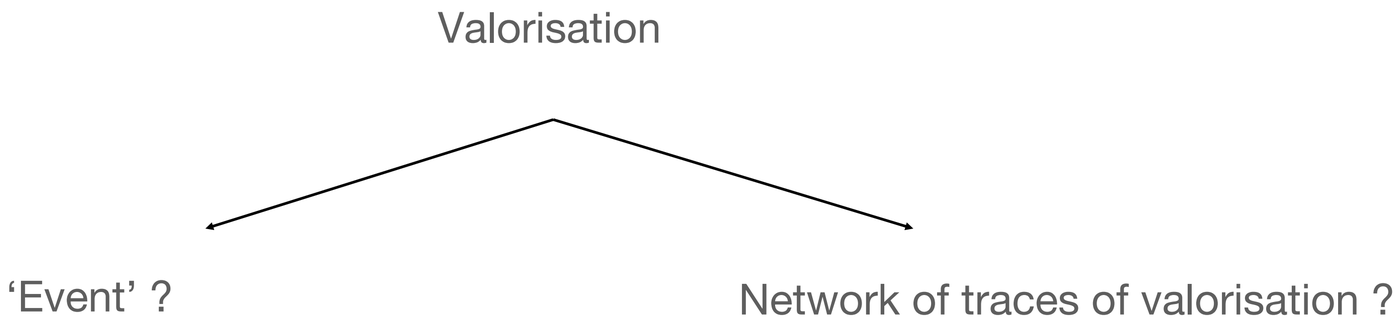
4





"Life itself is nothing until it is lived, it is we who give it meaning, and value is nothing more than the meaning that we give it."

Existentialism & Humanism, p. 51

➔ Agency as a technical condition

➔ Traces *behind* our ‘acts’ of valorisation