

**Peter Sloterdijk, *Derrida, An Egyptian: On the Problem of the Jewish Pyramid*,
trans. Wieland Hoban, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA, 2009.**

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“Derrida, an Egyptian” is a succinct yet extraordinarily intricate thought-tapestry created to commemorate the life and work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the wake of his passing in 2004. Sloterdijk weaves his argument for labeling Derrida an “Egyptian” through an exploration of how he was or would have been received by other philosophers; specifically Niklas Luhmann, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, Franz Borkenau, Régis Debray, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Boris Groys. Above all, Sloterdijk is driven by the question “[c]ould it be that the core impulse of deconstruction was to pursue a project of construction with the aim of creating an undeconstructible survival machine” (p.9)?

In utilizing the implications of Freud’s late-career argument that the biblical Moses was Egyptian, not Jewish, Sloterdijk dubs as “Egyptian” Derrida’s premise that the nature of a subject necessarily contains its obverse; that “between the X as possible and the ‘same’ X as impossible, there is nothing but a relation of homonymy.”¹ Yet Sloterdijk takes the Egyptian theme further, effectively making it his structural loom upon which to thread, through the warp of deconstruction, thoughts on monotheism, and im/mortality; including the demise of philosophy as currently practiced. Perhaps the brightest thread in Sloterdijk’s tapestry is the idea that, within Egyptian culture is an object – the Pharaonic pyramid – that constitutes a subject extraordinary in its *inability* to be deconstructed “because it is built to look as it would after its own collapse.”

A small book of around 10,000 words, “Derrida an Egyptian” nevertheless deserves its stature as a stand-alone publication. It is a conceptual masterpiece. In its realized

¹ Jacques Derrida, “Et Cetera,” trans. Geoff Bennington, in *Deconstruction: A User's Guide*, ed. Nicolas Royle (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 300.

form, the work requires even the philosophically literate reader to be set down between each brief vignette to allow time for contemplation before moving on to the next chapter, and the next philosopher in Sloterdijk's interrogatory list. However, the reader is set down upon the alluvial soil of the banks of Sloterdijk's Nile, a soil made all the more fertile by the author's love and comprehension of the work of Derrida as being representative of an age of immense, compass-less uncertainty, yet also as having divulged the hint of a way forward in philosophical practice in just such an epoch.

For Sloterdijk, Derrida was a thinker worthy of the utmost respect; a humble man who could hold two opposing thoughts in his mind without qualm; a philosopher who, as Sloterdijk records, stated in his final days that he "was certain that he would be forgotten as soon as he died, yet at the same time that something of his work would survive in the cultural memory" (p.vii).