We have seen in the first chapter of this thesis that it is to define the objectivity of the world in its absoluteness that Plato and Kant have formulated their fields of transcendental concepts. The early Wittgenstein also wants to formulate this objectivity conceptually, but in terms of concrete metaphysical entities. Later on he realises that concrete ideality is no different from transcendental one in their conceptual import and that both have no basis in our ordinary language and the world in it. His rejection of ideality is so tremendous and formidable that it looks as if transcendental philosophy had to either bow out of the scene or it owed an explanation to our day-to-day life. Quine articulates the rejection of ideality of the objectivity of world in empiricist terms and we see in him a concept of indeterminate meaning and inscrutable reference and it means that, according to him, our conception of ideal objectivity is a myth. And now in this chapter we come to Derrida, who questions the very concept of objectivity on the basis of his assumption that the world itself is an impossibility originally. He shows the impossibility of the world as presence through a notion called *differance* and calls his method of analysing being in general into absence deconstruction.

Derrida's notion of the absence of the being of world is a rejection of the determinate picture of reality we ordinarily adhere ourselves to. In place of this picture we have in him a notion of the world which makes it a phenomenon of which we cannot say anything. We will see what *differance* is and it is the concept (or non-concept) on which Derrida founds his theory (or non-theory) of absence.

**Derrida and *differance***

Derrida sees our world as a flux. This flux does not consist of elements but is a trace of ‘*is*’ and ‘*is not*’ combined into each other. He calls this trace or flux
temporalisation of space and spacing of time. An ordinary object can be seen destroyed or deconstructed into its ‘is and is not’ at once in this flux. This deconstruction is the reality, for Derrida sees that the spatio-temporal dimension of the world makes it different each moment in a radical manner in which an element in the chain of traces that make up the world for him is not the same as its preceding one or the following one. And it in itself becomes a non-entity and this is the reason why this flux is not of elements but of the absence of being.

If world is full of differences that constitute its absence how we feel that we have a world presented to us. This presence is due to our expectation of its being as a future event. That is, the being of the world is not given now but we expect it of it in a future which, according to Derrida, never comes. His concept of differance involves in it both the difference and the deference or the postponement of being to an unreal future that make the world an illusion of presence. Differance thus makes the identity of an object an enigma. So this concept (or non-concept) makes the world an identity postponed to an unreal future through a chain of differences. Derrida writes about the French word "to differ" that has both the meanings that differance is defined to have:

"In the one case "to differ" signifies nonidentity; in the other case it signifies the order of the same. Yet there must be a common, although entirely differant [differante], root within the sphere that relates the two movements of differing to one another. We provisionally give the name differance to this sameness which is not identical: by the silent writing of its a, it has the desired advantage of referring to differing, both as spacing/temporalizing and as the movement that structures every dissociation."\(^1\)

Derrida is not concerned in his view of the reality with the French connotations of the word "to differ" in their literal sense but with differance that shows difference and deference as the nature of the flux that makes up our reality. In the above remark he only indicates those connotations of the French word in
question. In his employment of differance we will see that he means spacing of time and temporalisation of space are indistinguishable from each other and are in their unity responsible for differences of the world that make it an absence or an expectation about its presence in an unreal future.

Let us now see the different ways through which Derrida makes sense of differance, though in certain instances we feel that he repeats the same point over and again to substantiate the rich implications and connotations of it. Differance is neither a word nor a concept. This outlook goes very well with his position that nothing can be said positively about anything for being in general is an absence. He follows this line of thought to say that differance is neither an act of the subject nor the passivity of the object. That is, it is neither active nor passive. Then what is it? He says it is the middle voice that makes it a combination of opposites denying an essence to it. Being the middle voice this way it destroys the Kantian subject and Platonic objectivity that is not subject dependent. For Derrida the objectivity that Plato and Kant takes as the basis of the articulations of their conceptual fields is due to the illusion that a world is present there. He says that this presence is always an articulation of absence as a postponement towards being over differences and a postponement in a void.

Then a question arises here: How does Derrida make sense of differance if no talk is possible about anything whatsoever? He views his description of differance as a strategic move to show that everything comes down to a mere absence at the end. He writes:

"Reflection on this last determination of difference will lead us to consider differance as the strategic note or connection—relatively or provisionally privileged — which indicates the closure of presence, together with the closure of the conceptual order and denomination, a closure that is effected in the functioning of traces."
Striking the operation of differance on an indescribable level that undoes the concept of entity in general Derrida points out that all convenient distinctions of the presence mark not only their absence in themselves but also that of their relation as opposites. They themselves are assailed by their condition called differance which conditions their relations as opposites as well. Derrida opines that we cannot call differance either a concept of sensibility or that of intelligibility for differance is the general condition of the distinction between sensibility and intelligibility which makes the distinction as such a non-essence.

Plato and Kant depended upon intellect of man to arrive at the essences of being. They think that the world of senses do not reveal the objectivity of the world as such. Plato has shown that the same thing may be hot and cold at the same time for two different persons at the same time or for the same person at different times. He searches then for the absolute heat and the absolute cold which no matter their contingent condition of being is retain their respective identity and this is the reason why he thinks such absoluteness is independent of space and time. And Kant criticises Hume for his confining himself to the world of senses at the cost of the intelligible part of man that, according to him, constructs the world. Pitted against the view of Plato and Kant is Derrida’s notion of absence that, he believes, reaches out to the differences that go beyond even the relative differences of the ordinary world. On this notion the world is given neither in sense experience nor in intelligible reflection originally but all such distinctions are a result of illusion called presence. Neither differance itself is either intelligible or sensible. He writes:

"We must be referred to an order, then, that resists philosophy's founding opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The order that resists this opposition, that resists it because it sustains it, is designated in a movement of differance (with a) between two differences or between two letters."

Neither pure rationality nor a method of empirical examination reveals what differance is. Derrida envisages a play that violates the logic of empirical and
conceptual enquiry which will eventually provide us with something that appears risking its disappearance, something which makes being ‘an endless calculus’ of absence. In his own words:

"The concept of play [jeu] remains beyond this opposition; on the eve and aftermath of philosophy, it designates the unity of chance and necessity in an endless calculus of absence."^4

Derrida is very cautious to see that differance does not come to be seen as a transcendental concept. To be transcendental is for him to endorse an anchor that is solid and intense in its presence. Of course, in his Of Grammatology he describes the operation of differance as transcendental, but he makes it clear there that this is to show that it does not function at the level of ordinary objectivity but at a level where the distinction between the ordinary and transcendence (ontic-ontological difference) cease to be significant. He calls it transcendental there as a strategy to show that no concept of objectivity can master the play of differance. Though Derrida does not call the reality a flux his view suggests it from its employment of time and space to this effect. Rather it may be that he does not directly do so as it will be a kind of naming something in philosophical mode which cannot have a philosophical name or a name in general for that matter. But for all that, the practical reasoning of differance will show us that reality is flux of being and not-being that makes itself absent as a chain of traces, which are fluxes in turn. Derrida prefers the word trace to describe differance. For him differance as trace is a trace without an origin and a purpose. He explains how differance is a reality out of the differences being created eternally by time in conjunction with space each forming the interior of the other, a reality that negates or deconstructs the presence of being:

"To differ" in this sense is to temporalize, to resort, consciously or unconsciously, to the temporal and temporalizing mediation of a detour that suspends the accomplishment or fulfillment of "desire" or "will," or carries desire or will out in a way that annuls or tempers their effect. We shall see, later, in what respects this
temporalizing is also a temporalization and spacing, is space’s becoming-temporal and time’s becoming-spatial, is "primordial constitution" of space and time, as metaphysics or transcendental phenomenology would call it in the language that is here criticized and displaced.”

Derrida does not view a sign as secondary to a presence or an object that is generally taken to be represented by it. He holds that as long as a sign is considered a substitute for an object, in it presence is deferred in the sense that presence is desired in it. Presence is desired in a sign and it is desired as a future possibility as no one knows what a thing in itself is except through configurations of signs called language. However he points out that if language is different from its reference then this relation is a matter of differance. So he calls signification "the differance of temporalizing”. Broadly what it means is that reference is written into language as its negation and language is written into reference as its negation. That is, language is not alien to reference and also the latter to former. So in the chain of differences we find what we are accustomed to think as an exclusive difference between language and reference; but Derrida says that this difference is not on a different level but on the same level where differance makes its movement possible as an impossibility.

This view of Derrida is an outcome of his belief that an entity is related to other entities in the world through differences. According to this view what makes an object what it is is its being determined not on its own but by relations with other objects. This is his questioning of absolute being of an object in its uniqueness and asserting a deconstruction of it into its different relations of difference. So here we may take note of the fact differance is not merely a linear trace of ‘is’ and 'is not's but in its general purport a chain of traces in different modes of differences. Nevertheless, its underlying logic cannot be anything other than a play of Ms and is not’. The table I see in front of me, according to this move, is what it is in its being what it is not. It is its relations with the other entities. We may not lose sight here of the important conviction of Derrida which stipulates that even if an object is taken
in isolation provisionally it is not a presence but a desired presence over a chain of
differences and this conviction is his basic and subtle view on which his various
demonstrations of it on macro plane depend.

Though Derrida is critical of Saussure for his privileging speech that
represents presence over writing, which represents absence, he appreciates his view
that language is a configuration of differences of terms. Language understood thus
gives Derrida the possibility of seeing the negation of an object/sign into its
differences constituted by its relations with other objects/signs, a technique he
makes use of in his criticism of Plato on the basis of Plato's use of word pharmakon
in Phaedrus. And this possibility is that of locating the play of differance on an
ordinary plane, of course, at the risk of its negating itself and naturally that is the
fate of this play as Derrida himself points out. He writes about Saussure's view on
difference:

"It was Saussure who first of all set forth the arbitrariness of signs and the
differential character of signs as principles of general semiology and particularly of
linguistics. And, as we know, these two themes - the arbitrary and the differential -
are in his view inseparable. Arbitrariness can occur only because the system of signs
is constituted by the differences between the terms, and not by their fullness. The
elements of signification function not by virtue of the compact force of their cores
but by the network of oppositions that distinguish them and relate them to one
another." 6

Translated in ontic terms this view will be that the individual entities of the
world can be replaced by other individual entities and their present position is not a
necessity but a contingent situation in the network of relations. And these relations,
for Derrida, are articulations of absences that point to differance without an origin
and a purpose. Like a sign in the language the tree over there can give way to some
other entity that will replace it and what matters in this replacement is the relations
of the entities in question with other entities. Derrida’s radical version of this view
makes everything disappear from its generally perceived place and it fills this space with negation of its being for ever. Derrida expresses his view as to this in the following way:

"The first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself. Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences. Such a play, then--differance--is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general. For the same reason, differance, which is not a concept, is not a mere word; that is, it is not what we represent to ourselves as the calm and present self-referential unity of a concept and sound [phonie]."  

Derrida's concept of time and space is in effect a rejection of the presence of them. Time is making the entire existence a nothing. Derrida says an interval is desired in the flux of time to make sense of being even in its negative sense that will give us a grip over sense. And Derrida calls this interval spacing. But he says time does not make itself absent within this interval and as a result we see this interval dividing itself into its differences or absence and he calls it temporalisation of space. This constitutes his explanation of time's becoming spatial and space's becoming temporal. He calls this phenomenon not only differance but also protowriting, prototrace, pharmakon, etc.

Derrida makes the semiological differences the very condition of reality and thus its absence. He says that there cannot be any presence "before the semiological difference or outside it". He believes that when Saussure says that language is not a function of the speaking subject he is echoing the death of the subject conceived independent of language. Absence of the object and subject that language heralds through its differences as its very condition makes everything a phenomenon of
language. As a network of differences, language determines its own absence eternally as also being in general. Derrida writes about "the subject":

"This implies that the subject (self-identical or even conscious of self-identity, self-conscious) is inscribed in the language, that he is a "function" of the language."\(^8\)

It is not difficult for a follower of the later Wittgenstein to understand Derrida's move here. However, there are differences between them. Whereas Wittgenstein stops at blind necessity and vague sense as the bedrock of being Derrida translates this blindness and vagueness into an abyss of absence of being and according to him 'there is no support to be found and no depth to be had for this bottomless chessboard where being is set in play". Derrida starts from where Wittgenstein stops positively to see everything comes down into an eternal indescribability of negative kind, though he himself may not call it negative as he does not see anything positive there to oppose it to.

Derrida envisages the destruction of opposites into the traces where one of them does not stand diametrically opposite to its other, but determinant of the other and being determined by the other. For example, according to his view, good can be made sense of only in terms of its relation with bad and it marks the destruction of the pure concept called good. Good will be a conjunction of what it is and what it is not and this conjunction is not that of two external concepts but of finding each one of them in the interior of the other as each other's internal disappearance. Good is the differance or is and is not of bad. He objects to all coupled oppositions such as the intelligible vs. sensible, life vs. matter, culture vs. nature and the like on the same logic. It shows his deconstruction works not only within a particular entity taken in isolation where it is a trace or traces on its own but also in its relations with other entities where these relations viewed as operating within the entities themselves in question. In Dissemination he calls this phenomenon the polysemy of a word that is believed to represent an object. The polysemy of a word for Derrida is its
destruction of identity as it will be related not only to its different meanings in it but also to its opposite meanings conceptually as, for example, good is to bad.

Differance is not something absent but an absence of the conceptuality that projects an illusion called presence as the opposite of absence. What it shows is that the being of the world is a deference over differences and, therefore, it is absent. But this showing or differance or this movement of making the being absent is not itself either absent or present. Differance as it is is that which "exceeds the alternatives of presence or absence". Differance marks the absence of what we call presence and it in itself is neither present nor absent but appears risking its disappearance. What the title of this chapter indicates is that which Derrida names "the delimitation of ontology (of presence)". Derrida says that the language of presence or absence cannot account for differance which does not make distinctions of this kind in its original move. Rather this move is a formidable question mark on any coupled opposition. The following remark by Derrida sums the points we have just made:

"What is questioned by the thought of differance, therefore, is the determination of being in presence, or in beingness. Such a question could not arise and be understood without the difference between Being and beings opening up somewhere. The first consequence of this is that differance is not. It is not a being-present, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent one makes it. It commands nothing, rules over nothing, and nowhere does it exercise any authority. It is not marked by a capital letter. Not only is there no realm of differance, but differance is even the subversion of every realm."

Derrida calls our accepted world in its presence a transgression. In Quine we have seen that this world is an outcome of a pragmatic approach towards what is otherwise an inscrutable whole. However, Quine does not question the presence of being but only the definiteness of reference and determinacy of meaning. Derrida, on the other hand, questions the very thing called presence and, instead, he puts forward a play called differance that is absent and present at the same time which
makes the presence called transgression absent in its being present and absent at the same time and it makes it an original trace without an origin and purpose. We cannot say whether differance is either present or absent but only that in its presence is written into absence and vice versa and it thus exceeds the meaning of ordinary language to be is and is not at the same time. Differance is a "false beginning or end of a game"11 called reality and what lies between this beginning and this end cannot be for the same reason different.

Derrida calls differance protowriting in his article we have been considering now. And he develops what he provisionally calls a science of this writing in his Of Grammatology and we will now see briefly what are his reflections on differance as writing as explained in that book.

Differance as protowriting and Grammatology

Derrida criticises the view that privileges speech over writing. According to this view writing derives its being from a spoken language. What gives the spoken language this 'alleged superiority' is the fact that it is live with a subject and intentions present in it as its owners. And this view takes writing as devoid of a live subject and consequently of independent of someone who can correct an understanding of it if its intentions are sometimes misunderstood. But for Derrida the live subject, object and intentions connote their own absence and if it is speech that makes us feel that presence is there, then speech must be considered causing an illusion. Derrida here makes his shift for privileging writing over speech as the condition for speech as well as writing. However this privileging is not that of ordinary writing which still is anchored to a spoken subject who has written it but that of protowriting which connotes the complete absence. Taking the clue from the provisional absence of subject in the ordinary phonetic writing Derrida derives his view called protowriting or nonphonetic writing that marks the absence even of the secondary presence that phonetic writing represents. Thus, Derrida's objection is not merely to speech but also to phonetic writing. But this does not make him call
the transgression called presence through phone, or disguises that is created through it as forms of presence, a contingent factor. Or, what can be contingent in the necessary movement of differance? He writes:

"These disguises are not historical contingencies that one might admire or regret. Their movement was absolutely necessary, with a necessity which cannot be judged by any other tribunal. The privilege of the phone does not depend upon a choice that could have been avoided. It responds to a moment of economy (let us say of the "life" of "history" or of "being as self-relationship")."

One may feel here that Derrida is in the grip of Wittgenstein's dictum of leaving everything as it is. A close scrutiny will but reveal that Wittgenstein's dictum is translated into an interpretation of it in terms of a deferred presence over differences in Derrida. Derrida obeys and disobeys Wittgenstein at the same time. In a way Wittgenstein also does the same as his PI testifies to the fact that he does not want to leave everything as it is whatever its historical compulsions may be. But Wittgenstein remains a philosopher of forms of life that come into play with their rules out of blind necessity and Derrida, on the contrary, questions the fundamental presence that a form of life communicates.

Derrida understands that there is a kind of fundamental solipsism at work in making the illusion of presence possible. This solipsism dictates that the experiencing subject is in close touch with the world. Even if one says that I do think that the world is independent of myself there is a reference to 'I' or 'subject' even in this denial of subject-dependent view of the world. Derrida calls this phenomenon "hearing (understanding) oneself speak". We have seen that the later Wittgenstein by making the subject a rule or a move of language-game like any other rule or move of it has questioned the primacy of the subject in making the world possible. And it is the same move Derrida favours with regard to the subject but the difference he has with Wittgenstein is that he makes language a realm of absence resulting from the play of differance.
By taking a stand for protowriting, Derrida deconstructs the subject that speaks or experiences the world into a trace or traces that make presence of any sort an impossibility. It is a trace of absence in the sense that it makes presence an illusion by placing itself beyond the distinction between presence and absence. By this deconstruction, what Derrida announces is the "death of speech" as he calls it. And for him, this death is that of presence in general. He writes:

"'Death of speech' is of course a metaphor here: before we speak of disappearance, we must think of a new situation for speech, of its subordination within a structure of which it will no longer be the archon."\(^\text{13}\)

Derrida traces the history of privileging speech at least to Plato. His well-known article on Plato entitled 'Plato's Pharmacy' is a criticism of Plato on his favouring speech over writing in his philosophy in general and in *Phaedrus* in particular. This favouring for Derrida is the favouring of presence over differance or favouring of logo-centrism and for him, this Platonic bias regulates the western philosophy until now. He quotes Aristotle and Hegel to show that how they see writing in its derivative nature. For him, the reality is that of the absence of being or that of being deferred over differences and it is protowriting that represents this deference or absence, it being neither absent nor present. And it is the fear of this absence that Plato and other philosophers articulated in their preferring speech to writing, which is not fully that of absence but heralds it in a way. Derrida, preferring the other course of reflection, questions the very presence of the world and argues for its absence that will give way to its being as non-being or differance.

We have seen that for Derrida, there is no presence outside language. As language is a configuration of differences each term in it is a negative determination whereby it is what it is and what it is not in itself. Here we may note that Derrida questions the notion that there is a distinction between the signifier and the signified, the former being a sign and the latter a solid content, whether it is a
mental idea or object independent of the mind. Derrida's position as to this is: can we have a notion of the signified except through a sign? Take for example the word 'tree'. We say it has a content called 'tree out there'. But the 'tree out there' is combination of words. So any presence whatsoever is revealed through signs or words. It is not that we can have a world independent of language or signs. Derrida sees reality as a play of signifiers through differences and a play which these differences make one of the absence of being and of the 'is and is not' in manifold ways. Derrida finds that protowriting or differance determines language and in it there is no distinction between content and form but what is give there as it is. This determination is the determination for its own absence and for the appearing of the protowriting which risks its disappearance in the same event. Derrida writes about the protowriting or nonphonetic writing that questions the substantiality of language and reality through it: 

"If the nonphonetic moment menaces the history and the life of the spirit as self-presence in the breath, it is because it menaces substantiality, that other metaphysical name of presence and of ousia. First in the form of the substantive. Nonphonetic writing breaks the noun apart. It describes relations and not appellations. The noun and the word, those unities of breath and concept, are effaced within pure writing."14

Derrida realises pure or nonphonetic writing as the condition of epistemology. And it is for him the presupposition of history and science. All kinds of objectivity owes their being to the play of this is and is not. So objectivity contains in itself its own evasion. This evasion is presupposed eternally. Derrida calls a study of this possibility "a science of science" and it, he says, "would no longer have the form of logic but that of grammatics".15 It is this science that Derrida calls grammatology. However, this science is not that of objectivity or of episteme but that of their closure. It is the description of the movement called differance.
Grammatology is to be seen as opposed to linguistics. The fault Derrida finds with linguistics is that it bases itself on the emphatic presence of phone. And it cannot see the closure of logic and episteme as the object of its study. Grammatology, on the other hand, makes its object of articulation this closure as the condition of language and the study of it. It liberates protowriting from it's being suppressed by phone and its allies. In the context of a comparison between phonetic writing and (nonphonetic) writing Derrida writes:

"The system of language associated with phonetic-alphabetic writing is that within which logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence, has been produced. This logocentrism, this epoch of the full speech, has always placed in parenthesis, suspended, and suppressed for essential reasons, all free reflection on the origin and status of writing, all science of writing which was not technology and the history of technique, itself leaning upon a mythology and a metaphor of a natural writing."[16]

The fear that haunts Derrida now is that his conception of protowriting may be considered dependent upon the objectivity of presence as a postulation of it through an irony. By accepting the play of irony of the objectivity as the rejection of objectivity of the accepted kind he wants to find a transcendental realm for the movement of protowriting. However, he cautions that this transcendental move is not to locate an ideal or ordinary presence but to show that beyond the naive objectivity how we eternally lose our being as present. His adherence to transcendentalism here is strategic move which negates itself as a transcendentalism of ideal presence. He says that we are in the grip of an 'unperceived and unconfessed metaphysics’ even in our scientific thinking and that it is to avoid falling back into this metaphysics that he wants to see his notion of protowriting as a transcendental move. And it is more than obvious that it is not concerned with any kind of essentialism and its essence is the rejection of essence. The transcendental anchor that Derrida desires for differance is only a request to view it free of naive objectivism of ordinary existence and science.
In his article 'Differance' Derrida has called trace or differance a middle voice to show that it is neither active nor passive. And in Of Grammatology he says that it is merely passive. Nevertheless, there is no contradiction involved in it. The former is to show that trace is a force of ‘is and is not’ and the latter that it is invariable in that our world cannot be imagined to have a different move or mode.

Derrida invites metaphysics to reflect upon protowriting as "its death and its resource". This is a strange invitation. But the strangeness involved in it is only apparent. For "metaphysics of logos" is concerned with being and this being is a product of protowriting as deference, as a dream of a future that never arrives. So it is this dream of being that is the subject matter of metaphysics, according to Derrida. And such a dream is its own negation and it thus heralds at the same time the death of metaphysics.

Is a positive science of grammatology possible? Derrida answers in the negative to this question. This impossibility compels one to articulate this science provisionally in the language of ordinary objectivity. However, he insists that this articulation must at the same time ‘point beyond the episteme’ or objectivity of presence. At the end he confesses his inability to articulate it otherwise when he says that 'grammatology, this thought, would still be walled-in within presence'.

'Plato's Pharmacy' is the article where Derrida locates the play of differance on a macro plane by seeing how the word ‘pharmakon’ iterates and reiterates its different, often heterogeneous, meanings in its very structure to mark its destruction as a unified determined whole of presence. For Derrida pharmakon thus becomes the other word of protowriting. We will see his engagement with pharmakon now.

Derrida on Plato and Pharmakon

In 'Plato's Pharmacy' Derrida says that Plato's dialogue Phaedrus hides in its text the possibility of showing how differance and not presence is the very
condition of the reality. So he aims at a deconstruction of the text to bring out this condition that it hides. He does it by throwing light upon the way the word ‘pharmakon’ appears in the dialogue. He says there that we are not to be bothered in this process about the stated or unstated intentions of Plato in the dialogue but about how Plato becomes a representative of presence, which is an illusion or transgression, with or without his being aware of it.

In *Phaedrus* Plato says that it is speech and not writing that a dialectician has to prefer in his search for essences of the world. His contention here is that writing only records what we speak and when we speak our hearers can be in a direct dialogue with us. And in the case of writing, he says, there is a possibility that it may be misunderstood by some of the readers of it. Socrates in the dialogue raises objections to writing as the primary vehicle of knowledge through a myth. He narrates the myth where Theuth, the inventor of writing, comes to the king Thamus to state to him that writing, as it will increase memory and wisdom, ought to be introduced to the subjects. But the king in the myth says that writing will do the opposite of what Theuth has said. It will increase forgetfulness as people will not take the trouble of utilizing their memory for knowledge and will commit whatever they know to written words that will take care of their memory. As they will no longer be interested in live knowledge through conversation they will depend on written words for their knowledge which can only provide them with mechanical repetition of it, they will become people of the conceit of wisdom. After narrating this myth Socrates adds that it does not mean that one should not write but one should not prefer it to speech. We must keep in mind here that in the same dialogue Socrates explains how matters of knowledge have become matters of articulations of anarchic and irresponsible thoughts in Greece then. The writers remain hidden behind their writing and their modes of thinking are shaping a culture of knowing that does not have to be anchored to a responsible method. It is against this background writing is looked down upon by Socrates. But he mentions in the context that those who remember from within may make use of the service of writing that is from without as a reminder of what they ought to know from within
and for them this reminder will not substitute for their memory. It may be the case that Socrates is over worried about the effects of writing in the dialogue. In the case of Derrida’s reflection on Plato’s view of writing what matters is not this but the conceptual questions involved in prioritising speech over writing.

Before we consider Derrida’s symbolic understanding of Plato through Phaedrus let us pause for a while to state briefly what this dialogue is all about. This dialogue is about the love between a man and a boy. Socrates in the dialogue is of the opinion that this love is not bad as such if it is guided by the realisation of beauty in itself, which is the intelligible form of beauty seen in the ordinary world. He says a man who really loves a boy will not think of having a physical relation with him but will be an admirer of his beauty that will take him to the contemplation of the heavenly beauty. And he adds that even if the man with heavenly heart has physical relationship with the boy by chance, his prime concern cannot be with the pleasure arising out of it but with the good of the boy and his growth in all respects. Socrates appreciates the former love the most and then the latter. What he depreciates is the love between a man and the boy where the only concern of the man is the satisfaction of his bestial pleasures through that. And he calls this love sinister love and condemns it in the strongest terms.

Phaedrus shows that there is something called ideal beauty and beholding it is seeing the splendour in the world of essences. This belief of Plato in essence is the point of contention for Derrida with Plato. Derrida finds the source of Plato’s aversion to writing in his belief that there is something called the essence of the world. Derrida believes that an essentialist outlook about the world will forget or ignore the absence of being of an entity and its condition called differance. For him writing represents the absence of being and it resembles protowriting that makes up the world as its absence where it will be a play of being and non-being without bringing forth any solid presence in the play.
Plato gives speech the superiority over writing and says that we understand writing on the basis of spoken language. Derrida says that this way of looking at language is to accord it a relation with reality that holds in presence. But he finds that the world is not in our hold and that it is not present but absent and what is real is differance, which is neither present nor absent. To understand this he implies a suggestion in his article that urges us to look at meaning as a passage from writing to speech. It will be, then, a passage from confusion to an illusion of presence and one from absence to an economy of life called transgression. It will be putting what Plato does in a reverse order. So Derrida does not take Plato's disparaging writing in its literal sense but in a symbolic sense where what Plato does is arguing for the illusion called presence against the reality called differance, which in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy' is called Pharmakon.

In the myth which Socrates evokes to condemn writing in the dialogue, Theuth says that it is a pharmakon (medicine or remedy) for memory and wisdom. And the king refutes it saying that writing is a pharmakon not for memory and wisdom but for forgetfulness and the conceit of wisdom. So writing that represents protowriting here for Derrida is a pharmakon. Derrida asks: what can be the essence of any writing, if at all it can be called essence? Writing in its non-essential form itself is given a secondary status as it imitates the absence of being that will result in seeing the world in its being conditioned by differance. The essence of writing of vulgar or phonetic kind is differance and not speech for Derrida. The whole Platonic enterprise is to save presence from being engulfed by this protowriting called differance. Derrida reads Plato's condemnation of writing not as a condemnation of phonetic writing but as that of nonphonetic writing or differance. He writes:

"What, in depth, are the resemblances underlying Socrates' statements that make writing homologous to painting? From out of what horizon arise their common silence, their stubborn muteness, their mask of solemn, forbidding majesty that so poorly hides an incurable aphasia, a stone deafness, a closedness irremediably
inadequate to the demands of logos? If writing and painting are convoked together, summoned to appear with their hands tied, before the tribunal of logos, and to respond to it, this is quite simply because both are being interrogated: as the presumed representatives of a spoken word, as agents capable of speech, as depositories or even fences for the words the court is trying to force out of them. If they should turn out not to be up to testifying in this hearing, if they turn out to be impotent to represent a live word properly, to act as its interpreter or spokesman, to sustain the conversation, to respond to oral questions, then bam! they are good for nothing. They are mere figurines, masks, simulacra.”

This remark is a response to Socrates’ position in the dialogue that if you ask a piece of writing to clarify your doubts or respond to your objections to it, it will retain the majestic silence of a painting. This silence indicates its inability of articulating presence that speech represents. And differance cannot likewise articulate presence but marks the absence of being and is the movement of writing that makes being written into the anterior of non-being and vice versa. Pharmakon or writing is this absence that Plato fears and wants to cast out beyond the pale of speech, and phonetic writing only vaguely imitates this absence. Socrates’ objection to phonetic writing is basically an objection to protowriting and the absence it marks.

The word pharmakon is used in Phaedrus and other dialogues of Plato in different ways, with its positive and negative connotations. In the dialogue in question Socrates goes out of the town that is his habitual place, which he normally does not leave, because of a piece of writing which the individual called Phaedrus carries with him while taking his walk to the country side. Socrates says to Phaedrus that he has carried a pharmakon with him to take himself out of the town where he discusses philosophy with people. So pharmakon is here something which will take you out of the way and it is writing that is referred to as pharmakon here. It means that Socrates does not want to reject presence as he wants to remain in his habitual presence but he is being guided/misguided to leave that because of pharmakon.
Pharmakon or differance causes the disappearance of presence and in place of it installs a movement of being and not-being, both of which are written into each other as the destruction of both presence and absence.

Derrida equates pharmakon with differance as a determination of both substance and antisubstance at the same time. In his own words:

“The pharmakon would be a substance—with all that that word can connote in terms of matter with occult virtues, cryptic depths refusing to submit their ambivalence to analysis, already paving the way for alchemy—if we didn't have eventually to come to recognize it as antisubstance itself: that which resists any philosopheme, indefinitely exceeding its bounds as nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance; granting philosophy by that very fact the inexhaustible adversity of what funds it and the infinite absence of what founds it.”

In Greek ‘pharmakon’ means remedy, drug, poison, sorcery, paint, recipe, philter, antidote, etc., in different contexts. But Derrida says that even in the same context of a use of it it iterates and reiterates all these meanings. So it contains its being and non-being at the same time in it. For example when Socrates says pharmakon takes himself out of his habitual place where philosophy flourishes to a country side we are informed by this not only the good effect of getting along someone like Socrates for a discussion on it but also its bad effect of taking someone out of a place where philosophy belongs in Greece. We know Socrates dies of pharmakon. Is it good or bad in itself? Derrida raises this problem. It causes the death of Socrates. But Socrates says before taking pharmakon (hemlock) that pharmakon will take him to the world of great souls. Derrida says that it is good and bad at the same time and if we separate one of them as its meaning of it in a context, then what we do is to try to conform it to a kind of objectivity, which is originally an illusion. And for him each word hides in itself its own disappearance and the Greek word ‘pharmakon’ is a striking example to show this.
Derrida sees a chain of paradoxes and contradictions in *Phaedrus*. In the beginning of the dialogue Socrates says that he does not want to engage himself with certain myths as that will not serve his avowed aim of knowing himself or self-knowledge. Then why does not he reject myth as such as it does not represent the literal and ideal objectivity that he is in search of in the dialogue by preferring speech to writing? We see a little later Socrates makes use of myths in the dialogue. It is clear in the context of the dialogue that Socrates uses these myths to drive home certain convictions that will serve us to have an understanding of the ideal world and the way to it. Derrida’s point here is that myths are not transparent and they cannot take one to the ideal knowledge of the self and the world of essences that Plato defines as the real knowledge. So according to him Plato embraces a contradiction in his approach to myth. Moreover, it is through a myth that writing is condemned saying that writing is secondary. Derrida asks: Is a myth primary or secondary in the ladder of entities?

Again, Socrates is initiated into self-knowledge not through a speech of an oracle but through an engraving at Delphi, which is a kind of writing. If writing is secondary, then Socrates is initiated into self-knowledge through a secondary means. And Derrida’s question here is: how what is initiated by a secondary phenomenon can have the profundity that Socrates claims for it? Derrida believes that the platonic assertions contain in them their own denials and it is what pharmakon proves in its movement. In *Phaedrus* Socrates calls the living speech a written discourse in the soul as the subject of it is present along with it with his intentions. Derrida points out that Plato himself shown that writing secondary and how, then, it can be primary only because it is written in the medium of soul. So writing assails not only object but also soul and everything comes down for Derrida to the eternal absence of being. And this absence, he says, cannot be removed and what Plato does through his dialectic is to make an attempt to forget this absence. So dialectic is forgetting of pharmakon. However, forgetting something is not the removal of it and this leads Derrida to call dialectic “inverted pharmakon”. Derrida sees in pharmakon the general condition of any talk and being as its absence.
Derrida finds that it is Platonism that "sets up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality"\textsuperscript{19} and it implies that his criticism of Plato is the criticism of Western transcendentalism in general. The project of Derrida makes the Kantian attempt to define a priori and objective basis of the world look like an attempt in vain. What Derrida heralds is not only the end of Western transcendentalism but transcendentalism in general that articulates presence of being one way or other.
REFERENCES


2 ibid., pp. 130-31.
3 ibid., pp. 133-4.
4 ibid., p. 135.
5 ibid., p. 136.
6 ibid., p. 139.
7 ibid., p. 140.
8 ibid., p. 145.
9 ibid., p. 153.
10 ibid., p. 153.
11 ibid., p. 159.
13 ibid., p. 8.
15 ibid., pp. 27-28.
16 ibid., p. 43.
18 ibid., p. 70.
19 ibid., p. 76.